

Advancing Students' Reading Skills: Support for French as A Second Language Teachers

Callie Mady *

Stephanie Underwood **

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of four full-day professional development sessions on French as a second language teachers' confidence to use strategies to support their students' reading development. Situated in Ontario, Canada where the science of reading has become a topic of focus influencing the development of a new English language curriculum, the French as a second language teachers in this study requested such a focus for their professional development. The teachers completed a pre- and post-questionnaire that included a focus on the science of reading and transfer between languages. They also participated in post-professional development semi-structured interviews. The results showed that teachers gained confidence in supporting their students' reading development and, in particular, using the science of reading approaches.

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Both authors were equally involved in the completion of this manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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* Callie Mady, PhD, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1354-4958>, Nipissing University, Schulich School of Education, calliem@nipissingu.ca

** Stephanie Underwood, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6605-7149>, Near North District School Board, Alliance French Immersion Public School, stephanie.underwood@nearnorthschools.ca

Introduction

Much empirical evidence exists to support various theories, frameworks, and instructional approaches for the reading development of monolingual readers, particularly in English first language programs (National Reading Panel, 2000; Moats, 2020). Although French as a second language (FSL) teachers, French immersion teachers in particular, have looked to this research and that from bilingual contexts to inform their reading development initiatives, the recent publication of the Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Right to Read* report (2022) has refocused Ontario teachers' attention as it challenged Ontario's educational policies, programs, and curriculum for reading instruction. In particular, the report highlighted systemic failings within Ontario's education system pertaining to students with reading difficulties and minority students specifically. To address these findings, the report emphasized the need for educators to implement pedagogical practices based on the science of reading. Although much of the available research and the *Right to Read* report implies that the constructs of learning to read in a second language are generally the same as within the English first language context, educators within the FSL context have additional considerations (e.g., choice of language of instruction). This study sought to respond to FSL teachers' immediate self-assessed need for assistance with supporting students' reading development as encouraged by the *Right to Read* report and ensuing curricular change, presently only available for the English language curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023), yet anticipated for the French immersion context.

Literature Review

The Science of Reading

We recognize that the science of reading is not, nor should be, the sole focus to develop FSL students' reading skills, the emphasis in Ontario described above has created a thirst in teachers for professional development on the topic grounded in their desire to support students. Given the present lack of new curricular support for FSL contexts in Ontario, FSL teachers, in particular, are anxious to find means to enhance their students' reading development as, similar to the curriculum, the *Right to Read* mostly addresses their English colleagues. Broadly, the science of reading encouraged in the report is a body of research compiled from various disciplines, including psychology, applied linguistics, education, and neurology. The science of reading can inform educational practice and offers teaching strategies to teach reading skills to all students. Gough and Tunmer's simple view of reading (1986) is an influential theory that provides the basis for this approach. In the simple view of reading, decoding and comprehension are essential to reading skill development (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Decoding involves manipulating the individual sounds represented by written words, and language comprehension involves interpreting the meaning of words (Such, 2021). Effective readers use both skills automatically, decoding and understanding written words simultaneously. As it pertains to the second language learning context, more specifically, the simple view of reading provides evidence for the use of crosslinguistic transfer (Verhoeven & Leeuwen, 2012). Yet, given that much of the success in second language learning is grounded in time in the target language (Dicks, 2022), FSL teachers

often maximize the use of French, sometimes using it as the sole language of instruction (Cummins, 2007). Given the above focus on the science of reading and additional research in the second language setting that encourages some inclusion of students' first languages (e.g., Davis et al., 2019; Fortune & Tedick, 2019; Mady & Garbati, 2014; Zaidi et al., 2022), second language teachers may need to consider if, when, and how to include other languages for the benefit of their students' reading development in particular while exposing students to an environment rich in the language of instruction - developing a solid linguistic base in which language comprehension skills become increasingly critical as students cross the threshold from fluent decoding (Bourgoin, 2019; Such, 2021).

