

Second-Language Education Policy in Quebec: ESL Teachers' Perceptions of the Effects of the Policy of English as a Compulsory Subject at the Early Primary Level

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This qualitative policy study focuses on the implementation and perceived effect of a recent language policy making English a compulsory subject in primary Cycle One (grades 1-2) in Francophone public schools in the province of Quebec. Based on the analysis of narratives from interviews with four teachers, three resource teachers, and two directors of instruction in charge of second-language teaching in public school boards, this policy study explored the perceptions, implementation, and effects of the policy regarding the compulsory teaching of ESL at the early primary level.

Nous avons entrepris une étude d'orientation portant sur la mise en œuvre et l'effet perçu d'une politique linguistique qui rend obligatoire l'étude de l'anglais au premier cycle du primaire (1^{re} et 2^e années) dans les écoles francophones publiques au Québec. Reposant sur l'analyse d'entrevues auprès de quatre enseignants, trois enseignants ressources et deux directeurs pédagogiques chargés de l'enseignement en langue seconde dans les conseils scolaires publics, cette recherche étudie les perceptions, la mise en œuvre et les effets de la politique visant l'enseignement obligatoire de l'ALS au début du primaire.

In many public schools in non-English-speaking countries in the world such as China, South Korea, and Japan, the introduction of English as a foreign language (EFL) as a compulsory subject beginning in grade 1 has been a common feature of educational programs. The province of Quebec did likewise in 2006 by introducing English as a second language (ESL) as a compulsory subject in grades 1 and 2 (primary Cycle One) in Francophone primary schools across the province (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir, et du Sport, 2006a). This article follows an earlier piece that dealt specifically with the origin and formulation of the new ESL policy (Fallon & Rublik, 2011). This qualitative study is a follow-up focusing on:

- how the policy was understood and implemented in the field;
- how research participants perceived the effects of the policy on parents' and students' attitudes toward English and on the basic literacy skills and competences of Francophone students in their mother tongue.

It is important to state that this ESL study does not intend to provide gener-

alizable conclusions valid for all ESL contexts and situations dealing with the teaching of ESL in Cycle One or to provide a single unifying narrative that explains the situation of all Francophone schools in Quebec.

The findings from this study are based primarily on an aggregation and interpretation of the views and perceptions of school district staff, resource teachers, and teachers involved in the policy implementation process at the school board and school levels. Conducted over six months, the interview portion of this study provided opportunities for research participants to reflect on and think critically about the implementation process of introducing ESL at an early age and perceived changes that were associated with the teaching of ESL in primary Cycle One in terms of parents' and students' attitudes toward the English language and basic literacy skills and the competences of Francophone students in their mother tongue. For many research participants, this was perhaps their first opportunity to do so.

This article comprises three main sections. The first is the context of the study; the second outlines the conceptual framework for policy analysis and the research methodology employed; and in the third we provide an account and discussion of our findings and the implications of this study for future research in the area of ESL language policy.

Context of the Study

In 2006, the Liberal Government in Quebec introduced policy changes in ESL education (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2006a). This new policy was introduced in response to criticism about the responsiveness and effectiveness of Francophone public schools in preparing a flexible and bilingual work force that was required for the province's enhanced competitiveness in the global market (Laberge, 2005). The growing phenomenon of globalization was characterized by the government as the main challenge to the preexisting situation, demanding a policy response with regard to the teaching of ESL.

