



Language Planning Programs for French Language Learners: What is the Role of the SLP?

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CONTEXT

In Canada, French and English are co-official languages. However, the status of these languages remains unequal in most of the country. Outside of Quebec, English-speaking Canadians find themselves within a majority context: French being the minority language. **In Ontario, French medium elementary schools have seen a significant increase in the linguistic and cultural diversity of their students; most of whom come from families who use English in their households and have very limited knowledge of French.** Initially, these children often have difficulties at school due to their insufficient language competence in French and are faced with the challenges of having to learn, develop and maintain a minority language.

To help these French Language Learners (FLL), the Ontario Ministry of Education created an **intervention program called Actualisation Linguistique en Français, or ALF**. This program aims to help these FLLs develop the French language skills necessary for them to succeed in other academic areas. The ALF curriculum, composed of the contents and expectations of the program, is very vague and abstract in terms of how this intervention should be given. It states which competencies to work on, but does not specify how or by what means these competencies should be taught. Because of the lack of a concrete structure to follow, **we do not currently know how these interventions are being provided throughout the different schools in the province.**



AIM AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study was to **look at how French medium schools in Ontario intervene and help children who are FLL** through a specific language planning program instated by the province to support the needs of FLLs (ALF).

This program, although widely used, has received very little scientific attention. This is interesting because 1. the program was created over 20 years ago, 2. it is used in many schools throughout the province and 3. there is a high demand for this type of program to accommodate FLLs in the minority context. Through means of survey data, this study looked at the **practices and techniques used by schools to teach FLL**.

This study also looked at the Speech and language pathologist's (SLP) role in these types of FLL programs. Even though this type of intervention deals with language and communication, it is not part of the official scope of practice of an SLP to intervene within these programs. This study thus sought out to **discover the SLP's perspective within this intervention context** to see if their implication would be an asset.

Objectives

1. Discover how French medium schools in Ontario intervene and help FLLs through means of the ALF program.
2. Examine the role and perspective of the SLP within FLL intervention.

METHOD

This study used an investigation method by means of survey data. A **34-question electronic survey** was created using a secure online survey website, *Free Online Surveys*, in order to **obtain information on the workings of the ALF program within Ontario's French medium schools as well as on the practices and techniques used** by the individuals providing this intervention. The participants of this study were all professionals working under one of four French medium school boards in the North of the province.



Participation in this study was **anonymous**. The only personal information obtained were the role of the participant within their school as well as the school board under which they were employed. 68 schools were called to participate in this study. In total, **20 individuals answered the survey**, all claiming to be responsible for providing ALF intervention within their school. Among these 20 participants, 6 of them abandoned the questionnaire at different times. However, the answers provided by these 6 participants prior to abandonment were still considered during data analysis.

School Board	Participants	Role	Participants
Conseil Scolaire public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario	n = 5 (25%)	Homeroom teacher	n = 12 (60%)
Conseil Scolaire catholique du Nouvel-Ontario	n = 8 (40%)	Resource teacher	n = 6 (30%)
Conseil scolaire catholique Franco-Nord	n = 4 (20%)	SLP	n = 1 (5%)
Conseil scolaire catholique du district des grandes rivières	n = 3 (15%)	School principal	n = 1 (5%)

RESULTS

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were performed on received survey data. Practices and techniques stated by respondents were grouped into categories. The **school personnel respondents** (n=19) valued **repetition and drilling of vocabulary words and French language concepts** the most to help FLLs. The practices used seem to favour **creativity and interactive learning** (games, songs, etc...).

Practices and techniques used by the school personnel respondents (homeroom teachers, resource teachers and school principal) while providing ALF intervention to FLLs	
Vocabulary and concept drills (n = 4)	Learning concepts through play/games (n = 4)
Use of many visual aids during sessions (n = 3)	Use of a kinaesthetic approach/gestures (n = 2)
Oral communication activities (n = 3)	Cutting words into syllables (n = 1)
One on one intervention for students with complex needs (n = 2)	Songs and nursery rhymes to help remember concepts (n = 3)

The SLP's **perspective** (n=1) was unique. This respondent valued the use of **conversation stimulation** during ALF intervention, as these children often don't have the opportunity to use and practice French outside of school. The SLP's strategies are based on **strategies founded by research commonly used within the speech therapy field** in other types of intervention.

Practices and techniques used by the SLP respondent while providing ALF intervention to FLLs	
Vocabulary and concept drills (repetition)	Learning concepts through play/games
Ask open-ended questions and avoid questions that can end conversation	Allow time for the child to think and respond
Make many comments	Modeling (using yourself as example)
Offer choices to the child (ask choice questions)	Establish links between vocabulary/concepts and the child's life/environment for better understanding
Group learning (grouping children with similar skill sets)	Scaled learning (starting with simple tasks then gradually adding levels of difficulty)

In terms of program administration, many **inconsistencies** were found from one respondent to the next, revealing that **this intervention is not provided in a uniform fashion** throughout French medium schools in Ontario.

Differences in program administration among respondent answers	
Intervention is not always given by the same person	Length/timing of sessions differs
Curriculum is not always used (40% of respondents admitted to not using the curriculum at all)	No set evaluation guideline of child's progress to determine when to withdraw child from the program
Decision to withdraw child from the program is not made by the same person	Type of training (if any) on ALF implementation received by respondent varies

CONCLUSIONS



Results allow us to conclude that **FLL intervention through means of the ALF program is done differently from one Ontario school to the next**. We can hypothesize that these inconsistencies are due to the lack of a concrete structure provided by the program's curriculum. More studies would be necessary.

In terms of the SLP's perspective, we can determine that it is different, yet important. **Collaboration between the SLP and the school personnel would be an asset.**

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE TRACKS

The number of participants limited this study. We were not able to get a generalized picture on how ALF is administered throughout the entirety of the province. Additionally, 6 out of 20 respondents abandoned the questionnaire, leaving us with data blanks. The survey itself also acts as a potential limit to this study as we were unable to administer a pre-test of the survey; a vital step in the investigation method.

Due to the lack of prior scientific attention this program received, this study serves as a **starting point for future studies**. Changes can be made to the program's curriculum in order to **give a concrete intervention structure to follow and to foster a multidisciplinary approach thus including input from an SLP**. Studies aiming to **measure the success of the program** could also be beneficial, as this program currently does not have any significant data in regards to whether or not it truly works.



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