Crosslinguistic Transfer

It is often assumed that second language learners learn to read much the same way as monolinguals; however, there is also evidence demonstrating that they develop language and literacy differently (August et al., 2009; Bernhardt, 2003; Jared et al., 2011). Given the necessary consideration of language use within an FSL context and the past thrust to use French as the sole language of instruction, this following section examines the potential use of students' other languages as a means to develop reading skills within the science of reading approach.

Crosslinguistic transfer frameworks can advance biliteracy pedagogy by highlighting the potential for positive transfer and additional necessary considerations to enhance such transfer. Lado's contrastive analysis hypothesis (Lado, 1964) underscores that language skills transfer, but more specifically, the learner's native language influences the acquisition of the second language, particularly as it relates to the "subsystems of the second language grammar" (Genesee et al., 2006, p. 155). Additionally, Cummins' (2000) interdependence hypothesis posits that languages are developmentally interdependent and that the first language facilitates the development of the second language. Cummins highlights that students with strong academic skills in their first language transfer those skills to advance the acquisition of the second language. Furthermore, Cummins highlighted that linguistic transfer can be facilitated with effective instruction. Chung et al. (2019), in their systemic review, detail that the contrastive analysis hypothesis allows for the transfer of skills from the first language to facilitate the learning of the second when the two languages share features (Chung et al., 2019). More specific to the context of this current study, empirical evidence for the positive transfer of reading skills between first and second languages is defined by Scarborough's rope (Scarborough, 2001). Scarborough's rope (Scarborough, 2001) is an infographic model based on the science of reading, which is divided into two sections of skills: lower reading skills, including phonological awareness, decoding of words and sight recognition, and higher-order reading skills, defined as language comprehension skills that encompass a focus on prior knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literary knowledge. Scarborough's rope also recognizes that learners acquire reading skills in both their first and second language. The emphasis of this article is on the lower reading skills mirroring the requested focus of the participating teachers and the thrust of the current Ontario context.

Phonological Awareness

Lower reading skills are foundational skills and, in second language learning remain crucial skills for students to learn how to decode in an unfamiliar language. There is a significant amount of empirical evidence on the importance of phonological awareness for emergent monolingual readers and bilingual learners of French, with evidence indicating that those phonological awareness skills not only transfer from English to French but are predictive of future reading abilities (Archambault et al., 2019; Comeau et al., 1999; MacCoubrey et al., 2004).

Phonological awareness skills are identifying and manipulating individual sounds such as phonemes, onsets, rime, and syllables. Such awareness contributes to word decoding and is often one of the first skills taught in the science of reading approach. When students are exposed to instructional activities which promote phonological awareness skills, those skills further develop and can transfer from one language to the next (Chung et al., 2019; Goodrich et al., 2013; Haigh et al., 2011; Kruk & Reynolds 2012). Evidence suggests that the explicit instruction of these phonological awareness skills in the learner's first language improves the second-language learner's ability to decode in both languages (Goodrich et al., 2013; Kruk et al., 2012). Current research suggests that phonological awareness skills are most easily transferred from a student's first to a second language, and sound phonological skills in their first language can predict phonological awareness, word reading, and later reading comprehension skills in a French immersion context (Coté et al., 2021). Similarly, in broader contexts, research shows that when students have acquired the ability to manipulate individual sounds in their first language, those skills can transfer to the second language (e.g., Comeau et al., 1999; Durgongulu et al., 1993; Gottardo et al., 2001; Koda, 2007). In their study of English-speaking French immersion Grade 1 students at risk for reading difficulties, MacCoubrey et al. (2004) found that English phonological measures could effectively identify students at risk and predict future reading achievement in both English and French. Similarly, Jared et al. (2011) found that "phonological awareness, letter-sound knowledge, rapid automatized naming and grammatical ability in English" predicted reading in French (p.119). Likewise, in a Kindergarten French immersion context, Erdos et al. (2014) found that phonological awareness and letter sound measures could predict reading difficulties. In addition to early identification, Wise, D'Angelo and Chen (2016) explored the impact of English phonological awareness training on 16 French immersion children identified as at risk for reading difficulties. They found that phonological awareness interventions in the students' first language significantly reduced phonological awareness deficits and promoted reading skill acquisition. Although the potential for positive transfer to support students' reading development in FSL contexts is evidenced above, FSL teachers need to consider how to balance the leveraging of a student's first skills to promote second language reading skills with the maintenance of French as the language of instruction.

