UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC EN ABITIBI-TÉMISCAMINGUE

DESCRIBING STUDENTS' ORAL ABILITY IN INTENSIVE AND REGULAR ESL
PROGRAMS IN ABITIBI-TÉMISCAMINGUE

RESEARCH REPORT
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INTRODUCTION

In the early 80s, research findings on the efficacy of the Intensive English Program (IEP) in Quebec, an alternative to the well-known language immersion programs in Canada, gave researchers, educators and policy-makers alike a glimpse of the success of such programs in the development of English as a second language (ESL) for students in cycle 3 of primary school. These findings showed that not only were students surpassing their peers in second language (L2) proficiency, they even outperformed their peers at the secondary level who had received the same number of hours of instruction in English (Spada & Lightbown, 1989). This means that regardless of the similarities in the type and hours of instruction received at the secondary level, students who received IE instruction in their primary years did better at the secondary level, when compared to students who received regular English instruction at the primary level. Furthermore, the students' attitudes towards learning ESL were also very positive and posed no danger of diminishing the learning of their first language (L1) (Lightbown, 1991). The long-term effects of the intensive learning environment were also very positive (Lightbown & Spada, 1991).

The implementation of the IEP in Quebec has been met with many challenges. Although research in the areas of efficacy and implementation are numerous, there is less information on the implementation of the program in rural regions of Quebec, where the linguistic environment varies significantly from that of the research contexts previously studied. A recurring question about the program has been its relevance and ultimate efficacy in rural regions of Quebec, where little to no English is used outside the classroom (FSE, 2012; Lightbown, 2014). The current study explores the relationship between the availability of English outside the classroom and the development of oral ability among students in the Intensive English Program (IEP) in Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

The findings suggest that the oral ability gains of students in the IEP surpass those of their peers in the regular core program, despite minimal input and output opportunities for both groups in their L2 outside the classroom. Although the study did not make a comparison between the gains from students in urban regions, where opportunities for input and output

are potentially higher than what the students in this study have experienced, the efficacy of intensive exposure to L2 in the context of IEP can still be recognized as significant.

CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM STATEMENT

Introduction

The following chapter describes the background and purpose of the current study. In order to provide a frame of reference, a brief historical overview of the development of the Intensive English Program (IEP) in Quebec is presented, followed by a description of the characteristics of the IEP in Quebec. Finally, it concludes with the contributions of the study to the implementation and efficacy of the IEP, and discusses the general question driving the research project.

1.1 Background and Purpose of the Study

White and Turner (2005) reported on the oral abilities of students enrolled in regular English as a second language (ESL) programs and IEPs. Their findings show that where regular ESL students attained the program objectives, students registered in intensive English (IE) surpassed them in oral production outcomes. One of the reasons that explains this observed advantage is the augmentation and concentration of English instructional hours which, according to previous studies (Collins, Halter & Lightbown, 1999; Collins & White, 2011; Serrano, 2007; Serrano & Munoz, 2007), leads to better results in second language acquisition (SLA).

Little research has investigated the oral proficiency levels of regular and intensive programs in rural regions such as Abitibi-Témiscamingue. This is significant, since the linguistic characteristics of these rural regions (Statistics Canada, 2011) differ significantly compared to the larger metropolitan areas in Quebec where most studies have been conducted (White & Turner, 2005). Therefore, the description of student oral ability in these programs can provide useful information about the program's utility in rural regions, where students are often exposed to little (or even no) English outside the classroom.

To begin, it is important to distinguish between the IEP and the immersion second language (L2) program, which is also popular throughout Canada. The IEP has a specific number of

instructional hours (300-400) devoted to English language instruction, with all remaining core subjects (maths, science, etc.), taught in the students' first language (L1), French. Alternatively, in the immersion program, all subjects are taught in the target language (Lightbown, 2012). This is important to emphasize in the case of Quebec, as the establishment of the Charter of the French Language (1977) makes English immersion illegal in the province.

In 1977, the Charter of the French Language was introduced by the provincial government to protect and encourage the role of the French language in Quebec. The fundamental language rights in Quebec are the following (*La Charte de la langue française*, 1977; Ch. II. Sec. 2-6):

> Sec. 2 The right to have civil administration, health and social services, public utility enterprises, professional corporations, associations of employees and all enterprises doing business in Quebec communicate with the public in French.
>
> Sec. 3 The right to speak French in deliberative assemblies .
>
> Sec. 4 The right of workers to carry on their activities in French.
>
> Sec. 5 The right of consumers to be informed and served in French.
>
> Sec. 6 The right of persons eligible for instruction in Quebec to receive that instruction in French.

As characterized by the Charter of the French Language, English immersion would violate the "right…to receive…instruction in French" and as such, it was seen as an infringement on the protection and the promulgation of the French language. Because of this, English immersion is deemed illegal within in the province of Quebec.[1]

However, as Lightbown (2012) points out, even before the publication of the charter, there was already movement towards an alternative L2 program in English which also safeguarded the students' French language development. This began with the work of researchers in the early 70s (Lambert & Tucker, 1972) who looked at L2 development in a

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[1] La Charte de la langue Française : chapitre VIII, article 79

group of anglophone students throughout grade 4 in an experimental French immersion program. Their findings show that

> "*Students did not fall behind their peers in the development of their English language skills; students did not fall behind their peers in their learning of academic content; although there were some delays in the development of reading ability in English, those were overcome after the initial years; students did not lose their identity as English-speaking Canadians, but they developed more positive attitudes toward French Canadians.*" (Lambert & Tucker, 1972 as cited in Lightbown, 2012, p. 28).

The impact of the report produced by Lambert and Tucker (1972) was an inspiration for French immersion in Quebec (Genesee, 1987; Lyster, 2007; Swain & Johnson, 1997, as cited in Lightbown, 2012).

Since its development in the late 70s (Billy, 1980), the IEP has been successfully implemented in a number of schools, and in some cases entire school boards, with favourable results (Spada & Lightbown, 1989; Lightbown & Spada 1991; 1994; CS du Lac-Saint-Jean, Étude, 2011).

Throughout the 1990s, more and more schools were reaching high levels of success with IEPs in French-medium schools. The Liberal government in Quebec, headed by Jean Charest, tried to make the IEP compulsory for grade 6 in 2011, recognizing English as an essential requirement for Quebec to carve a predominant place for itself in the economic arena and create more career opportunities for francophone students. However, the *Parti Québecois* derailed the province-wide plan when they were elected to leadership in 2012, allowing only individual schools to decide whether to implement the IEP.

Criticism of the IEP has been widespread and may be one of the reasons why an increase in schools implementing the program hasn't been seen. The biggest criticism comes from teachers and their unions. The "Fédération des syndicats de l'enseignement" (FSE) explains its position by accepting the importance of the approach to teaching ESL;

however, it finds that the IEP comes with its share of challenges. In its newsletter "La Dépêche FSE – February Issue-2012", the FSE strongly denounced the province-wide implementation of the IEP, claiming that Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur (MEES) did not take into consideration the impact of the IEP on students' learning conditions, teachers teaching conditions, or the organizational structure of schools. They claimed that the reduced time allotted to core subjects – particularly in subjects like French and Math, where content is already quite weighty – would be next to impossible to manage. Teachers' concerns regarding students with learning disabilities and behavioural difficulties were also on the table for debate. The FSE viewed this to be of top priority, and felt that the implementation of a program like IE would be detrimental to the progress of students deemed at risk. Finally, but certainly not least of the considerations, was the allocation of resources. Essentially, this concerned how the program would affect the task management of already existing homeroom teachers, as well as the development of the resources needed to fill the gap in qualified ESL teachers' resource inventories.

With the re-election of the Liberal Party in 2013, the program was once again resurrected; indeed, Quebec's Education Minister, Yves Bolduc, expressed his wish to "implement the program with flexibility, taking exceptions and special cases into account" (The Canadian Press, 2014).

In August 2014, the Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation (CSE) issued its own recommendations based on a report published by the ENAP (École Nationale d'Administration Publique). This was based on findings concerning the teaching of ESL in its intensive form to cycle 3 students (CSE, 2014). Even though the findings were favourable for the IEP, there were a few cautionary notes which prevented the CSE from endorsing the program for province-wide implementation. The two main points centered on concerns regarding students with disabilities and their progress in their L2. This was mainly associated with the possible lack of resources, such as teachers and teachers' aides to teach in the IEP, and not necessarily as a function of the program itself. Another point addressed was the need for sufficient human resources – not just for students with disabilities, but for all students and the program in general (e.g. specialist and special

education teachers) – to assure the success of the program. As a result, the CSE recommend that it remain the decision of individual schools and School Boards in Quebec whether to implement the IEP in grade 6.