In 2003-2004, a new program was developed in preparation for the teaching of ESL in primary Cycle One. Its implementation was slated for 2006-2007. During the development phase, the new ESL curriculum was field-tested for two years from 2004 to 2006. In 2004-2005, the Elementary Cycle One program was field-tested in six schools in five regions of Quebec (Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean, Estrie, Laurentides, and Capitale-Nationale). The purpose of the field-testing was to verify the practicability of the program and to validate the relevance of its content. During this first pilot phase, teachers and students were filmed regularly during the school year, and DVDs were produced for future reference and teacher-training. In 2005-2006, seven regions volunteered for a second year of field-testing (Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean, Estrie, Laurentides, Capitale-Nationale, Montréal, and Bas-St-Laurent). This time, the piloting process

was aimed at validating the goals of the previous year throughout a full cycle, as well as at verifying the feasibility of the program in a multiethnic community. As in the first phase, teachers and students were filmed regularly, and the content was used during the implementation phase to illustrate exemplary educational practices in ESL-teaching. Each school had to allocate 90-120 minutes of instructional time per week to English-teaching by volunteer ESL specialists who received seven days of training from the Ministry of Education curriculum-writers' team.

Embedded in these training sessions were ongoing consultations between the team from the Ministry and the teachers participating in the experimentation about changes to be made to the ESL program in development. Feedback from teachers was used to revise and refine the curricular solutions under development. Before the publication and implementation of the Elementary Cycle One ESL program, the pilot process played a critical role in determining which alternatives were to be considered by curriculum-writers in terms of an appropriate curricular approach for teaching ESL in the particular educational environment of Quebec.

Before the introduction of ESL as a compulsory subject in Cycle One, French was the only medium of instruction and language being taught as a subject. The program was designed to enable children to progress at their own speed and to master basic knowledge in French language arts, mathematics, moral education or moral and religious instruction, arts education (music, visual arts, drama, dance), and physical education and health.

In 2006, the Education Act was modified to include ESL as a compulsory subject for the primary Cycle One. This new program targeted mainly the oral aspects of the language, aiming to provide opportunities for Francophone children to gain exposure to the English language and culture through authentic songs, rhymes, and stories selected from a repertoire of early childhood education resources (Arcouette, 2006; Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2006a). However, although the ESL program was developed and used for 90-120 minutes per week (out of a total of 25 hours of weekly instructional time) in the pilot schools, no instructional time was specifically allocated to the teaching of ESL in other schools. Later, during the implementation phase, this presented a challenge in introducing ESL into an already full schedule. Schools were put into a situation in which they had to provide instructional time from the non-apportioned time of seven hours (weekly) previously allocated exclusively to art education, physical education and health, and moral or religious instruction.

Age and Second-Language Acquisition

For decades the question of the best age for learning a second language has been debated among teachers and scholars. Public opinion seems to support the notion that the youngest age possible is the ideal time to start learning a

second language. It is believed that children's language-learning abilities decline with age and that it is more difficult for older students to acquire native-like fluency in a second language (Newport, 1990).

However, much second-language research does not support this belief. In fact older students have been shown to learn a second language more efficiently than younger students (Cenoz, 2002). Recent research by Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam (2009) provides compelling evidence of the effects of age of acquisition. Their study involved 195 Spanish/Swedish bilinguals who had self-identified as native-like in their L2. However, it was found that only those who had started their L2 acquisition after age 12 were perceived by examiners to be native speakers of Swedish, and only a few of the early learners demonstrated native-like competence. Thus native-like attainment of a second language has been shown to be rarely attained by adult learners, and it is much less common among younger learners than previously assumed. Although there may be a certain critical period during which language-learning is at its optimal level, it is not clear at what age students should begin learning a second language in schools (Johnson & Newport, 1989).

Success in learning a second language-learning is predicted not by age alone, but by a number of factors such as individual differences (American Educational Research Association, 2006; Johnstone, 2002). Learners' and parental attitudes toward the target language can also either enhance or inhibit the language-learning process (Schumann, 1975). Language-learning difficulties in older children may have more to do with the social and psychological changes commonly occurring during adolescence (Schumann). Children in grade 1, for example, are normally excited about learning ESL. The novelty aspect is high at this age, and students appear highly motivated to learn English, and they find it fun. However, these same students later in high school may have an opposite reaction to learning ESL. It is important to remember though, that it may not be the subject itself that the students dislike, but school in general, as the same lack of motivation seems to transfer across subject areas (Ryan & Patrick, 2001).

