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"I Have Big, Big, Big Dream!": Realigning Instruction with the Language-Learning Needs of Adult Syrians with Refugee Experience in Canada

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on a study involving multiple sources of data that captured adult Syrian refugee learners' unique language-learning needs by developing and implementing needs assessment surveys; conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the learners and teachers; and analyzing the learners' oral production. The insights gained from the analysis of direct data (the learners' oral production) and indirect data (content analysis using NVivo 12 Plus of the learning needs reported by learners and teachers) are intended to inform the work of researchers conducting needs assessment as well as the practices that are applicable within and beyond the Canadian context of instructors and material developers working with English-language learners who are refugees.

KEYWORDS

Syrian refugees; adult language learners; language training; needs analysis; resettlement; integration

RESUMÉ

Cet article fait le rapport d'une étude impliquant plusieurs sources de données qui cerne les besoins singuliers de réfugiés syriens adultes en matière d'apprentissage linguistique en développant et en mettant en œuvre des questionnaires d'évaluation des besoins; en réalisant des entrevues semi-structurées approfondies avec les apprenants et les enseignants; et en analysant la production orale des apprenants. Les renseignements obtenus à travers l'analyse de données directes (la production orale des apprenants) et de données indirectes (analyse de contenu des besoins rapportés par les apprenants et les enseignants à l'aide de NVivo 12 Plus) visent à guider le travail des chercheurs effectuant de l'analyse des besoins ainsi que les pratiques applicables à l'intérieur et au-delà du contexte canadien des formateurs et développeurs de contenu travaillant avec des apprenants de l'anglais langue seconde qui sont réfugiés.

INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), from 2015 to 2019, 48,085 Syrian refugees resettled in Canada. Faced with limited funding and resources, Canada is having to address enormous language-training challenges in its efforts to resettle this unprecedented arrival of refugees (UNHCR, 2021). As some

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recent headlines have described, cities across Canada are encountering critical problems in language training for adult Syrian refugees (e.g., Carman, 2016; Rolfsen, 2016; Waisman, 2018). Yet as then Immigration Minister John McCallum has pointed out, "Official language training … is fundamental to successful settlement," and "there's very little in terms of welcoming newcomers that is more important than language" (O'Neil, 2016).

Canada's language-training program for immigrants—Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)—has played a pivotal role in the federal strategy for integrating immigrants. This approach, which combines refugees and newcomers together, is designed to help immigrants and refugees integrate into Canadian society by providing English or French (the official languages) language training, along with knowledge about Canada (Huang, 2021b). For the LINC program, the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) is used to assess learners' proficiency levels. The CLB standard is a descriptive scale of language ability in English as a Second Language (ESL), written as 12 benchmarks along a continuum of progression from basic and intermediate to advanced abilities (Jezak, 2017; Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, n.d.-b). IRCC's overall evaluation of the LINC program found that 80.7% of learner respondents had registered in the program "to improve English for daily life" and "to get a job." Still, the program's dropout rate can be as high as 25% (IRCC, 2012). A more recent report also indicated that "no CLB progression was noted" for 43% of those who accessed IRCC-funded LINC programs between January 2014 and March 2016 and that the number of hours needed to progress one CLB level in four language domains (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), varying by different factors (e.g., age, educational level, CLB level before entering the program, etc.) averaged 524.5 hours (IRCC, 2017, p. 30). Moreover, the 2016 employment rates for male and female Syrians with refugee experience who had resettled in Canada were only 24% and 8%, respectively (among those, 53% were government-assisted Syrian refugees) (Houle, 2019). Similar results from research in Europe have identified notably less positive employment outcomes for refugees who arrive with low (first language) literacy levels (e.g., i Solé, 2014).

In the words of Sam Nammoura, a refugee advocate, "The longer any newcomer has to wait to learn English, the longer they must wait to get a job and settle into their new life in Canada. To find a job, to integrate, to provide for the family, for better opportunities—English is very essential" (Klingbeil, 2016, n.p.). As Nelson and Appleby (2015) have argued, learners' voices are needed to provide "a potentially powerful source of insights that could, and indeed should, be driving the design, delivery, and evaluation of education programs for these students" (p. 325); in turn, research on these matters should inform the professional development needs of instructors as well. In line with Nelson and Appleby's call, the present study—part of a multi-year project designed to address the language-training issues faced in Canadian cities because of the recent arrival of Syrian refugees—was undertaken in order to identify these refugees' unique language-learning needs.

CONTEXT: SUPPORT FROM THE LITERATURE

Lack of language skills necessary for living and working in a new country is one of

the most critical barriers faced by refugees (e.g., Kirova, 2019; Khabra, 2017), whether—in the case of Canada and other English-speaking countries and in the context of this study—it is English for general or for specific purposes (e.g., for work in a specialized field). In determining what a particular group of learners needs to learn, as well as how and why, the term "language-learning needs" may involve multiple perspectives and factors (Hyland, 2006; Long, 2005). Since the 1970s, with the advent of learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning, scholars have suggested various theories, models, and frameworks for analyzing language learners' needs (e.g., Dudley-Evans and John, 1998; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). With them have come a wide array of terms associated with the concepts of needs and needs analysis, including *objective* and *subjective* needs; *perceived* and *felt* (or expressed) needs; *target-situation* (e.g., skills needed to perform competently), *learning-situation* (e.g., preferred way of learning), and *present-situation* (e.g., current skills and language use) needs analyses; *product-oriented* and *process-oriented* needs; and *necessities*, *wants*, and lacks (e.g., Basturkmen, 2010; Flowerdew, 2018; Ozdemir, 2018). Needs analysis is important because the results are key to identifying the linguistic features and communicative practices, skills, and competencies of the target groups. Understanding learners' needs is a widely accepted starting point for designing and implementing a language course. By extension, context-specific needs analysis is fundamental to designing tasks and developing courses and materials. Researchers also generally agree that collecting and applying information about learners' needs is pertinent to specifying the objectives, procedures, content, materials, methods, and outcomes assessments at the task, course, and program levels (e.g., Basturkmen, 2010; Flowerdew, 2018).

Yet as Hyland (2009) pointed out, "Needs are not always easy to determine … because they mean different things to different participants" (p. 204). Since the 1980s, numerous studies on language-learning needs assessment have examined the needs of learners of English as an additional language using a variety of data collection methods that focus on different areas, skill domains, and contexts. Study results have highlighted the learner-specific and context-dependent nature of language-learning needs. Needs analysis in the English for general-purposes setting, however, remains understudied as a result of the diversity and lack of specificity compared to English for specific or academic purposes (Ozdemir, 2018). Empirical research has also revealed that language-learning needs are learner-specific and context-dependent (Huang, 2010; Long, 2005). The unique situation of Syrians with refugee experience in the English-for-general-purposes context thus calls for a learner-centred approach and must start with understanding these learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, experiences, and needs (e.g. Fang et al., 2018a; 2018b; Huang, 2021a; Kirova, 2019).