1.2 Characteristics of the Intensive English Program (IEP) in Quebec

a) **Number of hours devoted to English instruction:** In core ESL programs, students receive up to 50 hours of ESL instruction a year, which is equal to 300 hours of instruction between grades 1 and 6 (MELS, 2011). The provincial average for the secondary level is 100 hours per year, equalling approximately 500 hours of instruction over the five years of secondary school (MELS, 2011). By contrast, the intensive program offers 200 to 300 minutes a day (SPEAQ, 2001), which equals 400 hours over a five-month period.

b) **Language instruction:** One characteristic that distinguishes an intensive program from an immersion program is the focus on language instruction. The IEP excludes instruction of subjects other than English. This in accordance with Law 101 (Gouvernement du Québec, 1977), where the instruction of core subjects in English is outlawed in Quebec public schools.

c) **Models of IEP:** The IEP is typically offered in grades 5 or 6 (cycle 3) and consists of approximately 400 hours of language instruction (not content), which can be distributed over one academic year (8 hours/week), one semester (18-20 hours/week), or through a series of 'mini-intensives' across a ten-month school year (Collins & White, 2011).[2] Many variations of the IEP exist in order to give both schools and teachers flexibility of implementation. To date, there have been no conclusive indications to confirm one model's superiority over another in terms of results; therefore, further research has been suggested in this area to address how the distribution of time in different models of the program can lead to different long-term outcomes in English proficiency (Collins et al., 1999).

d) **IEP Curriculum:** In the ministry guidelines, there is no set curriculum for the IEP.

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[2] See appendix I.

Therefore, teachers generally develop their own materials, emphasizing oral communication over reading, writing, and grammar points. Thematic topics covered may reflect teacher preferences to cross-curricular themes seen in other subjects. White and Turner (2005) report that numerous cooperative learning activities are also utilized by IE teachers to encourage interaction in pairs and small groups, therefore promoting maximum opportunity for oral communication.

Among the many studies conducted on the development of IEP and its outcomes, White and Turner (2005) measured the oral proficiency of students in IEP instruction as compared to that of students in regular (core) ESL. Their study looked specifically at comparing oral proficiency to overall L2 acquisition, placing the construct of oral proficiency at the center of their investigation.

1.3 Contribution of this Research Project

Since its implementation across different regions of Quebec, analysis of the IEP in different linguistic settings and its influence on students' comprehensive L2 learning – particularly oral production – has not been a focus of research. The present research will provide relevant information regarding the characteristics of the linguistic environment in a remote region of Quebec, as well as how these characteristics could influence the oral ability of students in their respective English programs.

With the information provided in this study, school boards in remote regions will be better informed when making decisions regarding the implementation of IEPs. They will have data of students' oral abilities in the IEPs from their own school boards, allowing them to make more accurate assumptions regarding the efficacy of the program in the very specific linguistic context of Abitibi-Témiscamingue. Teachers and parents will also benefit from the information provided, as it seeks to reveal the benefits the IEP provides for students.

1.4 General Research Question

The investigation of the IEP in different linguistic settings in Quebec and its influence on

students' comprehensive L2 learning, particularly oral production, has not been a focus of research. As a result, information on how students' oral abilities may differ given a different linguistic setting than a larger metropolitan city, where students have more exposure to English, is scarce.

The present study seeks to answer the following general research question: *How does the linguistic environment influence the performance on oral tasks in an ESL Intensive English Grade 6 class and a regular ESL Grade 6 class Abitibi-Témiscamingue?*

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will elaborate on the theoretical concepts related to this study. These include a definition and explanation of oral ability and its link with oral fluency as a construct in SLA. By providing a series of foundational definitions those which are applicable to and used for the realization of this study are more deeply connected with.

Furthermore, an overview of research on oral tasks and scoring in the field of language testing is covered, as it has been a concern in past similar studies evaluating oral proficiency. The chosen approach for this study is then justified based on the information provided by previous research in the field.

Another equally important theoretical element linked to this study is the understanding of the linguistic environment in which L2 learning takes place. Here, research highlighting key characteristics on the role of the linguistic environment is presented, and its contribution to the elaboration of the current study is explained. This is done through by the presentation of research related particularly to the IEP in Quebec, but also in study abroad and other immersion contexts.

Finally, the concept of time and intensity of time in second language learning is described beginning with the explanations of the *spacing effect* provided in cognitive psychology, which addresses learning in a general context. This concept is then transferred to the second language learning context, where there is a paradigm shift and results differ significantly. This shift is then further explained by the research in the field of SLA, by using examples which demonstrate the differences between L2 learning models using the drip-feed method, as opposed to the intensive method seen in programs like the IEP.

2.1 Oral Fluency (Oral Proficiency and Oral Ability)

Oral Proficiency and Oral Ability

The term *oral proficiency* can potentially cover a multitude of abilities in L2 oral

communication. Indeed, the definition of oral proficiency has been a topic of discussion among researchers which has yet to be standardized (Freed, 1990a, 1990b). White and Turner (2005) have used the term *oral ability* for the data collected in their study. For the current study, the term oral ability can be best described as the use of speech functions by a non-native speaker (Galloway, 1987). This can be further refined by the speaking guidelines used by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) *Proficiency Guidelines* (1986), which consist of four categories: context, content, function and accuracy. The focus for this study has been placed on function, which, according to Galloway "is perhaps the most crucial element in oral proficiency assessment. If the speaker cannot combine linguistic resources to perform communicative tasks, explicit knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is of questionable value" (1987, p. 30). In Galloway's continuum, the proficiency indicators include three functions: narrating in the past, giving descriptions, and supporting an opinion. These are description which best fit the function of oral ability in the assessment tools used by White and Turner (2005) and have been adapted to this study in the form of the rating scale used for the story retell (Appendix I).

Oral Fluency

Oral communication is the competency predominantly associated with the IEP (Collins *et al*., 1999; Collins and White, 2011; White and Turner, 2005) and is the central focus of this study. Several definitions provided by researchers are provided to help clarify this construct's role within the dynamics of language proficiency. This clarification will then be used as a reference point from which to establish the role of oral fluency within the context of this study.

The definitions related to oral fluency are many and multilayered. Chambers (1997) pointed out the importance of distinguishing fluency from accuracy, as they are commonly contrasted concepts in communicative language. Chambers also claimed that the definition of fluency is extended into overall oral proficiency, while fluency is one of many descriptors of oral performance. It is also important to distinguish the word "fluency" as

referred to in communicative language teaching (CLT). In this context, Chambers refers to fluency as the "effectiveness of language use within the constraints of limited linguistic knowledge" (p. 536*)*.

Similarly, Brumfit (1984) defined oral fluency as "the maximally effective operation of the language system so far acquired by the student" (Brumfit, 1984, as cited in Chambers, 1997, p. 57). Canale and Swain (1980) and Bachman (1990) emphasise the role of *strategic competence*, which explains how learners make the best of their linguistic knowledge to communicate in their L2. This suggests that grammatical knowledge is only one predictor of oral fluency, and certainly not the most influential.

Furthermore, researchers who have defined fluency as a performance phenomenon point out that it is a unique aspect of speech production in language acquisition (Lennon, 1990; Schmidt, 1992). They describe fluency as a *skill-based* component, as opposed to other components of language acquisition, such as grammatical accuracy, syntactic complexity and lexical range, which are *knowledge-based*. Lennon (1990) and Schmidt (1992) argued that all of these constructs inevitably influence one another and are therefore interdependent pieces of a puzzle that represents a complete picture of what proficiency entails in language learning.

Fillmore (1979) conceptualized fluency in three different ways: (1) the ability to articulate at length and with minimal pausing (2) the ability to express ideas coherently, with reason and in a "semantically dense" manner and (3) the ability to be fluent in a wide range of contexts. Fillmore argued that a fluent L2 speaker is proficient in all the above abilities while also incorporating creativity and imagination in their oral production. Rossiter (2009) further elaborated on the above notions by describing fluency as the *"one component of proficiency that contributes to ease of communication"* (p. 396).

Finally, Lennon (1990) distinguished between broad and narrow fluency. He described broad as fluency characterized as general proficiency, which includes accuracy and complexity of output. Narrow fluency, however, is restricted to temporal measures, such

as length and number of pauses, amount of hesitation and number of repetitions. Lennon further elaborated on the functionality of broad and narrow fluency by explaining that "Fluency is an impression on the listener's part that psycholinguistic processes of speech planning and speech production are functioning easily and efficiently. Dysfluency markers, as it were, make the listener aware of the production process under the strain" (Lennon, 1990, p. 391).

Furthermore, Segalowitz (2000) differentiated *cognitive fluency* from *performance fluency*. Cognitive fluency concerns "the efficiency of the operation of the cognitive mechanisms underlying performance" whereas performance fluency refers to "the observable speech, fluidity, and accuracy of the original performance" (Segalowitz, 2000, as cited in de Jong & Perfetti, 2011, p. 202).