Some research suggests that younger children may learn English better, but only if in an English-speaking environment (Muñoz, 2006). In other words, younger may be better if children are learning ESL in a country where English is the official language in normal living conditions. Introducing ESL at the grade 1 level in a classroom situation in a non-English-speaking environment will not automatically result in a higher level of English proficiency. The conditions of the learning environment, both inside and outside the classroom, cannot be ignored (Muñoz). Factors such as attitude, motivation, use of strategies, and learning conditions have also been shown to have a significant effect on language-learning (Ellis, 2008; Fathman, 1975; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Ortega, 2009).

In summary, the language-learning process is complex and fraught with many affective factors that may fluctuate from day to day. Thus it is difficult to isolate a factor such as age when discussing the optimal time for language-learning to begin. Past and current research does not support the popular belief that younger students learn languages better. Thus for the government of Quebec to initiate ESL classes in grade 1, the argument that younger is better does not provide an adequate rationale for this new policy.

Conceptual Framework and Research Methodology

Conceptual Framework

We adapted and used Levin’s (2001) and Blaikie and Soussan’s (2000) model of policy cycle as our analytical framework for this policy study (see Table 1). Our study focused on how the policy was interpreted, understood, and implemented by research participants. It also addressed how they perceived the effects of the policy on (a) the attitudes of students and parents toward English, and (b) the basic literacy skills and competences of Francophone students in their mother tongue.

The policy implementation stage reflects the extent of commitment to ensuring that the policy direction is realized. The analytical focus is on factors that can “be thought of as pertaining to the change itself, to the setting where implementation is to occur” (Levin, 2001, p. 10). In some cases, the implementation process takes place in a context that itself is changing as it relates to the level of enthusiasm for or resistance to the policy, how the policy is reinterpreted, the pace of implementation, the level of funding commitment and development of local capacity, and procedures in implementation by school boards and schools.

Table 1
Stages of the Implementation and Effects of the Policy Cycle
(adapted from Levin’s, 2000, and Blaikie & Soussan’s, 2000,
Stages of Policy Cycle: Elements of Analysis)

<i>Stages of Policy Cycle</i>	<i>Elements of Analysis</i>
Policy implementation	<i>Implementation process:</i> the focus was on developing an understanding of how the policy was interpreted and implemented by participating school boards and schools;
Policy effects	<i>Effects of policy:</i> the focus was on developing an understanding of how research participants perceived the effects of the policy on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the attitudes of students and parents toward English, and • the basic literacy skills and competences of Francophone students in their mother tongue.

The stage-of-policy effect provides a basis for understanding the effects of the policy on individuals and organizations. In this policy study, the analytical focus was on developing an understanding of the on-the-ground experiences of those implementing the policy as they related to the policy intent and processes themselves.

Research Methodology

An exploratory and descriptive study method was used in this research project (Jensen & Rodgers, 2001; Robson, 1993; Yin, 1993). This research method was integrated into a multi-method approach (triangulation) in which the same phenomenon was investigated using several procedures and data sources: content analysis of government documents (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2005, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d) used as implementation guidelines, and semi-structured interviews of ESL teachers, resource teachers, and school district officials involved in the implementation process. Our study is grounded in research addressing issues related to the age of second-language acquisition.

Letters of invitation to participate in this study were mailed to 30 primary schoolteachers, resource teachers, principals, and school board officials in the selected research site. Despite follow-up telephone calls, no school principals responded to this invitation, and only four ESL teachers in four school sites agreed to be interviewed, along with two school district-based officials (directors of instruction) and three resource teachers. All participants were considered bilingual in French and English, with French being their native language. All the ESL teachers held a Bachelor of Teaching English as a Second Language and had been teaching ESL for at least five years at the time of the interviews. The participating resource teachers had been in their position for at least four years, and all had a Master's in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). They were involved in providing support to ESL teachers through workshops and classroom visits. The two school board-based officials had been in their position for a minimum of seven years; one had a master's degree in curriculum development and the other in educational leadership, and both had previously been resource teachers and ESL teaching specialists for a minimum of 15 years.

