

Language, dreams, and integration: Stories from Canada's LINC students

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Article abstract

This article investigates the dynamics of language learning and cultural integration within the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, focusing on the experiences of three former students who completed Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) level 5 proficiency in Alberta. Through qualitative interviews and questionnaire responses, this article explores how participation in the LINC program influenced their personal and professional growth, the ways in which the program assisted them, and their future goals in Canada. Drawing on Norton's theoretical framework of identity, investment, and imagined communities, the research highlights the multifaceted nature of language learning and its implications for immigrant adaptation and socio-economic integration. The findings underscore the students' resilience, commitment, and aspirations in navigating linguistic and cultural transitions, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of language education and immigrant integration in the Canadian context. Recommendations include diversifying participants, integrating student feedback, and exploring blended learning approaches.

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Abstract

This article investigates the dynamics of language learning and cultural integration within the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, focusing on the experiences of three former students who completed Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) level 5 proficiency in Alberta. Through qualitative interviews and questionnaire responses, this article explores how participation in the LINC program influenced their personal and professional growth, the ways in which the program assisted them, and their future goals in Canada. Drawing on Norton's theoretical framework of identity, investment, and imagined communities, the research highlights the multifaceted nature of language learning and its implications for immigrant adaptation and socio-economic integration. The findings underscore the students' resilience, commitment, and aspirations in navigating linguistic and cultural transitions, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of language education and immigrant integration in the Canadian context. Recommendations include diversifying participants, integrating student feedback, and exploring blended learning approaches.

Keywords: Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB), identity, learning investment, imagined communities, language education, immigration integration


Résumé

Cet article étudie la dynamique de l'apprentissage de la langue et de l'intégration culturelle dans le cadre du programme de Cours de langue pour les immigrants au Canada (CLIC), en se concentrant sur les expériences de trois anciens étudiants qui ont atteint le niveau 5 des Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens (NCLC) en Alberta. Par le biais d'entrevues qualitatives et de réponses à des questionnaires, cet article explore la façon dont la participation au programme CLIC a influencé leur croissance personnelle et professionnelle, les façons dont le programme les a aidés et leurs objectifs futurs au Canada. S'inspirant du cadre théorique de Norton sur l'identité, l'investissement et les communautés imaginées, la recherche met en évidence la nature

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multiforme de l'apprentissage des langues et ses implications pour l'adaptation et l'intégration socio-économique des immigrants. Les résultats soulignent la résilience, l'engagement et les aspirations des étudiants dans la traversée des transitions linguistiques et culturelles, contribuant ainsi à une meilleure compréhension de l'enseignement des langues et de l'intégration des immigrants dans le contexte canadien. Les recommandations comprennent la diversification des participants, l'intégration des commentaires des étudiants et l'exploration d'approches d'apprentissage mixte.

Mots-clés: Cours de langue pour les immigrants au Canada (CLIC), Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens (NCLC), identité, investissement dans l'apprentissage, communautés imaginées, enseignement des langues, intégration des immigrants

Introduction

Canada is one of the world's major immigrant-receiving nations. In 2021, immigrants represented almost one in four Canadians (23.0%), the highest proportion in over a century (Statistics Canada, 2024). Many individuals worldwide seek to relocate to Canada for a better life for themselves and their children. Approximately a quarter of a million immigrants are admitted into the country annually to pursue their aspirations (Satzewich & Liodakis, 2017). In line with the 2025–2027 Immigration Levels Plan, Canada aims to admit 395,000 permanent residents in 2025, 380,000 in 2026, and 365,000 in 2027 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2024a). In 2025, Canada's immigration targets for permanent residents include 232,150 economic class immigrants, 94,500 family class immigrants, 58,350 refugees and protected persons, and 10,000 under humanitarian and compassionate grounds. For temporary residents, the targets are 673,650 overall arrivals in 2025, 516,600 in 2026, and 543,600 in 2027. These targets include arrivals through the International Mobility Program, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, and international students. The overall target for new temporary resident arrivals is 673,650 (IRCC, 2024a).