Decoding Skills

The literature for decoding skills in a second language, particularly in French immersion, is less robust compared to the available research for phonological awareness. To

the best of our knowledge, few relevant studies examine the construct of word decoding in a second language setting exclusively; instead, phonological awareness and decoding are often combined in current literature. Nonetheless, decoding words is an important part of learning to read. Decoding means connecting sounds to symbols to graphemes, effectively reading a written text's letters and sound combinations. Emergent readers in both first and second-language contexts require solid phonological awareness skills such as letter-sound knowledge, blending, and sentence repetition to decode words in second-language texts (Erdos et al., 2011). The science of reading focuses on the explicit, systematic, and cumulative teaching of decoding skills to ensure students decipher the code and eventually construct meaning from a text.

Similar to the transfer of skills in phonological awareness, there is evidence that decoding skills transfer cross-linguistically. For example, research has shown that learners who experience difficulty with decoding and spelling in their first language experience the same in their second (Geva, 2006). Intuitively, we may consider that French oral language plays a part in decoding; however, Jared et al. (2011) found that though oral language is an essential factor, it does not contribute to decoding.

Word Recognition

Word recognition is the ability to process and retrieve sight words from memory as though they are mapped in our minds. Word recognition is a cognitive construct that occurs automatically without conscious thought and is a significant factor in reading. Similar to the crosslinguistic transfer of phonological awareness skills, Durgongulu et al. (1993) found that phonological awareness skills were a "significant predictor of performance on word recognition tests both within and across languages" (p.461). Additionally, Chung et al. (2017), in their longitudinal study of at-risk French immersion learners in Grade 1, found that word reading development and orthographic processing in both English and French were similar and predictive of Grade 3 reading achievement. Lastly, Comeau et al., (1999) also found a strong connection between phonological awareness and word decoding in both the learners' first language and second language.

The above literature demonstrates a connection between phonological awareness, decoding, and word recognition, their ability to predict and address reading difficulties as well as the potential for positive crosslinguistic transfer to support students' reading development (Durgongulu et al.,1993).

Comprehension Skills

Comprehension is the *raison d'être* of reading. Once students are proficient in decoding, they can spend more cognitive resources on reading comprehension (Kilpatrick, 2015). Many skills are involved in building text comprehension, including background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literary knowledge (Scarborough, 2001). For this reason, text comprehension can be construed as a set of skills reliant on many cognitive constructs (Kilpatrick, 2015; Bournot-Trites, 2008). Building comprehension skills in a second language is similar to building skills in a learner's first.

Whereas reading comprehension skills are developed in one language, they link to those skills in the language being learned (Geva, 2006).

At the same time, though there is some evidence of a delay in reading skill development during the initial years of second language instruction, children attending early French immersion programs reach a similar level of reading skills as their peers in the English program in the junior grades (Comeau et al., 1999; Raudszus et al., 2021). Lower proficiency in the language of instruction, including lower vocabulary knowledge, maybe a partial cause of the initial lag, although there are likely to be other factors at play contributing to the complexity of learning to read in a second language (Koda, 2007; Raudszus et al., 2021). At the same time, by Grade 6 many of these students outperform their peers in English, French, and math (Turnbull, Hart, & Lapkin 2006). Given that this study's FSL teacher participants expressed desire to focus on lower reading skills accompanied by the above information and the sole focus on comprehension within the present FSL curriculum offering prior curricular support to teachers, we limit our discussion of the higher-order reading skills to vocabulary knowledge.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge has a significant impact on the reading comprehension of monolinguals and bilinguals alike (Droop & Verhoeven, 2003; Lervåg & Aukrust, 2010; Jared et al., 2011; Lee & Chen, 2019). Droop & Verhoeven (2003), in their comparative study of Dutch majority language students with Turkish minority students, found that reading comprehension as a construct can be viewed "as the product of word decoding, vocabulary knowledge, morphosyntactic processing and oral text comprehension" (p.99). According to some researchers, in terms of reading comprehension for second language learners, vocabulary knowledge is more critical to constructing meaning than it is for first-language learners (Verhoeven, 2000). Students learning a second language must understand the vocabulary well to inform their understanding of the text. In their study of Norwegian students, Lervåg & Aukrust (2010) found that vocabulary was a significant predictor of reading comprehension in both first and second languages and that having a limited vocabulary can impede reading skills. Raudszus et al. (2021), in their study of reading comprehension skills of French immersion of students in the upper grades, found that vocabulary predicted reading comprehension growth. Lee and Chen (2019), in their study of 66 French immersion students' reading development, examined the interaction between vocabulary, fluency and reading comprehension and found that by Grade 3 word reading fluency and vocabulary were related to reading comprehension in the same grade. Their results suggest that there may be some developmental factors at play, particularly that students in Grade 2 might not have reached automaticity in reading and thus are spending too many cognitive resources decoding. Further, the authors posited that insufficient vocabulary development directly influenced students' reading comprehension. In addition, as with the lower reading skills, explicit teaching can have a positive impact on vocabulary and, thus, reading development. For instance, Hipfner-Boucher et al. (2016) found that explicitly teaching cognates to Grade 2 French immersion students contributed significantly to reading comprehension.