We interviewed the research participants individually once for 75 minutes each. Each interview consisted of approximately 12 questions, which were based on the origins, implementation, and effect of the new ESL policy at the primary level. The following questions represent a sample of the interview protocol: *Do you think this policy is a good thing? Why or why not? What form and amount of support (inservice/pedagogic days/workshops, etc.) did you receive when this policy was introduced? Do you continue to receive support? How? What is the general feeling of your students toward learning ESL?*

A second interview was not required, as further elaboration was deemed unnecessary by both participants and researchers. Given the choice of being

interviewed and responding in the language of their choice, participants preferred to use English. We therefore conducted and audio-recorded the interviews in English. We verified the accuracy of the transcriptions, and all participants interviewed were given the opportunity to read and review their interview transcripts. None of the research participants made changes to the transcript of their interview.

The data were analyzed across the policy stages and in each major analytic code to interpret and explain the process of policy implementation and its effect as perceived by the research participants. We used a preliminary coding scheme for the data-analysis phase based on the main questions of the study: (a) how the policy was understood and implemented in the field; and (b) how research participants perceived the effects of the policy on parents' and students' attitudes toward English, and the basic literacy skills and competences of Francophone students in their mother tongue. We engaged in continuous comparison to identify similar events and to group them into the same conceptual categories. Next we used so-called axial coding, generating categories and subcategories (splitting categories) to establish larger categories and make connections among larger categories and subcategories (splicing categories). To facilitate management of the large amount of data that we collected, we used *Atlas.ti* (version 4.2), a qualitative computer software analysis program, to assist with coding and retrieving data. We also used this program to help to display the data by generating visual maps and diagrams of developing categories and their relationships. Analytic case summaries were developed for each of the policy analyses, and the findings were organized according to the two stages of policy cycle (see Table 1).

Findings and Discussion

Implementation and Perceived Effects

Main Features of the Implementation Process in School Boards and Schools

The research participants indicated that the strategies used during the implementation process were focused mainly on training teachers in how to actualize the general intent of the ESL curriculum for primary Cycle One in terms of teaching practices and tools to be used in class.

At first, they were sessions offered by the Ministry of Education to English as a second language specialists in the field and also to language ... to second-language consultants in different school districts across the province, and also to resource people in the different boards of education. There were sessions for teachers to prepare them and to explain the new programs in terms of purposes and orientations. They also prepared learning materials for the field. They give to teachers several exemplar situations, lesson plans, but they

were also assessment situations being discussed. I think the Ministry of Education did a good job on the implementation of the program of English as a second language. The Ministry of Education did a really good job in implementing and giving the tools to teachers in helping them to meet the expectations of the new English as a second language program for Cycle One. (Research Participant 3: School-District Official)

However, issues related to the internal potential sources of resistance, how the policy should be understood by implementing school districts, the pace of implementation, the level of funding commitment, and the level of development of field capacity to provide competent teachers were not predominant throughout the implementation process.

First, our data highlighted the view that the process became complex over time as it drew attention to factors that affected implementation such as time allocation and lack of competent human resources.

I think I would put more time into this. I think half an hour per week is not enough, to put it mildly ... I think the way they work it with what they have, because ... you know ... they move time around throughout a whole day and if you want to put more time in one, in English per se, they have to take it from French or take it from ... it's a schedule issue. (Research Participant 7: ESL Teacher)

What happened when they implemented the Cycle One program, the Ministry of Education did not think about the fact that they would need more English teachers. So they didn't inform the universities about this potential impact. To train a teacher, it takes four years. However, they implemented the program two years after its creation. (Research Participant 1: ESL Teacher)

Second, the issue of the level of autonomy of individual schools to interpret educational policies raised the critical issue of how local schools understood the new policy on ESL. The end result as outlined by the research participants was that few schools adopted all aspects of the policy in a complete and balanced manner.