The definitions of fluency provided by the aforementioned researchers provide the parameters for understanding the construct of oral fluency. For the purposes of characterization, broad fluency best defines the oral fluency to be measured in the present study, as the aim is to assess proficiency of output data generally, as opposed to narrow fluency which is restricted to temporal measures. This study aims not to minimize the importance of narrow fluency, but rather to emphasize broad fluency in order to make results more accessible to the stakeholders; this way, they can better interpret the data presented in relation to their perspective of the IEP.

Since the goal of the study is to evaluate L2 learners' fluency and clarity in the delivery of their general communication, Segalowitz's (2012) distinction between cognitive fluency and performance fluency helps elaborate this point. The idea of performance fluency as an area where "observable speech, fluidity, and accuracy" are measured relates directly to the aims of this study in assessing the general fluency and accuracy of speech of L2 learners in the context of IEP and core programs.

2.2. Research on oral tasks/scoring

One of the main challenges addressed by White and Turner (2005) in the field of language

testing is. Although still an under-investigated area in the field of L2 assessment, research is beginning to shed more light on the aim of providing more accurately representative assessment tasks for researchers and educators alike (Bachman, 2002; McNamara, Hill, & May, 2002). Just as the definitions of oral fluency vary, so do assessment tasks. This means that, depending on the area of oral fluency to be studied, different tasks must be chosen to best elicit data corresponding to the constructs under investigation.

White and Turner (2005) attribute much of the research in the area of oral task assessment and scoring to have focused on extended speech production. This is an exciting development, as it allows researchers to provide a more complete picture of learner gains in language production. It must be noted, however, that with this development comes the challenge of producing appropriate tools and procedures to accurately assess the results. This is one of the reasons why in the assessment components of the present study, focus has been placed on extended oral production as opposed to isolated speech events. The oral task procedures here allow participants to provide responses in the form of extended speech by retelling a story in their own words. This type of data has the potential to reflect a global picture of learners' gains in oral proficiency.

2.3 Linguistic environment

A rich linguistic environment can provide an optimum opportunity for L2 learners. Investigations of study abroad and immersion have demonstrated the efficacy of language gains for students enrolled in these programs (Housen, 2012; Llanes, 2012). Many of these studies have attempted to answer the question of what the most effective linguistic environment for L2 learners is. Therefore, this section begins by elaborating on the definition of *linguistic environment*.

Linguistic environment can be defined in terns of differing levels of target language input. In addition to this, opportunities for output can similarly be a contributing factor (Long, 1996). According to Long, maximizing opportunities for interaction and comprehensible input in the target language is the key to successful L2 acquisition. Therefore, the

frequency – as well as the quality – of interaction privileged by the learner defines the type of linguistic environment they are exposed to. A highly rich immersion environment where the learner is completely immersed in the target language both inside and outside of the classroom may be contrasted with a class where minimal input and output takes place in the form of drip-feed learning within a classroom-only environment.

Krashen (1978) developed the concept of comprehensible input, maintaining that optimum language acquisition occurs when learners receive input they can understand. He further suggested that this input should be one step beyond the learner's current language ability, in order to allow learners to continue progressing in their development. According to Krashen, language learning is centered on comprehension, whereas production (or output) is a reflection of what has been learned. Hatch (1978) further elaborated on Krashen's input hypothesis to include *interaction input*, which designated even more significance to the role of meaningful verbal interaction in the target language.

Further research in the field of SLA reveals that input alone cannot provide the full scope of resources needed for comprehensive language learning (Housen, 2012; Long, 1996; Mackey, 2007; Swain, 1985). The comprehensible output hypothesis emerged out of Swain's (1985) study of anglophone students in French immersion programs who demonstrated near native-like comprehension skills on language measures and performance in their coursework, but significantly lacked production skills when compared to their French-speaking counterparts. Such evidence suggests that output is more than just a reflection of what has been acquired; it is a significant component of language learning (Mackey, 2007).

Swain's theory has since been elaborated on by a set of claims synthesized by Long (1996) as the *Interaction Hypothesis*. According to this theory, conversational interaction has a significantly positive impact on language learning. Studies have shown that interaction leads to better both comprehension and incorporation of input from interlocutors (Loschky, 1994). As a result, learners can negotiate and modify their language in order to achieve a new level of comprehension and acquire new structures (Long, 1996). In effect, this allows

the learner to partake in meaningful interaction in the target language, in turn allowing for optimal gains in the target language.

Housen (2012) studied the role of L2 interaction in a broader context of comprehensible input by applying it in a European setting. His study aimed at revealing differences in L2 learning as a result of varying extracurricular activities involving students' L2s. The results revealed that the highest levels of L2 achievement were attained in places where there were additional input and output opportunities for students in their L2. This was attributed to three main factors: 1) foundation building and continuity, 2) time and intensity and 3) extended levels of extracurricular activity in students' L2. The extracurricular activities provided many opportunities for interaction in the target language, therefore favoring higher levels of L2 acquisition.

Housen, *et al*. (2011) studied the impact of L1 prominence on L2 acquisition. They define L1 prominence as the relative presence of the L1 in the learning context. In this study, the investigation of contextual factors on L2 learning is of great significance. By placing into perspective the presence of L1 in the micro (individual), meso (curricular) and macro levels (extracurricular) of the learning context, identification of how any or all of these factors are also present in the mediation of L2 learning can be undertaken. In looking at contextual factors as possible contributing elements to L2 learning, Housen and collaborators demonstrate that macro-level differences can influence L2 instructional learning. They documented these contextual factors in terms of both global L2 proficiency and specific productive L2 proficiencies such as lexical diversity, accuracy and fluency.

Individual differences in SLA must also be taken into consideration as factors which can alter the learning outcome within the same learning context. These differences include cognitive capacity, working memory, social context, learning strategies and motivation (Mackey, 2007).

In summary, there appears to be convincing evidence that linguistic environment plays a crucial role in the development of SLA. Swain (1985) and Long's (1996) insights into

comprehensible output and the interaction hypotheses, respectively, have contributed to an understanding of the environmental factors contributing to oral proficiency. Likewise, Housen *et al.*, (2011) and their research on the effects of L1 prominence on L2 acquisition is further evidence that contextual factors can influence L2 learning. Finally, Lightbown (2014), Nation (2007) and Mackey (2007) all suggest that focus on meaningful input and output in the target language can maximize L2 acquisition, particularly when considering oral proficiency.

In the present study, the contextual factors related to linguistic environment are an important point of investigation. By presenting descriptive information on the linguistic environment in both the IE and core programs, it can be established if or how much exposure to the target language outside the classroom may have affected participants' oral ability in their second language.

2.4 Time and Intensity of Time in L2 Learning

Lightbown (2014), in discussing the implications of time and intensity on L2 learning, pointed out the need for a balance between overall time, time allocated to L2 language instruction and L2 as a medium for content learning. It should be noted that even though the context of this study is not a content learning environment, the exposure to English inside and outside the classroom in the IEP is referenced as an example of balance among the learning and instructional elements being beneficial in overall L2 acquisition. Nation's (2007) four strands are cited as a guideline to help reach that balance. They include 1) meaning-focused input, 2) meaning-focused output, 3) language-focused learning and (4) fluency development. This supports a theoretical basis which places creating opportunities for both comprehensible input and output as part of an acquisitionally conducive learning environment.

The question of time as a factor in SLA and the intensity of use of such time has been a topic of much discussion and, consequently, further research has been called for in hopes of improving L2 and FL programs in North America and elsewhere.

Rooted in the cognitivist approach, the effects of repetition have been a primary focus of memory research since the first formal experiments of Ebbinghause (1885). One enduring findings in this literature is that the spacing between repetitions produces a powerful impact on later memory; stimuli that are repeated in immediate succession (massed repetition) are harder to remember than stimuli repeated after some delay (spaced repetitions) (Bjork, 1979; Greene, 2008). Ongoing research continues to assess the optimum intervals and moderating influences of retention intervals, but the basic phenomenon of the *spacing effect* is highly robust, having been replicated many times in numerous domains with various types of materials and memory testes (Cepeda, Vul, Rohrer, Widted, & Pashler, 2008; Delaney, Verkoeijen, & Spirgel, 2010). The spacing effect is important for a theoretical understanding of human memory and has great applied relevance to educational practice (e.g., Dunlosky, Rawson, Marsh, Nathan, & Wilingham, 2013; Son & Simon, 2012)

In pedagogical contexts, the spacing effect theory denotes the advantages of distributed learning in contrast to learning concentrated into massed blocks of time (Glenberg 1976; Raaijmakers, 2003; Serrano, 2012). In practical terms, this translates into distributed versus concentrated instructional time.

However, there has been a paradigm shift with regard to SLA. Research in this area notes inherent differences between other subjects and SLA, concluding that spacing has the inverse effect in L2 learning opposed to subjects like math and science (Rohrer & Taylor, 2006). The following is a presentation of both the cognitive psychology explorations of the spacing effect and its relationship to pedagogical practice, as well as research conducted in the field of SLA, in order to demonstrate the divergent findings of the spacing effect on SLA.

