Exploring educated Syrian refugee students' trajectory in educational settings in Quebec (Francisation and at university), and its impact on the (re)construction of their identity(ies)

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Abstract

This thesis, based on a qualitative research project, looks into young educated Syrian refugees' trajectory in integrating into Quebec society by describing their learning journey through the Francisation program and English university settings. The study describes these students' perspectives on their understanding of the concept of identity and their narrative of the way their learning journey was reshaping their identity(ies). Following a snowball selection process, I recruited five female and five male university students as participants. Eight of them were enrolled in the Francisation program first and then entered their university studies. Two of the students first completed their university studies before enrolling in the Francisation program.

The study was based on three main research questions: RQ1: What does 'identity' mean to young Syrian refugee students, and how do they describe their identities before and after attending educational settings in Quebec? RQ2: Why did the young educated Syrian refugee students choose to do Francisation before or after their university studies even though they had French language competency? RQ3: Who played an essential role in their integration journey through those educational settings?

Through an open-ended, semi-structured interview schedule, I collected the narratives of these ten students. I then carefully analyzed the data to extract the important emerging themes. The students defined identity as inheritance (from parents and socialisation) , behavior (Manners and ethics), labels (being categorized, being put in a single box) , achievement or experience (related to professional identity and an on-going process changing with experience). They indicated that they chose to participate in the Francisation program because of gratitude towards the host society. Willingly making choices to do Francisation and university studies, building multi-belonging- relationships and evolving multi-identities seem to be interrelated. Both the

Francisation program, university extra-curricular activities and participation in cultural clubs and associations were important in creating belonging relationships. Caring educators played an important role in both educational settings.

Résumé

Cette thèse, basée sur un projet de recherche qualitative, examine la trajectoire d'intégration dans la société québécoise de jeunes réfugiés syriens scolarisés, en décrivant leur parcours d'apprentissage à travers le programme de francisation et les milieux universitaires anglophones. L'étude décrit les points de vue de ces étudiants sur leur compréhension du concept d'identité et leur récit de la façon dont leur parcours d'apprentissage refaçonne leur(s) identité(s). À la suite d'un processus de sélection boule de neige, j'ai recruté cinq étudiantes et cinq étudiants universitaires comme participants. Huit d'entre eux ont d'abord été inscrits au programme de francisation puis ont entamé leurs études universitaires. Deux des étudiants ont d'abord terminé leurs études universitaires avant de s'inscrire au programme de francisation.

L'étude était basée sur trois questions de recherche principales : RQ1 : Que signifie « identité » pour les jeunes étudiants réfugiés syriens, et comment décrivent-ils leur identité avant et après avoir fréquenté les établissements d'enseignement au Québec ? RQ2 : Pourquoi les jeunes étudiants réfugiés syriens scolarisés ont-ils choisi de faire la francisation avant ou après leurs études universitaires alors qu'ils avaient des compétences en français ? RQ3: Qui a joué un rôle essentiel dans leur parcours d'intégration à travers ces milieux éducatifs ?

Au travers d'un outil d'entretiens semi-structuré et ouvert, j'ai recueilli les récits de ces dix étudiants. J'ai ensuite soigneusement analysé les données pour en extraire les thèmes émergents importants. Les élèves ont défini l'identité comme l'héritage, le comportement, les étiquettes, la réussite ou l'expérience. Ils ont indiqué qu'ils ont choisi de participer au programme de francisation en raison de leur gratitude envers la société d'accueil. Faire volontairement des choix

de francisation et d'études universitaires, construire diverses relations d'appartenance et des identités multiples en évolution semblent être des processus interdépendants. Le programme de francisation, les activités parascolaires universitaires et la participation à des clubs et associations culturels ont joué un rôle important dans la création de relations d'appartenance. Les éducateurs bienveillants ont joué un rôle important dans les deux contextes éducatifs.

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Thank you to the ten remarkable individuals who agreed to be interviewed for the purposes of this research. I am truly touched by your stories. Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to my ancestors who came as refugees to Syria, inspired me how to be survivors and build-rebuild themselves in a new country. I dedicate this thesis to every refugee who did not have the choice of living in peace in their country of birth and origin. Despite the odds they did choose to integrate, celebrate their self and cultural identities, create and share beauty with their love, determination, and passion to keep alive the hope for a peaceful home in this world for all.

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Chapter One: Introduction, Research Significance and Key Terms

This thesis, based on a qualitative research project, looks into young Syrian refugees' trajectory in integrating in Quebec society through educational settings. It addresses young Syrian refugees' learning journey in two main educational institutions: Quebec's Francisation program and English university settings. The study brings those students' perspective on their understanding of what an identity is, and the way their learning journey was reshaping their identity by integrating in this new environment through those educational settings. When I read about refugee students, especially Syrian refugees, I never feel that their knowledge or skills have been valued. Somehow, I always have the impression that the word "refugee" leaves a negative impact on the reader. In fact, most of the research about Syrian refugees emphasizes the fact that Syrian refugees are illiterate or do not have the language skills needed.

The research results presented in this thesis seek to highlight another reality of Syrian refugees by bringing the perspective of educated refugees on integrating in a host society, Quebec. Furthermore, I discuss the idea that although upon arrival to Montreal, they already had French and English language skills, they still chose to take part in the Francisation program but then continue their higher education in an English language university. I utilise Ager and Strang's (2008) theory as a tool to analyze the young Syrian refugees' integration and learning journey and its impact on their identity (re)construction; especially that Ager and Strang's hypothesis of integration is based on four main parts (foundation, the facilitators, social connection, and means and markers), which I will discuss later in details in chapter 3. Ager and Strang's theory of integration helps me to gain an insight into Syrian educated refugees' choice of why and how becoming a member of Quebec society is essential, evolving belonging relationships, and developing both self and cultural identities through educational institution**s** and

educator's role in this process. Further, Ager and Strang's hypothesis of integration will support my main argument of this study, which is: young educated Syrian refugee students support their well-being and evolve identity by willingly building belonging relationships throughout Francisation and re-doing university studies. I also argue that willingly making choices of doing Francisation and university studies, building multi-belonging relationships, and evolving multi-identities are inter-related.

The stories of integrating through educational settings (i.e., Francisation and university studies) provided by the participants in this research study offer insights for future policy makers and programs of teacher education, refugee education and integration.

Research Purpose

It was the first summer in a place that I was going to call home. A friend of mine asked me if I could help a non-profit Montreal-based organization that organizes free weekly play gathering for refugee children. And since I had recently moved to Montreal because of the Syrian war and pursuing my BA degree in early childhood education, I agreed to help that organization without thinking twice about it. One day when we were playing in a group of 7-12 year old children, a very young Syrian refugee girl refused to respond to me in Arabic, saying " انا ما بعرف احكي عربي" which means I do not know how to speak Arabic "بليز، فيكي تحكي فرينتش معي؟" (can you please talk French with me?). I was shocked and somehow saddened and pained. She had been in Montreal only a month, and yet she was ashamed to speak Arabic and was demanding to speak in French only. At that time, I knew that I should investigate and see if young refugee students at the university level feel the same or not. Thus, this thesis examines the experience of young refugee students in the Francisation program and university studies, and underlines what those

students think about their identity and whether the two mentioned educational programs had some role in their identity (re)construction or not.

As a refugee who came to Quebec and had gone through the Francisation program for eight months and then on to university to get her BA degree, I have personal experience in both educational systems. Having completed the Francisation program in Quebec, I was able to see and feel the "power" of French that rules in Quebec (Bill 101) as applied to refugees, I saw how the French language was dominant. By spending 8-9 hours in the Francisation program per day, I noticed the language's influence on my own speech pattern. Thus, I believe that the Francisation program had impacted and renewed my identity that was rooted in the firm rock of past homelands and identities, as a woman with agency and memory, speaking in a new language but claiming the recognition of the identities carried within - in Armenian and Arabic. However, afterwards, my educational journey in university was different. I was able to celebrate my Armenian-Syrian identity in various settings. My identity was reconstructed, but it was also rooted in my past identities. I had the opportunity to participate in university social clubs and associations both Armenian and Syrian.

The purpose of my research is to help close the gap in the literature concerning the education, identity construction, and well-being of refugees among young adult students attending colleges and universities after or before completing the Francisation program.

Research Context

Canada’s immigration policies reflect the country’s vision, policy making history, and national identity (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013). Before 1967, Canadian immigration policy was based on racial factors; however, according to Walker (1992) there are four major phases in Canadian immigration history that reflect the mindset of Canadian society (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013). The first

phase is known as the “imperial outpost” (p.88) phase, during which the Canadian government strived to maintain the country’s British heritage, and passed the first Immigration Act in 1896. The second phase began in the second decade of the twentieth century and ended with the end of the Second World War, and is the “White Dominion” phase named after English subjects of the British Empire.

In the postwar years, a shift came in Canadian immigration policy. In contrast to the superpower nations that emerged out of the Second World War, Canada took the role of a “middle power” (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013, p. 91). This status represented the third major phase in Canada’s immigration policy, and was followed by the fourth phase, “the Multicultural Society” (p. 94). This fourth phase coincided with Prime Minister Trudeau’s multiculturalism policy changes (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013). Most notably, this phase led to the Immigration Act of 1976, which moved Canada further toward a more comprehensive multicultural integration policy (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013).

In 2002, the previous Immigration Act of 1976 was changed by the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013). Under Stephen Harper’s leadership Canadian immigration history entered the modernization stage, where the main objective of the federal government became preserving Canada’s status “as a destination of choice for talent, innovation, investment, and opportunity” (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013, p.95). Thus, over the years the modification of the immigration policies played an essential role in the nationhood of the country and its identity (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013). According to Canada 2016 Census (2016), there are more than 250 ethnicities living in Canada, which underlines the heterogeneous composition of Canadian society.

"Diversity in Canada is inextricably linked to immigration, and the population's growing diversity represents a spectacular shift in Canadian social policy, which paralleled the striking alteration to immigration policy" (Ghosh & Abdsi, 2013, p.85). Canada has been a culturally diverse country since before the sixteenth century (Kymlicka, 1995). It is clear that a single state may be both multinational (i.e., the alliance of national societies) and polyethnic (i.e., the result of migration from various countries). The evolution of Canadian policies was impacted by this diversity.

Consequently, one cannnot ignore the fact that Canada is the country of origin of multiculturalism (Semotiuk, 2017; Ghosh & Abdi, 2013; Kymlicka, 2012). Canada is also the first country in the world to embrace multiculturalism in its constitution (Leal, 1983; Ghosh & Abdi, 2013). However, because of the need to preserve the French language, Quebec adopted a different approach from the rest of Canada (Kymlicka, 1995). Quebec embraced interculturalism oriented policies instead of multiculturalism (Kymlicka, 1995; Ghosh & Abdi, 2013), and took the responsibility of taking control over its immigration and integration policies. "Quebec has been relatively successful in integrating newcomers to a common Francophone but pluralistic culture" (McAndrew, 2013, p.1) this made Quebec a special case (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013), whereas refugees integrated into an Anglophone society in other parts of Canada. At the same time, Canada has a long history of refugee welcoming and protection (Ghosh, Sherab, Dilimulati, & Hashemi, 2019). The history of Canada welcoming refugees will be discussed in detail later on in this thesis.

A Glimpse into Syria and Its Youth Profile

In this section I will try to provide a demographic backdrop of the studied group - the Syrian youth. Ouellet (2018) states that contemporary Syrian society is an ethnic, cultural,

linguistic and confessional mosaic. According to the *Economist* (2015), Syria in 2011 had 22 ±.5 million inhabitants, almost entirely Arab; that is to say, most Syrians share a historical lineage, a common language and claim a shared Arab identity. However, the population of the Syrian Arab Republic contains minority groups as well. For example, recent figures show (8.3%) Kurdish, (1.8%), Armenian, (0.6%) Turkomaniacs and (0.3%) Circassians (Taha, 2016). There are also varied religious groups; for instance, Sunnis (82%), Alawites (10.2%), Christians (4.6%), Druze (1.8%), Ishmaelites (0.9%), Shiites (0.4%), and Yazidis (0.1%) (Taha, 2016).

In December 2012, a little less than two years after the start of the politically-motivated clashes in Syria, Syrian exiles started their flight to the nearest countries, which are Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Those countries welcomed 500,000 Syrian exiles (Oullet, 2018). Canada also played its role in accepting Syrian refugees. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2016), in November 2015, Canada launched the Syria Operation Plan to support the resettlement of 25,000 Syrian refugees by February 2016. This five-phase plan included the following: first, refugee identification; second, treatment abroad - interviews, medical examinations, security checks; third, organization of transport - private chartered flights, verification of exit permits, health checks and security checks; fourth, arrival in Canada - border processing, transport to reception centers and temporary accommodation; v) and finally settlement and integration.

As of December 31, 2017, there were 50,930 Syrian refugees resettled in Canada. Of these, 50% (25,285) arrived through the Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) category, 41% (20,785) as Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR) and 9% (4,760) through the Joint Refugee Nominee (JRN) Program. I should underline the fact that under the refugee category, around 18,000 of the Syrian refugees settled in Quebec, with the majority settling in Montreal (IRCC,

2018). All ten Syrian refugee students who participated in this study settled in the greater Montreal area, in Quebec.

In general, the overall level of education of Syrian refugees varies from one group to another. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC 2017a), more than 60% of the Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) have a secondary diploma or below while nearly 40% of the Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) have a college or university education; moreover, 85% of GARs arrive in Canada without any knowledge of either official languages: English and French in Canada. The reason why 85% of GARs have neither of the official languages is due to the fact that although the Syrian Refugees were taught these languages in school, inadequate attention was paid to them as will be explained later in Chapter 2. English is taught in school in Syria; while 64% of PSRs are fluent in at least one of the two languages, of them 88% are fluent in English.

The Rapid Assessment of the Impact of the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Initiative released in December 2016, stated that the adult Syrian GARs tended to have lower levels of education and proficiency in both official languages than previous cohorts of resettled refugees. On the other hand, the adult Syrian PSRs stood out with higher levels of education and proficiency in official languages than the PSR cohorts admitted between 2010 and 2014 (CIC, 2016a). Additionally, 86% of GARs do not master either of the two official languages (neither English nor French) compared to 38% of PSRs; 91% of GARs have up to secondary level of education, compared to 64% of PSRs – I should also mention that 25% of PSRs have a university degree while this level is only reached by 2% of GARs (CIC, 2017).