However, new immigrants face myriad challenges as Kaushik and Drolet (2018) outline:

- lack of information and guidance;
- lack of recognition of foreign credentials;
- lack of recognition of previous work experience or employers' requirement for Canadian experience;
- difficulties in obtaining references;
- prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination;

- cultural integration;
- social and emotional support;
- health and wellbeing; and
- lack of language skills.

Notably, language skills are crucial for success in the labor market and pose a significant challenge to the effective social and economic integration of skilled immigrants (Boyd & Cao, 2009; Chuba, 2016). Failure to acquire the host language often complicates the entire settlement process for immigrants, leading to stress, frustration, and mental health problems (Beiser & Hou, 2001).

Xu and Hou (2023) underscored the importance of proficiency in the official language of the destination country due to the increasing immigration from non-English-speaking nations to major immigrant-receiving countries. Developing host language skills is seen as a universal and fundamental approach to promoting integration through settlement services (Lanphier & Lukomskyj, 1994, p. 369). Proficiency in the destination language is considered a crucial aspect of immigrants' human capital (Chiswick & Miller, 2003; Picot, 2008). Empirical research consistently shows that proficiency in the destination language is vital for immigrants' success in the labor market, leading to higher earnings (Chiswick & Miller, 2002; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003), greater employment prospects (Aldashev et al., 2009; Arkoudis et al., 2009), and improved occupational attainment (Huot et al., 2020).

Against this backdrop, this article delves into the dynamics of language learning and cultural integration within the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, centering on the experiences of three former students who achieved Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) level 5 proficiency in Alberta. Following Norton's theoretical framework on identity, investment, and imagined communities, this article analyzes qualitative interviews and questionnaire responses. It then explores the LINC program's impact on personal and professional growth, assistance provided, and participants' future goals in Canada.

LINC program

The Canadian federal government funds language training for newcomers who are permanent residents or protected people. Free language classes, known as LINC in English and *Cours de langue pour les immigrants au Canada* in French, are available under Section 95 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRCC, 2023). Both programs provide fundamental free language training in English and French to adult immigrants and aim to help newcomers integrate into Canada and into their communities socially,

culturally, economically, and politically. Although settlement refers to the shorter-term transitional issues faced by newcomers, integration could be a life-long process of mutual accommodation between an individual and society (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2011).

Service-providing organizations such as schools, colleges, universities, libraries, and community agencies deliver LINC programs, which assess eligible legal school-leaving age students' English/French language skills using Canadian Language Benchmarks tools. LINC offers classes from basic language literacy to advanced and workplace-specific language skills, covering CLB classes 1–8. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC, 2013) declared that more than 60,000 newcomers benefit from LINC every year. In a 2010 evaluation by the Government of Canada, students' perceptions of the LINC course's effectiveness were measured. More than three quarters (77%) of the Canada-wide LINC students found it very helpful for reaching their learner goals, while 75% found it very helpful for understanding and speaking with Canadians in daily life. Building upon the aforementioned LINC evaluation, this article seeks to address the research questions (RQs):

1. How has the CLB 5 students' experience in the LINC program influenced their personal and professional growth?
2. In what way did the program help the CLB 5 students?
3. What are the CLB 5 students' goals in Canada?

Addressing these questions would benefit both IRCC and LINC schools by enhancing the program and affirming its positive impact. This article aims to support both the improvement of the LINC program and assess its beneficial effects on students. Given the recent closure of some immigrant services and LINC schools across Canada due to federal funding cuts aimed at reducing immigration levels, this article is particularly timely.