Seabrook *et al*. (2005) conducted classroom experiments studying the effects of literacy in both 'clustered' (massed) and distributed sessions. Their analysis demonstrated that those students attending the distributed sessions had improved more at the end of the experiment than those in the clustered sessions, thus validating the spacing effect in classroom learning methodologies. However, other research in block scheduling at the high school level and

accelerated courses in universities show more favourable results for the intensive model (Carroll, 1994, Rettig and Canady, 2001; Seamon, 2004; Walker, 2000; Wlodkowski, 2003, as cited in Serrano & Muñoz, 2007).

Research in language acquisition has found spacing to have the inverse effect within the context of SLA, with both adult and child learners. Researchers have come across similar findings which support massed learning in SLA, arguing that the spacing effect in cognitive psychology is measured by assessing the recall of words and/or particular structures as opposed to skill acquisition (Raaijmakers, 2003; Serrano, 2002). Language learning is concerned mainly with general language proficiency, and this requires the acquisition of skills, particularly when it comes to the intensive model, where focus is placed on oral skills rather than recall items.

Research also shows that augmenting time spent engaged in L2 learning can improve apparent proficiency levels in language acquisition (Curtain, 2000; Collins *et al.*, 1999; Collins & White, 2011; Serrano, 2012; Serrano & Muñoz, 2007; Stern, 1985). Met and Rhodes (1990), for example, suggest that "the amount of time spent on language learning and the intensity of the learning experience may be among the most important factors determining the rate of language acquisition and the level of proficiency that can be attained in a language program" (as cited in Curtain, 2000, p. 5).

Curtain's (2000) findings further demonstrate that "greater use of target language will produce greater results" (p. 18). She also calls for more research on the identification of the minimum amount of time and intensity needed. This is crucial, she points out, as there is a minimum level below which language programs can be completely unproductive.

There is also the intensity of the instruction to consider (Curtain, 2000). The development of intensive L2 programs has been a direct result of the frustrations of educators and parents, who see few results from the traditional drip-feed method consisting of 1-2 hours of ESL instruction per week throughout the elementary years (Spada & Lightbown, 1989).

As previously mentioned, research findings show that there is considerable improvement in language learning at the primary level, where course instruction is administered in

intense or massed blocks of time (Collins & White, 2011; Spada & Lightbown, 1989; Lightbown, 2012; Netten & Germain, 2005; Stern, 1985; Serrano, 2012; Serrano & Muñoz, 2007; White & Turner, 2012).   The intensive French and English programs in Quebec broke ground in this regard and from that, the proliferation of these sorts of programs throughout Canada and even overseas can be seen (Serrano, 2012).

Researchers in the SLA domain has continued to utilize the spacing effect as a tool to examine the distribution of instructional time within the context of the IEP in order to determine whether this variable influences the proficiency outcomes of the students enrolled in these classes.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This section begins by describing the type of mixed methodology utilized during this study and why, and is followed by a description of the research context. Once the context has been established, information on the participants is presented, beginning with the recruitment process and followed by more specific information on the different types of participants (students, teachers, and parents) involved in the study.

The methodology section also includes information on the data collection and analysis procedures enlisted. These procedures are described at length according to their respective measurement instrument (questionnaires and oral fluency measurement tasks).

Finally, the subsection on ethical considerations and limitations of the study serves to identify any issues and concerns related to ethics, as well as factors which limit data collection, analysis, and ultimately, the final results.

3.1 Type of Research Study

A descriptive mixed methods design was chosen for the current study, based on a research model that combines both quantitative and qualitative instruments for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014). Accordingly, both the quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously. The quantitative data (obtained through the oral proficiency tasks) was used to provide information regarding the students' oral proficiency level, and the qualitative data (obtained from the parent and teacher questionnaires) was used to describe the linguistic characteristic and types of exposure students receive both inside and outside their schools.

Once the data from the oral task was collected from the groups (IEP and Core Program) and analysed, the results were then compared in order to gain a better understanding of how performance on one oral task compared across ESL students in Grade 6 intensive and regular programs in a remote region in Quebec (Abitibi-Témiscamingue). In the same

light, the information from the parent questionnaires serves to elaborate on and describe the linguistic characteristics and context in which the students live. The teacher questionnaires were aimed at acquiring descriptive information regarding the teacher's L1, teaching experience and use of English in the class, as well as curriculum and pedagogical materials used in the context of their English classes.

3.2 Research Context

The region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue is located in the north-western part of Quebec, some 600km north of Montréal with a population of approximately 145,690 with in minining and forestry as its its main industries (Statistics Canada, 2012). The region's 3 largest cities include Rouyn-Noranda, Val d'Or and Amos with their respective school boards (Commission scolaire de Rouyn-Noranda, Commission scolaire de l'Or-et-des-Bois, and la Commission scolaire Harricana). At the time of the study, there were only two schools (École La Prélude and Notre-dame de Fatima) that had successfully implemented the IEP in this region. Since, there has been a third school – École d'Évain in the Commission scolaire de Rouyn-Noranda – to implement the IEP.

The research context for this study is of particular interest, as it differs from similar studies conducted in more urban regions of Quebec. IE students in schools located in the greater Montréal area and its suburbs, for example, benefit from medium to high levels of English language exposure outside the classroom due to the larger population of Allophones and Anglophones in that area. In its 2011 report, Statistics Canada (2011) reported that, in the region of greater Montreal, English counted for 14.0% of the language spoken at home, as well as 16.6% for languages other than English or French. These numbers are a great contrast to that of the region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue, where in the three most populated cities (Rouyn-Noranda, Val-d'Or, and Amos), the same statistical categories show the numbers to be at 0.01% for English as the language spoken at home and 0.0% for languages other than English and French (Statistics Canada, 2011)[3].

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[3] Population by language spoken most often and regularly at home, for census subdivisions (municipalities) with 5,000-plus population.

3.2.1 Participating schools' contexts:

Core ESL Program

This core ESL program school is located in the city of Amos, the third largest city in the region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue and part of the Commission Scolaire Harricana. The students at the school follow a core ESL program for grade 6, which includes core English instruction of 50 hours over the school year. The total number of students participating in the study was 19. Since there were not a sufficient number of signed consent forms received from the first group, the participating teacher sent out additional consent forms to a second group of grade 6 students, also taught by her. As a result, the 19 participating students were from a combination of two grade 6 classes taught by the same ESL teacher. The data from all students was collected during the 2017/2018 school year.

Intensive ESL Program

School 1: This school is located in a small village in the region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue, and is part of the Commission Scolaire Harricana. The school implemented the IEP in 2011, which includes 400 hours of English instruction over a 5-month (February to June) period. There were seven students enrolled in the IEP cohort for the 2017/2018 school year, when data was collected.

School 2: This school is located in the city of Rouyn-Noranda, the largest city in the region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue and part of the Commission Scolaire de Rouyn-Noranda. The school implemented the IEP in 2002, which includes 400 hours of English instruction. Originally, the school distributed the 400 hours of instruction throughout the 10-month school year in the form of 10-day/10-day intervals. This meant that students did English language instruction for 10 days and core subject instruction in French for the following 10 days, cycling throughout the school year. However, at the time of data collection, the school had switched to a 5-month model as

well, where English instruction was conducted between September and January. There were 20 students enrolled in the IEP cohort when data collection took place.

It should be noted that the 3 groups are similar in that the participants were all grade 6 students enrolled in schools in the same regional context in Quebec. The only difference between the two group categories lies in the number of instructional hours they received in English, as well as the distribution of those hours throughout the school year. Students from School 1 in the Core ESL Program received 1 hour a week of instruction in English, with an accumulation of 36 hours over the course of their grade 6 school year. Students from School 1 and 2 in the IEP, however, received daily instruction in English for an accumulated 400 hours over a consecutive 5 month period.

3.3 Participants

The following tables provide descriptive information about the teachers and students implicated in the study.

3.3.1 Participant students and teachers

Table 1
Core ESL Program

	n	Teacher's L1(s)	Training, Experience	% of class conducted in En (teacher reported)
School	21	French	B.Ed (TESL), 6 years in ESL	50%

Table 2
Intensive ESL Program

	n	Teacher's L1(s)	Training, Experience	% of class conducted in En (teacher reported)
School 1	6	French	B.Ed, 3 years in ESL	75%
School 2	20	English	B.Ed, 31 years in ESL	90%

3.3.2 Participant parents

The parents were asked to complete a questionnaire with information relating to their child's exposure to English outside the classroom

3.3.3 Procedure for participant recruitment

Letters were sent to school board directors for authorization to contact individual schools and teachers. Once authorization was granted, a letter of invitation was sent to the principals of each school with requests to contact the individual teachers who will be implicated in the research. Once the teachers had accepted the project, individual meetings were arranged to go over all aspects of their implication in the data collection process. At this time, descriptive information was gathered on the participating students, as well as the teachers, using a questionnaire completed by the participating teachers. In addition to information provided on their own participation in the research project, the teachers also received information regarding the participation of the parents and students implicated in the study. A consent form was sent to the parents during the first two weeks of school (in September) informing them of the research project as well as inviting them to complete the questionnaire, which included questions on their child's exposure to English outside the classroom. Once the consent forms were returned, dates were scheduled for the first data collection procedure - the pre-test.