Learners with Refugee Experience

Canada is one of the leading countries admitting refugees for permanent resettlement (Sevunts, 2019; UNHCR, 2021). But although these constitute a group of learners with distinct language-learning needs, research examining these needs in Canada has been scant. Benseman's (2014) qualitative study of New Zealand identified common challenges (e.g., psychological trauma, management of dislocated families) and learning issues (e.g., dealing with abstractions, learning appropriate norms of

behaviour, following instructions) faced by 36 adult refugee learners from 10 different countries and with limited education. Of Benseman's proposed strategies for instructors, very few items (2 out of 23) seemed specific to the particular needs of learners with refugee experience (e.g., teacher's "understanding that learners' previous trauma can be played out in the classroom … in the form of constant headaches, difficulties in concentrating on tasks, and ongoing health issues" (see pp. 100–101 for the full list). Windle and Miller's (2012) study of low-literacy, refugee-background students in Australia highlighted the lack of instructional resources needed to scaffold learning and the time needed to progress through the curriculum and to develop learners' autonomy. More recently, the study by Miller et al. (2014) of secondary school learners and teachers similarly pointed out the teaching challenges in planning, which stemmed from diversity in student competence, lack of time, heavy workloads, and limited resources. The study concluded that "teaching was not guided by well thought out unit and lesson plans grounded in evidence-based understandings of their students and their needs," but instead "tended to be directed by intuition and a set of enacted habits" (p. 46). Studies have identified beneficial pedagogical approaches, including, among a wide range of strategies, the use of bilingual instructional support for adult learners (e.g., Benseman, 2014) and children with refugee experience (e.g., Madziva and Thondhlana, 2017). These approaches integrate learners' prior lived experiences and views into instruction (Nelson & Appleby, 2015). Finally, in the publications and resources reviewed by Ratkovic et al. (2017) in the Canadian context, only 59 relevant sources had been written or published between 1997 and 2017 about refugee (non-Syrian-specific) students in kindergarten to the 12th grade. Their review underscored "a lack of instructional data on supporting refugee students in the Canadian classroom" (p. 3) and concluded that "further studies exploring the academic, psychological, and social challenges refugee students face, and the strategies they use, are critical" (p. 21).

Few studies focused on adult refugee language learners have been situated in Canada or within the LINC context specifically. In this context, the knowledge gap on refugee students' integration (Ratkovic et al., 2017), and the specific needs of Syrian adult refugee learners is glaring. The need for the present study is further supported by research showing that LINC programs lack suitable curriculum material and consistency in the levels of courses offered and support delivered across Canada (e.g., Jackson, 2013). Specifically, the study's goal is to identify the specific language-learning needs of Syrians with refugee experience from the instructors' and learners' perspectives in order to inform practices for those practitioners who support these learners.

FOCUS OF THIS RESEARCH

This study[1] used a mixed-methods design (Ivankova, 2015), gathering multiple sources of data—both indirect (i.e., surveys and interviews) and direct (oral language production)—capturing the specific language-learning needs of Syrians with a refugee background. Mixed-methods research "enables researchers to seek a more panoramic view of their research landscape, viewing phenomena from different viewpoints and through diverse research

[1]This study was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

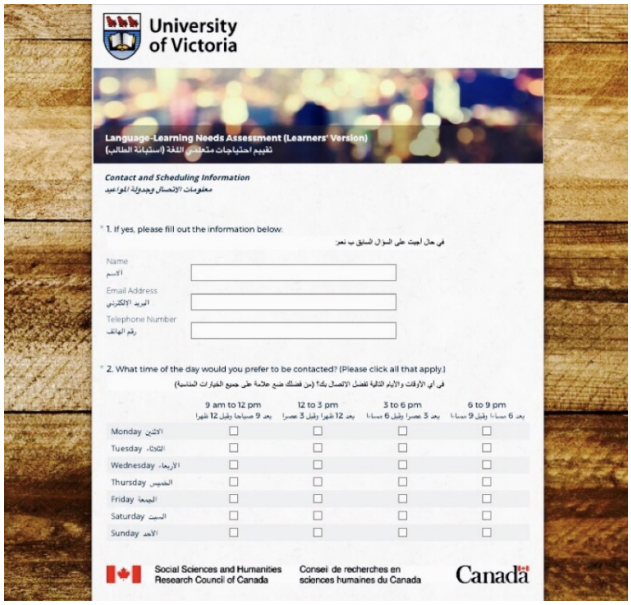
Table 1
Instructor Profiles

Characteristics	Details	Distribution
Gender	Female	70.6%
	Male	23.5%
	Preferred not to be identified	5.9%
Age	25–29	5.9%
	30–39	17.6%
	40–49	29.4%
	50–59	41.2%
	60 and above	5.9%
Highest degree	BA	29.4%
	Post-graduate diploma	11.8%
	Master's	52.9%
	PhD	5.9%
Experience living in countries where Arabic is spoken	No	76.5%
	Yes	23.5%
Years of teaching experience	Under 5	11.8%
	6–10	29.4%
	11–15	29.4%
	16–20	11.8%
	20 and more	17.6%
Years of teaching in LINC program	Under 5	47.1%
	6–10	23.5%
	11–15	23.5%
	20 and more	5.9%
Experience in LINC program	Pre-literacy	46.6%
	LINC 1	73.3%
	LINC2	46.6%
	LINC3	60.0%
	LINC4	46.6%
	LINCS	26.6%
	LINC6	20.0%
	LINC7	13.3%

lenses" (Shorten and Smith, 2017, p. 74). Our research addressed three key areas of inquiry: (1) Syrian learners' language-learning needs from the instructors' perspective, (2) Syrian learners' language-learning needs from the learners' perspective, and (3) Syrian learners' language-learning needs gleaned from their own oral production.

PARTICIPANTS

The study involved survey responses fully completed by 17 LINC instructors and 14 learners, followed by individual interviews with 8 instructors and 9 learners. The learners all came to Canada as government-assisted refugees; at the time of the surveys and interviews, 36% reported that they were employed (range: two months to one year; fields: painter, housekeeping, tile setter, pharmacy assistant, and plumber). **Table 1** and **Table 2** present a profile of the survey participants.