Theoretical framework

This article is guided by Norton's (1995) work on identity and investment, as well as imagined communities and identities, which are considered foundational in language education (Cummins, 2006; Kramsch, 2013; Miller & Kubota, 2013; Ortega, 2009; Swain & Deters, 2007). As identity has been established as a research area "in its own right" (Zuengler & Miller, 2006, p. 43), Norton (2013) defines the term as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 45). Drawing on poststructuralist theory and a wide range of research in the global community, Norton conceptualizes identity as multiple, fluid, and a site of

struggle. She believes that people perform different identities in particular spaces or conditions, in the same way that they can be positioned by others. This applies to language learning contexts as well, where learners negotiate relations of power and seek to assert their place as legitimate speakers, recognizing that learners are social beings with complex identities (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Anderson (1991) coined the term *imagined communities* to provide the social context for the work of imagination and to argue that imagination takes place on a societal and not just on an individual level, in the form of ideologies of nationhood. Norton's (2001) work connected the notions of imagination and imagined communities with the processes of L2 learning and use in classroom practice. In her construct of imagined communities and imagined identities, she focuses on the future when learners imagine who they might be, and who their communities might be, when they learn a language (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Norton (2001) indicated that imagination plays both an educational and an identity function and adds that if we do not acknowledge the imagined communities of the learners, we may exacerbate their nonparticipation and impact their learning trajectories in negative ways (Pavlenko, 2003).

Furthermore, Norton (1995) also developed the construct of investment to complement the construct of motivation in the field of second language acquisition. Conceptualized as a sociological complement to the psychological construct of motivation (Dörnyei, 2009; Murray et al., 2011), investment holds a significant place in language learning theory for demonstrating the socially and historically constructed relationship between language learner identity and learning commitment (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Norton's notion of investment emphasizes the role of human agency and identity in engaging with the task at hand. It highlights the importance of accumulating economic and symbolic capital, having stakes in the endeavour, and persevering in that endeavour (Norton, 2013, as cited in Kramsch, 2013, p. 195).

Norton (1995) noted that investment theory claims that learners' motivation is tied to their belief that language acquisition increases their social value and enables them to assert their own identities. She underscores that high motivation alone does not guarantee increased investment in language tasks. This construct highlights the socially and historically constructed relationship between learners and their commitment to language learning. This perspective acknowledges that learners' commitment to learning extends beyond mere motivation. Learners invest in specific language and literacy practices with the understanding that such practices facilitate the acquisition of diverse symbolic and material resources. Consequently, these practices enhance the value of their cultural capital and augment their social power (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Methodology

Participants of the study

This article presents the experiences of three former students from a CLB 5 class at a LINC school in Alberta. The CLB 5 level, which corresponds to the Intermediate level, aligns with the B1 level (Independent user) in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (North & Piccardo, 2018).

The three students had lived in Canada for more than five years and studied LINC. They were chosen as the main respondents of the study regardless of age, national origin, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, and other identities to uphold diversity, equity, and inclusion. They were selected through purposive sampling, a form of non-probability sampling in which cases are selected on the basis of their ability to provide information relevant to the topic of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

Pseudonyms are used to maintain the students’ anonymity (as shown in Table 1). Ibrahim, a refugee from Syria, arrived in Canada in 2016. His first language is Arabic, and at 34 years old, he achieved CLB 5 proficiency. Reyna, originally from Mexico, initially visited Canada on a tourist visa, later marrying a Canadian citizen. She became a permanent resident at the age of 36 and attained CLB 5 proficiency. Her first language is Spanish. Peterson, also a refugee from Haiti, attained CLB 5 proficiency at the age of 36. His first language is Creole, and French is his second language.

Table 1
Background of the three student-participants

Participant	Country of origin	Gender	Age	First language	CLB proficiency
Ibrahim	Syria	Male	34	Arabic	CLB 5
Reyna	Mexico	Female	36	Spanish	CLB 5
Peterson	Haiti	Male	36	Creole	CLB 5

Research protocol

Prior to the interview, the students were briefed on the purpose of the tracer study, also known as a follow-up study or alumni survey (Schomburg, 2003), which aims to retrospectively assess the study conditions and provisions experienced by graduates.