3.4 Data Gathering

The oral proficiency measurement instruments and procedures chosen for this study were adapted from White and Turner (2005), which were part of a larger study called the Oral Proficiency Project. The project addressed the challenges of the assessment of the communicative approach to language teaching in the context of the IE program in Quebec, and was primarily concerned with the development of appropriate tasks, tools, and procedures for the assessment of oral proficiency.

In their study, White and Turner (2005) used three oral production tasks to investigate the differences between groups. The tasks were chosen with three specific evaluation objectives of students' oral performance: 1) The ability to communicate in English with simple vocabulary and sentences within an acceptable time frame; 2) The ability to recall and recount a story immediately after hearing it in English; 3) The ability to use synonyms and borrowing from L1 in order to compensate for developing communication difficulties. For the current study, only the second evaluation objective was used – namely, ability to recall and recount a story immediately after hearing it in English through Story Retell. The primary reasons for this adaptation are due to the constraints of time, scope and resources available for this study. As a result, oral proficiency measures were limited to one instrument (Story Retell) as opposed to the three used by White and Turner.

3.5 Instruments and procedures

White and Turner's (2005) study included two questionnaires – one addressed to the students and the other to the teachers involved. Both are used with the same purposes in this study, but with a minor change; the information elicited in the questionnaire to the students is instead addressed to the parents in a modified form of the questionnaire used in Lightbown (1992) on comprehension based ESL courses for young children. It was felt that the information solicited from parents would be more accurate than if it was retrieved from the students. The second questionnaire to the teachers remains unchanged in form and purpose from that used by White and Turner.

Finally, the oral assessment task already discussed kept with the same objectives and procedures. The video content for this study, however, was changed to two different short animations: *The Present* (Frey, 2014) for the pre-test and *Lifted* (Pixar, 2007) for the post-test. In *The Present*, a young boy receives a box from his mother while playing video games, only to find out that inside it is a puppy with three legs. Disappointed, he returns to his video game, but the puppy continues to play and jump around regardless of his handicap. Intrigued by the puppy's persistence, the boy puts away his game and gets up to

go play with the dog outside. As he does this, we see that he, too, has a leg missing – and the moral of the story is revealed. In the post-test film *Lifted*, an alien in training attempts to abduct a human from earth with his spaceship but meets many difficulties.   His supervisor, a bigger, more experienced alien, steps in as soon as all is about to be lost, returning the human back to his bed without any signs of damage. Both stories involved a beginning, climax and a resolution, with few characters and minimum conversation.

All instruments and their procedural instructions are described below within the context of their quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

3.5.1 Parents' questionnaires

The questionnaire addressed to the parents elicited information regarding the language(s) spoken at home, exposure to English outside of school, reading habits, as well as one attitude question – whether or not they felt it was important for their child to speak English.[4] The questionnaire is the same one used in Lightbown (1992), and in the current study it aims to solicit information regarding the amount of L2 exposure received outside the classroom, thereby describing the linguistic environment of the students.

3.5.2 Teachers' questionnaires

Based on the questionnaire used by White and Turner (2005), the teachers' questionnaire includes eight questions eliciting information regarding the teacher's L1, teaching experience, use of English in the class, curriculum guidelines, and pedagogical materials used.[5]

3.5.3 Student task (pre-test and post-test)

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[4] See appendix IV
[5] See appendix V

The Story Retell task assesses oral proficiency by elicitation of recalling and recounting information after watching a short narrative film. This task is based on characteristics that resemble activities familiar to students in communicative language classrooms (White & Turner, 2005).   For the pre-test, students viewed a short video clip (4 minutes) and were asked to retell (in 2 minutes) their version of the story to the researcher. The students' stories were audio-recorded and later transcribed.

Students performed the task twice, which served as pre- and post-tests, respectively. The purpose of using pre- and post-testing is to document the evolution in oral proficiency. A different video clip was used in the pre- and post-tests.

Table 3

Timeline for pre-tests and post-tests

	School Core English Yearlong instruction	School 1 IEP 5 month/ 5 month	School 2 IEP 5 month/ 5 month
Pre-test	October, 2017	October, 2017	February, 2018
Post-test	June, 2018	February, 2018	June, 2018

As in White and Turner (2005), students were tested at the beginning and the end of the program. The two IEPs had two different timelines, as one started in IE the first half of the school year, and the other at the second half of the school year. In the case of the core English program, the pre-test was administered in October and the post test in June.

3.5.4 Rating procedures

Story Retell

The rating procedure for this task consists of three yes/no questions leading to a score between 1 and 6.[6] The audio recorded data, along with corresponding transcriptions, were used to answer these questions and calculate scores. For inter-rater reliability, two raters

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[6] See appendix I

scored each student's audio recorded responses after having reached a consensus on how the score the data using the provided yes/no questions.

Parents and teacher questionnaire

Since they were required to answer discrete questions, a simple quantitative analysis (frequency counts) was carried on for the parents' questionnaire for the purpose of informal correlations. Because of the small number of participants, the variation was not great enough to gather any statistically significant correlations; instead, trends or specific questions that stand out in describing the group of students' linguistic environment will be highlighted.

A qualitative narrative report will be used to present the teachers' questionnaires. The categories used for the analysis of this data are: teachers' L1s, teaching experience, use of English in the classroom, curriculum guidelines and materials used.

3.6 Ethical Considerations and limitations of this study

3.6.1 Ethical considerations:

Even though all measures were taken to safeguard the personal information and privacy of the teachers participating in the data collection process, due to the research context and considering the number of schools that have implemented the IEP in the region, there is a possibility that participant teachers can be identified. This was clearly stated in the consent form.

3.6.2 Limitations:

A major limitation for the study was the number of participants available for the collection of data. At the time of data collection there were only two shools in the region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue with the IEP. As a result, and as seen in the describtive information in

Tables 1 and 2, the number of students in the Intensive English Program were limited to 2 groups equalling only 32 students in total. Since the data sample was limited only to the small number of participants, it reduces to some degree the statistical power of the results, therefore rendering more inconclusive findings.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Introduction

The data collected for this study included an oral task to measure the oral proficiency of students in English, a questionnaire to parents to gather information on the students' linguistic environment of students, and a questionnaire for the three participating teachers to allow for further elaboration on the linguistic environment offered to the students in the classroom. All data collection procedures and analyses were conducted in the same manner for both groups. The following is a presentation of the findings for all three of the data sources collected for the study for both the Intensive English group and Regular groups.

4.1 Data analysis of oral task

As mentioned in the methodology section, two raters were used to provide two sets of scores for the oral task, which were then combined as final scores for each student. Therefore, a Cronbhach's Alpha test was conducted to assure inter-rater reliability of results. A t-test was also conducted between groups to check for any significant differences. Furthermore, descriptive statistics associated with the oral task (pre-test and post-test) were computed, including means and standard deviations for both groups. Finally, the gain scores frm the descriptive statistics were calculated and presented. The computer applications utilised for the statistical analysis were Microsoft Excel (version 16.27) and SPSS (version 20).

4.1.1 Inter-rater reliability

For the scoring of the oral task in the story retell, two raters were used. Both were native English speakers and had either experience teaching or tutoring ESL students at the college level. The raters convened in order to gain a common understanding of the scoring criteria associated with the task, assuring consistency of interpretation. Each rater then proceeded to score the pre-tests and post-tests from the two groups. In order to further ensure inter-

rater reliability, a Cronbach's Alpha was also conducted on both the pre- and post-test data from both groups. The results, presented in Table 4, demonstrate a high inter-rater reliability of 0.99 for both the pre- and post-test.

Table 4

Inter-rater reliability: Cronbach's Alpha

	Rater 1 & 2 (N = 47)
Pre-test	.99
Post-test	.99

4.1.2 T-Test results

An independent unequal variance[7] t-test was conducted on the pre-test results of both groups, with an alpha level of 0.05; no significant difference was found : ($t(20) = 4.7$, p > 0.05), indicating, therefore, that the results can be predictive of similar populations.