Another fact that was revealed by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2018), is that the family composition also was different from one type of refugee sponsorship program to another.

For example, 49% of PSRs were single people, while 55% of GARs families had between 4 and 6 members. In addition, none of the households that came through private sponsorship had more than 9 people, while 1% of households admitted under the GAR category, i.e.43 families, had between 10 and 13 people. For the purpose of this study, I should emphasize that Quebec welcomed 22% GARs versus 78% PSR Syrian Refugees (CIC, 2018).

Ouellet (2018), first, analyzes the influence of social class on the migratory trajectories of Syrian refugees exiled in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, and, secondly, analyzes the way social class influences the process of accessing resettlement in Canada. His study shows that Syrian refugees in their first transition countries had more access to social resources and services than in Canada. Consequently, the lack of accessibility to resources when they arrived in their country of settlement for those refugees who landed in Canada, had a negative impact on their trajectory. For example, “individuals supported by the RAP (Resettlement Assistance Program) have faced extreme difficulties and are, for the most part, cut off from the social networks and financial resources necessary to settle in a new country” (Ouellet, 2018, p.71). According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2017a), the assistance provided is administered through a network of nonprofit community organizations, educational institutions and other Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)-funded stakeholders called service providers.

The significance of the thesis

This thesis aims to explore ways to understand the young educated refugee students' views of the concept of identity. The aim is to describe how they express their identity construction/ evolution/ integration in the intercultural environment in Quebec. The study will also examine whether the educational settings and the learning journey support students and

acknowledge their cultural identities and histories they carry from their country of origin where they also experienced war and trauma associated with war.

This thesis aims to contribute to the literature on identity formation in general. In addition, it is hoped that it will assist practitioners and educational program developers dealing with trauma and post-trauma therapies, as well as policymakers.

As discussed above, the data generated by this thesis project gave me the opportunity to investigate refugee students' experience in Quebec's educational settings and to develop an understanding of how students' identities were changing and developing. It was done through interviewing ten students (five male; five female) so that I could capture the experiences of both male and female genders. Lastly, the main significance of this study is the population studied. In existing refugee literature, there are few studies that are done with young educated refugees in language learning programs and higher educational contexts. Thus, the purpose of undertaking this study is to contribute towards filling an important gap in the literature on the refugee education, integration, and identity formation of refugee students.

Research Questions

As it was mentioned above, drawn from my personal experience in Quebec's educational integration program and university studies as a refugee, I believe more research studies should be done in this field. The main three questions of this research study are:

(**RQ1)** What is identity, in general, for those Young Syrian Refugee students, and how do refugee students describe their identities before and after attending educational settings in Quebec: the Francisation program and postsecondary (College/CEGEP and university) studies.

(RQ2) Why did young educated Syrian refugees choose to do Francisation before or after University studies even though they had French language competency?

(RQ3) Who played an essential role in their integration journey through those educational settings. My motivation for asking this question is that I am interested in developing an educational understanding of the impact, if any, of the Francisation Program, and University Studies on the identity(ies) of refugee students.

I also believe that more research should be conducted in this field to support refugees' integration and identity construction. To ensure the well-being and good academic performance by refugee students, it is important to have an understanding about their integration and identity construction experiences (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016). In my study, I also ask students about their opinion of how they are viewed by the educators in terms of their ethnicity, culture, language, religion, socio-economic class. Furthermore, how does the way they are identified and referred to affect them personally and academically?

Key Terms

Even though the phenomena of exile, displacement, and global migration are not new, the word refugee can be used variously and sometimes bring with it a negative or sad impression. According to Lacroix (2004), in Canada there are also different types of refugees (i.e. refugee claimants). The young Syrian refugee students who participated in this study are sponsored refugees. A sponsored refugee is an

> Individual who has been recognized as a refugee overseas and who has been sponsored by a group of Canadians, a church group or the government according to sponsorship roles defined in the 1976 Immigration Act. A sponsored refugee arrives in Canada with a permanent resident status and may apply for citizenship after three years of residence (Lacroix, 2004, p. viii).

At the same time, one cannot deny that modern societies are increasingly faced with

minority groups demanding recognition of their identity, and acknowledgement of their cultural differences. “This is often phrased as the challenge of ‘multiculturalism’” (Kymlicka, 1995, p.1). It is often argued how refugees should be given the freedom and the right to lead their new life in their new environment. This requires consistent renegotiation of the refugee’s identity while integrating in their new social context (Hoekstra, 2016). This also extends to include the reconstruction of self: the cultural, or language identity of refugees. For example, “[t]he negative evaluation of one’s language or identity might result in the desire for social mobility, which in the present context might entail the acquisition or use of a language, which symbolises a more positive identity” (Hoekstra, 2016, p.32). Thus, the (re)construction and recognition of self or cultural identity in a new environment is something that refugees face in their integration journey. Since identities are always fluid, ever-changing and multiple, new comers to a society will have the opportunity to adopt what suits them as Ager and Strang’s (2008) theory points out.

Another essential concept that I will underline here is "integration" and policies that enable integration into society. Martin-Jones (2015) believes that integration policy is a switch from broad issues such as language privileges of displaced people to offering help for language acquisition that will provide them access to schools and better jobs. The Quebec government has a broader definition for integration that is mainly based on three components: 1-) development of French language learning services for children and adults, and advancement of the utilization of French by the newcomers. 2-) Increased help for the transparency of the host society and the full investment of immigrants and their posterity in Quebec's financial, social, social and institutional life. 3-) Development of relations between the new comers and Quebecers of all origins. In other words, the Quebec government emphasizes integration as a collective commitment that both new

comers and Quebec society need to actively engage in while being respectful towards the different backgrounds of newcomers (The Quebec Ministry of Immigration, 2015).

The educational institutions are not only places of academic achievements. They also play an essential role in socialization and building relationships for young Syrian refugees since these are the first structures/agencies to provide a sense of belonging and safety to counter the post-traumatic experience of the young adult refugees. Even though Canada has a long history with refugees and refugee education, "Quebec took the initiative and became the first among the provinces in Canada to offer legal guarantees for the educational rights of minorities through its Charter of Rights in 1975" (Ghosh, 2004, p.557). And since Quebec is a special case and embraced the intercultural approach instead of a multicultural one, as mentioned above, this was also reflected in its educational approach. "'Intercultural Education' was to be the formula for enabling integration of the new arrivals. Interculturalism means a Quebec that will be pluralistic in outlook, but Francophonic through its reliance on the medium of the French language " (Ghosh, 2004, p.558). I will discuss the context for Quebec further in chapter 2.

I should also draw attention to the Francisation program, which is the Quebec government-funded linguistic and cultural program offered to adult newcomers through the *Ministère de l'Immigration et des communautés culturelles du Quebec* (MICC). The Quebec Government (2015) encourages non-francophone immigrants and immigrants who still did not find work in Quebec to attend this program so that their integration into the new environment can be smoother economically, socially, and culturally as well. Francisation courses are offered to adult immigrants at CEGEPs and universities (MIDI, 2015).

CEGEP is an acronym from the French term Collège d'enseignement general et professionnel, which means General and professional teaching college. This is a unique institution to Québec. It is a public college that provides the first level of post-secondary education. Young people who attend a CEGEP in French still have the option of attending an English university in Quebec because at present, the language laws apply to school education only.

Researcher Positionality

As an Armenian Syrian woman who was born and raised in Aleppo, Syria, I always considered myself as integrating two identities: Syrian and Armenian. My identity was something inherited, taught, evolved, and questioned. First of all, inherited because, as a third-generation daughter of refugees, I was born in Aleppo, I inherited the history of Armenia, the trauma of surviving the Armenian Genocide, and my grandparents' refugee life stories. At the same time, my identity development was also *influenced* by my parents and teachers. I was taught the Armenian literature, Armenian culture and heritage at home. Equally, I was taught how to be an active and responsible Syrian citizen, Arabic literature, Syrian culture, and history at school. Even though the schools that I attended in Aleppo, until the university stage, were private Armenian schools, the educational program was given in Arabic. Thus, my mother tongue is Armenian; however, the language that I was always taught in at school was Arabic. Third, my identity was something that is ever-evolving and changing because I was growing up and being exposed to different environments (i.e., school, university, Armenian community centers, local community centers). My identity was and still is something that I question. For example, it was a strange thing for me to study in one language at school in Aleppo but live with another one at home, like many of the immigrants. In other words, I always questioned my identity and what identity could be for someone like me who

had two homes**,** one, that I carried within me and another one, that I grew up in. Bhabha (1994) locates a person who is shifting between two worlds in his concept of hybridity. Bhabha (2015) uses the concept of hybridity to describe 'multi' but intercultural identity, which empowers an individual to achieve his/her agency. This concept will be further reviewed and examined in the literature review chapter.

After exactly 100 years from the date of the Armenian Genocide, I became a refugee like my ancestors who arrived in Aleppo, Syria as refugees having escaped the Genocide of 1915 perpetrated against the Armenians by the government of Turkey. The ugly war in my hometown Syria gave me once again a refugee identity, only this time a Syrian-Armenian refugee. Yes, I do identify myself as a Syrian-Armenian. According to the Armenian Diaspora Survey (2019) conducted in Quebec "14% emphasized their country of origin (e.g. Lebanese-Armenian, Romanian- Armenian)", and I am from that 14% identifying myself as Syrian-Armenian (p.11).

On 29 December of 2015, we flew away from everything familiar to me and took the airplane, hoping that a brighter future will be waiting for my family and me in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. I was 21 years old once we arrived to Quebec. I did not only fear not knowing where or what we were going to go through; I was also tremendously worried about how I would sustain both of my cultural identity(es) in this new environment. Moreover, I was also concerned about how I was going to accept my new environment and integrate into Quebec society, with a new language, culture, and traditions.

Although I believe that identity might be a choice of someone's self-representation/presentation in discourse in different contexts, it is definitely not something that could be worn as a mask; not at all. To conclude, my identities are multiple: as a refugee woman, wife, mother, survivor of wars and genocide, Syrian-Armenian, newly minted Canadian

living in the province of Quebec, student, researcher, and teacher, I live and thrive through my identities!

As I am finalizing this thesis manuscript, the question of language and nationhood is once again revived in both Quebec and Canada. Both levels of government are vying to recognize that the language in Quebec is French and that Quebec has the status of a nation (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013). A nation means a community that leaves in certain region sharing a particular language and culture (Kymlicka, 1995). There are of course pro and con opinions expressed on all sides, including from indigenous nations. Therefore, it is into this particular context that the new refugees try to integrate. As the context is quite fluid, it is expected that the integration process and the re-construction of identities of the new refugees will be informed by the knowledge gained through the Francisation program and the debates happening at the provincial and federal levels.

Summary

This chapter has provided a general outline about my background, motivation and purpose for undertaking the research project on which this thesis is based. It has introduced and clarified the understanding of key terminologies in the study (i.e. refugee, integration, and Francisation). The chapter details my three main research questions and explains the reason why they were asked. It also underlined how integrating has an impact on refugees' identities and their (re)formation as well as sense of belonging to a host society. Finally, a glimpse of Quebec's educational foundation was also introduced. This is important in relation to the refugee education, which will be discussed in detail in the upcoming chapters. The next chapter will explore the literature related to identity and educational issues with particular attention to refugees and also the special educational context in Quebec in which this study is based. Meanwhile, in chapter three I will

discuss the reason I adopted a qualitative approach for my research study to look into the narratives of young Syrian refugee students' integration experience in higher education settings, after accomplishing the Francisation integration program. Moreover, there I will also highlight my study's questions, sampling and analysis approach, emphasizing that I will use Ager and Strang's theory of integration to contextualize the main argument in this thesis . In chapter four, I will present the perspectives of Syrian educated young refugees about RQ1: what 'identity' means to them, and how they describe their identities before and after attending educational settings in Quebec. RQ2: Why did the young educated Syrian refugee students choose to do Francisation before or after their university studies even though they had French language competency. And RQ3: Who played an essential role in their integration journey through those educational settings? Throughout chapter four, I will represent how Syrian educated young refugees described an identity as inheritance, behavior, labels, and achievements or experiments. Finally, in the last chapter, I will analyse their narratives, compare it to the existing literature to make further suggestions for future studies, and mention the limitation of this study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter, I present the existing literature on identity construction and re-construction, refugees, refugee education, and integration. I point out a gap first in the teacher training program; second in research on higher education settings. I argue that education plays an essential role in supporting refugees' integration, learning trajectory, and the re-construction of cultural and self-identities.

Refugees in Canada

Starting in the 1990s and based on experience with immigration and settlement practices for newcomers and the diversity of their needs, Canadian policy needed to take into account the differentiation and specification of the newcomers into two categories: refugees and immigrants (Ghosh et al., 2019). In 1976 with the Immigration Act, all the refugees were given the right to have permanent residency status. Further, Canada categorized refugees into three different groups: government-sponsored (GAR), privately sponsored (PSR), and Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) which is a private-government partnership and each category has a different policy regarding their integration process (Ghosh et al., 2019).

Because of the Bill 101, The *Charte de la langue française,* the province of Quebec has a different position in the migration process. According to Gagné and Chamberland (1999), Quebec formed its own department of immigration in 1969 having in mind the development of Quebec via the integration to the majority of the francophone population. Quebec developed new selection procedures and planning objectives for its own immigration system and designed its own immigration policy, and has taken on full responsibility for the integration of new

immigrants into its society (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004). The government's first attempt was to offer the Francisation program to new immigrants and their children so that they could be easily integrated into the Quebec school system (Gervais, 1994; Ghosh & Abdi, 2004). The Francisation is the Quebec government-funded linguistic and cultural program offered to newcomers through the Ministère de l'Immigration et des communautés culturelles du Quebec (MICC).