The participants were former students at the CLB 5 level who studied under the researcher in 2017. They were recruited in 2022 to participate in the study following an invitation sent to all eligible former students. The students provided their voluntary participation through signed consent forms. They

were informed that they had the right to decline to answer any questions, not partake in any procedures, and withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. Should they choose to withdraw, any information collected would be destroyed unless they granted permission to retain it. Approval was obtained from the academic coordinator of the LINC school, and McGill University provided ethical clearance for the research.

Researcher positionality

In exploring the dynamic interplay of language learning and cultural integration within the LINC program, the researcher brings a wealth of diverse experiences and professional insights from his deep involvement in language education. Possessing practical experience as both an ongoing CLB assessor and a former LINC instructor, he has a firm grasp of language acquisition and acculturation processes. Committed to ethical engagement, the researcher navigates power dynamics and potential biases with transparency and sensitivity. By fostering trust and mutual respect, he aims to honor the voices and experiences of participants while upholding the article's ethical integrity.

Data collection

Data collection comprised two recorded interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams. Additionally, one respondent completed a written questionnaire due to the difficulty in scheduling and participating in a live interview. Answering a written questionnaire allows for flexibility in completing the task at their convenience. This resulted in two interview recordings involving two participants, while the third participant solely completed the questionnaire.

Data analysis

Transcriptions of the recordings were conducted, followed by a qualitative analysis to discern patterns and themes within the data. This approach allowed for a natural emergence of themes, which were then connected to relevant theories on second language acquisition. Such a method underscores the importance of integrating empirical evidence with theoretical frameworks, thereby deepening the understanding of the research subjects and ensuring methodological integrity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The analytical process entailed categorizing the data and interpreting the significance of the identified themes in relation to the research questions. Additionally, quantitative data from a national evaluation of the LINC program in 2010 substantiated the qualitative findings in the study.

Results and discussion

To address the study's objectives, this section presents the outcomes derived from conducting two interviews and administering one questionnaire. The student-respondents' anecdotal statements were connected to the existing literature, constructs, and theories in second language acquisition/education.

RQ1: Influence of LINC program on personal and professional growth

One of the primary strategic goals of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), is to facilitate the settlement and integration of newcomers in Canada. "Settlement" pertains to the shorter-term transitional challenges experienced by newcomers, whereas "integration" represents an ongoing, lifelong process of mutual adaptation between an individual and society (IRCC, 2024b). Within IRCC's suite of settlement programs, the LINC program plays a pivotal role in advancing the core strategic objective of facilitating the successful integration of newcomers into Canadian society and fostering the promotion of Canadian citizenship (CIC, 2011). Ibrahim (Extract 1), Reyna (Extract 2), and Peterson (Extract 3) shared their journeys in the LINC program:

Extract 1:

Ibrahim: I was planning to study Business Administration to work in an insurance company. That is why, I studied LINC to learn English. After CLB 5 and 6, I did a short computer program then I studied ESL 3-6 full-time at Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT). In the afternoon, I volunteered at Christmas Bureau and food bank to improve my English and to meet new people, as well. On a scale from 1-10, I rate myself between 8-9 in terms of my investment in the LINC program. I have improved my reading and writing more than before, but listening and speaking skills were not very well because I only heard the correct language from the teachers when I was in the LINC classes.

Extract 2:

Reyna: My purpose of studying LINC is to improve my English. Before I can understand a little bit of English; but, I want to improve my speaking, right? Also, I need a certificate for Canadian citizenship application. I gave my full attention to my LINC classes. Sometimes, you want to stay home after work; but you try your best — you go to school everyday and try not to put obstacles in the front, even if it was snowing. You have to be positive and see your goal for the future.

Extract 3:

Peterson: I want to improve my communication skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. I only did CLB 5 in the LINC program. After that, I studied ESL at a university in Alberta. I believe I did very well in my LINC class. I got the highest score in class. I passed all my assessments with high grades.