To summarize, learning to read in one language is a complex skill. In addition to the intricacies of supporting emergent readers in their first language, learning to read in a second language context such as FSL requires teachers to consider similarities in supporting lower-order reading development (i.e., a focus on phonological awareness, decoding, and word recognition), and higher order reading comprehension considering vocabulary knowledge, while maintaining French instruction and development. The Ontario context with the *Right to Read* report accompanied by a change in focus in the English Language curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023) to include an emphasis on the science of reading has FSL teachers anticipating similar changes to FSL. Without detailed support for FSL contexts, the board in this study sought to provide professional development on the topic of reading for their FSL teachers with a view to guide teachers' support for students' reading development in their second language contexts.

Research Aim and Research Question

Our aim was to support teachers' reading instruction for the FSL classroom and to examine if and how that PD support influenced their confidence to support students' reading skill development.

Methodology

Research Design/Model

This study used a mixed-method approach integrating quantitative questionnaire data with semi-structured interview data in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) and the influence of the PD sessions on their confidence with reading instruction. Questionnaires were used to gather numerical data pre and post-PD sessions and follow-up semi-structured interviews allowed for deeper understanding of the PD experience (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Such an approach allowed for consideration of contextual influences (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007), which offers rich information to the participating board of education.

Publication Ethics

Research ethics approval was obtained through Nipissing University's Research Ethics Committee on 09/07/2023 and assigned number 103407. The authors complied with research and publication ethics.

Participants

Forty FSL teachers attended the initial full-day PD session, and the majority ($n=35$) chose to complete the pre-questionnaire. Through the questionnaire, thirteen teachers expressed interest in continuing with three additional sessions, but due to limited supply of teacher coverage, the invitation was issued to those in the junior division who expressed interest. The number of participants in the three additional PD sessions that followed varied from 7 to 9 FSL teachers at each session. Attendance at each session varied depending on the availability of supply teachers to be able to provide release from teaching for the participating teachers; at times, when there were not supply teachers to offer coverage, participating teachers were required to stay with their class rather than attend the PD session. Seven teachers completed the post-questionnaire and participated in semi-structured interviews.

Language repertoires of participants

The majority of the pre-questionnaire participants spoke English as a first language ($n=25$), with the remainder ($n=10$) having French as their first language. The participants had a variety of French learning experiences. At the elementary level, fifteen attended French first language schools, fourteen French immersion, four core French, and two had extended French learning experiences. Exposure to French lessened at the secondary level, with eight continuing in the immersion program, six with French first language, three in core French, and two continuing in the extended French program. A minority continued the study of French in university, with four having French as a major, five as a minor, and four studying French through individual courses. Of the teachers who continued with the smaller group PD sessions, two of the seven had French as a first language with the others having English. Of the teachers who continued with the smaller group PD sessions, two of the seven had French as a first language with the others having English. The majority learned in French immersion ($n=5$) with the others learning in extended French ($n=1$) or French first language contexts ($n=1$) in elementary school. In secondary school, one continued in immersion, one in extended, two in French first language and the remaining three did not continue at the secondary level.