This kind of school autonomy does have a negative impact on second language competency. If they had a more strict policy regarding the teaching of second languages and I do not know if that will ever happen at the government level to find somebody who will have the guts in a French province to say that we need more time for the teaching of English. (Research Participant 4: ESL Resource Teacher)

What happened, and this is one of the things that people tend to blame it all on the new program, before those school governing bodies were created, which have a lot of powers over the school, and when time allocation is only suggested in the curriculum, you ended up with a fragmentation in terms of provision of English as a second language among schools. Some schools might have 90 minutes of English while others have only 60 minutes. (Research Participant 5: School-District Official)

This devolution of power to local schools created disparity among schools in the same district with regard to the provision of ESL programs in primary Cycle One. Most of the research participants indicated that they could choose from two models: offering ESL classes for 30 minutes once a week year-round; or for one hour once a week for half the school year. This variation in the provision of ESL in primary Cycle One was also reflected in the amount of funding allocated for ESL. This varied from school to school, resulting in the provision of complete sets of texts for students in one school to the provision of no materials for students in another, leaving teachers in the latter setting to work from an original set and to create their lessons piecemeal from scratch.

It will be great to have 90 to 120 minutes per week. However, I have schools in my school board that provide different amount of time for the teaching of ESL. Funding is also an issue. There is no standard formula for allocating financial resources for the teaching of ESL. (Research Participant 9: ESL Teacher)

For some schools, this lack of essential building blocks and their autonomy in implementing changes seems to have impeded their willingness or capacity to provide an effective and quality ESL program in primary Cycle One. Although research participants preferred having longer ESL classes over the entire year, scheduling was an issue as the extra time had to come from existing schedules. Which teachers would be willing to give up time from their subjects to ESL? Not only was it a logistics issue in terms of scheduling, but it could also be a battle of wills over reluctance to relinquish time from French, physical education, math, or art instruction. In Research Participant 7's words, "It's like a chess game!"

In summary, our data indicate a need to pay close attention to the critical details of how the ESL policy and corresponding curriculum were shaped in the field. This need was somewhat overlooked in the implementation mechanism as little space and time was allocated to schools to assess the actions needed to achieve the intended results of the ESL policy and corresponding curriculum.

Perceived Effects: Students' and Parents' Attitudes Toward ESL

One of the main goals of the ESL program in primary Cycle One was to provide exposure and foster positive attitudes toward English. This entailed having fun, minimizing the fear of speaking English and making mistakes, and positively introducing English to students before they encountered any negative ideas associated with learning the language.

Our data indicated a high degree of acceptance of English among students and parents.

Ohhh they're happy, they're happy! They just love English! And in fact this year I have my Cycle One in the whole year ... I had my principal's daughter in grade 2, and when she finishes English, at the end of January she was so sad! She said, "Mommy, I won't have English anymore!" (Research Participant 7: ESL Teacher)

The program allows more play type of things, and the kids come out without any prejudices towards second language learning. The program is based on listening to songs and plays. We also saw that they could function only in English, which is a major hurdle at the primary level. (Research Participant 5: ESL Teacher)

Participants reported that students enjoyed their ESL classes mainly because of the teaching activities suggested in the program: songs, stories, drawing, coloring, cutting, gluing, ESL through artwork, and total physical response (TPR, Brown, 2007). This reaction also seemed to have a positive effect on parents' attitudes toward learning ESL in general.

I have two schools ... sometimes, they come to see me ... I don't know 10 or 15 parents ... when I see these parents from Cycle One ... because I have their older sister or brother, and they talk to me and say, "Yeah, that's a good idea." And sometimes, parents from older students say, "Oh yeah, that's a good idea to put English in Cycle One." (Research Participant 8: ESL Teacher)

An unexpected effect of students learning ESL at an early age may be that of motivating their parents to become more interested in learning English themselves.