University of Victoria

Language-Learning Needs Assessment (Learners' Version)

Contact and Scheduling Information

1. If yes, please fill out the information below.

Name

Email Address

Telephone Number

2. What time of the day would you prefer to be contacted? (Please click all that apply.)

	9 am to 12 pm	12 to 3 pm	3 to 6 pm	6 to 9 pm
Monday	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tuesday	☐	☐	☐	☐
Wednesday	☐	☐	☐	☐
Thursday	☐	☐	☐	☐
Friday	☐	☐	☐	☐
Saturday	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sunday	☐	☐	☐	☐

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Figure 1
Online Needs Assessment Survey

Table 2
Learner Profiles

Characteristics	Details	Distribution
Gender	Female	7.1%
	Male	92.9%
Age	20–24	28.6%
	25–29	14.3%
	30–34	14.3%
	35–39	7.1%
	40–44	28.6%
	45–49	7.1%
Education	No formal education	7.1%
	Grades 7–9	14.3%
	Grades 10–12	42.9%
	Technical/vocational education	7.1%
	University (dentistry, pharmacy, mechanical/-civil engineering, and agriculture sciences)	28.6%
Years in Canada	Under 1	7.1%
	1–2	92.9%
Current levels	CLB Stage I	78.6%
	CLB Stage II	21.4%

Note. N = 31 (LINC instructors: n = 17; learners: n = 14) from the survey. CLB (Canadian Language Benchmarks). Stage I (CLB 1–4): Initial Basic Ability; CLB Stage II (CLB 5–8): Fluent Intermediate Ability; CLB III (CLB 9–12): Developing Advanced Ability.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Following the procedures for survey development (e.g., Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2009) and the author's previous work (Huang 2010, 2018), two versions of the Language-Learning Needs Assessment Survey were developed, piloted, and refined before being distributed via the institution-supported SurveyMonkey platform. The learners' version of the survey (**Figure 1**) consisted of seven sections with 38 items:

1. survey information and informed consent page;
2. contact and scheduling information (for learners who expressed interest in being contacted for a follow-up interview);
3. personal information (e.g., age, gender);
4. educational background;
5. language background (e.g., first language, previously learned languages, formal language-learning experiences);
6. professional information (e.g., primary field of work prior to living in Canada, previous jobs in Syria, communication skills associated with these jobs); and
7. current use of English (e.g., languages used in Canada, confidence about English communication, current CLB level, areas they felt they needed to work on, and ways language training programs could help them improve their communication skills for personal, social, and/or professional purposes).

The instructors' version of the survey covered all sections included in the learners' version, but the 27 questions geared specifically toward LINC instructors included ones eliciting information about language-teaching experience and training. This section included questions about whether the instructors had lived in an Arabic-speaking region and if they were proficient in Arabic (and, if so, at what level). Unlike the learners' version, the instructors' version contained an additional 11 questions eliciting information about their experiences with the LINC program, their instructional approaches and methods, their Syrian learners' language-learning needs, and the instructional challenges of teaching the LINC program at specific levels, reflecting on their recent and current experiences.

Individual participants' responses were then used to develop interview questions that would guide the interview, which we tailored to each participant. The average number of guiding questions was 20, and the questions were presented in the same order used in the survey so that participants could refer to their previous responses in case they were unable to recall what they had said. This allowed us to seek clarification on their responses and ask them to elaborate.

Learners' oral production data were elicited through an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Speaking test. The test involved asking the participants to respond to questions about themselves and their families, to speak about a topic, and to engage in a longer discussion on the topic (Huang, 2013).

Three steps were undertaken in collecting data:

1. The survey link was sent to LINC instructors through LINC providers across Canada whose contact information

was publicly available (as per institutional guidelines; ethical protocol number 17-275). Eighty messages were sent, and 41 instructors accessed the survey, with a completion rate of 41.5%. For the learners' version distributed through the LINC providers, among the 20 who accessed the survey, 14 completed it, with a completion rate of 70%. In both cases, it was possible to calculate only the completion rate, because learners and instructors may have forwarded the survey link to their peers, making a response rate impossible to calculate accurately.

2. With each survey completed in full, the respondent gave permission to be contacted for a follow-up interview. A mutually convenient time was scheduled by phone or email, and the semi-structured follow-up questions were developed based on each survey respondent's answers.

3. All interview sessions with instructors were conducted by video-conference, and all learners' interview sessions were conducted at the places of the participant's choosing (e.g., at the institution where the author works or at the learners' home). Learner participants outside British Columbia all declined to participate in the interview remotely because of their discomfort with video-conferencing tools; travelling across Canada to conduct face-to-face interviews was unfeasible. For these reasons, interview opportunities agreed to by these learners were not pursued.

Prior to each interview, verbal consent was obtained from each participant by reminding those interviewed that they could refuse to answer any question and could stop at any time without needing to provide an explanation, that their identities would be kept completely confidential, and that only code numbers would be used for all files and the dissemination of findings. Learners were administered the IELTS Speaking test after giving consent but before being interviewed. This sequence was used to simulate the test-taking situation as well as to allow for the possibility that their oral production might be of use to them when they reflected on and reported their language-learning challenges.

Each participant's survey responses were then made available to them during the interview, and all interviews were recorded using both QuickTime Version 10.0 audio-recording and a digital voice recorder as a backup. The interviews were conducted by two interviewers. Each interviewer took turns asking the guiding or follow-up questions, while the other recorded any notes for follow-up. The interviews lasted from one to two hours in English and/or Arabic, whichever language participants felt most comfortable using to express their thoughts.

For the data analysis, survey responses were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively (those responses from the open-ended questions). The interviews were transcribed verbatim by three transcribers and checked for accuracy. Including the responses to the open-ended questions from the survey (9,471 words) and the interview transcripts (instructors: 76,833 words; learners: 72,427 words), 158,731 words from both sources were uploaded to NVivo 12 Plus (QSR International, 2018) for qualitative coding and analysis. The final code structure contained 20 parent nodes, with 2,645 individual unique codes, for a total frequency count of 5,419 codes. The entire coding process and cycles are described in Huang (2019).

The assessment of learners' oral production was rated on the basis of the scoring

criteria established by IELTS and CLB (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, n.d.-a; Huang, 2013). Learners' oral production data were first rated by two raters according to the CLB and IELTS Band scores. Any disagreements about ratings were discussed until complete agreement was reached. The oral production data elicited using the IELTS Speaking test were also transcribed fully for analysis by two coders with training in applied linguistics. The focus was on accuracy (Housen & Kuiken, 2009) in the domains of vocabulary (defined by "using vocabulary with precision"), coherence (defined by "speaking coherently with fully appropriate cohesive features and developing topics fully and appropriately"), and grammar (defined by "producing consistently accurate structures"), with a total of 1,247 coding decisions.

RESULTS

Major themes emerging from the data on instructors' perceptions about their work teaching Syrian learners revolved around their perceptions about the Syrian learners in general (n = 20), their instructional approach at the LINC level (n = 43), their instruction at CLB Stage I (Initial Basic Ability; n = 124) and Stage II (Fluent Intermediate Ability; n = 43) and in general (n = 36), learners' own language (L1) use (n = 54), and LINC program feedback (n = 169). We coded 489 items from the instructors' perspective.

When asked about their *general instructional approach across levels*, the instructors reported that their main foci in speaking were (1) use of repetition to establish routines, (2) spelling strategies, and (3) basic conversations. Reading involved sign reading or memorizing words for reading, vocabulary centred upon meaning-form mapping and word recognition, and listening involved instructors' self-created short paragraphs or stories for comprehension. Writing focused mainly on letter combinations.