Teaching experience

The participants' teaching experience and qualifications are represented in Table 1 below. As shown, the majority of pre-questionnaire participants ($n=19$) received their FSL qualifications more than ten years ago, six received their qualifications between five and ten years previously with ten participants getting their qualifications under five years ago. The participants were qualified to teach in a variety of divisions, some with qualifications in more than two divisions, thus leading to numbers over the total 35 participants as follows: 28 were qualified at the primary/junior division, 26 at the junior/intermediate and 11 at the intermediate/senior divisions. The vast majority taught at the elementary level ($n=39$), some having taught in multiple levels and/or in more than one program): 28 in French immersion, eight in core French and three in extended French. As revealed in the post-questionnaire, the majority ($n=6$) of the small group that continued with the PD sessions had over ten years of teaching experience, with the remaining one teacher having two years' experience. Three had primary/junior/intermediate qualifications, two primary/junior/senior, two junior/intermediate, one primary/junior and one junior/intermediate/senior. The majority ($n=5$) teach in junior/intermediate French immersion and two teach in elementary core French.

Table 1. Teachers' Qualifications and Experience

Descriptor	Number of Pre-questionnaire Participants (<i>n</i> =35)	Number of Post-Questionnaire Participants (<i>n</i> =7)
Teaching Experience		
10 years or more	19	6
5-10 years	6	0
5 years or less	10	1
Teaching Qualifications		
Primary/Junior	28	1
Junior/Intermediate	26	2
Intermediate/Senior	11	
Primary/Junior/Intermediate	0	3
Primary/Junior/Senior	0	2
Junior/Intermediate/Senior	0	1
Teaching Context		
Elementary	39	7
French Immersion	28	5
Core French	8	2
Extended French	3	0

Data Collection and Analysis

After having obtained ethical approval from Nipissing University's research ethics board (09/07/2023, 103407), we used a pre- and post-questionnaire and a post-semi-structured interview to explore the impact of the PD offerings. The pre-questionnaire had biographical questions asking about teachers' language repertoires, their French learning experiences, and their teaching qualifications and experiences. It also had a Likert scale section that asked about their confidence level in using strategies to support students reading development (15 items). The Likert scale options were ranked from the lowest: strongly agree (1) to the highest strongly disagree (5). This section was used to provide a pre-and post-PD session comparison. Comparisons were made using the Wilcoxon signed rank test given the varied size of the pre- and post-groups and the lower number of post-respondents. Given that the focus of the initial PD to junior teachers was supporting students' reading comprehension, the questionnaire offered fewer items on the science of reading than if that teacher-requested focus had been anticipated. However, of the 15 items, some pertained directly to Scarborough's rope (2001): one item asked about teacher confidence with phonological awareness, one item about word recognition, another on guiding students in the act of reading, and another focused on vocabulary development. In addition and in keeping with the research evidence above, there was one item that asked about teachers' confidence in highlighting positive transfer between languages. The remaining items inquired about teachers' planning to enhance reading development. The limited number of participants allowed for the interviews to be conducted by two professors post-PD sessions following the protocol that had six questions that asked a) teachers' impression of the delivery of the PD sessions in French, b) how, if at all, these sessions influenced their development of students' reading skills, c) the challenges associated with meeting students' needs, if any, d) how, if at all, the sessions met their needs, e) how these sessions compared to their past PD experiences and f) them to share anything that was left unsaid.

The questionnaire used a Likert scale to explore teachers' confidence to enhance students' reading comprehension in an FSL context. The Likert section (with 1 indicating strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree) of the pre-questionnaire served as the post-questionnaire to facilitate pre- and post-PD comparisons. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test (Wilcoxon, 1945) was used to examine data from a larger-size pre-questionnaire group in relation to those from a smaller post-questionnaire group. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed. The participants were then provided the transcripts for their review to check for accuracy (Elo et al., 2014; Varpio et al., 2017). The data were then coded and categorized in an inductive manner where themes were derived from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). To add to the dependability of the coding and categorization processes, two professors analysed the interview data. The data presented reflect a consensus between raters.