Since 2011, the Syrian war has scattered millions of people, creating the largest displacement crisis of our time. In 2016, Canada admitted the largest number of refugees in a single year (25,000) in nearly four decades (World Vision, 2018). While it is the Federal Government's responsibility to determine who can enter the country as a refugee, education is a provincial responsibility, so that developing curriculum and resources to meet the needs of refugees is handled by each province (Ghosh et al., 2019). Frater-Mathieson (2003) reminds us that the need to identify and prepare for the education of refugee children is an international and essential issue. Canada needs to improve refugee access to higher education as currently only 1% have access (Ghosh et al., 2019).

The Role of Education in Creating Societies

Studies in social sciences investigate the connection between school and society, between knowledge and the way that knowledge is being transmitted, and between societal status and power (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013). Education plays a vital role in preparing responsible and active citizens, shaping the moral and political skills of the members of heterogeneous societies. Such skills are necessary for the pursuit of the common good and a democratic vision (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013). According to Ghosh and Abdi (2013), there are at least three groups of educational theorists who influenced the adoption of the different directions and applications to thinking

about the role of schools and schooling. These are Feminist, Post-modern/post-structuralist theories and more recently post-colonial and Critical Race Theory (CRT). For example, the conflict theorists, who came after structuralist-functionalist theories, believe that since knowledge and power are directly connected, the school has traditionally been a space to transmit the existing structure of unequal status, replicating the biases inherent in society towards certain groups without questioning and critical inquiry. They advocate a transition from liberal ways of thinking to "the socialist interpretation of equality" (p.15).

The evolution of philosophies of education leading to different approaches to teaching started teachers to question (feminist theories) their way of teaching, school objectives, and created a vision to embrace social justice (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013). In other words, one cannot deny the essential role that schooling and teachers play in maintaining and supporting concepts that celebrate diverse cultures and validate diversity in society. Here, culture also is understood as meaning that social groups interact and communicate with each other in their daily life. Hence, "schools can be understood as cultural sites, and everyone in the classroom as culturally constructed through participation in multiple cultural communities" (DiAngelo, Robin & Sensoy, Özlem, 2010, p.1).

The continued evolution of the educational philosophies also brought into existence various educational methods and purposes. Banks and Banks (2007) argue that schools throughout their curriculum shape students' beliefs and behaviors, in multi-ethnic and increasingly diverse classrooms. Adding on the previous concept, Gutmann (2004) emphasizes that it is education's role to educate students to be open and embrace diversity and appreciate the importance of the variety of cultures that encompass society. I should also highlight the fact that "[s]chools have also been the domain of intense conflict over whose knowledge and culture are

to be communicated' (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013, p.13). More and more there is emphasis, nowadays, that the objective of education should be transformed for two main purposes: "empowerment and agency" (p.106). However, are those objectives reaching out to refugee students' needs? In order to discuss this question, the following two paragraphs present a brief review of refugee education, the educator's role, and challenges faced by students during their learning and journey of integration.

Refugee Education and the Educator's Role

Bearing in mind that Canada embraces multiculturalism, but Quebec focuses on intercultural education (Ghosh, 2004), in this section I highlight refugee education and the important role that educators play in refugees' learning and integrating journey. Under the refugee category, around 18,000 of the Syrian refugees settled in Quebec, with the majority settling in Montreal (IRCC, 2018). Frater-Mathieson (2003) identifies that trauma, schooling disruption, and issues speaking an unfamiliar language are all issues that impact refugee students

Therefore, schools need to be aware of their responsibility to these students. They are often the students first real source of connection in their new country, and most reliable source of socialization available to them during their adjustment to Western society (Wilkinson, 2002). Sullivan and Simonson (2016) describe schools as an essential key for refugee students' services by underlining the schools' responsibilities towards those students and encouraging schools to set up positive mental health environments for those students so that they will be able to foster educational accomplishments. Moreover, schools are not only seen as a place where students will adjust to the new host community (Birman et al., 2005; Fazel & Stein, 2002), they are also a place where students will establish and develop their first relationships. And forming those relationships will spread a secure and safe environment for those traumatized students (Fecser,

2015); therefore, establishing a secure environment to learn for those students. However, it is the educators' responsibility to support the needs of those students by acknowledging the strong relationship between mental health, general well-being, and their academic achievements (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016).

Those refugee students are arriving into a school system that is, not only in a different language and organized along different curriculums and norms, but also focused on the individual motivation of the student who are traumatised by war and related hardships and thus certainly posing a significant challenge. Although teacher education programs vary from one province to the other in Canada since Education is a provincial jurisdiction (Ghosh et al., 2019), it is believed that Canadian teachers are often eager to help refugee children; however, the limited knowledge of the right way to support refugee children is a barrier alongside several others (e.g. refugee children's limited literacy skills; not knowing the language).

Although Rousseau and Guzder (2008) discuss the many intervention programs to support refugee children in Canadian schools, I believe, there is an enormous gap in the literature about refugee education in post- secondary and higher education in Canada. For example, one of the intervention programs that Rousseau and Guzder (2008) underline is the Pharos program. Within this program, each level of schooling contains, "a training course for teachers supported by multimedia material, along with two series of classroom lessons focusing on the shared refugee experience and on recreating links at school and in the new social environment" (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008, p.538).

It is only recently that equality, diversity and integration (EDI) programs have been the focus of attention at the higher education levels based on strong recommendations by the ministeries of education. Furthermore, here I should also emphasise the crucial importance that

educators recognize those students as survivors and not victims (Frater-Mathieson, 2003). Teachers are eager to foster teaching methodologies that integrate and provide the necessary support for the special needs of those survivors, but they feel that they do not have enough knowledge, skill sets or preparation that would enable them to support their students. In the next paragraph, I explain some of the challenges that refugee students meet in education settings, specifically in higher education.

Challenges

As discussed above, education is crucial to integrating refugees into their host communities, but using education for this purpose is not without challenges. First, Slowey, Schuetze, and Zubrzyki (2020) argue the use of education for this purpose in adult populations is under-investigated. They address how the migrant education literature is mainly concentrated on children. That is why they emphasize the urgency of research in young and older adult migrants in higher education. De Wit and Altbach (2016) underline that "the challenge for academic communities in Europe and elsewhere is to increase access of these refugees to higher education" (p.117). Furthermore, Slowey et al. (2020) suggest that higher education plays an essential role for young migrants and helps them to confront social challenges, improve lifelong learning chances and support them to have more positive results on the individual and societal level. At the same time, I should also mention that in higher education, there are issues of equality, access, and educational engagement (Crimmins, 2020).

According to Leek Openshaw (2011), students who had a certain type of trauma at any age will have a hard time concentrating and learning in a class. It is very important for this population to evolve a sense of safety in their learning environment so that they can be able to learn and achieve their desired educational goals (Fecser, 2015). However, to be able to learn in

a safe environment or to not be able to learn in a "triggering" environment is also related to the biology of the human body. Fescer (2015) says that when a traumatized student feels safe in their learning settings, their "lower brains are better regulated, allowing them to form relationships and focus and learn" (p.22). In order to develop a secure learning environment, teachers must be careful not to create a triggering situation in their classroom (Fecser, 2015). Thus, the challenge for educators becomes a matter of discerning how to meet the needs of such students in their classrooms. According to Ghosh et al. (2019), most Canadian teachers currently do not feel competent in meeting this demand.

Nevertheless, it is the teachers' responsibility to provide for these students. Provincial policies on the subject vary, but some provinces have made some effort to assist teachers in accommodating refugee students. For example, the ministry of education in Manitoba developed a website where their teachers can find narratives of refugee students. Those narratives that are provided by the refugee students can help teachers of refugees to understand refugee students' unique needs, and build on this understanding to create an exemplary practice in their classrooms (Ghosh et al., 2019). While such resources are useful to teachers already in the field, the fact remains that sufficient training with regard to traumatized students is still not offered to pre-service teachers (Ghosh et al., 2019).

Refugee students continue to experience socio-psychological challenges in Canadian schools (Ratković, Kovačević, Brewer, Ellis, Ahmed, & Baptiste-Brady, 2017). Gunderson (2002) described this condition by saying that because of their traumatic experience they will be "lost in the spaces between various identities" (p.702). And a teacher, given what we have disussed about the role of education in the life of refugee students, potentially has a greater influence on students' identities than other people in that student's life (Lee, 2008).

Before drawing attention to the integration of refugees, education, and identity (re)construction, in the next paragraph, I highlight the importance of refugees' willingness or choice to be part of societal culture.

Refugees' Freedom of Integration

The modern age has given different types of *choices* which people have to make during different stages of their life. Immigrants, especially refugees, face more life-changing choices in their host countries than other people in those countries. Aside from the obvious concerns of language and displacement, this reality is also related to the multiple identities which a refugee must inhabit (Babaei, 2019). Still, the consensus seems to indicate that refugees must navigate these multiple identities and integrate into their host country, for their own well-being (Margalit & Raz, 1990).

According to Margalit and Raz (1990), there are a few other reasons why a refugee should integrate into their host country. First, one can gain familiarity with the societal culture, which allows for more varied and available social connections. Secondly, membership in a societal culture impacts people's self-identity, one which is based on belonging and not accomplishments, which are themselves not a stable source of secure identity (Margalit & Raz, 1990). Furthermore, the sense of belonging promotes a sense of recognition, mutual respect, and responsibilities (Tamir, 1993), which leads to shared national identity, promoting relationships of unity and trust (Miller 1993; Barry 1991).

Given the connection between choice and cultural membership in the previous paragraph, Kymlicka (1995) advances the assumption that the integration of immigrants can be either fair or not fair based on whether they were forced to move out of their countries or changed their social-cultural context voluntarily or under other conditions. It is hard to draw a differentiation between

refugees and immigrants, especially in a world where injustice exists, but this does not mean that migrants should assimilate the dominant culture to integrate. Instead, Kymlicka (1995) emphasizes that people should have the absolute freedom to choose what is best from their own culture "and to integrate into their culture whatever they find admirable in other cultures" (p.105). In other words, people should acknowledge the significant role people's membership plays in their own societal culture since it gives them valuables to support their self-identity.

Refugees' Integration and Identities

Frater-Mathieson (2003) discusses the fact that refugee students face several obstacles because of their complex experiences (i.e. violence, fear, stress). And based on Krasny and Sachar's (2017) article, it is the responsibility of both public and private organizations to encourage interaction between the local and new comers' cultures because only by then the opportunities begin to follow in a healthy way. Rousseau and Guzder (2008) argue that schools are uniquely responsible among organizations, because they are responsible for directly transmitting cultural values and indeed also ideas of the "others" of a given culture. Dawn (2006) argues that schools need to be aware of this responsibility they wield, in suggesting that more needs to be done to ensure refugee students are explicitly included in the Quebec school system.

But this process is still not without its challenges, and merely changing educational policy will not improve outcomes for refugee students. The integration of refugees requires enormous efforts, not just by the school system, but by the Canadian community and the newcomers themselves (Fantino & Colak, 2001). It is significantly challenging for refugee students to integrate their history with their present status and the future realities living as Canadians (Fantino & Colak, 2001). Deckert and Vickers (2011) underline the fact that this process of immigration and integration is complex and has its effect on one's self-perception and

identity construction. Dawn (2006) also agrees with this interpretation stating that during an integration process, a student may face identity construction problems. She believes that new language learning and integration have a relation with family language policy and refugee identity. As Norton (1997) indicates, each use of the host country's language can be seen as a new space in which the identity of a refugee is negotiated and reconstructed.

Dawn (2006) points to the importance of language planning and instruction in Quebec, such as *class d'accueil* and Francisation, as being sites where cultural identity is negotiated in this way. In other words, integration classes are not only teaching refugees the host country's language, but also shaping the way refugees view their life itself by reconstructing their own values, rituals, and meaning. Orlowski (2012) refers to those approaches which transmit the dominant culture to students as *hegemonic disourses*. While communicating the values of the dominant culture, these disources reinforce also a homogenous, traditional, and static identity of the Other (Kubota, 1999, 2001, 2004a, 2004b; cf. Duff, 2002; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Leki, 2006).

Some parents of refugee students express an awareness of the negative aspects of this process of negotiation. Although recently arrived Syrian refugee parents are happy about the fact that their children are involved in Canadian schools, they are worried about their children's identity and whether they are going to forget their first language or culture (Topan, 2016). Naffi and Davidson (2016), using Kelly's (1955) Personal Construct Pschology (PCP) approach to examine the integration of Syrian refugees, suggest that integration is really a site of compromise. They argue that the common terms *inclusion* and *integration* are really two distinct concepts. Integration involves the refugee becoming a part of the host society, but inclusion is what happens when the host society changes to welcome the refugee's culture and an identity.

Naff and Davidson (2016) insist that both are crucial for full thriving of all newcomers in their new country.

Identity(es) Definition

According to Deckert and Vickers (2011), one's identity can be changed or reshaped. Wojecki (2007) argues that we all reshape our identities to some extent, and that this (i.e., constantly renegotiating one's identity as a reponse to one's society) is a major feature of the modern world. Fantino and Colak (2001), in a similar vein, also viewed identity through the lens of modernity theory and agree that an individual's full integration into a society must include aspects such as context, time and social connections. However, Norton-Peirce (1997) reminds us that identity is not merely an external, social construction, but is also made up of our internal motivations, such as a drive for achievement, group membership, and freedom from harm.

While identity is a term that is very broad and often contested in the research, for the purposes of this paper I argue that it is fundamental for researchers to recognize that all of us have a place with numerous social groups. Gaither (2018) refers to this concept as *multiplicity of belonging*. It currently seems that this reality is poorly acknowledge in the research, and past research mainly observes populations whose identities fit certain formal categories. Gaither (2018) contributed to this concept in a study with bicultural populations, which suggested that people who are able to negotiate aspects of both cultural identities, rather than either refusing to integrate at all or assimilating completely tend to show greater capacity for complex thought.

Wenger's (1998) characterization of identity carries elements of Gaiter's belonging and identity construction relationship. The author argues that we identify ourselves by how we take part or experience the activities surrounding us and how others appear in ourselves. Wenger conceptualizes identity as a concept from a social cognitive perspective, where he believes that

identity is constructed socially. Identity is socially constructed not only because of the environment or the social classes that one belongs to but also by participating in everyday life. Wenger (2002) expands on the connection between identity construction and practice by defining three notions: engagement*, imagination,* and *alignment* in the process of belonging. This aligns with Rummens' concept of identity, that states that "[i]dentity may be defined as the distinctive character belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group" (Rummens, 2004, p.6).