Table 5

Independent (unequal variance) T-Test between IE group and Regular group

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test (IE & Regular)	4.7	20	.023

4.1.3 Descriptive statistics (IE & Regular)

Descriptive statistics for the oral task are presented in Table 6. The results are presented in their respective groups (IE and Regular). In the intensive group, the mean score for the pre-test at 7.5 (2.08) and the post test at 9.9 (2.56), are significantly higher than the regular group, with a mean for the pre-test at $N = 21$, 4.0 (2.28) and the post-test at $N = 21$, 5.1 (1.95). The differences in pre-test and post-test scores in the individual groups are further highlighted by the gain scores for both groups (Gain scores were calculated by subtracting the pre-test score from the post-test score), displayed in Table 7.

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[7] Independent unequal variance was used due to the fact that the two data samples were not equal in size (IE = 26, R = 21).

Table 6

Descriptive statistics (IE and Regular)

(a) Intensive group

Task	*N*	Min.	Max	Mean	SD.
Pre-test	26	0	12	7.5	2.08
Post-test	26	0	12	9.9	2.56

(b) Regular group

Task	*N*	Min.	Max	Mean	SD.
Pre-test	21	2	8	4.0	2.28
Post-test	21	2	10	5.1	1.95

Note: Scores represent combined ratings of Raters 1 & 2

Story Retell pre-test: 6-point scale x 2 raters = 12

Story Retell post-test: 6-point scale x 2 raters = 12

4.1.4 Gain score for descriptive statistics (IE & Regular)

To further elaborate on the descriptive statistics of the pre- and post-tests for both groups, the gain scores between the tests were calculated and are presented. The gain score in the intensive group, 2.4 (1.52) is a significantly higher than the regular group, 1.1 (1.19).

Table 7

Gain score descriptive statistics (IE and Regular)

(a) Intensive group

Task	*N*	Min.	Max	Mean	SD.
Story Retell	26	0	4	2.4	1.52

(b) Regular group

Task	*N*	Min.	Max	Mean	SD.
Story Retell	21	0	4	1.1	1.19

Note: Scores represent combined ratings of Raters 1 & 2

Story Retell: 6-point scale x 2 raters = 12 (Gain scores were calculated by subtracting the pre-test score from the post-test score)

4.2 Parents' Questionnaire

The questionnaires distributed to the parents[8] aimed at gathering information which described the linguistic environment outside the classroom, as well as one attitude question regarding learning English. The responses to the questions were given on a scale of 1-6 and computed accordingly. Frequency counts were used for each question to determine overall group responses for individual questions. These results were also separated into the two groups in order to display any differences in the linguistic environment of each group.

Below are the results of the questionnaire based on individual questions for each group.

Table 8

Results from parents' questionnaire mean score comparison (IE and regular)

Question	*Intensive Mean*	*Regular Mean*
1. Language spoken with friends	1.23	1.14
2. Hours of TV in French a week	2.73	2.85
3. Hours of TV in English a week	2.68	0.85
4. Language preference for family	2.11	1.85
5. Exposure to English outside home (school not included)	2.07	2.04
6. Does student enjoy reading in French	4.53	4.52
7. Does student enjoy reading in English	1.8	1.57
8. Does student try to read billboards, publicity, etc, in French	4.53	4.95
9. Does student try to read billboards, publicity, etc, in English	3.23	3.02
10. Student's general attitude towards his/her ESL/IE class	5.92	3.57

Answer scale:
1. **Always french** 1-2-3-4-5 6 **always English**
2. **Less then 5hrs** 1-2-3-4-5-6 **more than 20hrs**
3. **Less then 5hrs** 1-2-3-4-5-6 **more than 20hrs**
4. **Always French** 1-2-3-4-5-6 **Always English**
5. **Rarely** 1-2-3-4-5-6 **Very much**

6. **Not at all** 1-2-3-4-5-6 **yes, a lot**
7. **Not at all** 1-2-3-4-5-6 **a lot**
8. **Never** 1-2-3-4-5-6 **often**
9. **Never** 1-2-3-4-5-6 **often**
10. **Very negative** 1-2-3-4-5-6 **very positive**

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[8] See appendix III

Based on the responses from both groups, it is clear that the language of preference spoken outside the classroom for students is predominantly French. Questions 1 and 4 indicate that students in both groups almost always spoke French with their friends, as well as at home with family members. Few indicated themselves or their spouses as bilingual, therefore explaining the occasional conversation in English. However, this was not a strong enough indication to allow for a preference towards speaking English in the home.

Questions 2 and 3 asked parents about the number of hours their child spends watching television in French and English. Even though it appears that the number of hours spent watching TV a week for the groups seems to be low, it does appear that for the IE group the hours of television watched in French are comparable to the hours in English. These findings differ, however, for the regular group, where the hours of television watched were predominantly in French.

For Question 5, parents were asked whether their child had any other source of exposure to English than those already indicated. This could include activities, vacation, summer camp, etc. The responses for both groups were similar, indicating rare occasions where students were exposed to English in the contexts described. There were, however, some rare instances of exposure (however brief and intermittent) which were described in the context of family members or in-laws who were native English speakers, and therefore opportunities were created for the students to hear conversations in English.

Questions 6 to 8 asked parents about their children's language preferences in reading. The responses for both groups indicated that French was the definitive language of choice when it came to reading. In other reading related questions, parents were asked regarding the students reading of billboards, advertisements, and news headlines. Questions 9 and 10 indicated that in this case, the language preference for both IE and regular English groups did not vary considerably. In fact, in both groups' preferences for reading English billboards, advertisements, and news headlines was close to their preferences for reading the same items in French. The difference between this type of reading and the reading of

longer texts may be explained by the fact that the phrases are shorter and simpler to decipher.

In a final attitude-related question, parents from both groups were asked to describe their child's attitude towards learning English in school (IE and Regular English, accordingly, for each group). Both groups averaged positive responses, however the Intensive group averaged 2.35 points higher than the regular group and, therefore, leaned more towards the positive side of the scale.

4.3 Teacher Questionnaire

The teachers' questionnaire included eight questions eliciting information regarding the teacher's L1, teaching experience, use of English in the class, curriculum guidelines, and pedagogical materials used.[9] A qualitative narrative report is used to present the teachers' questionnaires. The categories used for the analysis of this data were: teachers' L1s, training and teaching experience, use of English in the classroom, curriculum guidelines, and materials used.

Table 10

Participating teachers' descriptive statistics

Teacher/English program	Teacher's L1(s)	Training, Experience	% of class conducted in English (teacher reported)
Teacher 1 (IE)	French	B.Ed, 3 years in ESL	75
Teacher 2 (IE)	English	B.Ed, 31 years in ESL	90
Teacher 3 (R)	French	B.Ed (TESL), 6 years in ESL	50

Descriptive information regarding the participating teachers' L1, training and teaching experience, as well as the use of English in the classroom is presented in Table 10. The use of English in the classroom varies among groups. In the Intensive groups, teacher 1 reported 75% of the class was conducted in English, as many of the students presented with

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[9] See appendix V

learning difficulties, forcing the teacher to resort to French for explanation and translation. Teacher 2 reported the use of English in the class to be at 90%, leaning to 100% towards the end of the 5-month program, as students became more comfortable with the use of English in the classroom. The teacher for the regular group reported 50% of class time was conducted in English and noted that it was simply not possible to do more due to student disinterest and comprehension levels.

Teachers were also asked about curriculum guidelines and materials used in their respective programs. As was the case with most teachers of Intensive English, where there is no specific curriculum or materials provided, many use the existing core ESL program and make adjustments to enrich the curriculum (White & Turner, 2005). The two intensive teachers in this study also used a variety of resources to uphold the communicative nature of the Intensive English classroom. Teacher 1 reported the use of games to encourage verbal communication, as well as the use of daily routines which promote the use of varied vocabulary. She also reported using movies for further exposure to oral English content and later using the content for oral comprehension questions, therefore providing opportunities for students to practice their communicative skills. Teacher 2 reported using much cross-curricular content from the students' science and social studies classes to enrich the intensive English classroom. Besides these, teacher 2 developed many of her own materials (grammar and other) to supplement the learning needs of the students in her class.

In the core English group, Teacher 3 reported using an activity book called "Special Delivery," which provided content to develop the three competencies (C1 = interacting orally in English, C2 = listening to, reading and viewing text, and C3 = writing text) in the core ESL program in cycle 3. She also designed group activities to encourage the communicative approach in the classroom, although, she reported that this was often met with resistance from the majority of students, and often the conversations would slip into French. In the case of all teachers (IE and Regular), English is always encouraged in the L2 classroom, however there are no explicit rules that require students to speak *only* in English.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the influence of linguistic environment on the performance of two groups of students completing an oral task in the region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue in the province of Quebec. The groups were comprised of an intensive English and a regular ESL class. Findings suggest that the gains in oral proficiency for the intensive group were significantly higher when compared to the regular group. Since the two groups came from the same region, their linguistic environments were comparable, as expected; the only significant difference in linguistic environment lay in classroom exposure to English, in which case the intensive group clearly triumphs. These results are further explained within the context of the theoretical concepts associated with the study.