I think it's really funny, you see a little kid come home and the mother, she just listens to what he says ... and he sings the "The Wheels on the Bus" and tells her that this is the wheels, and this is the mommy, cause there is a mommy and a daddy on the bus, and a baby that goes whawha ... They think it's really funny, and they know what they're talking about ... So, you know, they see that they are learning, somehow ... through a song! (Research Participant 7: ESL Teacher)

The only apparent concern from parents was whether students with learning challenges should be learning ESL. Our data suggest that both parents and students appeared to be positively affected by the new ESL policy and how it was being implemented. Consequently, it would be interesting to see if this positive effect might translate into increased pressure for more balanced provision of ESL in primary Cycle One in terms of time allocation, resources, and use of a more innovative curriculum.

Perceived Effects: French Basic Literacy

The research participants did not indicate that learning ESL interfered with the development of students' basic literacy skills and competence in French. All the research participants had learned both French and English almost simultaneously: they believed that if they could learn English without detracting from their French language, then learning ESL would not have a negative effect on their students' French (Brown, 2007; Coelho, 2004; Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

I don't think learning a second language prevents the learning of basic literacy and numeracy skills. What I see in class is that my students make links between English and French and they ask me why it's not the same or they tell me that it's just like French. It makes them think about French and analyze it, so I believe it might even help them. (Research Participant 9: ESL Teacher)

They're not supposed to look at the reading and writing, but they also figured that, you know, learning to read and learning to write and introducing English at the same time ... they felt it was better to put the grades 1 starting in January, and give one full hour for the grade 2, from September to the end of January. (Research Participant 7: ESL Teacher)

The four ESL classroom teachers reported that the ESL curriculum that had been implemented in their schools was designed such that more time was allocated to grade 2 in order to reduce any possible interference with basic literacy development in French in grade 1.

Resistance to the new ESL program may be more politically/culturally fuelled, rather than linguistically driven, in terms of interfering with the development of French literacy among their students. (Research Participant 7: ESL Teacher)

Maybe, [Bill] Law 101¹ kind of scared people a little. Because, for having been through ... my studies both in English and French, No ... it does not impede on French or math or ... any other subject! ... The people that are going to be afraid, you're always afraid of some-

thing you don't know! And I think that the people that think that it is going to be disturbing either French or math, or other subject, are people that don't speak English and they are afraid! You know, I think you have to keep an open mind on that. People that are afraid are the people that don't speak English and they're afraid of it. (Research Participant 7: ESL Teacher)

I think that when we talk about English, it's always ... you know ... It's like the "Two Solitudes"? French and English. And when you talk about English ... sometimes they say: "Oh! French, French is important and we ... but we're not cutting on minutes for the French but can we just give more English ... more English, and what about French, French, French! So they're going to have less time in French! And one of them, one of the teachers said, "They can learn English by watching TV." Oh yeah? Watching TV? Good! Good! Sometimes ... *Sesame Street* or ... *Character* but ... they're learning ... no ... I think you have to go further. You have to make intensification, and that's ... I let them talk, and when they ask me my point of view, I said, "To learn English, you must have intensification." And so they rejected it, so I asked them, Can we have 30 minutes more for Cycle One of English? Because, now they just have 30 seconds ... 30 minutes uhhh.

However, as one ESL teacher (Research Participant 8) explained, for some teachers in her school, putting more emphasis on ESL might lead to assimilation.

Conclusion and Research Implications

Incongruence was manifest in how schools understood and implemented the ESL policy and corresponding curriculum. This case study reveals a significant variation in and across participating school districts and schools with respect to the capabilities and provision of ESL programs in Cycle One. Most research participants outlined the struggle faced by schools in developing capabilities in terms of conditions to be put in place and of the actions to be taken toward achieving the intent of the policy enshrined in the ESL policy and curriculum for Cycle One.