The responses provided by Ibrahim, Reyna, and Peterson offer valuable insights into the ways in which their experiences in the LINC program influenced their personal and professional growth. These responses align with Norton's framework of identity and investment in language learning, shedding light on the complex interplay between learners' identities, motivations, and language learning trajectories.

Ibrahim's proactive approach to language learning and integration into Canadian society resonates with Norton's conceptualization of identity as multiple and fluid. His commitment to enhancing his language skills and qualifications reflects his investment in language learning as a means of increasing his social value and asserting his identity in his new environment (Norton, 1995). By participating in volunteer work and further education, Ibrahim actively engages in the construction of his imagined community, envisioning himself as a contributing member of Canadian society (Norton & Toohey, 2011). This engagement also aligns with sociocultural theories of language learning, emphasizing the importance of real-life contexts in language acquisition (Vygotsky, 1978).

Reyna's motivations for studying in the LINC program and her perseverance despite challenges align with Norton's notion of investment as a socioculturally constructed relationship between language learner identity and learning commitment. Her aspiration to become a nurse in Canada reflects her imagined community and future-oriented identity, where she envisions herself integrating successfully into the target language community to achieve her professional goals (Norton, 2001; Ushioda, 2017). Moreover, her resilience and determination, demonstrated by her dedication to attending classes despite obstacles, resonate with research on immigrant integration and language learning (Berry, 1997).

Similarly, Peterson's focus on improving communication skills and his success in the LINC program underscore the educational and identity functions of imagination highlighted by Norton (1995). His high level of investment in language learning, as evidenced by his dedication to mastering language tasks and achieving academic success, illustrates the dynamic interplay between motivation and investment in language learning (Norton, 1995). Peterson's achievement in the program also reflects the effectiveness

of language learning programs in facilitating language development and skill acquisition among learners at various proficiency levels (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

The experiences shared by Ibrahim, Reyna, and Peterson resonate with findings from the Government of Canada's (CIC, 2011) national evaluation of the LINC program in March 2010. The primary reason for enrolling in the course, as highlighted by Ibrahim, Reyna, and Peterson, was to improve English for daily life, reflecting a mean rank of 1.55 in the national evaluation. Additionally, the pursuit of employment, a goal emphasized by Peterson, ranked closely as the second-most common motivation, with a mean rank of 1.75. Other motivations echoed by the participants included preparing for further studies, obtaining certification in a trade or profession, gaining knowledge about Canada, preparing for the citizenship test, and improving communication with family members, all of which align with the diverse aspirations and goals of LINC program participants (CIC, 2011).

Overall, the three students' shared experiences demonstrate the transformative power of language learning programs like LINC in facilitating immigrant integration and fostering personal and professional growth. By grounding their narratives in Norton's theoretical framework (1995), along with insights from other scholars, a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at play in language learning contexts and the crucial role of identity and investment in shaping learners' language learning trajectories (Darvin & Norton, 2015) is gained.

RQ2: Transformative experiences of LINC language participants

Drawing from five years of experience as a LINC instructor, the researcher asserts that enrolling in LINC language classes offers numerous advantages. Firstly, individuals benefit from instruction by highly qualified and experienced teachers. Additionally, these classes provide flexible learning environments, allowing participants to engage online or in a classroom setting alongside peers at various locations such as schools, colleges, and community organizations. The scheduling options are adaptable, enabling participants to choose between full-time or part-time classes during the day, evening, or weekends. Also, the curriculum emphasizes essential topics tailored to the Canadian context, delving into subjects like housing, banking, citizenship, employment, education, and other pertinent areas to enhance practical knowledge. When inquired about how the LINC program helped them, the participants responded (see Extracts 4, 5, and 6):

Extract 4:

Ibrahim: I have been in Canada for 6 years now. I became a Canadian citizen in 2019. When I got my certificate of completion for CLB 5, I applied for Canadian citizenship. I have a job that can support my family. I am happy and fulfilled now because my life is changed.. That is why my advice for newcomers is to learn English first through LINC.