Wenger's (2002) perception of engagement in the process of belonging is when someone becomes involved with his/her surroundings by various means or activities. Meanwhile, the understanding of imagination of belonging is the image we create for ourselves. Furthermore, within the image is how we would like to introduce ourselves to others. Whereas the alignment is developed when one becomes sure that their local activities are part of the shared cycle of different points of view, understandings, and activities.

Gee (2001) argued that there are four ways to question an adult's identity that is influenced by a certain type of power in a specific context. The first one is labeled (N-identity) or the nature perspective of seeing an identity (Gee, 2001). To elaborate more on the previous perspective, Gee (2001) gives an example about him saying that the fact that he is "an identical twin is a *state* that [they are] in, not anything that [they have] done or accomplished" (Gee, 2001, p.101). A second perspective that Gee (2001) underlines is labeled as *the institutional perspective* (or I-Identities) (p.102). He explains that I-Identities are related to someone's position or authorization that are defined by certain type of rules and principles. For example, the fact that he is a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is his I-Identity (Gee, 2001).

The third perspective that Gee (2001) highlights is *the discourse identity* or D-Identities, which "is an individual trait, a matter of one's individuality" (p.103). An example of the previous idea could be if a person sees another person as charismatic; the trait charismatic is not something that s/he born with, rather it is an adjective given or noticed because of their interactions (Gee, 2001). Lastly, the fourth perspective of viewing someone's identity is the *affinity perspective* or A-Identities (Gee, 2001, p.105). And when someone belong to a certain group to share and participate a set of practices, it is called an "affinity group" (Gee, 2001, p.105), and this becomes part of their A-Identity. Hence, we notice the impact of social factors on identity construction and reconstruction (p.211).

Homi Bhabha and other post-colonial theorists have pointed out that identity is not fixed and question whether there is any culture that is pure or essential. Homi Bhabha's (1994), postcolonial theory of identity suggests that identities are now always "hybrid" or bridging two or more cultures in a "third space" where cultures meet and where cultural meaning and representation are not fixed. By being positioned in the juxtaposition of cultures the hybrid identity can mediate between both cultures to translate and negotiate difference (Ghosh, 2022 in press).

Taylor (1991) describes 'transculturation', as the capacity of individuals to cross over two societies and to decipher, organize and mediate proclivity and differentiation inside a dynamic of exchange and thought. They have encoded inside them a counter-hegemonic agency. The opening up of the 'third space' where cultures meet results in rearticulation of arrangement and hybrid identity (Bhabha 1994).

Ultimately, for the purpose of this thesis, identity can be seen as something which exists in multiplicity and a constant state of negotiation with social structures (Tabouret-Keller, 1997). Ostuji (2008) clarifies this point in reminding us that labels like "Japanese" or "Australian"

might seem fixed, but are not static; rather, they are behaviours that can be reconstructed based on the social interactions. Identity is never a complete state, and should never be considered a finished, unchanging product (Holland et al., 1998; Hall, 1992, 1997). To conclude, identities are about who you are, and what you might become. Identities are also transnational, ongoing narratives of the self, linked simultaneously to socialization and sociolinguistics discourses (Marshall & Mossman, 2010).

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter, gave a brief introduction into Canada's refugee history and refugee education history. I also underlined the fact that although Canada embraces multicultural education, Quebec on the other hand, embraces intercultural education. Consequently, I highlighted the importance of educator's role in the process of integration and learning of traumatized populations. I then pointed to the gap in the education and preparation of educators in knowing how to be inclusive with this sensitive population. I underlined the refugees' freedom of choice and integration through educational settings and through learning experiences, and the way both of the integration and learning experiences connected to one's identity (re)formation. Lastly, I discussed how various authors have defined identity.

In the next chapters, I will first provide my study's theoretical framework and then present the young educated Syrian refugee narratives to compare their own conceptualisation of their experiences to what is found in the related literature discussed above. I am hoping to bring the new evidence to enrich the literature about the role of formal education in the reconstruction of new identities by refugee students who complete the Francisation programs and then access university education.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology chosen in conducting the current study including the selection criteria used for the choice of participants. I define also my data collection method (i.e., narrative method with a focus on sensory narratives and identities). Lastly, I describe the research theoretical framework, process of data analysis, and how I navigated potential ethical issues.

Theoretical Framework

Within refugee studies literature, conceptualizing integration and a successful integration always has various hypotheses and interpretations. Zanghi (2020) argues that integration for refugees is not similar to the integration of immigrants. In her analysis of integration, she emphasizes the fact that refugees did not choose to leave their countries voluntarily. And beside the trauma that they need to process, refugees "are faced with a language of communication, religion and culture which are often very different from their own" (p.37).

My research is based on Ager and Strang's theory of integration, which will be discussed in the next paragraph.

Ager and Strang's (2008) Theory of Integration

Since my study explores the integration journey of young Syrian refugees through Quebec's Francisation and higher educational settings and its' effect on their identity construction, my study is based on Ager and Strang's theory of integration (2008). Ager and Strang believe that integration is multidimensional. They first look at conceptions of nationhood and belonging, social capital and social relations, trajectories of integration and the two-way integration process. They build their hypothesis of integration on four main parts: the facilitators, social connection, and means and markers.

The first part of Ager and Strang's theory of integration is the foundation: *Citizenship and Rights.* Ager and Strang (2008) argue that to understand the concept of integration, one needs not disregard the various definitions of citizenship and the rights and responsibilities that are combined with it. Although there are various concepts of citizenship depending on the context, "[d]efinitions of integration adopted by a nation inevitably depend on that nation's sense of identity, its 'cultural understandings of nation and nationhood'" (Ager & Strang, 2008, p.173). On the other hand, the rights consist of human decency, freedom of cultural choice, justice, safety and self-government (Ager & Strang, 2008). These concepts will help me to analyze Syrian refugees' understanding of identities, especially that I examine their identities and its evolution though integration in Quebec's education system, and I also explore to see if there was any oppression or a power complexity that forced them to reconstitute their identities. Secondly, according to Ager and Strang (2008), it is important to consider two major barriers, not considered elsewhere within the developing framework: language and cultural knowledge as well as safety and security. The authors argued that when refugees felt safe and felt that the local community saw them as peaceful, they could create the feeling of being at home. "Feeling safe" and accepted as "Peaceful" were identified as facilitators that eliminate barriers to successful integration.

As for cultural knowledge, Ager and Strang reported that a number of refugees suggested the value of sharing their own culture with others, helped in promoting mutual understanding, and also contributed something of value to the integrated community (Ager & Strang, 2008). Knowing the language of the local host community is key to gaining the cultural competence and ability to integrate in the wider host community. This concept is also essential to my research

study since I am examining Francisation, the French language teaching programme offered by the Quebec Government.

The third foundation of Ager and Strang's theory of integration is the social connection that includes social bonds, social bridges, and social links (2008). Moreover, according to Ager and Strang (2008) many refugees classify 'belonging' as a most important characteristic of living in integrated communities, involving links with family, committed friendships and a sense of respect and shared values. My study will also probe this aspect to find out how valuable it is for young refugees to feel secure, respected by sharing their own values and encouraging them to integrate in their new environment.

Finally, the last part of the Agar and Strang's (2008) theory, is about "markers and means" listed as: *Employment, housing, education*, and *health.* For this thesis, I will focus only on the education context since my research is exploring the influence of Quebec's higher education settings and Francisation integrational program. My decision to focus on this aspect of integration is strengthened by Agar and Strang's (2008) insistence that schools are a critical site of integration, and are where many of a refugee's close relationships are formed.

Methodology

I use a qualitative approach using in-depth semi-structured interviews as the method to get narratives as my data. The qualitative descriptive method aims to display "the facts of the case in everyday language" (Sandelowski, 2000, p.336), and in-depth semi-structured interviews have broad, open-ended questions about the experiences, challenges, or conflicts that the refugee students face in an educational setting in Quebec, which makes them useful in obtaining useful information to address my research questions.

Throughout the research, the qualitative approach helps me collect as much data about Syrian refugee students' educational and integration experiences to represent the events as seen by the participants (Sandelowski, 2000). Also, informed by qualitative data, Mohamed and Bastug (2021) underline the complexity of Syrian refugees' relationship with media, integration in Canada and their involvement in their host country and its impact on their sense of belonging and identity. Their qualitative study investigated the pre and post migration experiences of Syrian refugees to Canada.

The current study also references another qualitative study on Syrian refugee resilience and identity, this one conducted in the Netherlands (Udwan, Leurs, & Alencar, 2020). Rather than seeking to validate a particular understanding of resilience, the authors welcomed subjective reflections on Syrian refugees' transformations and meaning-making of everyday experiences and negotiating challenges, obstacles, and expectations (Udwan et al., 2020). And in my qualitative descriptive study since students describe their integration experience and identity definitions, they are expected to tell me the honest realities of their society and their identities (Lawler, 2002).

Narratives are recommended to collect data from students and investigate their understanding of identities (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008). Over the past two decades, narrative as a form of social research has received growing attention (Andrews, 2007; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Goodley, 2004). Hence, my study has a qualitative descriptive approach based on the Syrian refugee students' narratives.

Data Collection

Upon receiving approval from the McGill Research Ethics Board to conduct qualitative research on human subjects, I established four exclusionary criteria:

1. The participant population of the research would include young refugees who were 18 years of age or older.

2. The study will engage with young adult students who had completed the Francisation programme and were currently enrolled in/or had completed university studies in Montreal, Sherbrooke, or Quebec City; or who first went to university and then enrolled in the Francisation programme.

3. The study exclusively recruited full-time students because I believe a full-time student will have a different experience than a part-time student since they naturally will spend more time in the educational setting be it in the Francisation program or the university setting.

4. I made sure that I include both gender perspectives. I believe it would enable a more holistic understanding of the challenges that young refugee students face regarding their identities, its construction, and integration.

Before administering interviews, I sent an initial recruitment email to potential participants (see Appendix A). Given my own refugee background and my personal integration journey in Quebec, finding research participants could have been quite easy for me. However, the start of my research study coincided with the advent of the global COVID-19 pandemic which made the process of finding a safe and secure environment for me and my study's participants rather stressful and confusing. Therefore, all of the interviews were conducted on the phone, each call lasting around an hour or an hour and 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded by using a recorder program of my MacBook Pro. During the interviews, I kept taking notes in my notebook to use them later on while analyzing the data.

I started interviewing students from my personal network; for example, people whom I met while I was enrolled in university studies and the Francisation integration program. I also used snowball sampling to recruit additional participants. It is recommended as an especially useful strategy when a researcher wishes to study some stigmatized group or behavior (Saylor Academy, 2012). The reason for my choice of snowball sampling for recruitment of the participants is the fact that snowball sampling is a form of *non-probability sampling* where a researcher can approach individuals who meet the characteristics of the studied population (Oliver & Jupp, 2006). Hence, depending on snowball sampling I recruited Syrian refugee students who met the four exclusionary criteria I had established for selecting participants as discussed earlier on.

First, I emailed potential interview candidates the details of my research study. Once they confirmed their willingness to being part of my research study by replying to my first email, I sent them the research participant consent form to be signed by them (see Appendix B). Afterwards, I coordinated the actual interviews through another email for a convenient date and time for both me and my research participants. Eventually, I was able to find ten Young Syrian refugee students (five female and five male) who were comfortable to generously share their educational and integration journey through the phone call interviews. I was conscious about the sensitivity of my topic, and that is why I had prepared a list of CLSC addresses in advance to provide to the participants (see Appendix C) in case they experienced stress and anxiety during or after the interview. The interviews were done over a period of time, started on August 30, 2020 and completed on October 10, 2020.

Research Participants

As I highlighted above, following a snowball process, I recruited ten young Syrian refugee students who were at their University studies. All the interviews were conducted in English. The ten participants recruited were all currently living in various neighbourhoods in the greater Montréal area. At the time of the interviews, these refugee students had either been granted the Canadian permanent resident status or Canadian citizenship. The earliest date of arrival was 28th of December 2015 and most recent arrival was 1st of March 2017.

Even though I did know a few of the participants because either we had a class of Francisation together or met at university's campus by chance, I never knew details of their personal life narrative. Thus, although I might have encountered same post-migration feeling(s) in my journey of integration and identity re(construction) through education, I was aware that I should listen carefully to each narrative without superimposing my own experience, to honour the fact that everyone's experiences were unique and various.

In order to protect their privacy, the next table gives the young Syrian refugees demographic information but instead of using their real names I am referring to them by their gender and interview number (i.e. for the first female that I interviewed I will be referring her as F1).

Table 1

Demographic Data

Participant	**Gender**	**Age**	**Ethnicity**	**Birth City**	**Native Language**
1	Male	20	Old-Armenian*	Aleppo	Arabic

2	Male	22	Old-Armenian	Aleppo	Arabic
3	Female	22	Arab	Aleppo	Arabic
4	Female	19	Armenian	Aleppo	Armenian
5	Female	20	Armenian	Aleppo	Armenian
6	Female	18	Arab	Mashtal-Helou	Arabic
7	Female	32	Arab	Damascus	Arabic
8	Male	27	Old-Armenian	Al-Hasakeh	Arabic
9	Male	23	Arab	Damascus	Arabic
10	Male	21	Arab	Al-Hasakeh	Arabic

Note. "Old Armenian" denotes a descendent of Armenian parents who immigrated to Syria before the Armenian genocide of 1915.

An additional characteristic of this study's participants is that, eight out of ten students were enrolled in the Francisation programme first and then continued their studies in a University setting in Quebec, but the other two did their university studies first and then completed the francisation program.

Demographic information was collected on a fixed question and answer schedule (see Appendix D) while the in-depth semi-structured interviews had broad, open-ended questions about the experiences, challenges, or conflicts that the refugee students face in an educational setting in Quebec (see Appendix E). Those semi-structured questions had more, narrative, diary-entries based approach. It is has been asserted that the narrative approach in qualitative research

is the method of human knowledge and the fundamental method of communication (Czarniawska,1997).Czarniawska (1997) in her book talks about the history of narratives in the social science studies, its importance, and its critiques. According to Czarniwaska (1997) narratives interface with the personal to social events, procedure, and associations.