For CLB Stage I, individual and paired work were the key formats used to attend to basic linguistic usages for daily interactions and sociolinguistic (cultural norms and nuance) needs. Few instructors used community-integrated learning strategies (e.g., visits to gardens, banks, and museums) in addition to their use of basic listening comprehension tasks. Teaching related to employment was mentioned only three times—once involving reading a truck-driving manual, and twice during conversational tasks related to car parts.

For CLB Stage II, mention of community-integrated learning included, for example, visiting a farm, participating in activities at the local art gallery, speaking to an elementary school class about the learners' refugee experiences, and visiting a medical centre. For other language domains, listening involved comprehension types, pronunciation involved form-focused games that included practice with segmental features (i.e., those discrete units or segments that constitute the basis of a sound in speech), and vocabulary learning generally involved explicit teaching of meaning-form mapping and rote learning. Reading focused on vocabulary learning through generating word lists, and writing included journal keeping and error correction.

Overall, the *instructors' perceptions of Syrian learners* indicated a consensus about their learners' abilities to acquire skills in listening and speaking. As one instructor put it, "A lot of the teachers in my school have commented how the Syrian population in particular … their listening and speaking develop much faster in English than perhaps people from other places" (I16). Another said, "They tend to be very good at picking up things orally; they kind of have [a] superpower like

that" (I20). Instructors working with learners with post-secondary educational experience in Syria noted that "some of them have been professionals with university degrees before, and those are just really quick learners" (I17).

At the CLB Stage I levels, however, instructors perceived learners' frustration about the speed of their progress. As one put it, "We're seeing a lot of frustration among Syrian students" (I07). Another instructor said, "They're frustrated in how long it's taking them, especially their reading and writing, to learn because they want to go … to enter the workforce.… I don't blame them. I feel frustrated for them too" (I16). Yet another instructor reported that "many of the CLB 1 students in particular are frustrated or become frustrated about moving up…. Three months later, they still don't have enough English to have a simple conversation" (I32). Another noted, "Everyone in my class has been there for over a year. Some two years, and they are not even at Level 1 literacy" (I18). Learners' attitudes toward the future were more short-term in relation to their status, their learning about the need to pass LINC 4 for citizenship or work, and the slow progress they were experiencing through the levels. As articulated by one instructor:

> I get the impression that most Syrian refugees don't really know what they're going to do in Canada … that once they're done [with] level 4, they're not interested in going any further than that … and they are frustrated in how long it's taking them to learn English because they … want to enter the workforce.
>
> *(I16)*

The instructors also shared their observations regarding their learners' use of technology and mobile devices, or else their attitude toward technology-mediated instruction: "They don't like [the] online component thing" [I16]. As another instructor put it, "Low computer literacy but great with a cell phone" (I03). Another stated, "They'll do everything on their phones and they're good.… Syrians are some of the fastest learners in the world" (I20).

Instructors also commented on their work supporting learners across CLB Stage II, on issues related to critical thinking skills, cultural expectations, and employment-related concerns. Two perspectives emerged from the data: first, that learners just needed the language knowledge to activate critical thinking skills. As one instructor explained,

> Many of [my] students, Syrian learners, have done high school or university classes. Presumably they would have learned critical thinking in those areas…. I guess one perspective could be that they simply need the language literacy in order to use their critical thinking skills in a language learning environment.
>
> *(I32)*

The second perspective tended to view Syrian learners as lacking a critical approach to ideas, opinions, and concepts. One instructor reported the absence of the development of critical thinking skills in CLB Stage I and the challenges of moving learners beyond rote learning, or what he called "matching," toward a "free association kind of learning" (I01). For learners at CLB 6 and 7, the issue also "tends to be critical thinking, details, depth, nuance. Certainly vocabulary, advanced vocabulary is a challenge, not because of the vocabulary but because they never read anything. So they only have the spoken vocabulary that they can deal with" (I31).

Comments on gender differences were mixed: some instructors saw it as a non-issue, while others noted that women tended "to socialize through other women first" in group work, but also "worked well with men" (I20). Another commented, "The men want to get a job because they need to provide for

the family, so they're focusing on their listening and speaking so that they can get a job, more so than the reading and the writing" (I12).

Regarding teachers' perceptions of *learners' own language use*, the perspectives varied, but most reported limiting the use of first language (L1) in their classrooms. As several instructors noted, "I prefer they do not use it when I am teaching them, unless I ask them to" (I35); "We had to set norms, and I, as a teacher, kept saying, 'No Arabic,' at regular intervals of time" (I12); or the use of L1 was "only for comprehension emergencies … when all else fails" (I29). This approach mirrored what was reported by learners. For example, one learner reported that

> the use of a non-English language was completely prohibited. And they catch any students using different language other than English,… they're gonna given him homework, and he's gonna have to finish it in five, six hours. And he gets, the student gets a red card. So, like, he gets like less points or it counts to his history in the program, so it was very difficult.
>
> *(L03)*

While own language use was discouraged, most instructors recognized the benefits of L1 use in navigating communication obstacles, increasing learner confidence, appreciating cultural differences, building learner community, increasing efficiency in teaching, lowering affective filters, establishing trust, and maintaining cultural identity. For example:

> When I first started,… I tried to suppress the Arabic, and that was totally the wrong approach. Now I embrace [it] … they're all Syrians, and … a couple of students are much higher … so I ask different people to write the Arabic so that they can appear side-by-side. Total embrace of the Arabic. It's helpful and it makes them feel more comfortable that there is also the community, and bonding with each other.
>
> *(I16)*

Most reported being judicious about L1 use in the classroom, to ensure that learners would not overly rely on L1 translation. Some instructors attributed learners' lack of progress to their need to use their own language at home. For example:

> Most are terrified that their children are not going to remember their culture or their language. And for probably about a third of my students, just that reason alone is why they don't progress. Because they go home and they speak their language with their kids as much as possible, because they're desperate to try and keep their kids in that culture and in that language, and they don't want to lose it for the next generation.
>
> *(I02)*

For the *program feedback* theme, instructors reported on the LINC program's strengths and limitations across levels (literacy: $n = 23$; CLB Stage I: $n = 91$; CLB Stage II: $n = 23$; overall: $n = 32$). At the literacy level (positive: 30.4%; negative: 69.5%), the strengths pointed out by the instructors touched on the nature of the program, which enabled them to gain a sense of personal meaning and reward for what they did. Regarding limitations, central issues were the lack of English training for employment purposes and for meeting learners' needs, the length of time required to complete CLB Stage I, and space limitation for enrolment.