Extract 5:

Reyna: Because of the LINC program, I am now able to use English at work. But at work, we have many languages. It's quite challenging to listen to different accents. And we have different culture, right? Sometimes, when somebody you hear does not speak good English. You do not understand.

Extract 6:

Peterson: The LINC program helped me in many ways. First, it helped to improve my writing, listening, and speaking skills. Second, it helped me to use academic language when I am speaking with my friends. Additionally, the LINC program has helped me to write resume and cover letter the Canadian way, and eventually got a job.

As an aside, Ibrahim came to Canada in 2016 due to the devastating war in his home country, Syria. While he was still under the researcher's tutelage, he shared that life in Canada was difficult and that he wanted to go back to Turkey, where he used to work as a carpenter. Through unwavering perseverance and a commitment to self-improvement, Ibrahim underwent a remarkable transformation in his life's trajectory, moving from a war-torn homeland to the freedoms offered by Canada. Upon arrival with limited English proficiency, he dedicated himself to honing his language skills, resulting in a profound development that now enables him to communicate effectively and engage meaningfully within Canadian society. On the other hand, Reyna can now use English at work and distinguish proper from improper English, while respecting the cultural background of her workmates. This idea ties into the concept of social identity, emphasizing the link between an individual and their surroundings. Identity formation is influenced by the interactions a person has within their social sphere and their position within society. Identity is in part a product of the social interactions one has with others and of one's negotiated place in society (Verkuyten 2005). For his part, it is worthwhile to know that the lessons Peterson learned in CLB 5 are useful—he was able to write his employment application documents, which students in his level are expected to navigate. Indeed, the benefit of linguistic integration is for immigrants to participate fully in civic life and function as full collaborators in the shaping

of society (Oakes & Peled, 2017).

RQ3: Navigating futures: Aspirations and goals in Canada

Significantly, the students engaged in CLB 5 back in 2017. Five years later (2022), this research initiative was launched with the specific goal of understanding the current situations of these students. The question “What are the CLB 5 students’ future goals in Canada?” arises as a compelling and vital inquiry to gain insights into their current whereabouts and activities. As we contemplate their journey in Canada, comprehending the aspirations and future objectives of LINC students holds immense significance. Delving into their goals within the Canadian context not only guides their trajectory but also reveals the myriad possibilities and ambitions propelling their path forward. When prompted about their future goals in Canada, the student-participants’ responses included (see extracts 7, 8, and 9):

Extract 7:

Ibrahim: I work with the Federal Government as a field material quality technician. I got certified by the Canadian Council of Independent Laboratory, and I’m registered under Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission as a nuclear gauge worker for testing the density and moisture of soil. At first, I had no experience in this kind of civil engineering work; however, I got a 2-week training. Now I have a good career here in Canada. It’s a very good job. Now I have a good experience with civil engineering, so why don’t I study civil engineering? I am planning to attend the 2-year Diploma in Civil Engineering technology at Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) next year or later. I graduated Economics from Syria and I have my transcript of record. I will just translate it from Arabic to English. Otherwise, I still have to do academic upgrading, such as: English 30, Physics 30, Chemistry 30, and Math 30.

Extract 8:

Reyna: I am a Canadian citizen now. My priority now is my kids. I have to take care of my two children—the oldest is just 3 years old. I work full-time in production line. After work, I have to study those links (ESL websites) on my phone at home. It’s a little bit hard. Remember teacher in our CLB 5 before I did a PowerPoint presentation about my future goal in Canada to become a nurse someday. That does not change. Because I like to help and close to sick people—I like to be part of that team. I like to do the job since I was young. If I have a chance, I would like to pursue my goal, God willing. My goal should not wait for long. I think it’s not too late. Licensed Practical Nursing is just 2 years at NorQuest College.