Data Analysis

Each interview session, I transcribed the interviews for analysis. In total, this equates to approximately 13 hours of audio recordings and over 100 pages of transcribed raw data. I coded all participant responses by emergent themes. Some of the themes that I identified in analayzing the data were experiences that I classified under definition of identity in general, description of young Syrian refugees' identity before attending any educational institution in Quebec, making choices, the experience of Syrian refugee students' integration going through two Quebec educational contexts: Francisation and University (I-community role, II- educator's role).

Summary

My research study took a qualitative approach to investigate the narratives of young Syrian refugee students' integration experience in higher education settings, after accomplishing Francisation integration program. Moreover, the participant selection criteria I imposed were discussed and justified my choice of the snowball sampling approach to finally reach out to ten young Syrian refugee students (five females and five males) with the defined characteristics as mentioned above. The in-depth semi-structured questions that were asked in order to see if there is any pressure that impacted those students' identities (re)construction, and if any, what that meant to those students on personal and academic levels. I embraced Ager and Strang's theory of integration to reach my main argument of this thesis.

Consequently, I analysed my raw data and coded them into categories and sub-categories. In other words, I analysed the data thematically and brought up the common definitions based on students' personal narratives.

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

This chapter will present a deeper analysis of the data given by participating students of this research. It will also represent the themes culled after analysis of the raw data generated by the interviews; following that, a discussion. The themes discussed below feature interview data on educational trajectories and experiences of the Syrian refugee students, in both the Francisation program as well as English-language university settings.

Student Profiles

The participants in this study arrived as part of the 2015-2016 wave of Syrian refugees accepted to Canada. They all came directly to the province of Quebec. They waited for their papers in different countries where they had taken safe refuge – most of them arrived from Lebanon. These participants were all born and raised in various Syrian cities where they spent the first twenty years of their lives. They, therefore, had started their university studies in their hometowns. Only three of the ten students had the opportunity to continue their studies in the countries where they waited in transit, such as in Beirut, Lebanon. Even though these participants were educated in Arabic, in Syria, most of them had some knowledge of French before coming to Quebec. In fact, they were taught French as a subject in their high schools because of the reform of the Syrian curriculum to include a third language (Muderyet Al tarbye B Halab, 2001). For a few of them, especially those who came from the city of Aleppo, their second language is indeed French, because they attended French language private high schools.

To expand on their French language background and competency, it is important to know that the participants in this study came as refugees in two categories: either sponsored by the government (RPG) or refugees who arrived by private citizen sponsorship (RPSP). The existing statistics show, that in the RPG group, 10,9% and of the RPSP group 56.1% have English

language competency while 1.9% of the RPG group and 5,9% of the RPSP group have French language knowledge (CIC, 2017a). However, the level of French language knowledge varied among the students interviewed, and it was mainly based on their city of origin, their age, or the educational curriculum they followed back home. In 2001 the ministry of education in Syria brought a small change to the Syrian education curriculum and included French as a second language as a mandatory subject in both private and public high school sectors (Muderyet Al tarbye B Halab, 2001).

Therefore, those participants who had graduated from high school before the updated curriculum, had no knowledge of French and no competency in French language. In the words of one participant: "when I was in Syria, the next generation after me start[ed] to take French [language as a subject]. My generation didn't take [the] French [language]" (Participant 8). Whereby, students who got their high school degree after the curriculum modification said that they had some "basic knowledge." For instance, one of the students said that he "had a very basic French knowledge, but it wasn't the focus at all in his studies and was just at the basic level. Just to learn it, no practice, no vocabulary, no conversation. It was basically just some grammar rules" (Participant 9).

On the other hand, the students who came from Aleppo, a city in northwestern Syria, had different experience with the language because they had the option to attend a private French-Arabic school. As one male [or female] participant observes:

> Yeah, I was above average in French. I just like, I learnt it at school since I was six years old, and everything at that it was a language course that we took every semester but I was never fluent in, right? So, I never use it (Participant 1).

Given the above results, it was interesting to delve into what motivated the participants to decide

to complete the Francisation program while having in their minds the conviction that they will attend an English-language university.

The participating students were selected for this study because they all had the same middle-class socioeconomic status, were of Christian faith and had already enrolled at universities in Syria. The fact that my participants were all of the Christian faith was not something I specifically was looking for and it was not specified as an inclusion/exclusion criterion in selecting the participants. It so happened that they were all of the Christian faith, although my intention was not to focus on religion. Nine out of ten participants had at least some basic knowledge of French upon arrival to Quebec. All participants had participated in the French integration program offered by the Quebec government for six months on average. Even though they had successfully completed the program, they had all decided to study at an English-language university.

Finally, six out of the ten participants were enrolled in engineering and nine out of ten students' parents held university degrees from their hometown, either in engineering, law, medicine, or accounting. Unfortunatley, even though their parents had degrees and professions, none of them worked in their specialty in Quebec. Four or five years after settling in Quebec, six out of ten Syrian refugee students included in this study had found jobs related to their current majors. All of the participants arrived in Quebec with their parents and siblings and were currently still living together in one household at the time of the interviews.

Research Theme 1: What do you understand by the word Identity?

When I asked the participating students what identity meant for them, I received various versions of a definition of identity. For many of them identity is "multiple of the things" (Participant 8), and for others it is only one thing at a time. Using my notes to analyze the data,

the most common definitions for what an identity could be for those refugee students came into four categories: an inheritance, behavior, label, and an experience or achievement.

Identity as Inheritance

One student said, "[Identity] would come from parents, so whatever the parents' religion, whatever the parents' origin, culture …whatever moves from the parents to children … someone passes it to you" (Participant 4). This account shows how a young Syrian refugee understands the concept of identity, or what identity is. Throughout the analysis of the interviews it becomes clear that the participants believe identity to be something passed on from one generation to another; in other words, something inherited from the older generation. They also added that identity is learned. For instance, one of the students emphasized that identity is taught by the parents: "for me, I would say [identity is] what my parents taught me" (Interview 3, female student).

Identity as Behavior

At the same time students also saw an identity as behavior and ethics. "Identity is the person and (the) behavior…and the moral issue and being a human … the moral issues that's the more important one!" (Participant 7). They also mentioned that identity can be manners that someone would learn it from his/her surroundings: "someone's identity is all the things that shaped him into the person he is at the moment….[it is]manners [that] he learned from home to his background" (Participant 9).

Identity as Label(s)

Many of the participating Syrian refugee students also believed that identity is something that addresses you and your beliefs; "something that represents you. Something like a sentence

that you can tell people, or a word that you can't tell people to literally label you or put you in a box of the words you say", said one of the students (Participant 6). Similarly, identity was also discussed as a way of thinking: "identity…I think it's the way you think, so in the same country, you have a lot of different opinions, a lot of different people. So, your identity can belong to more than your country's nationality" (Participant 2).

Identity as Achievements or Experience

The other characterization that describes identity in general, according to those students, is identity as achievements or experiences that someone aims to accomplish. Syrian refugee students emphasized that identity is related to professional and life achievements that are recognized by others; for instance, one of the students said: "identity is like a plan that you have. Like, if you plan on becoming a manager or whatever field you chose, this is your identity. It's the achievement you do" (Participant 1). Lastly, it was also interesting to see that students identified their identities as experiences; or like one of the students mentioned: "it's about the experience that (someone) had" (Participant 10).

Identity at the beginning of the Integration Journey

> I am a Syrian immigrant; I am new in this country. I have all the cultures; like, I have all these ideas that are with me, that I carry from my hometown. I didn't have a lot of information about the country I am in now, let's say this society I'm going to be integrated in; I had few details, I didn't have the full scope picture (Participant 9).

This is the way the young Syrian refugee student described his identity before attending any educational institution here in Quebec. His statement shows the way he sees himself as an immigrant, in fact, none of the students used the word "refugee" in representing their identities – they referred to themselves rather as "immigrant." He also emphasized that that he is aiming to

be involved in his new environment, which is the Quebec society. Three sub-themes emerged for this stage of the process of integration to the host society. First, all of the participants underlined at some point, while describing their identities before attending any educational institution in Quebec, the fact that the urge of being part of Quebec was or was going to be part of their identity. A second common theme that the young Syrian refugee students emphasized about their identities' is experiencing war or witnessing war:

> so actually going through the war, it is part of my identity…yeah, the fact that we all went through the war and like suffered, you know, a lot of war related tragedies…so it does become part of your identity for sure" (Participant 1).

Finally, the students' linguistic skills made up the third most mentioned trait of their identities. For instance, one student described themselves as someone "who knew English and a little bit of French" (Participant 4).

After examining the participating Syrian refugee students' perspectives on their identities before attending any educational institutions in Quebec, I concluded their narratives about their identities in four main research themes: someone who is striving to belong to Quebec, being a witness to a war, being an immigrant rather than a refugee, and thinking about the linguistic skills that they carried within themselves. In the upcoming paragraphs, I will convey their reasoning related to their decision to follow the Francisation program offered by the Quebec Government, and why they chose to attend an English language university. Lastly, I will describe the way those learning experiences in the Francisation program and the English language university programs impacted their identities.

Research Theme 2: Young Syrian Refugees' Integration through Educational Settings

The students who had chosen to go to an English language university, knew before coming to Quebec that "Quebec is a linguistically divided society with two groups of social institutions" as described by Dawn (2006, p. 254). The reasons for the choices made by the participants were diverse; however, here, I represent the common reasons and the most repeated ones that were mentioned by the young adult Syrian refugee students who took part in this study.

For most of the participants, the reason for choosing to attend an English language university was that they were more comfortable in English and it would make their path shorter and more manageable. One of the students said

> Because I already felt that I was late …because I was twenty-two or twenty-three, so when I had the choice to go into university, I wanted to stop wasting time; go into university as soon as possible, graduate as soon as possible. So, the English university was the fastest choice" (Participant 2).

Although all of the students were taught English as a second or third language back in their hometown, they had never followed an English language curriculum. As previous noted in Chapter 2, English was offered as a second or third language but the medium of instruction was Arabic.

Another reason for choosing an English language university was given to be personal communication based on the source of help that those participants had at the beginning of their academic and integration journey: "I also had more contact at Concordia University, so it made it sort of easier for me as a newcomer to register and have more information about programs at Concordia than in French language universities" (Participant 1).

Some of the participants chose to continue their university education in English because they were not sure whether they were going to settle in Quebec. Moreover, English is more widely used in the world and everyone can understand it. “I decided to go with English because that is much easier for me to proceed in with my studies after all like if I decided to go to the United States or decided to go back to Europe that would be much easier for me, it’s more international yeah” (Participant 10). This and similar responses indicate that the participants are not sure whether they are going to continue living in Quebec. Therefore, from the participants’ responses we gather that they were somehow knowledgeable about Quebec’s bilingual reality. All of them knew that they were going to continue their university studies in English for the different reasons mentioned in their responses as presented above. One student in particular expressed this sentiment quite clearly in telling her story:

> I applied to come to Canada, Quebec; well I had selection for Quebec, which means I was selected to go to Quebec, to learn French. Well, in Quebec 101, the first thing to learn to integrate in Quebec and live comfortably [is the language]. Your French is the key, because over here French language is the language that everybody speaks. For me, I want to learn French because I personally adore Quebec culture and I love how Quebec is always different from other provinces and French language was part of Quebec, is part of Quebec, so I consider myself a Quebecer; I chose to go and learn the language so I can not only integrate but feel the value of Canadian, not originally French Canadian, but Québecoise Canadian’ (Participant 4).

On the other hand, young Syrian refugees had also the freedom of doing Francisation program or not doing it. As, I mentioned above, even though they had French language competency, they freely chose to do Francisation upon their arrival. Eight of the ten participants

chose to first complete the Francisation program and then pursue university studies. Two of the participants first completed their university studies and then enrolled in the Francisation program and completed it. This participant's account, as a newcomer to Quebec, shows that learning French as a third language in the Francisation program offered by the government is the key to integrating into the host community. This reason was one of the main reasons mentioned by all participants in the study. It also illustrates the feeling of responsibility and gratitude towards the host society.

A second reason for which the participants in this study attended the Francisation program is for a double financial consideration. First, they received a weekly stipend for attendance, $141 CAD. (Babaei, 2020). This concept was underlined and repeated by one student in particular, who stated:

> Basically, because Quebec! The first language is French, so me and my parents we decided to improve our French and that same time it was the government paid money so we're not doing so great financially, when we got here so it was a good chance for both I mean learning and getting the money (Participant 3).

The other part of the financial consideration mentioned by all participants is to have better job opportunities: "I wanted to improve my French, which was for finding better job because there isn't much jobs which you can find with very basic French" (Participant 6).

Consequently, all ten of the participating students completed three levels of the Francisation program, and seven of them attended the program in French-language university settings. Even though all of the students described their overall experience in Francisation programs as "positive" or "slightly positive." Those who attended the Francisation program first described their experience as being positive. The two students who attended the Francisation

program after completing their university studies described their experience as being "slightly positive."

In the next section, I present refugee students' journeys through their language learning experiences, university studies and their identity construction, based on their inclusion in two educational settings in Quebec: Francisation programs and university studies.

Research Theme 3: Young Syrian Refugee Students' Experience with Francisation and University Contexts

In this section, I am going to illustrate the two main factors related to the Francisation program and university studies that played a major role in the integration of the participants into their host society. The data will be presented through comparing the learning experience of participants in these two educational settings, and their relative impact on the identity representation and re(construction) of these students. The two factors are the following: 1) Community role and 2) Educator's role.