At Stage I (positive: 39.5%; negative: 60.5%), the strengths highlighted by the instructors included the use of community-integrated learning approaches; the task-based, practical approach to teaching; the development of learners' confidence in speaking; and the program's mission, which was to help with settlement and integration. The limitations shared by instructors focused, for the majority of codes, on the lack of alignment of learners' needs with instruction, the mismatch between learners' needs

and employment-related language training, and the inadequacy of materials suitable for meeting learners' needs. In turn, these added to issues related to teaching preparation time and compensation, the financial resources needed to support the community-integrated learning activities, the challenge of implementing Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, nd b), and teachers' lack of preparation to deal with refugee learners and mixed-level classes. For CLB Stage II (positive: 57%; negative: 43%), comments on positive aspects included the program's focus on grammar, error corrections, and the target language culture, along with use of technology to mediate learning. The limitations noted by instructors were mainly lack of relevance to employment, shortage of level-appropriate materials, and class sizes that were too large.

Of the instructors' comments about the program in general (positive: 25%; negative 75%), positive comments focused mainly on personal learning through their work supporting this group of learners and celebrating their success stories. Instructors also commented negatively on some recurring issues already noted, ranging from the assessment of learners' progress, to class size, waiting lists, learner lack of progression through levels, unavailability of ready-to-use materials and resources, and inadequate professional development support.

Identified Learners' Needs and Teaching Challenges

Regarding *learner needs* identified by the instructors ($n = 441$), 76.42% of the codes pertained to the needs of learners at the literacy and CLB Stage I levels. At the literacy level ($n = 54$), among the skill domains, speaking skills (e.g., functional language use in everyday greetings, small talk, asking for help, confidence building) were mentioned most frequently, followed by writing (e.g., letter formation, formatting, writing personal information), reading (e.g., text direction, phonetics, basic signs), listening (e.g., listening for functional needs, basic listening skills), and computer skills (e.g., basic computer literacy, email). Other needs related to numeracy and personal circumstances (e.g., family, work).

The following examples demonstrated the need to develop basic literacy skills: "It's really starting at the basics … particularly [for] the Arabic speakers… [L]etter formation, writing, being able to put words on paper … is a huge problem for Syrians, especially at the lower levels" (I20). As for personal circumstances, one instructor empathized:

> They gotta work. They have this struggle between wanting to go to school and get the CLB that they need in order to either get citizenship or go to college, but they gotta pay their bills…. I don't know what the answer is for them because I get it, you know … and they have children as well.
>
> *(I07, Huang, 2021b, p. 62)*

For CLB 1 ($n = 104$), the skill domain most frequently identified as needing support was speaking ($n = 21$) (e.g., functional needs that cover daily activities, asking for help, giving instruction, small talk, conveying personal information), followed by reading ($n = 19$) (e.g., alphabet and basic signs, stories, reading for meeting functional needs, text direction). Then there were the domains of listening (e.g., basic instructions, conversation, daily function) and writing (e.g., writing for functional purposes, spelling, text direction) (with $n = 15$ each). Other codes included basic computer skills, becoming familiar with Canadian cultural and classroom norms, and dealing with cultural shocks and personal circumstances ($n = 11$).

For CLB 2 (*n* = 31), the needs identified were evenly distributed across skill domains. Some of the common codes included needs related to pronunciation, asking questions, use of modals, listening for reduction, vocabulary, reading strategies, and grammar.

The needs reported by the instructors at CLB 3 and 4 (*n* = 67) touched on similar issues in three of the four skill domains (speaking: asking questions, pronunciation, social and work interactions; reading: vocabulary, strategies, cultural literacy; listening: vocabulary, reduction, functional needs). For example: "It's specific jargon they have difficulty with. What was the one—plunger. Plunger, nobody knows how to say *plunger*. They all call it toilet CPR" (I20). What was uniquely highlighted at this level were learners' concerns for citizenship and employment purposes (*n* = 13). As one instructor put it,

> What we're seeing—because of the citizenship requiring the 4 in the speaking and the listening … that's what they want. They want speaking and listening. Last week I said, 'We're focusing on reading and writing for the next two weeks,' and some of them were just not interested in that at all. We do have class beginning, not just for Syrian students but any students for citizenship, and we're focusing on listening and speaking, and that's all they want.
>
> *(T12, Huang, 2021b, p. 61)*

For CLB 5 (*n* = 47), the needs extended across speaking (e.g., fluency, spoken grammar, pronunciation, idiomatic expressions), reading (vocabulary, syntax, strategies), listening (e.g., vocabulary), writing (e.g., grammar), English for academic purposes, and English for specific (employment-oriented) purposes. As one instructor pointed out, "Quite a few are trying to increase their CLBs to 6 so that they can enter the EAP program at colleges" (I04).

Finally, for instructors who commented on CLB 1 to 6 together (*n* = 81), needs related to English for employment and certification featured most prominently (*n* = 46), followed by computer skills, writing (e.g., grammar, topic development, rhetorical patterns), speaking (e.g., pronunciation of vowels at the segmental level, accuracy, critical thinking, cultural awareness), and listening (e.g., vocabulary, strategies).

With respect to the *teaching challenges* identified by the instructors (n = 180), those at the literacy level (*n* = 17) included dealing with L1 use, attendance, basic computer skills, cultural knowledge and sensitivity, learners' negative attitudes about placement, overconfidence, resistance to formal language use, and lack of level-appropriate pedagogical resources. Teaching challenges at CLB Stage I (CLB 1 to 4) (*n* = 96) involved a wide range of issues about cultural expectations related to time, teacher-learner boundaries, classroom behaviours (*n* =14), attendance and attention spans arising from personal circumstances (*n* = 13), and classroom L1 use (*n* = 11). Other issues included group work, learners' lack of literacy and exposure to technology, the managing of learners' expectations regarding progress, lack of reading habits, learning and teaching mismatches on employment needs, identifying and balancing diverse needs, academic literacy in learners' L1, challenges in implementing PBLA, and perceived language interference from learners' L1.

For CLB Stage II (CLB 5 to 8) (*n* = 79), the issues revolved around PBLA, learners' frustration with their levels of progress, and dealing with their preferred learning approaches. The observation by one instructor captured several issues and challenges in supporting learners:

> I just think that the cultural shock piece is underidentified. The learning style, the rote learning, the memorization approach to learning is underidentified. Lack of education in their own culture

> has not been identified. When there are adults with grade 1 and grade 3 education, who don't have any understanding of grammar or language in their own language, that hasn't been identified. Conceptual literacy needs to be looked at…. Right now, I'm working 40 hours a week, being paid for 26, and I'm the one that's funding all the educational material … so I'm totally tied and limited to what I can do, unless I do it myself, and I know I'm not unique in this problem.
>
> *(I01)*

Reflecting on their challenges, the participating teachers shared their recommendations at different proficiency levels (*n* = 139). For CLB Stage I, the recommendations were wide-ranging, including tailoring instruction to appropriate needs assessment, dividing language training into two streams (English for specific purposes focused on employment needs, and English for general purposes focused on daily functional needs), cultural awareness training for instructors, employment-tailored instruction, better alignment of materials with the PBLA requirements, support for assessment, involvement of more real-world tasks that meet learners' needs, community-integrated learning, ready-to-use pedagogical materials, and crisis or trauma management resources.