5.1 Oral fluency (ability) and oral task scoring

As discussed previously, the construct of oral fluency has proven to be a complicated one to define in the field of L2 learning. Studies measuring oral fluency can vary in their focus. For a great majority, the narrow definition of fluency (Lennon, 1990) related to the measurement of temporal aspects (length and number of pauses, hesitations, number of repetitions) is used to set up procedural instruments and analysis tools. In de Jong and Perfetti (2011), mean length of pauses, phonation/time ratio, and articulation rates (in syllables per minute) were used to measure fluency development in ESL students. There is also value in studies that take a broad approach to the definition of fluency (Lennon, 1990) when examining measures of fluency.   White and Turner (2005) were interested in evaluating the performance of students in three oral tasks across two groups (intensive and regular ESL). Their goal was to see if the communicative approach (which characterised the intensive program) influence the oral ability gains in that group, as opposed to the regular ESL group, which did not necessarily apply the communicative approach as its focus. The term *oral ability* was been used by White and Turner, as opposed to oral fluency. This is perhaps due to the nature of the language elicited in the study, which does not which does not fit into the narrow definition of fluency discussed by Lennon (1999),

nor that of cognitive fluency, discussed by Segalowitz (2000). As a result, the broad definition of fluency has become a more meaningful framework to use. In addition to this, Segalowitz's (2000) differentiation between cognitive fluency and performance fluency helps in the elaboration of the meaning of oral ability in the case of White and Turner (2005), as well as in the current study. Here, the researcher's interest lies in measuring the general fluidity of the learners' speech. Therefore, the more general term *oral ability* has been adopted to refer to this form of elicitation of language.

As previously mentioned in the theoretical framework, there are as many different variations of oral assessment tasks as there are definitions of oral fluency. Therefore, when it comes to choosing and preparing an assessment task, it is important to distinguish what part or parts of oral production are being assessed and how to elicit the language required for assessment. In the case of this study, focus has been placed on the evaluation of extended speech in the form of a retelling of a story.

As research in the field of oral assessment is still developing and does not yet have definite answers and formulas for all assessment situations (Bachman, 2002), researchers like White and Turner (2005) have come up with their own assessment tools and scoring procedures. This study used a score sheet[10] developed by White and Turner (2005) which indicated the presence or absence of the main events in the story, as well as accuracy markers and use of L1 and L2 indicators to assess the general ability/proficiency of students in retelling a story in English. For the most part, this type of scoring allowed the researcher to perform an analysis which was consistent and efficient, yet not highly intricate or complicated. As a result, the assessment can provide a more global picture of the learners' oral proficiency.

5.2 Time and intensity of time (intensive English vs. regular English)

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[10] See appendix V

A central variable in the study was the comparison of two groups (intensive and regular ESL) which were distinguished by the amount and intensity of instructional time in which they learned English. Research findings in IEPs in Quebec have already established advantages in proficiency gains for students in intensive programs compared to those in regular programs. White and Turner (2005) compared the oral abilities of students on three oral tasks between regular ESL ($N = 73$) and intensive students ($N = 79$). Findings showed significantly higher gain scores for the intensive students in all three tasks. In another study, Collins et al. (1999) focused on the difference in the distribution of time between different models of the intensive program. The groups included three types of intensive programs, all of which included approximately the same amount of instructional time (400 hours). The instructional hours for each program were distributed over the school year in the following manner: spread over 10 months (*distributed*, $N = 236$), spread over five months (*massed*, $N = 324$), and spread over five months plus exposure outside class (*massed plus*, $N = 149$). Advantages were found in both the massed and massed plus groups. However, the researchers noted some variables in the participant population which may have made the groups not entirely comparable. For example, after embarking on the data collection process, researchers were made aware of the fact that some schools had academic entry requirements for their program. In the current study, this variable is not an issue, as all schools have reported no academic entry requirements for students enrolled at their schools.

In this study, the mean gain scores between groups were higher for the intensive group ($N = 27$) than the regular group ($N = 21$), providing further evidence for the efficacy of the IEP compared to the regular ESL program in developing the oral ability of students.

In previous studies, however, contextual factors (such as the linguistic environment in which the groups were a part) remained similar. That is to say, all groups were from schools in and around the suburbs of Montreal, where the linguistic environment was likely to have a similar distribution, given the linguistic diversity of larger city centres and their suburbs.

5.3 The influence of the linguistic environment

Herein is the discussion of the distinguishing variable of the current study, which shows the possible influence of the linguistic environment on the oral abilities of students in the same groups studied by White and Turner (2005) and Collins et al. (1999).

In Housen's (2012) study of global proficiency development in L2 in European Schools (ES), the number of hours of instruction in the L2, coupled with additional input and output opportunities outside the classroom, sheds some light on the potential influence of the linguistic environment in L2 learning. Housen examined Italian L1 students in years 3 and 4 of the primary cycle ($N = 71$) in four contexts: Bologna (Traditional School Italy, Context 1), Varese (ES School Italy, Context 2), Brussels (ES School Belgium, Context 3) and Culham (ES School UK, Context 4). The study looked at the instructed L2 learning and outcomes as a function of the students' extracurricular activities. A CAF (complexity, accuracy and fluency) model was used to analyse speech samples. Although Housen was investigating overall L2 proficiency, the findings are still relevant to the context of this study, which focuses only on oral ability.

The ES curriculum allows up to 30% of class time to be taken up in the L2 through subject and content teaching. In secondary school, students can expect to have up to 60% of their timetable in the L2, depending on the subjects studied. In addition, many schools encourage and organize extracurricular activities which also take place in the students L2. The ultimate goal of L2 education in the European Schools is to attain native like proficiency.

Housen (2012) detected no significant differences between contexts 1-3. However, students in context 4 (Culham, ES School UK) had clearly developed more fluent and complete proficiency levels (particularly in grammar and vocabulary) than the other three contexts. Students in context 4 scored 16% higher in fluency, 13% in grammar, and nearly 25% in lexical proficiency. Clearly the linguistic environment in context 4, which provided English as a *lingua franca* for the students inside and outside the classroom, had a

significant role in the outcome. Housen *et al*. (2011) echos similar findings in a previous study with German speaking students learning English as an L2 in the ES system.

In the current study, the linguistic environment was assessed by the amount of English instruction students received in their respective English programs, as well as the use of information from the parents' questionnaires on the level of exposure students had to English outside the classroom. As Table 8 in the Presentation of Results indicates, both groups have similar levels of exposure outside the classroom, as would be expected. Therefore, exposure to English outside the classroom for both groups is comparable, with one exception being hours of TV watched in English, recorded at 2.68 for the intensive group (approximately 10hrs/week) and 0.85 for the regular group (approximately 1hr/week).

The real difference in the level of exposure the two groups had to English was in their respective English programs. For the students in the core ESL program, the number of instructional hours was 50 over the course of the school year. According to the participating teacher (Table 1), in practice, students received only half of that in English due interference of L1 in the classroom for explanation and other pedagogical reasons. Students in the intensive program, however, receive up to 400 hours of instruction in English over the course of a 5 month period. According to the participating teachers from the two intensive groups 75-90% of classes are conducted in English, which makes for a significant difference in L2 exposure.

5.4 Summary

The findings of this study demonstrate that there was a significant difference in gain scores in oral abilities between two groups of students in intensive and core ESL programs in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region of Quebec. This suggests that, despite the minimal presence of input and output in English outside the classroom for both groups, the intensive group had enough exposure within the context of the intensive program to outperform the core ESL group in terms of oral ability.

In fact, the difference in gain score means on one oral task (Story Retell) between intensive and core ESL groups in a larger metropolitan region of Quebec (intensive: $N = 73$, 2.37; regular: $N = 71$, 0.09) (White and Turner, 2005), is comparable to that of the same groups in a remote region of Quebec (intensive: $N = 27$, 2.4; regular: $N = 21$, 1.1).

The efficacy of the additional hours of instruction and exposure to English in the intensive program can therefore be asserted, even in a rural region of Quebec with limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Indeed, studies like Housen et al. (2011) and Housen (2012) demonstrate how L2 proficiency can be maximized in contexts where the linguistic environment presents additional exposure to learners' L2s outside the classroom (extra-curricular activities, *lingua franca*, etc.). This does not mean, however, that the IEP in rural Quebec without additional input and output opportunities outside the classroom will be less efficient and, therefore, not beneficial to students. There is certainly room for improvement, but the program can offer valuable opportunites for students to improve their L2, particularly when it comes to oral communication.

Further research targeting more specific variables in the linguistic environment in programs such as the IEP can provide information on the more specific types of input and output sources, which can help maximize the L2 oral abilities for students in these programs.