Community

For many of the students, doing Francisation and knowing that they are in a room where people share the same cultural background encouraged them to learn and be motivated. Knowing that people they are sitting next to are newcomers like them, not necessarily Syrian, made them feel comfortable to share their identities and stories. Most of the students emphasize the importance of "not being alone" in Francisation setting as a supportive, positive factor for their integration journey, that "…also being in a room full of people from around the world makes you feel not alone, you see them struggling as much as you struggle" (Participant 4). This "not being alone" feeling extended in the context of the Francisation integration program to a feeling of

finding ‘home’, to a sense of finding stronger family to which to belong, as one of the students echoed the feelings experienced by most as follows

> you feel like you want to go there and have fun; and have some smiles, and learn some stuff. It felt like some second family there, you know I was away from my parents, I was only with my aunt and my uncle, so everyone was like missing something so they were all together binding, you know what …I was missing that kind of family feeling, so I had a family there… (Participant 2).

Therefore, the students in my study gained a sense of belonging by making friendships in the first educational setting of their new journey in the host country, the Francisation program in Quebec.

Furthermore, they felt comfortable with their identity in a space where they felt safe because the people they met in the Francisation classrooms were sharing the same struggles to survive, to thrive, and to ‘find’ themselves in the new country.

> Making friends in the Francisation program helps you because you have a lot of difficulties when you arrive … the fact that everyone is there, is new and everyone is there for the same goals, it truly helps and motivates you to continue (Participant 2).

On the other hand, those students who attended the Francisation program as their second educational experience rather than the first one, had a completely different experience from the ones who first went through the Francisation experience. The two students who first completed university studies and then attended the Francisation program underlined that they did not need friends to survive because they already had ones from their universities:

> for me it was just go there, learn French and go back home. Like, it's not a place to socialize for me, it's not like a place to make friends or make friendships or relationships. For me, it was a place about being just here to learn French (Participant 6).

The second student who did her university studies before doing francisation agreed with the experience of the student mentioned above. She stated, "[I] don't care about making friendships" (Participant 7).

Therefore, for the students who were in the Francisation program after their first educational institution encounter in a university, the need for making friends was not present, and this expectation made them uncomfortable and discouraged their wanting to share their identities in the Francisation settings, unlike the students who experienced the Francisation program first. For those students who went through the Francisation program as their first educational experience and context in Quebec, this setting brought to them a sense of belonging, resilience to continue, and survive the obstacles facing them in the new country.

University

> In my first year, I joined a technical club that's where I made most of my university friends…when I joined the club I started being friend with others, I started seeing them doing the same and it helped my mental health a lot because I made friends. I have people to talk to, I had people who understood my pain or my struggles at university level not at personal level, and I also met people from different backgrounds who were also like me, who could relate to the difficulty of moving from here from a different country and starting to learn a language that was not your language so that helped me a lot (Participant 4).

This female student's statement suggests that joining the technical club gave her new friends, and both of the academic and personal support to overcome the challenges faced in her studies and new life. As we can see, higher educational settings were spaces where students established and developed their first relationships. Those friendships were not only supporting their academic achievements, but also facilitating their integration journey in the new environment, Quebec.

As indicated by the example above, in university settings, students were able to live or celebrate their identity through associations or clubs. In fact, eight out of ten students were either executive members of the Syrian students' association (SSA) of the university where they were studying, or they were active members in the same association. For instance, one of the interviewed students described the SSA by emphasizing that

> The SSA takes you back home… it makes you feel that you belong to that place because it's not only that I know about the culture, but makes me belong to Quebec, how Quebec is ready to receive my culture is what makes me belong to Quebec; so it goes both ways. So once I feel that …I can live my culture and celebrate in certain settings, I feel that I belong to that setting and It's not only knowing about the values of that specific setting (Participant 9).

Those associations not only played a role on the social aspects of their lives, they also gave them the sense of 'home' in the university settings which gave them peace of mind and motivation to achieve more on both academic and personal levels. One student expressed this concept in saying,

> I mean it makes you more engaged at school, makes you more motivated, makes you produce more, it's like it's not like the more time you spend at a place the more you get attached you get more engaged and more engaged means for focus on school (Participant 9).

Through these examples, it appears that associations or clubs in university settings gave those refugee students friendships, motivation to evolve academically, to discover Quebec culture, and celebrate their cultural identity as well.

The association not only opened space for the young refugees to make friendships and celebrate their identities (i.e. their Syrian culture as mentioned above), it also gave them opportunities to share their lived stories of war, as stated by one student, "Stories of war …is not something that I would go around and say it to people, I will just say it for someone who is closer to me, someone who knows me…" (Participant 3). And this account underlined the fact that Syrian students avoid talking about war on campus, unless they have a strong relationship or connection with a friend who had a similar traumatic experience.

At the same time, students who did share their stories of war in classroom settings regret doing it. One participant said that, "once I shared my experience of my childhood, but at the end of it I didn't feel good…they couldn't understand. I felt bad I thought like why I told him…he never experienced war" (Participant 7). This student's story also brought up other aspects of sharing identities – meaning that the students had a choice of deciding what part of their identities they wanted to share and where (outside vs. inside classroom). She continued by saying that she stopped sharing similar stories inside of the classroom because that experience made her think that her peers may consider her to be a member of ISIS (Participant 7).

Making friendships and sharing identities inside of classrooms were different experiences for those refugee students depending on size of the classroom and the size of the department that those students come from. For instance, if the students belonged to a small department (i.e., an honors program) they were comfortable to share parts of their identity while, if they belonged to a bigger department (i.e., Engineering, for most of the participants) they felt that there was no need to share their identities because it was not professional to do so, as indicated by one student:

> Everyone is there to study. No one is there to know about classmates, no one cares where you're from, no one cares what you are studying, no one cares what your opinion is about. They just care about information, being in class, asking questions, asking for help and that's it (Participant 2).

Consequently, Syrian students faced difficulties in making friendships inside of classrooms because they could not feel comfortable to establish relationships with their peers at university like they were able to do in the Francisation program, and this fact impacted negatively on their academic achievements. One participant lamented this situation in saying,

> I was feeling bit down not having someone to share my thoughts with, not having friendly talks, like casual talk when I feel that I need to share my opinions…I ended up with mostly C grades in my courses…I realized that I need to keep my social life, and strike a better balance with my studies and this affected me really bad mentally I wasn't happy… (Participant 2).

Unlike in Francisation classrooms, they believed that "no one cares" about their identity and this added another difficulty in establishing relationships. This was underlined by most students by saying that "my studies, engineering, was not 200 people, sometimes more than 200

students, so I didn't get the same feeling as being in a classroom full of 20 students where everyone knows the names of everyone" (Participant 4).

On the other hand, those students who participated in the interviews and who belonged to small departments were able to share identities with their peers. "With my classmates, for example, my religious identity wasn't issue to anyone at university, where I told you at Francisation, I didn't feel safe to share it with people at Francisation' (Participant 6). Therefore, Syrian refugees in smaller departments were able to make friendships and share identities which helped them to find success in their academic life.

Finally, it is notable that knowing peers inside classrooms increased their motivation and made them feel accepted. "It's more like it by third year now, I know everyone in my class, I know their names; I know where they come from, like I know a lot of them!" (Participant 6).

By now, we can see how the fact of making friendships with peers inside and outside the classroom, sharing identities with each other, and the feeling of belonging to a community in the learning environment, played an essential part in Syrian refugee students' learning journey and their well-being in Francisation and University settings. Next, I will examine the teacher's role as the other factor being presented in this analysis.

Educator's Role

In this section, I will underline the educator's role in Syrian refugee students' higher educational and integration journey. In both settings, Francisation and University, students mentioned ways in which they were affected directly or indirectly by their professors. For example, for many of the students, teachers they met at the Francisation classroom were the first Canadian persons with whom they came in contact, as one of the students interviewed stated: "Francisation is a good place to be as an immigrant and the professor was very inspiring, so he

gave me hope…he was the first Canadian person that I ever met" (Participant 1). Furthermore, characteristics or the background of the educator played an important role in building a relationship with the teacher and in being able to share identities. For instance, one of the students said:

> some of the teachers were themselves immigrants, so that added value to the relationship established. It's nice that the fact that you see the person who is teaching was able to learn themselves the language and then they are teaching it" (Participant 4).

Additionally, when Syrian refugee students felt that their identities were accepted by the teacher, this helped them to build strong relationships with the teacher. One student indicates this in mentioning her teacher's own bicultural identity:

> I mean my teacher was half Moroccan so she was half Arab so she had maybe the same basics that we have some traditions that we have so I feel that she knew my identity, she understood who I am, where I come from, so maybe that's how it has helped getting closer to the teacher (Participant 3).

This background familiarity encouraged the students to share their identities in the Francisation classroom and motivated them to learn the new language. Nevertheless, these students also underlined the fact that when there was no relationship between them and the teacher in the francisation settings, the cultural misunderstanding was more likely to happen which impacted their motivation to integrate and learn the language.

To expand on this concept, I will underline one of the examples that a participant of this study mentioned. The student described a dialogue between him and the teacher of Francisation where the student felt offended and tried to explain his point of view but the teacher answered him back by saying that 'I'm not saying it to insult someone. [Quebec] is our culture you need to

learn it because you're here now" (Participant 8). Another aspect that did not encourage young Syrian refugee students to develop or even share their identities is the lack of respect, which was strongly underlined by those students who did Francisation as their second educational stop. One student said that:

> I wasn't a newcomer when I started Francisation, so I kind of understood all the things happening around me in Canada and Quebec; especially knowing that people who were doing that course with me were newcomers and had no sense of what it is like to be respectful to other people, or values that we take as Canadians or as Quebecers in this country (Participant 6).

At the same time, when I asked the participating students what they think their teacher saw to be their identity in the Francisation classrooms, they all agreed that their teachers saw them as a student and not as a survivor, and this is how one of the students underlined this feeling: "They saw me as a student. I never felt that I'm a victim or that I'm coming from a very catastrophic situation" (Participant 10). Here, the refugee students are viewed as students and not as refugees, victims, nor survivors.

But being seen merely as students also had the drawback of being seen as invisible. One student expressed, "In University…profs don't see us, I guess. I don't think they know that we exist! Honestly, all the profs they don't care; they really don't" (Participant 3). For most of the students who came from large departments, this invisibility was the reality for them. However, some students argued that it is not logical to compare the Francisation and university settings since one is a more professional setting than the other. One student made a particularly detailed argument in saying,

> Well, I can't really compare because I'm not learning the language, I am learning engineering. In Francisation I will have one on one with my teacher and I will know better my teacher, versus what I'm having at university with 200 students in a course and may not even know how to pronounce my teacher's name and I will never have communication between me and my teacher. The education system is different because one place at Francisation, I am learning the language and at the other place I'm learning problem solving where I have problems in front of me and I just need to know how to solve them (Participant 4).

Another reason that students believed that in university "nobody cares if [they] do well" (Participant 1) is that there is no space to build a relationship with the professor since, as one student said:

> all they see is a student ID number on a piece of paper, or sometimes because they correct the exams…sometimes it's not the professors who are correcting the exams, it's another student who corrects the exam, the TA. There were some professors who never knew that I was part of their class (Participant 4).

The participating students justified these experiences by saying that it is their own responsibility to search out resources and,

> like for university, nobody cares if you do well. Yeah, like nobody cares about you! Like honestly you should be the only one who cares about yourself, because if you don't do your assignment there is nobody even, they don't even know your face. Right? So, submit the assignment, when corrected get your mark. You did it; good for you. You didn't do it; it's also your fault like nobody will follow up with you. Whereas at Francisation there was one on one follow up basically (Participant 1).

To summarize, what emanated from students' testimonials was the important role played by educators, especially caring educators, in their relationship with the students and in sharing their identities and the impact on the academic performance and the well-being of refugee students. In the next section, I highlight the significance of the refugee students' trajectories in both educational settings, in Francisation and at university, and the impact of this experience on the (re)construction of their identity(ies).

Research Theme 4: Impacts of Educational Experiences on Identity

At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed the way the Syrian students conceptualized identity. Now, I highlight definitions of what they think their identities are, who they have become after being engaged in both the Francisation program and university studies. Although the students admitted the difficulty of responding to this question, all of them, after taking a deep breath, agreed that their identity was something when they first came to Quebec and then it evolved into something different.

They underlined that there are parts of their identities that have been lost or changed due to what they learned in the Francisation program and at the university they attended. One student indicated that

> My identity has the same core, the same things that I built my identity on when I was growing up. After 18, you know, when you start to build your knowledge to build your mind …I guess it's almost the same with some differences but it's almost the same as I told you, it is so improved now with English for example, my experience at university, the class that I'm having, like even when I'm learning things and being more passionate than I was so everything has changed. (Participant 10).

According to the young Syrian refugee students, Francisation shaped their identities and added another characteristic to it. One student expressed this as, “I learned the language, so I felt like [I am] part of the Québecois culture so I added it to my identity; I used to see myself as an Armenian student, now I see myself as a student, Armenian and Québécoise” (Participant 4).

Further, those students who completed the Francisation program first thing upon their arrival, were also successful creating feelings of belonging to Quebec society. One student expressed some relief upon completing the Francisation program: “My feeling of belonging was much better after I left Francisation…the prof was trying to get along with students and get them to know how the system works here and what’s the country about, their mind-set and everything” (Participant 2). Consequently, students were able to create these connections with their host country or province facilitated and mediated by the educators in the Francisation program they attended.

In addition to the role of the educator of the Francisation program, the educational activities that took place during Francisation also helped the students to be involved in Quebec community. One student said that they

> …learned a lot! I have learned the culture of Quebec for example, they took you to a couple of places of important monuments, places where they show their culture in museums; when it was time for sugar-shack season, they took us to a sugar-shack; just basic Quebec activities! They showed us around and what can we do and what can’t we do so it was kind of showing us around (Participant 4).

Continuing their educational journey during their university studies, Syrian refugee students were exposed to the English educational system in Quebec. Their identities kept

evolving. One student mentioned that their identity has shifted, particularly in their language usage. They stated that they:

> don't speak as much Arabic as I used to, I don't use it. Yeah, for real, like I lost most of my proficiency in Arabic, let's say when it comes to the Standard Arabic, I really forgot a lot because I stopped practicing; like, reading heavy books that break your head with amount of ….because I am reading more in French and English and I'm working in French and I'm studying in English, Arabic rarely comes, it's not gone but it's really less' (Participant 9).