Learners' Perspectives

Perceived instructional approaches. The learners' description of their instructors' general instructional approaches generated 245 codes with several themes. At CLB 1, learners perceived the instructors as generally focusing on functional needs and daily communication in speaking. In the transition to CLB 2, instructors began to explicitly discourage the use of L1, translation, or an e-translator. Reading focused on personal stories, and work on writing was minimal, with attention to spelling. For CLB 3, the approach involved explicit instruction in grammar and the use of personal stories to teach reading, speaking, and writing. For listening, word recognition was emphasized, and involvement in peer interactions also increased. For CLB 4, there was a notable shift in the focus on writing to include essay writing and research. Speaking involved conversations and discussions primarily, and reading focused on developing comprehension and fluency. Reading, speaking, and writing also received greater attention at the CLB 5 level, with the work described as similar to that at CLB 4, except that in the speaking domain it also included presentations and aspects of the appropriateness of language use in interpersonal communication. Listening activities generally involved listening to recorded passages and responses to comprehension questions.

Learners commented on their preferred learning and teaching approaches (*n* = 53) related to instruction only at CLB levels 2 to 5. For CLB 2, they reported preferences for communicating with the teacher or speakers of English as a first language, reading information relevant to employment, listening to stories, and using pair-work in speaking. For CLB 3, preferences included social interactions, explicit grammar instruction, and conversation with instructors. CLB 4 preferences included face-to-face learning over technology-integrated modes, rote learning, and reading/listening with comprehension questions. For CLB 5, learners reported preferences for receiving explicit feedback, writing narratives, and completing multiple readings to develop greater reading comprehension.

Regarding reported *strategy use* (*n* = 68), learners at all levels reported substantial use of Google Translate and YouTube (*n* = 22). These tools were used widely by learners at CLB 1, and at CLB 2, learners reported using them to practise speaking and writing. At

the other end of the language-learning spectrum, learners at CLB 5 still reported using these tools, with Google Translate identified as a way to help practising pronunciation. As learners' comfort and familiarity with English grew, they increasingly explored English-language music and movies. At CLB 5, learners also noted an attention to language learning related to professional or employment purposes (e.g., university lectures and medical certification).

The specific *learner needs* identified across CLB 1 to 5 included 197 codes, within which codes relating specifically to career and employment constituted 43.1% (n = 85). Needs reported at CLB 1 were mainly functional (e.g., visiting doctors, filling out forms, reading official documents, interacting socially, and building confidence) and language skills required for future career goals (e.g., certification for electricians). At CLB 2, learners identified needs in two overarching categories. First, employment-related language-learning needs were identified, including language requirements for certification, transportation, work in the food and beverage industry, automotive certification, and employment-related communication. For example, one learner said, "I come to Canada in eleven months, I study English, 'what your address, what your name, what's ahh, how many have children, what name your children, how old are your son'—where is this work? Not work, it's not really for test or work-related" (L13, Huang, 2021b, p. 61). Second, learners identified needs related to their personal circumstances: in addition to the language requirement for citizenship, learners reported challenges to language learning such as childcare, time constraints, accommodation of work and language/certification studies, and the limited times and locations of program offerings.

For CLB 3, language-learning needs focused mainly on the target situation needs, while the four language skills needed to pursue post-secondary studies and employment remained a central focus for learners in a wide range of fields (e.g., software engineering, security, food and beverage, transportation, performing arts, aviation engineering). For example, one learner said, "I need to remember all the technical words for trucks, the inside of the truck … in order to pass the test" (L06, Huang, 2021b, p. 61).

The language-learning needs for learners at the CLB 4 level related to passing the certification exams required for medical professions (e.g., pharmaceutical science, medical science, dentistry). Reading and speaking were the two skill domains identified in relation to field-specific reading (e.g., anatomy, pharmacology, microbiology, physiology), speaking (doctor-nurse and doctor-patient communication), and field-specific terminology. As one learner stated, "They did ask the IELTS [score from] us, but what I need are special English courses and classes, preparing us to the Canadian Dentist Board examination. You have five years" (L19, Huang, 2021b, p. 61).

For CLB 5, the needs reported mainly concerned specialized vocabulary, grammar (e.g., sentence structure, prepositions), speaking (e.g., for functional needs in medical, government, and social/interpersonal communication), and writing (e.g., for certification exams). The reported language-learning needs were aligned mainly with their expressed future career goals (e.g., civil engineering, nursing, pharmaceutical consultation, education). As one learner said about learning a specialized vocabulary, "I have to translate a lot of word. Tissue names, cell names. So I have to translate to Arabic or to Turkish to understand. I know it and I studied it and I practised this work, but

… I have to memorize … know the name of tissues, name of cells, and I don't have any knowledge about this" (L17). He further commented on his learning needs in oral communication: "[I] have to explain, consulting people about their using medicine, about the benefit, what's the opposite … make advice for them, to lead [to] better health, to use their body or what they have to practise, which would be to avoid, which to use" (L17). Another learner stated that he "will need writing for researching … to make plans … engineer always have many plan, so writing is very important for me" (L05).

Learners also perceived a lack of fit between the language courses they took and their perceived needs (n = 128). One learner shared his frustration: "Not every day the same information, the same, the same.… Same English today for Monday grammar, Tuesday listening, Wednesday speaking" (L04). Another CLB 2 learner said, "I learn from YouTube more than I learn from [institution]" (L13). This sentiment was echoed by instructors; one reported, "We had program evaluations today, actually, and … it got quite heated in my class. There were students who were very upset.… They said, 'At this rate, I'm never gonna pass the certification or get a job"' (T16, Huang, 2021b, p. 62).

When learners were asked about their perceived overall confidence level in the key domains related to employment, 72.7% expressed confidence in reading, 63.4% in speaking, 45.5% in listening, 45.4% in technology-mediated communication, and 36.4% in writing. With respect to skill domains where they felt they greatly needed help, the majority identified all four domains: 83.3% for reading, speaking, and listening; 100% for writing; and 58.3% for technology-mediated communication.

When asked about how language-training programs might help them improve their communication skills (n = 69), learners generally had difficulty articulating specific recommendations, but they pointed out general areas, such as Canadian culture and English for general purposes (with a focus mainly on reading, speaking, and writing), English for certification purposes, English for employment purposes, English for academic purposes, and technology-mediated communication.