Procedure

We worked with one school board in Ontario, Canada, to offer four professional development sessions to FSL teachers. The school board chose the topic of supporting FSL students' reading development as the focus for the PD. Prior to the start of the first PD session, teachers were invited to participate in the research and complete the pre-questionnaire. The first PD session was delivered in part by a guest speaker for half the day, with teachers continuing to work on preparing to apply their learning to their context for the remainder of the day. Given the chosen audience of junior teachers, the guest speaker, an academic who studies reading development in second language contexts, addressed reading comprehension. The second and third days were with the teachers who continued a process of reflection on their application, discussion, and preparation for additional application of learning. In these sessions, the teachers asked and were provided an overview of the science of reading with resources. The guest speaker returned for half of the last session, with the teachers using the remainder of the day to plan for implementation of their learning to their context. At the end of this session, teachers were invited to complete the post-questionnaire and participate in semi-structured interviews.

Results

The pre-questionnaire offered items to gauge teachers' confidence in planning to enhance students' reading comprehension. As shown in Table 1, the pre-questionnaire prompted agreement from the majority of teachers on all 15 items pertaining to their confidence to enhance students' reading comprehension, including the first five items that pertain to the science of reading in particular and the last two items regarding support for individual students. Even though the teachers were confident in their abilities to support students' reading development pre-PD sessions, they expressed even greater confidence post-sessions. Post-PD sessions, the vast majority of items ($n=14$) received a higher level of confidence rating, with one item having lower agreement post-session (i.e., transferring responsibility from me to my students). The increase in levels of confidence pertaining to supporting reading comprehension suggests the PD sessions positively influenced teachers' confidence in that regard. A Wilcoxon signed rank test revealed statistically significant

differences between the pre-and post-questionnaire results, $W=2$, ($p<.05$), indicating greater agreement post-PD sessions with 1 being strongly agree ($Md=1.82$, $n=7$) compared to before ($Md= 2.12$, $n=35$).

Table 2. Teachers' Confidence to Enhance Students' Reading Comprehension

Item #	Questionnaire Item I am confident...	Pre-PD sessions			Post-PD sessions		
		M	SD	Count	M	SD	Count
1	supporting students to recognize individual sounds (phonemes).	2.15	0.49	27	1.86	0.64	6
2	supporting students to recognize word sounds.	2.12	0.58	26	2.00	0.53	6
3	highlighting positive transfer opportunities between languages.	1.86	0.59	31	1.57	0.49	7
4	facilitating students' vocabulary development.	1.94	0.48	31	1.71	0.45	7
5	guiding students in the act of reading.	2.18	0.51	26	1.71	0.45	7
6	teaching reading strategies.	1.91	0.60	30	1.71	0.70	6
7	planning lessons with pre-, during, post-reading activities.	2.09	0.56	27	2.00	0.76	5
8	providing a purpose for the reading.	1.97	0.62	28	1.71	0.45	7
9	transferring responsibility from me to my students.	2.03	0.51	29	2.14	0.35	6
10	emphasizing oral skills as a basis for reading development.	1.91	0.70	27	1.29	0.45	7
11	using writing in the development of reading skills.	2.38	0.49	21	1.71	0.45	7
12	setting up the conditions for students to develop reading fluidity.	2.41	0.60	18	2.14	0.83	4
13	enhancing students' understanding of reading passages.	2.18	0.51	26	1.86	0.35	7
14	determining students' individual needs as they pertain to reading development.	2.32	0.67	19	1.86	0.35	7
15	responding to students' individual reading needs.	2.38	0.59	19	2.00	0.53	6

In addition to the questionnaire data, the semi-structured interviews provided additional information related to supporting students' reading development. Teachers highlighted the importance of the topic, including aspects associated with the science of reading, as they hadn't had such learning in the past.