This student's account illustrated the loss of linguistic identity. Almost all of the ten students I interviewed confessed that they encountered the same type of loss but some of them mentioned more the loss of their Arabic reading skills, others writing skills, and a few their speaking skills.

Syrian refugee students also mentioned that their religious identity had evolved and changed. Five out of ten students emphasized that their religious identity was agnostic or atheist. None of the students mentioned the reason behind their religious identity change. I also wonder whether they actually wanted to espouse the Quebec value of secularism.

In summary, the Syrian refugee students who participated in this study were grateful for being able to engage in Francisation and university studies. They were proud that they now can fluently communicate in French and English and think like-French-Canadians. One student saw themselves now as Canadian. They stated:

> Now I am Canadian, yeah Canadian from Montreal…I'm very grateful for everything actually (the) education system has offered; and you ever had conflict between being this immigrant and then trying to be Canadian, you know? Identities reflected also on your studies as well have you ever had this? Yeah, like I feel seeing other perspectives also

> open minded and just getting involved in the system just made me a much better person (Participant 6).

Discussion

Throughout the presentation of the four themes, we saw how Syrian educated young refugees described an identity as inheritance, behavior, labels, and achievements or experiments. They also agreed that their self and cultural identity had evolved throughout their educational journey in University and Francisation. The community inside the classroom or outside of the classroom played an essential role in the process of their integration into their new environment. For university settings the community outside the classroom was mainly referred to as the students' associations, cultural clubs, or groups. Community inside the classroom, in both education settings, expanded to include not only the friendships between peers but also the relationship with the educator. The educator played an equally important role in facilitating the integration of the young refugee students to their new homes. This was achieved by the educator creating space for refugee students to celebrate and evolve their cultural and self-identities, supporting their academic success, personal well-being and integration.

Summary

This chapter has presented the perspectives of Syrian educated young refugees about RQ1: what 'identity' means to them, and how they describe their identities before and after attending educational settings in Quebec. RQ2: Why did the young educated Syrian refugee students choose to do Francisation before or after their university studies even though they had French language competency. And RQ3: Who played an essential role in their integration journey

through those educational settings?. In the next chapter, I offer my analysis of their narratives and compare them to the existing literature to make further suggestions for future studies.

Chapter Five: Analysis & Conclusion

Analysis

At the beginning of this study, I asked young Syrian-educated refugee students what they thought about identity. Based on their description, four research themes emerged. First, participants saw their identity as an inheritance that they have taken or given by their previous generation. The concept of inheritance was showed in Gee's (2001) described nature perspective or N-identities (p. 101). Gee (2001) describes it as a biological trait. He also explains that identity is something that one cannot control. In this case, the students' identities came naturally to them once they were born in a given family.

The second theme that came out from Syrian refugee students' answers was identity as behaviour. This definition demonstrates Gee's (2000) "the institutional perspective (or I identities)" (p. 102) that defines identity as something imposed, and here students underlined the factors or regulations in their environment that were of influence in making up their identity.

A third way that Syrian refugee students saw identities, in general, was through labels. In these responses, we see the third perspective described by Gee (2000) of "D-identities" (p.103), where he (2001) refers to an individual trait such as caring based on social interaction that only becomes identity because "other people treat, talk about, and interact" with a person in ways that brings forth and reinforces that trait (p. 103). According to Gee (2000), "D-identities" can be placed on a continuum in terms of how active or passive one is in recruiting them, that is, in terms of how much such identities can be viewed as merely ascribed to a person versus an active achievement or accomplishment of that person (p.104).

Lastly, young Syrian refugee students saw identities as an experience or achievement. This perspective of Syrian students aligns with Gee's (2000) definition of "A-identities" (p105),

where he recognizes that identities can be created through "participation in specific practices" (p105). Gee's (2001) "A-identities" also were shown in young Syrian refugee students while I was asking about how they define their identities before attending any educational institutions in Quebec (Francisation or University studies). It was interesting to see that each student while describing their identities in the beginning of their learning journey agreed on certain experiences, which in my opinion reflected their "A-identities". This included the fact that all of them saw that there are essentials: someone who is striving to belong to Quebec, witness to war, an immigrant rather than a refugee, and the linguistic skills that they carried within themselves. These represented their individual as well as collective shared identities.

Young Syrian refugee students' answers pointed out past, present, and future belonging relationships. In other words, they knew that at the beginning of their journey, they were immigrants who experienced war. They also emphasized that they had particular language competencies that reflected their language and cultural identity. They would evolve and develop by being part of Quebec society by adding the host community's history, language, and culture. I believe that understanding this multiplicity of belonging (Gaither, 2018) is essential to understand how Syrian refugees believe their identity had evolved or not. Consequently, I notice from their statements about their identities in the beginning of their journey how important is to them to establish a belonging relationship with their host community, Quebec. Gaither's (2018) and Wenger's (1998) concepts of identity illustrate how establishing belonging relationship shapes or reshapes one's identity. And as a mean of establishing that type of relationship young Syrian refugee students chose to be part of Francisation program and to restart their university studies.

The literature review represented in Chapter Two shows how refugees, unlike immigrants, do not choose to leave their countries. However, they encounter several challenges (i.e. new language) in their host countries that in order to overcome those circumstances they need to make some choices. Thus, my second question investigated their reasons of why those young Syrian refugees willingly choose to do Francisation before or after University studies even though they had French language competency. In a research project conducted by Lee (2008) who examined the reason why Chinese students want to learn English in the United States, he states that "for some language learners, a reimagining of 'choice' in learning English represented a counter discursive strategy" (p. 93).

Given the above results, it seemed logical to delve into what motivated the participants of this study to decide to complete the Francisation program while having in their minds the conviction that they will attend an English-language university. From the participants' responses we gather that they were somehow knowledgeable about Quebec's bilingual reality, and that is how they chose to do Francisation and English-based university. To emphasize, even before going to the Francisation program, all Syrian refugee students knew that they were going to continue their university studies in English for the different reasons mentioned in their responses as presented above. One of the responses provided above indicated that the participants are not sure whether they are going to continue living in Quebec, and this makes a strong connection with what Dawn (2006) expressed in his article, questioning whether the Quebec government's emphasis on the Francisation program was succeeding in making the newcomers stay permanently in Quebec. However, those students were aware of their responsibilities and duties as an immigrant to Quebec, and felt extremely grateful to the Quebec society for their hospitality.

Participants saw that learning Quebec's language and culture is a way of saying thanks the province or host community for its hospitality. This concept aligns with the first foundation of Ager and Strang's (2008) theory of integration: Citizenship and Rights. Young Syrian refugee students knew that they have certain responsibilities toward the host community, which is learning the dominant language and culture, but this also included them searching for opportunities to share their linguistic and cultural identities. This present the rights of Ager and Strang's theory of integration theory, where in order for integration to be successful immigrants have their right to share their background as well.

Although I summarized their main three reasons in categories, I believe that the reasons why young Syrian refugees chose to do Francisation and redo their undergrad level university studies goes beyond what they described above. Mainly, Syrian refugee students did it to build belonging relationship with their host society. This belonging and societal membership supported Syrian refugee students' well-being, opened new opportunities, and constructed their identities. This aligns with Margalit and Raz's (1990) argument that underlines how the migrant's choice of being part of societal structure is essential; moreover, it also supports and reshapes their self and cultural identities. They had the urge to build belonging relationships that represents Ager and Strang's (2008) theory of integration is the social connection that includes social bonds, social bridges, and social links, and young Syrian refugee students' chose these educational settings (Francisation and English University) as their means to integrate.

My third question helped me to see who or what played a main role in facilitating their learning and integration journey, which were the community and educators. For Syrian refugee students learning experience was not only related with grades or teaching style. Either in Francisation or university, Syrian refugee students looked at other important factors that

motivated them to learn, integrate, connect, and evolve on both academic and personal level. The first thing that they looked for in their learning environment was the security and feeling of comfort. One of the examples given above was about how doing Francisation with a room full of students who had shared background or struggles made them feel that they are not alone. Moreover, with this feeling of familiarity they wanted to feel at home in their learning environment and to feel safe and secure.

This concept aligns with Fecser (2015) concept of safety and refugee education, which was discussed in chapter 2. This is illustrative of the importance for this traumatized population to evolve a sense of safety in their learning environment, so that they can be able to learn and achieve their desired educational goals either if the goal is to learn new language, new culture, or doing their desired undergrad degree. And not feeling secure had negatively impacted their learning experience. For instance, when university students from bigger departments could not be able to create "home" in their classrooms, they instead joined cultural and technical associations/clubs, where they were able to create a safe place or as they called "a home." Furthermore, whenever Syrian refugee students felt safe and somewhere that they can belong to, they were also able to integrate, evolve, and celebrate their identities.

Young Syrian refugee students found resilience through making friendships. For the students who did Francisation before university studies, making connections with other students in Francisation classes was an essential need. Specifically, that Francisation was the primary institution for the participants to socialize and build bridges demonstrates Wilkinson's (2002) concept of how schools turn out to be the first stop for refugee students to integrate and build belonging relationship in any social structure. The urge of making friendships was also shown in

the higher educational settings where students established and developed their first relationships as well.

Conversely, a failure to make these relationships seemed to have a negative impact on the student's academic and social performance. This was demonstrated in the current study by the participants who stated that studying in a larger department meant they could not make social connections easily. This example aligns with Sullivan and Simonson's (2016) concept of how evolving positive social relationships support refugee students' well-being and academic performance. On the other hand, Syrian refugee students in smaller departments were able to make friendships and share their identities which helped them to find success in their academic life and made them feel accepted and felt comfortable being who they were in a space where they felt safe.

As I discussed in the literature review, schools not only are primary places where students will be establishing their first relationships (Birman et al. 2005; Fazel & Stein, 2002), but also places where students will strive to understand the social structure of a certain society through the school (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013). This is what the participants demonstrated when they were talking about their journey in Francisation and university. For example, one of the examples presented above underlined the fact that the teacher of Francisation, with whom they were in contact every day, was the main role model to them of what characteristics a Canadian person should have. And from the teacher, they somehow understood that that they are going to embrace Quebec's culture and identity.

Most of the young Syrian refugee students pointed out that once they knew the teacher had an immigrant background they felt more motivated to learn the French language; because if the teacher had done it, they could do it as well. The same attitude was shown in their university

studies. Sometimes, seeing a professor with an immigrant background teaching a course, encouraged the students to embrace their academic goals and build relationship with them. Furthermore, this familiarity and social connection with their teacher also encouraged students to share their self and cultural identities. It was easier for Syrian refugee students to share their identities in Francisation classes rather than university settings.

The main argument for them was that in Francisation classes they had opportunities provided by the teacher to share their cultural and self-identities; meanwhile, in universities no one cared about it. Even though they all agreed that once they feel the teacher had accepted their diverse identities, they accomplished more and increased their level of integration into this new culture. It was sad to see that Syrian refugee students believed that at the university level professors should not care about their students. They strongly argued that it was not the job of a professor to care about the well-being of their students. Additionally, they added that it is the students' responsibility to find a way to find a solution to their problem. This goes back to the lack of belonging relationship inside of university classes. This shows the fact that was underlined in the investigation by Slowey et al. (2020) about how migrants' learning in higher education as a way of social and cultural integration needs further investigation.

Another aspect mostly discussed by students who did university studies then enrolled in Francisation was the lack of respect that students experienced from teachers. The lack of respect became a major obstacle to sharing their identities and a block to their free development. And this had a negative impact on helping them to integrate as feeling respected is one of the foundations of Ager and Strang's (2008) theory of successful integration which is to have a sense of respect and shared values.

At the end of my interviews I asked whether the participants thought their identities had evolved or not, and if yes, then how they would define this evolution. All participants found difficulty in answering this question. However, they all were in agreement that doing Francisation and re-doing their undergrad studies somehow shaped their identities. In all of their personal narratives, they pointed out a new bonding relationship or sense of belonging to Quebec society either by the English and French language, or the dominant culture of Quebec. It was significant to see all of them self-identified as Quebecers rather than Canadians. This aligns with Gaither's (2018) assertion that belonging and evolving identities are interrelated and evolve together. Even though the Syrian refugee students mentioned that they lost some parts of their identities, (e.g., their religious identity), it was not clear if the educational system had an impact on it or they lost it to integrate to Quebec's identity. On the other hand, using more French and English impacted their linguistic identity, but at the same time, added two new ones.

Contribution to the literature

This study will add to the emerging literature on the small number of empirical studies on refugee identities**.** Throughout the literature review we saw how schools/ educational settings are not only places to learn, but these are also cultural sites where migrants and refugees learn to adapt to the host society. It was also discussed how the educator's approach of teaching and transferring knowledge inside the classroom impacts refugees' motivation to learn, and affects their well-being. The lack of effective teacher education programming in higher education was emphasized as well. Further, educational settings were seen as places to establish first relationships that played an essential role of creating sense of safety, belonging, and creating new identities. Of course, in the literature pointed out how migrants willingly making choices to be

part of a social group is essential for their well-being. And how it gives opportunities to develop sense of belonging that eventually recreated their identities.

Ager and Strang's theory of integration helped me analyze young educated Syrian refugees accounts, and based on the theory I concluded the following:

The freedom of choosing to learn French, then choosing English universities to redo their undergrad level studies represents the first foundation of Ager and Strang's theory of integration: Citizenship and Rights. Those students were aware of their responsibilities and duties. This concept includes the fact that they felt grateful to the Quebec society for their hospitality, and saw that learning Quebec's language and culture is a way of saying thank you for their hospitality. At the same time, they also looked for opportunities to share their language and culture with the host community because it was their right to do so.

Exchanging and learning language and culture is the key to integration as Ager and Strang's theory of integration mentions. Syrian refugee students had the need to share their self and cultural identities. At the time that they were learning the host culture and language and developing in their chosen majors, they also looked for opportunities to exchange their knowledge, language, and culture. For instance, in university settings they joined associations or cultural clubs to share their cultural and self-identities.

Consequently, young Syrian refugee students chose these educational settings (Francisation and English University) as their means to integrate. Those educational settings demonstrated another part of Ager and Strang's theory of integration, which are the markers and means.