Regarding *oral production*, during the interviews all learners mentioned their desire or need to reach a band score on the IELTS for study, immigration and citizenship, or professional certification. The results from the qualitative analysis of errors identified 36 themes, with a frequency count of 1,257. Among the errors, grammar issues had the highest percentage (n = 654, 52.74%), followed by coherence (n = 312, 25.16%) and vocabulary issues (n = 274, 22.10%). The top 10 deviations identified in each criterion were word choice (vocabulary) (n = 151), incorrect or missing determiners (grammar) (n = 109), hesitation (discourse) (n = 74), tense error (grammar) (n = 73), preposition (grammar) (n = 66), missing verbs (grammar) (n = 57), reference (discourse) (n = 48), pluralization (grammar) (n = 45), missing subject (grammar) (n = 40), and incorrect derivation (vocabulary) (n = 39).

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Lacking the necessary language skills for living and working in a new country is one of the most critical barriers refugees face; in this case, the lack is of English for general or for specific purposes (e.g., for work in a specialized field). The prevailing approach to implementing language training for newcomers in Canada has combined immigrants with refugees. While these learners do have common experiences, such as learning to

use a different language, navigating identity issues, and adjusting to life in a new country, myriad variables also deserve consideration. Learners with refugee experience are a distinct group of learners because of the unique circumstances they have had to face involving, for example, being forced to migrate and resettle in a place they did not choose, loss of family and community, interrupted education and work, trauma, and post-traumatic stress. The unique situation of Syrian learners with refugee experience—whether encountered locally, nationally, or internationally—calls for an approach to teaching English based on the reality that one size does not fit all (Kirova, 2019; Lindner et al., 2020). Instead, learner-centred and communicative approaches must start with understanding the learners' backgrounds, experiences, and needs.

Here the discussion is bracketed within the limitations of a small-scale study involving 31 LINC instructors and Syrian learners with refugee experience in Canada, with only one female Syrian learner completing the survey in full; those who volunteered to participate in the follow-up interview before completing the survey were all male. Thus, the results should be considered within this context.[2] The goal of the research, however, is on the transferability of the inferences derived from the research to other instructional settings or contexts, and not about generalizability (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; 2017).

Align Needs and Instructions

Instructors and learners appeared aligned in their perceptions that the language training provided and received did not generally meet the language-learning needs for citizenship, academic studies, or employment. Putting aside growing concerns regarding language policies that have led to establishing different thresholds of language proficiency and the requirement for meeting thresholds that are placed on non-English-speaking immigrants and refugees for these purposes (Annable, 2019; Huang, 2021b), instructors need to seek ways to create personal relevance by considering learners' needs, since these have clearly been sources of frustration for learners and instructors alike. Both the present (e.g., current skills and language use) and target situation (e.g., skills needed to perform competently) analyses—along with insights from the present study regarding, for instance, learners' perceived needs, preferred instructional methods, and preferred learning strategies—could enable instructors to better align their teaching with the needs that learners, even at low CLBs, are able to lucidly articulate in navigating program-specific assessment guidelines and external, proficiency-level requirements for specific purposes.

Share and Build Ownership in the Process

In addressing the perceived lack of personal relevance experienced by learners and rec-

[2]The survey on learning preferences in the context of English-for-employment conducted in 2020, while still showing a much lower response rate by female respondents, does reveal a slight change in the survey response patterns (male: 72.74%, n = 723; female: 26.96%, n = 268; prefer not to say: 0.3%, n = 3); this change might be attributed to the increase in technology use during the COVID pandemic. Naturally, the participant profile in the present study raises a question about whether learners of different genders might have reported different needs and preferences and whether their perspectives, if different, would have further informed the development of the training program. A study with a larger sample size that factors in other learner variables (e.g., education level, gender, etc.) merits researchers' consideration, especially given Canada's new resettlement target of 36,000 set for 2021, the highest since 2016 (Paperny, 2021). Having said that, the profile of those who volunteered to participate in the language-training program for employment as derived from this study attracted 2,242 responses (Huang, 2021b), and the profile of the participating learners who have completed the language-training program includes 52% females and 48% males. This balanced participation appears to lend some support to the transferability of the findings and the program beyond the profile of the sample in this study.

ognized by instructors, it is essential that instructors draw on learners' previous professional, lived, and learning experiences and their current real-life communication needs in order to implement participatory learning. This integration, in turn, will allow learners to be involved in negotiating lesson goals, content, methods, and formats to enhance ownership and agency (Nelson & Appleby, 2015). This approach may also address what the teachers and learners recognized as Syrian learners' preferences for a more teacher-driven approach to learning and the prioritization of communicating with teachers over other learners as the primary source of learning (e.g., Ćatibušić et al., 2019).

Strengthen Employment-Related Language Training

The survey data included learners' and instructors' comments about Syrian learners in the LINC context, which were interpreted with the profiles of the participants in mind. What emerged in the data were two distinct groups of language learners: adult refugee learners with limited L1 education, and learners with professional skills and experience. What also emerged in the results *across all CLB levels* were learners' overarching, real-world language-learning concerns about the target situation needs for citizenship and employment, and their awareness of needing social interaction for their language development and a sense of belonging in their host communities. The prominence of concerns over seeking employment is also reflected by the mention of the terms "work" and "employment" 592 times (instructors: 232; learners: 356) across all data sources. In line with Ghadi et al.'s (2019) analysis, the participants "were primarily concerned with securing employment and they were not convinced that their language classes were a means of doing so" (p. 77).

Integrating employment-focused lessons or tasks suitable at CLB Stage I especially deserves serious consideration. This recommendation is in line with findings of the Evaluation of the Settlement Program report (2011/2012 to 2015/2016) (IRCC, 2017), which concluded that learners "who utilized 'occupation specific' language training are the most likely to improve and need the least training hours, on average, to increase 1 CLB level" (p. 30). Similarly, the report by Sturm et al. (2018), which focused on the blended-learning LINC course "Edulinc," also showed that "requests for employment and/or profession-specific language instruction" were among the top of learners' requests (p. 7).

Focus on Vocabulary

Research has shown that learning a language and attaining needed proficiency are a key challenge for newcomers in gaining access to employment, pursuing further education, and integrating into the host community (Ghadi et al., 2019). Our data and analyses of learners' oral production point to lexical as well as sentence- and discourse-level issues (22.10%, 25.16%, and 52.74% of the identified errors, respectively) that could further inform instructors' practice and the development of associated pedagogical materials. As reported by Lu (2012), lexical variation (i.e., the total number of different word types in proportion to the total number of words) measures were found to be significantly correlated with test-takers' rankings of oral production. The evidence in the literature supporting the relation-

[3]A detailed analysis and discussion of measures related to the lexical profiles of the participants' oral production (e.g., lexical density, lexical sophistication, lexical diversity, mean segmental type-token ratios, and lexical variation) (Lu, 2012; Read, 2000) in order to detect areas where needs might emerge was excluded in this article, at the journal's request. The analysis placed greater

ship between lexical variation and the quality of test-takers' oral production[3] suggests that instructors and learners may consider prioritizing focus on the range of vocabulary.