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Appendix B: Rating scale (Story Retell –
*Arnold of the Ducks***)**
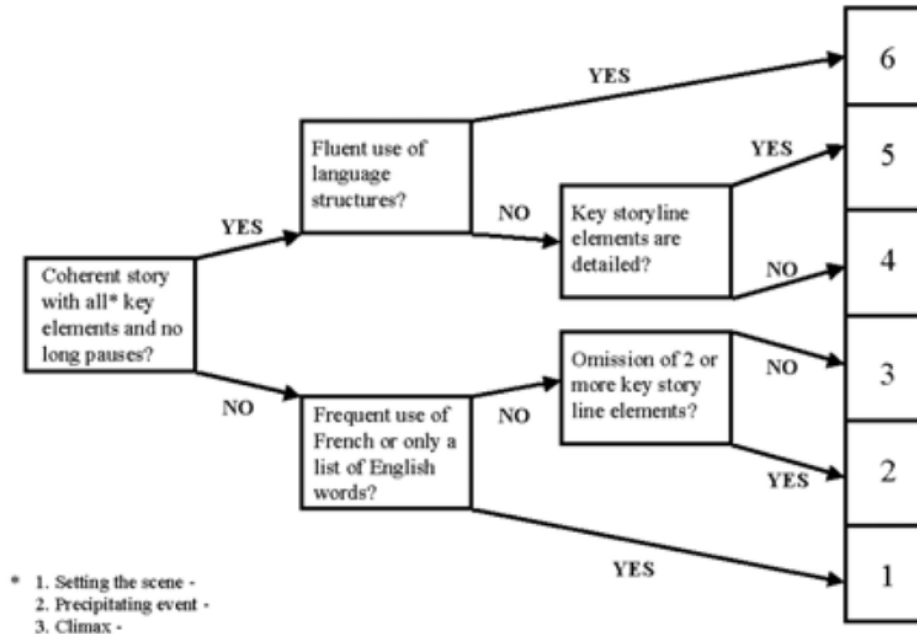
* 1. Setting the scene -
   2. Precipitating event -
   3. Climax -

Appendix II :   Verbatim Sample

Pre-test: School: Notre Dame de Fatima

Student : (1)

Verbatim:

1. The boy's play violent video game.

2. Uhh…ehh

3. He have one less leg, and the dog too.

4. uhh

5. He don't wants play with the dog.

6. And, ehh…at the end video, he go play outside with the dog.

7. Mhhh, ehhh…

QUESTIONNAIRE AUX PARENTS

Vos réponses à ce questionnaire nous aideront à interpréter les résultats de l'évaluation du l'environnement linguistique de votre enfant relatifs à sa capacité à communiquer oralement en anglais langue seconde dans la cadre de le programme d'anglais intensif. Tout rapport concernera les groupes plutôt que les individus et aucun enfant ne sera identifié.

Lorsque la question vous donne une échelle de réponse, veuillez tracer un X sur l'endroit qui correspond le mieux à votre situation. Toute réponse doit s'inscrire à l'intérieur de l'échelle.

NOM DE L'ENFANT___PRÉNOM_____

1. Quelle est la langue que l'enfant parle avec des amis de son ·âge?

toujours français							toujours anglais

2. Quel est le nombre d'heures par semaine que l'enfant passe D'HABITUDE à regarder la télévision en français?

moins de 5 heures							plus de 20 heures

3. Quel est le nombre d'heures par semaine que l'enfant passe D'HABITUDE à regarder la télévision en anglais?

moins de 5 heures							plus de 20 heures

4. Quand les autres membres de la famille regardent la télévision, quelle est la langue des émissions préférées?

toujours français							toujours anglais

5. En dehors de la famille, les amitiés, et la télévision, l'enfant a-t-il quelquefois l'occasion d'entendre et de parler anglais?

rarement							beaucoup

Si oui, pourriez-vous estimer le nombre <u>d'heures par semaine</u> pendant lesquelles il est en contact avec la langue anglaise?

moins de 3 heures | | | | | | | plus de 10 heures

6. Votre enfant aime-t-il lire en français (livres, revues, bandes-dessinées, etc.)?

non, pas du tout | | | | | | | oui, beaucoup

7. Pourriez-vous estimer le nombre d'heures par semaine que votre enfant passe D'HABITUDE en lisant?

moins d'une heure | | | | | | | plus de 10 heures

8. Votre enfant lit-il en anglais ?

pas du tout | | | | | | | beaucoup

9. Est-ce que votre enfant essaie de lire ce qui est écrit <u>EN FRANÇAIS</u> sur les panneaux publicitaires ou des renseignements sur des boîtes de céréales ou autres emballages?

jamais | | | | | | | souvent

10. Est-ce que votre enfant essaie de lire ce qui est écrit <u>EN ANGLAIS</u> sur les panneaux publicitaires ou des renseignements sur des boîtes de céréales ou autres emballages?

jamais | | | | | | | souvent

11. Comment évaluez-vous l'attitude de votre enfant envers son programme de l'anglais intensif?

très négative | | | | | | | très positive

* Revised version of questionnaire with permission from P. Lightbown

Teacher Questionnaire

1. How would you describe your L1 and L2?

   _____

   _____

2. If you described English as your L2, do you consider yourself completely bilingual?

   _____

   _____

3. Please indicate how many years of teaching experience you have in teaching English as a second language?
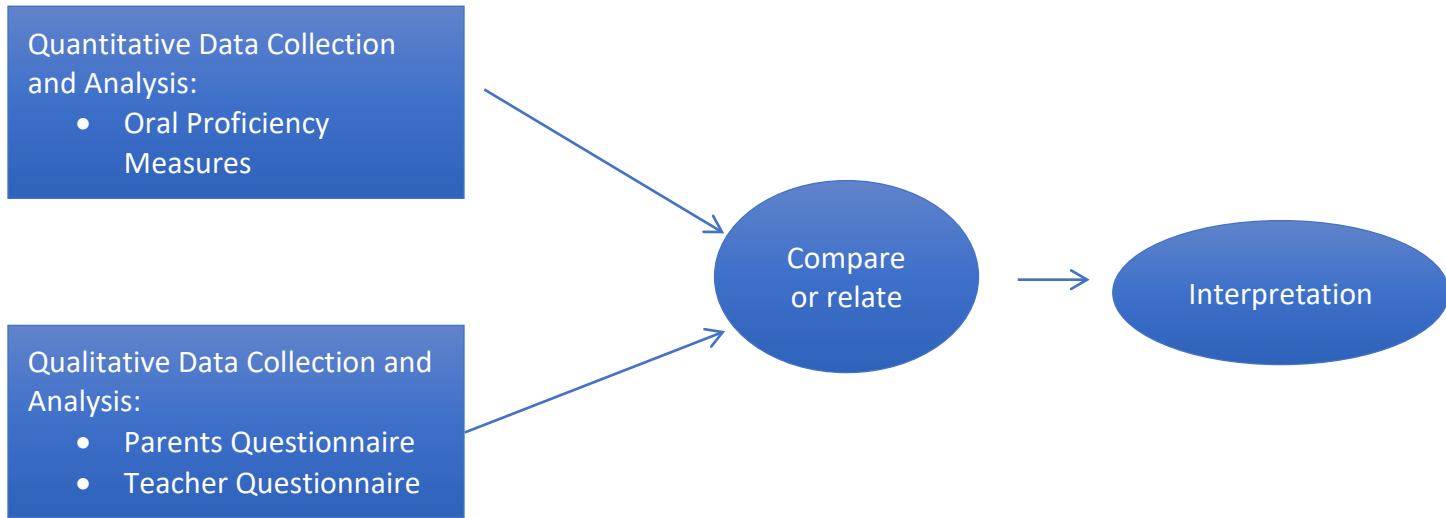
   _____

   _____

4. Please indicate a percentage which best describes your use of English in the classroom (ie. 50%, 70%, 100%).

   _____

5. Do you follow a specific curriculum guideline for your IE classroom? Please provide details.

   _____

   _____

   _____

6. What are the pedagogical materials used for lessons in your IE classroom?

   _____

   _____

7. Have you followed any specific training for becoming an IE teacher?

   _____

Appendix V: Procedural Diagram for Convergent Parallel Mixed Method Design*

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis:
- Oral Proficiency Measures

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis:
- Parents Questionnaire
- Teacher Questionnaire

Compare or relate

Interpretation

Appendix VI: Coherency of research elements

Research Question	Relevance of Research	Conceptual Framework elements	Methodology elements	Data analysis
What is the impact, if any, of the linguistic environment on the oral performance of students on one oral task in the IEP and in the regular ESL programs in the rural region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue?	Social: Relevance and application of the IE program in the rural context in Quebec	Linguistic environment	Parent questionnaire Teacher questionnaire	Categories Content analysis
		Oral fluency	Oral proficiency measures elicited through student task: • Story Retell	Rating Scale for Story Retell (White & Turner, 2005)
	Scientific: The examination of the linguistic environment as a factor in the IE context			