Participating primary ESL teachers, resource teachers, and school district-based officials interviewed in this study supported the introduction of ESL in Cycle One. However, from their own perspectives, how the program was implemented created resistance in some schools, as lack of human resources and conflict over time allocation and resources affected the willingness of some schools to adopt a balanced approach to the provision of ESL in Cycle One. In terms of the perceived effect of introducing ESL in Cycle One, our data revealed an emerging positive attitude toward ESL from students and parents in partic-

ipating schools with no perceived negative effect on basic literacy in French.

Our understanding of the Quebec government's ESL language policy leads us to claim that the policymakers and curriculum-writers have devised appropriate curricular and teaching approaches for the particular educational environment of the schools involved in this policy study. However, a policy that originates in Montreal or Quebec City may not take into consideration the diverse learning environments and conditions in remote regions or in regions where there is little outside exposure to English. Teaching English to non-native-speakers is complex, multidimensional, and context-driven (Brown, 2007; Coelho, 2004; Judd, 1981; Nayar, 1997). "An ESL situation can be redefined as a situation where non-native English speakers spend a vast majority of their time communicating in English" (Judd, p. 61). In our opinion, the label *ESL* might not be the appropriate classification for the teaching of English in a predominantly Francophone milieu. In fact, the distinction between circumstantial and elective bilingualism (Valdes & Figueroa, 1994) may be more useful considering the situation in Quebec. Second-language (L2) learning contexts vary; where the L2 is not used in the community, the decision to use it or not is a matter of individual choice (elective bilingualism), but in other settings, the circumstances require the use of the L2 (circumstantial bilingualism). Thus elective bilingualism on the part of the individual could be at odds with mandated bilingualism coming from the government of Quebec.

The political goal of increasing the level of bilingualism of Francophone students by introducing ESL in Cycle One is a plausible reality in an ESL environment. However, where English is a foreign language (i.e., English non-native speakers learn English in an environment where the dominant population speaks another language), it might not be realistic in terms of the current guidelines and policy directions for teaching English that have been adopted by the government. Achieving a bilingual level of proficiency in ESL in a classroom environment only, without exposure to English outside the classroom, requires more than the half-hour to one-hour classes per week provided by Quebec public schools (Coelho, 2004; Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Without the necessary comprehensible English-language input combined with form-focused instruction, learners are unlikely to make enough steady progress to reach the goal of bilingualism that the government of Quebec desires (Lightbown & Spada).

This study revealed the difficulties faced by ESL teachers in attempting to address the needs of the students and meet the learning objectives of the ESL curriculum due to the diversity of learning conditions framing the implementation and provision of ESL programs for Cycle One students. These findings on the effects of the Quebec ESL policy and curriculum for Cycle One will, we hope, serve as a starting point for future studies on the development of curriculum innovation in Quebec and other jurisdictions where

English is taught as a second language at the early primary level. However, some issues require attention. First, given the small number of participants in this study, it is not possible to generalize our findings with respect to perceived effects. Future research might involve a larger sample of participants in at least a few regions of Quebec. Second, this research took place in a French-dominant environment outside Montreal. Future studies should include a wider number of early primary school settings in urban, semi-urban, and rural areas where the use of English is more prominent in order to examine whether the inequalities in the provision of English programs in Cycle One exist in other Quebec areas. Third, comparative studies could be conducted in Quebec and elsewhere (e.g., in France and Belgium, which might have similar values and educational systems) with the aim of (a) exploring the effects of government policy on the compulsory teaching of ESL and means of implementation at the early primary level, and teachers' perceptions and classroom practices; and (b) fostering innovation in the design of English curricula for a French-dominant environment.

Note

¹ Bill 101, also known as Charte de la langue française (Charter of the French language), ruled that French is the only official language in the province of Quebec. This Bill protects and promotes the use of the French language in Quebec by prohibiting Francophone students from attending Anglophone schools (Hudon, 2011).

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