Reconsider Learners' Own-Language Use

With respect to using the learners' own language, while the approach of individual instructors varied, the general approach appeared restrictive toward L1 use. Instead of regarding use of the learner's own language as needing to be minimized, instructors and learners alike should learn about the languages and writing systems that learners already know, and to view their L1 literacy as a foundation for building their target language competency—in other words, using the "asset-based approach" (Warriner et al., 2019, p. 6; Huang, 2021a) to facilitate learning.

The instructional efficacy of taking a monolingual approach has been critically questioned through research across fields (e.g., Hall and Cook, 2012, 2013). Cognitively, prohibiting lower-level learners from using their own language to facilitate learning a new one can cause cognitive overload. Socio-linguistically, using the learners' own language helps build rapport and relationships among learners and between the learner and teacher. Pedagogically, judiciously using the learners' own language can make it easier to manage tasks or classes when establishing a framework for classroom work. On ethical grounds, denying learners the use of their own language works against affirming their cultural and linguistic identities (e.g., Block, 2007; Brooks-Lewis, 2009). As Warriner et al. (2019) have suggested, having "a more nuanced view of who refugee-background learners are, their existing linguistic resources, and their uniquely challenging life experiences will help teachers recognize possible ways to leverage resources" (p. 6). Instructors can thus use this knowledge to make their teaching accessible, relevant, engaging, and meaningful, especially for refugee learners with low CLBs.

Develop Flexibility in Instructional Formats

As gleaned from the results, one direction worth considering is the mobile-assisted blended learning approach (cf. Edulinc courseware; see Sturm et al., 2018), given the learners' lack of progression through CLB levels reported by both learners and instructors, their notable preferences for mobile-assisted technology, their strong resistance to computer use, and their need for flexible class-time options or program scheduling to accommodate their work and family commitments. The expressed need for flexible class-time options is in line with the report by Sturm et al. (2018), in which 42.2% of the reported learner requests were related to flexible class times and online options. The lack of progression echoed the findings from the Evaluation of the Settlement Program report (IRCC, 2017), which found that, for "43% of [the learners] … no CLB progression was reported," and that learners took, on average, 486 hours to progress one CLB level in the speaking domain (p. 30).

Enhance Community-Integrated Learning

Few instructors reported that their integration of community-integrated learning, though limited in scope, had positive outcomes. Key stakeholders—LINC providers, local businesses, non-profit organizations, material developers—should consider inte-

focus on the relationship between learners' lexical profiles and their abilities to communicate by speaking because of their limited oral proficiency. Readers may contact the author to obtain the results.

grating language learning with community interactions to respond to learners' needs and their specific volunteering or employment preferences. For learners, ample research has found wide-ranging benefits of this approach in the affective, cognitive, social, and cultural spheres (see O'Connor, 2012). A local needs assessment could be conducted to identify areas of community need for potential partnerships in line with learners' needs, and to develop a resource checklist before making decisions about sample lessons that can tie in learner and community needs (e.g., working as interpreters at local clinics, schools, and social service agencies; engaging in language and cultural activities at local libraries and community centres; assisting local charities, etc.). This two-way approach could help learners to develop their target language use and cultural awareness while informing them about local services and community events. It may also foster social connections between learners and the local communities to enhance community building and the integration of refugee learners (Clifford & Reisinger, 2019). Ultimately, language learning is a socially embodied process that aims to benefit not only individual learners with refugee experience, but also the communities they seek to join.

Develop Ready-to-Use Tasks and Pedagogical Materials

A recurring thread in the analysis was the lack of lessons or tasks and accompanying ready-to-use pedagogical materials tailored to learners' specific needs and appropriate to their different levels of L1 and L2 proficiency. Drawing on the insights gained from sources both direct (oral production) and indirect (needs from the teachers' and learners' perspectives) could contribute to developing a set of field-based lessons suitable for different CLB levels. For example, the field-testing of English for employment lessons tailored to learners from CLB 1 to CLB 5 is underway (Huang, 2021a), using a range of positions (based on employment statistics) suitable for employment at various proficiency levels. Taking an asset-based approach (MacSwan, 2018; Warriner et al., 2019) to learners' linguistic backgrounds, lived experiences, and perceived needs and approaches has the potential to make the LINC program—especially during the crucial initial stage (years one and two) of refugees' settlement experience in a new country—more attuned to the needs and preferences presented in this study. In order to tailor teaching to these refugees' specific needs at different levels of English language proficiency, programs and pedagogical resources should be developed that meet the vocational needs and transferable skills required of Syrian learners with low CLBs, and the certification requirements demanded of those higher-level CLB learners with professional designations prior to arrival. This in turn might help alleviate the frustration acutely felt by learners about their lack of progress and personal relevance. Further warranting critical attention in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) is the dearth of rigorous empirical research examining product- and process-oriented outcomes assessment for evaluating the implementation of instructional approaches, methods, and materials and the observations of in-class instruction involving refugee learners.

CONCLUSION

The settlement of newcomers and refugees in our community is of vital concern to everyone. As Martani (2020) pointed out, "All refugees resettled in Canada … face early integration challenges, starting with

language: the wait for language instruction is long, it is not job-specific and is not suitable for people who have low levels of education" (para 4). With the hope of contributing to the efforts to resettle Syrians with a refugee background by helping them more readily acquire the communication skills they need to function in Canadian society, this study examined data gathered from LINC instructors across Canada and local refugees in British Columbia in order to develop an evidence-based instructional approach and inform the development of pedagogical resources for newcomers. The desired result is to better align training with the reported needs of adult refugee learners, who face unique situations and have unique experiences (e.g., Ćatibušić et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2014).

One learner expressed his heartfelt aspiration at the end of his interview: "I have big dream. Big, big, *big* dream. Bigger than this earth!" (L16). Providing pathways for learners to pursue their individual dreams must begin with understanding their backgrounds and needs, and being aware of individual circumstances and contextual barriers to learning and instruction. As urged by Ćatibušić et al. (2019), "There is a strong consensus on the need to identify appropriate practices and interventions so that the varied and complex [learning] needs, … particularly [of] the most vulnerable, are addressed" (p. 3). To this end, needs assessment is the starting point in making evidence-based decisions about suitable practices and interventions to pursue for informing, providing, and assisting the crucial work of language training. These discussions are critical in facilitating the integration of refugees into Canadian society and the workforce.

Clearly, a myriad of individual learner and teacher, instructional, contextual, and institutional variables interact within the language-training process. The process is never a simple one, nor does it have a one-size-fits-all solution. Pedagogically, this study has contributed to developing an instructional approach and associated materials that directly address the needs of instructors and learners (Huang, 2021a). Socially, the research can assist the work of language training critical to facilitating refugees' integration into Canadian society and the workforce. Ethically, the study assists with breaking down barriers by developing a theoretically grounded and empirically supported approach to language training. This, in turn, helps refugee learners to acquire the communication skills they need for employment, thereby contributing to strengthening equity, diversity, and inclusion in Canadian society.

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