Significantly, they had the urge to build belonging relationships that represents Ager and Strang's theory of integration as the social connection that includes social bonds, social bridges,

and social links (2008). Those belonging relationships expended to reconnect and rebuild their identities (Gaither, 2018; Wenger's, 1998). Here, came the concept of *multiplicity of belonging* by Gaither (2018). Young educated Syrian refugees illustrated belonging to their original identity, living in a new one, and striving to build another that includes their past, present, and future belongings: as post-colonial theorists have pointed out, identity is always changing (Bhabha, 1994).

The conversations with the research participants provide an insight for policy makers and educators regarding refugee students' integration and learning journey. I could not find any difference between male or female perspectives; however, representing both gender perspectives gave my study a holistic view of refugee students' experiences.

Young educated Syrian refugee accounts aligned with previous literature in my review that established the importance for refugees to feel safe in their learning environment in order to engage effectively in the classrooms. Their narratives emphasized how stabilizing belonging relationships with their host communities are essential for integrating, well-being, and evolving their identities. It also added data on how young educated Syrian refugees chose educational settings (Francisation and University) as a means of integration to their host society, Quebec, as well as the way the teaching approach, teachers, and community support their academic and personal goals.

The findings provide an evaluation of some of the practices implemented for the integration of refugee students into the Francisation and higher education system. They highlighted the importance of acknowledging the knowledge and cultural identity contributions that the young educated refugees bring with them. My suggestion for further research would be to focus on higher education settings, and investigate how to better facilitate the inclusion of

refugees at the level of university classroom and the role they play in the integration of educated refugees. Similarly, in Francisation programs refugee students should not be out in the immigrant category. Their issues and challenges are different. Moreover, researchers need to investigate if there is a diversity of educators' or facilitators in both educational settings; specially that educators are primary role models for all newcomers but particularly so for refugees. Lastly, there should be more studies on how those educators or professors are aware of teaching traumatized populations since it goes beyond teaching and includes students' well-being.

Limitations

Here, I mention some potential limitations of my study. Readers may criticize the sampling method that I had used since in the beginning it was based on my personal relationship with past and present friends. Because of my own refugee background readers also can question the subjectivity inherent in my approach. Another limitation of my study is the limitation of the population studied based on the fact that I had specified certain characteristics in the choice of the participants to be included in this study. In a similar vein, all participants were Syrian refugees situation in the context of Quebec, so the study might not be applicable to other jurisdictions or other population groups.

Conclusion

This research addresses aspects of young educated Syrian refugee students' integration journey through Quebec educational settings: Francisation and university studies. The study gives a space for refugee students to share their integration and learning journey and their understanding of identity as a concept. By giving a voice to refugee students, my aim was to improve refugee education policies, teacher education content to prepare for teaching traumatized students, and underlying the importance of evolving a sense of belonging and

identity (re)creation.

This thesis gave a brief historical background on the context of this research. It pointed out how Canada has a long history of immigration and welcoming refugees. The study underlined that Canada is the country where multiculturalism policy originated, but Quebec has interculturalism, its own policies of integration. Because the recent refugees that Canada accepted were of Syrian origin under a special program, this research project studied the educated Syrian refugees who settled down in Quebec. First it presented a general description of the diverse Syrian population that includes minorities. Then, it discussed the three different sponsorship groups that those Syrian refugees came under: the Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) category, Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR) and through the Joint Refugee Nominee (JRN) Program. Further, it underlined the various characteristics (i.e. education level) of each of the Syrian refugee categories that arrive in Canada. Finally, this research described the young educated Syrian refugees who participated in this specific study.

Ager and Strang's hypothesis of integration supported the main argument of my study, which was: young educated Syrian refugee students support their well-being and evolve identity by willingly building belonging relationships throughout Francisation and re-doing university studies. I also argued that willingly making choices of doing Francisation and university studies, building multi-belonging relationship, and evolving multi-identities are interrelated. Making the choice to do Francisation even though they had known French and redoing their undergrad studies in English showed how they adopted this way to integrate and grow a belonging relationship with Quebec, which eventually rebuilt their self and cultural identities.

In the end, I discussed some of the critiques that may be raised about my chosen sample and approach for this research study. The main ethical issue for me was my subjectivity since I

had met a few of my participants during my personal integration or educational journey, before embarking on the selection of the sample for this study. To mitigate the effects of this type of bias, I wrote about my positionality in Chapter 1. In situating myself in this research I have offered an explanation for for the importance of subjective interpretations.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Initial Email to Participants

Email Subject line: Study Participation Consent Form Email Body

Dear [name of participant],

My name is Meghri and I received your contact information from [name of reference from network]. Thank you for your interest regarding this research study, which is entitled **Exploring the impact of Quebec's Francisation program and University Studies on the identity(es) of Refugee Students in Quebec.**

The study would require participants to be interviewed by telephone connection. The interviews will last for 45-60 minutes. A second interview may follow up, only if needed and with your agreement.

Attached is the consent form you need to sign, should you agree to participate. If you agree to participate in this study, we will review this form in detail virtually before signing if needed. We will also review it before starting the interview in case you may have any additional questions.

I wish you a great day and look forward to hearing from you. Meghri

Appendix B

Consent Form

Department of Integrated Studies in Education

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERVIEW

We would like to invite you to be in a study conducted by Meghri Bakarian (MA student at Department of Integrated Studies in Education). Her MA thesis co-supervisors are Professor Ratna Ghosh and Professor Claudia Mitchell. The purpose of the study is to learn about the refugee students' perspective(s) regarding their identity(es) and its complexity.

I would like to interview you about your perspective of what is an identity, and whether if you think that the Quebec educational system has impacted your identity construction or not. The interview would take approximately one hour to complete and can be conducted in English, Armenian, Arabic or French.

The interviews will be audio recorded. The PI's MacBook Pro's recording application will be used to audio record telephonic interviews. You will receive a call from my personal phone and then directed to speaker-mode, so that the MacBook can record our conversation. This way, interviews will automatically be saved on the researcher's personal MacBook. Audio recorded interviews as well as their transcription will be stored on a password protected USB key and kept under lock and key in a special storage cabinet in my home, the PI .

The data we collect will be kept confidential, safe and secure. Each interview participant will be assigned a pseudonym. This means that the personal information you provide will be kept confidential, will not be connected with the answers you give or shared with other researchers. Meghri Bakarian (principal investigator), and the two co-supervisors, Professor Ratna Ghosh and Professor Claudia Mitchell will be the only individuals who have access to identifiable materials. We will take every possible precaution to make sure that there is no third party interception.

Participation in the study is voluntary. If you choose to withdraw during or right after the study, all information obtained up until that point will be destroyed unless you specify otherwise at the time of withdrawal." Once the assigned pseudonym is removed (7 years after data collection is completed) or when data has been de-identified or combined for publication, it may not be possible to withdraw your data in its entirety. We can only remove it from further analysis and

from use in future publications. Pseudonym protected data will be kept for seven years. De-identified data will be kept for seven years. If you choose to be in the study, the researcher would be pleased to share a summary of the results with you.

Please, check Yes_or _No__ do you agree to be contacted for a second follow up interview, also

audio-recorded within the two weeks after you return the edited transcript.

Yes _____

No _____

If you decide not to be in the research, it will not affect your relationship with McGill University or any other service provider.

If you have any questions, please feel free to speak with the researcher Meghri Bakarian

(meghri.bakarian@mcgill.ca, 514 8261075) or the co- supervisors Professor Ratna Ghosh (ratna.ghosh@mcgill.ca), or Professor Claudia Mitchell (Claudia.mitchell@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 Lynda McNeil, the

McGill Ethics Manager, by telephone at:514-398-6831 or at: lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

Consent

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. A greeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities.

Participant's Name: (please print)_____ Participant's Signature:_____ Date:

REB file #

Appendix C

Montreal Area CLSC lists

CLSC d'Ahuntsic 1165, boulevard Henri-Bourassa Est Montréal (Québec) H2C 3K2	**CLSC Olivier-Guimond** 5810, rue Sherbrooke Est Montréal (Québec) H1N 1B2
CLSC de Dorval-Lachine 1900, rue Notre-Dame Lachine (Québec) H8S 2G2	**CLSC de Benny Farm** 6484, avenue de Monkland Montréal (Québec) H4B 1H3
CLSC de Montréal-Nord 11441, boulevard Lacordaire Montréal-Nord (Québec) H1G 4J9	**CLSC de Pierrefonds** 13800, boulevard Gouin Ouest Pierrefonds (Québec) H8Z 3H6
CLSC René-Cassin 5800, boulevard Cavendish Bureau : Y-201 Côte-Saint-Luc (Québec) H4W 2T5	**CLSC de Parc-Extension** 7085, rue Hutchison Montréal (Québec) H3N 1Y9
CLSC Saint-Louis-du-Parc (55 Mont-Royal) 55, avenue du Mont-Royal Ouest Montréal (Québec) H2T 2R9	**CLSC de Saint-Léonard** 5540, rue Jarry Est Saint-Léonard (Québec) H1P 1T9
CLSC Métro 1801, boulevard de Maisonneuve Ouest Montréal (Québec) H3H 1J9	**CLSC de Saint-Henri** 3833, rue Notre-Dame Ouest Montréal (Québec) H4C 1P8
CLSC de Rivière-des-Prairies 8655, boulevard Perras Montréal (Québec) H1E 4M7	**CLSC de Saint-Michel** 3355, rue Jarry Est Montréal (Québec) H1Z 2E5
CLSC de Côte-des-Neiges (Outremont) 1271, avenue Van Horne	**CLSC de Bordeaux-Cartierville** 11822, avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne

Outremont (Québec) H2V 1K5	Montréal (Québec) H3M 2X6
CLSC du Lac-Saint-Louis programme Ensemble 2840, boulevard Saint-Charles Kirkland (Québec) H9H 3B6	**CLSC de Villeray** 1425, rue Jarry Est Montréal (Québec) H2E 1A7
CLSC de Côte-des-Neiges (Maison de Naissance) 6560, chemin de la Côte-des-Neiges Montréal (Québec) H3S 2A7	**CLSC de Pointe-aux-Trembles-Montréal-Est** 13926, rue Notre-Dame Est Montréal (Québec) H1A 1T5
CLSC de Rosemont (Village Olympique) 5199, rue Sherbrooke Est Bureau : 3175 Montréal (Québec) H1T 3X2	**CLSC des Faubourgs (Larivière)** 2187, rue Larivière Montréal (Québec) H2K 1P5
CLSC de Ville-Émard-Côte-Saint-Paul 6161, rue Laurendeau Montréal (Québec) H4E 3X6	**CLSC des Faubourgs (Sainte-Catherine)** 66, rue Sainte-Catherine Est Montréal (Québec) H2X 1K6
CLSC des Faubourgs (Saint-Denis) 5800, rue Saint-Denis Bureau : Bureau 1002 Montréal (Québec) H2S 3L5	**CLSC des Faubourgs (Parthenais)** 2260, rue Parthenais Montréal (Québec) H2K 3T5
CLSC Saint-Louis-du-Parc 15, avenue du Mont-Royal Ouest Montréal (Québec) H2T 2R9	**CLSC de Verdun** 400, rue de l'Église Verdun (Québec) H4G 2M4
CLSC de Saint-Laurent 1055, avenue Sainte-Croix Saint-Laurent (Québec) H4L 3Z2	**CLSC de Mercier-Est-Anjou** 9503, rue Sherbrooke Est Montréal (Québec) H1L 6P2
CLSC des Faubourgs (Papineau) 1200, avenue Papineau Bureau : Bureau 380	**CLSC du Lac-Saint-Louis** 180, avenue Cartier Pointe-Claire (Québec) H9S 4S1

Montréal (Québec) H2K 4R5	
CLSC de Côte-des-Neiges 5700, chemin de la Côte-des-Neiges Montréal (Québec) H3T 2A8	**CLSC de la Petite-Patrie** 6520, rue de Saint-Vallier Montréal (Québec) H2S 2P7
CLSC des Faubourgs (Visitation) 1705, rue de la Visitation Montréal (Québec) H2L 3C3	**CLSC de Hochelaga-Maisonneuve** 4201, rue Ontario Est Montréal (Québec) H1V 1K2
CLSC du Plateau-Mont-Royal 4625, avenue de Lorimier Montréal (Québec) H2H 2B4	

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

1. What is your birth country?
2. What is your ethnicity?
3. What is your mother tongue?
4. How would you identify yourself as he, she or they?
5. If applicable, do you belong to any religious group if yes, would you like to identify?
6. Are you married?
7. Do you have children?
8. What level of education did you accomplish back home in Syria?
9. What level of education did your parents have back home Syria?
10. When did you arrive to Quebec?
11. Were you in another province before coming to Quebec?
12. Were you in another country before coming to Canada? If yes, which one?
13. Were you able to study in the country that you waited in?
14. With who did you immigrated or refuged to Quebec?
15. Do you live with your parents?
16. What is your current employment status?
17. How old were you when you first arrived?
18. How older were you when you first started attending?
19. What is your study?
20. In which year are you now?
21. How many levels of Franciation did you accomplish?

Appendix E

Interview Questions

Open-Ended Questions

1. How do you describe the word identity? According to you, what is an identity?
2. How do you describe your identity?
3. Did you have French language competency before going to Francisation? If yes, from where?
4. Why did you choose to do the Francisation programme?
5. When did you go to Francisation? And what did you learn from Francisation program?
6. How you think your professor saw you at Francisation?
7. What changed before and after going to Francisation?
8. Do you think that your identity(es) changed after the Francisation program?
9. What did you do to live/ embrace your identity at Francisation?
10. Why did you go to the Francisation and then decided to go to an English university?
11. How university was different from Francisation?
12. How you think your professor saw you at University?
13. What did support embracing your identity at the university? Can you please give me some examples? (clubs, etc.…)
14. Did you like sharing your identity with your surroundings? Profs? Friends? If yes, why? If no, why?
15. What part of your identity shared? What part you did not? In Francisation compared to university?
16. Do you think your identity is the same while/after attending a university in Quebec?
17. What language do you use the most while speaking to your sibilings? Is this language affected or changed after attending Francisation or university?
18. After all, do you think that your experiences in Francisation and universities impacted your identity?