Extract 9:

Peterson: Actually, I am a purchasing and receiving specialist at a food store in Ottawa now. My future is to upgrade my education in Communications and Electronics Engineering and then contribute to 5G development. Since French is my mother tongue, I would also like to become a math teacher here in Ottawa someday.”

The three students are all now working and have become contributing members of the Canadian economy. Notably, the CLB 5 curriculum underscores the teaching of employment-related lessons to prepare students for the Canadian workplace, including cover letter and resume writing, interview skills, job market information, workplace expectations, communication at work, relating with co-workers and supervisors, as well as giving and receiving feedback, among other topics.

A significant purpose among LINC students is to finish at least CLB 4 to obtain a certificate of completion, which they use for Canadian citizenship. While learning English, they are also preparing for their citizenship application, as English proficiency is one of the requirements. Reyna and Ibrahim fulfilled their dream of becoming Canadian citizens. Indeed, learning the language of one's host society is not simply a matter of acquiring a new code, but also about participating in one's new environment and reconstructing a new self accordingly (Feuer, 2008). Paradoxically, these findings contradict Ricento et al. (2008) discovery that LINC participants found the program insufficient in aiding their academic and career aspirations.

The students' anecdotal statements are consistent with Norton's construct on imagined communities and identities, which suggests that a learner's hopes for the future are integral to language learner identity. For many learners, the target language community is not only a reconstruction of past communities and historically constituted relationships but also a community of the imagination that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Notably, the students have a positive vision for themselves in Canada. They aspire to excel in English, pursue academic upgrading, and further their post-secondary education to become a civil engineer, nurse, and communications and electronics engineer, respectively. They are willing to do what it takes to achieve their dream. For instance, Reyna's revisit to her educational plans from seven years ago demonstrates the impact of such activities on individual growth. Encouraging students to articulate their aspirations in their new country fosters agentic self-formation, enabling them to self-regulate and pursue personal or social transformation (Duff, 2012).

Conclusion

The narratives of the three students underscore the transformative power of language education programs, particularly the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada, in facilitating the integration and socio-economic empowerment of immigrants in Canada. Through qualitative interviews and questionnaire responses, their experiences illuminate the complex interplay of identity, investment, and imagined communities within the language learning process.

The study revealed that participation in the LINC program significantly influenced the personal and professional growth of the students. Their journeys exemplified resilience, commitment, and determination in navigating linguistic and cultural transitions, ultimately contributing to their successful integration into Canadian society. Despite facing various challenges, including language barriers and cultural adjustments, the students demonstrated unwavering dedication to improving their English proficiency and pursuing their aspirations in Canada. Furthermore, the findings emphasized the multifaceted nature of language education and its profound implications for immigrant adaptation and socio-economic integration. Norton's theoretical framework provided a lens through which to understand the dynamic relationships between language learning, identity negotiation, and imagined futures within the context of the LINC program.

However, several limitations constrain the study's scope and generalizability. The small sample size of three participants restricts the applicability of findings to the broader LINC student population, and the focused questioning may overlook other dimensions of student experiences. To address these, recommendations include broadening participant inclusion to diverse LINC demographics, integrating student feedback for tailored instruction, and replicating the study across Canadian provinces. Additionally, exploring technology-enabled learning's impact, especially blended approaches during the pandemic, can enhance language proficiency and settlement skill development among LINC students.

Finally, this article highlights the pivotal role of language education programs like LINC in fostering immigrant integration and empowerment in Canada. By addressing the identified limitations and implementing the recommended strategies, policymakers, educators, and service providers can effectively support newcomers in their journey towards socio-economic empowerment and civic participation in Canadian society. However, the recent federal funding cuts to the LINC program highlight the importance of ensuring the sustainability of language program services for newcomers. The positive narratives of the three student participants in this study attest to the program's

significant benefits, underscoring the need for continued investment to ensure equitable access to language education for all newcomers.

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