I've been teaching for eight or nine years now, and we didn't really have a lot of PD going into reading and writing, especially in primary; it's a lot of oral. There wasn't a huge emphasis on that [reading] and so I found it very useful for me because I haven't had a lot of chance to really delve into it. Teacher 1

The decoding piece in earlier sessions was something that I had never known before obviously, I know how to do it myself, but to teach children to do it was nothing that I was ever trained on. Teacher 2

I felt like this is actually the first time that I've been able to acquire very clear and specific reading skills, so I'm very thrilled, and I'm a little sad that it's going to end. Teacher 3

I've always wondered how I teach reading because I just kind of got thrown into it and English is different than French. I never had any PD specific to literacy and all that stuff when we started with the board; they gave that to a lot of the English teachers... so for me, this was really really very useful. Teacher 6

I am learning about reading comprehension, differentiation, learning about decoding and the sounds. It really did respond to exactly what I needed at this point in time. Teacher 7

Some interviewees specified their appreciation of the resources provided:

This specifically felt so much more heavy and a good way heavy because there's so much and to kind of have the book opened in front of you now now we can start going through the pages right and we're consolidating what we are hearing it is overwhelming to hear all of these amazing strategies and think oh my goodness like when am I going to put these into place and how but at least the book is over right also rather than just choosing a good Canadian book for this series of PD sessions you actually had the author join you in the room Teacher 2

Sharing the various programs with us that are often used in younger grades, I didn't even know they existed and I have been struggling with junior and intermediate students who are very low [in reading] for where they're supposed to be for various reasons. And it's been nice to have all kinds of resources shared, like, "Okay, with this group, I'm going to try this program. Teacher 4

Although not addressed in the questionnaire, in the interviews, teachers underscored their appreciation of the guest speaker.

I think it was having her [guest speaker] being able to break things down for us and be able to ask questions. I mean you can't do that you can't ask a question to a book, you can't ask a book to give you an example on how you would actually implement that in the classroom, whereas she can just do it right then and there. I love today how she gave examples...like small group ideas on what actually tends to work best and easiest well yeah we want to know how to do things the easier way. Teacher 1

She's [guest speaker, book author] such a great valuable person, off the cuff she can answer all your questions because she has so much knowledge to give. It's just so nice to be able to hear from someone who is like not of the circle who can bring in some outside information and to read that book and not ever talk to her I don't think I would pull as much from the book but to read the book and talk with her and her refer to the book and go back in the book and then talk with her you know what I mean and it just feels like the book has so much more value now. Teacher 2

In summary, teachers expressed confidence to enhance their students' reading comprehension skills pre-questionnaire. It is important to note that the significant classroom experience of the participants may have supported such confidence. In addition, it is possible that second language teachers have strategies from language learning pedagogy that are transferrable to reading instruction as seen in other studies (e.g., Mady, 2020). Despite such confidence pre-PD, following four PD sessions on the topic of reading in FSL classes, the teachers were more confident to support students' reading comprehension. The interviews confirmed the relevance of the focus on reading for the participating teachers. Teachers also highlighted their appreciation for the guest speaker and the resources provided. It is worth highlighting that the receptivity of the teachers may have also been bolstered by the use of a PD model that responded to their learning trajectories (Cammarata et al., 2018) from the selection of the topic to the development of sessions two to four according to their needs (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2019).

Discussion and Conclusion

The review of the literature reflected the Ontario context where teachers are thirsty for means to support their students' reading development as encouraged by the *Right to Read* report (2022) and its influence in the newly published language curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023). In anticipation of a similar future thrust in FSL contexts, we focused on second language contexts and underscored the potential for foci from the science of reading and explicit instruction to positively impact student's reading in French as requested by the participating teachers. The offering of four full-day reading-focused PD sessions proved beneficial to FSL teachers' confidence to support their students' reading development. In fact, all but one of the post-questionnaire items showed an increase in FSL teacher confidence to

use those strategies to support their students. All of the items on the examined science of reading components showed an increase in confidence to focus on phonological awareness word structures, to guide students in the act of reading, and to concentrate on vocabulary development. In addition, teachers gained the confidence to encourage positive transfer between/among languages as supported by research evidence. It is important to note that this willingness to consider using multiple languages in the FSL class may be a change for FSL teachers who have often been encouraged to use French as the sole language of the class. As such, this may be an area where teachers will need additional support as they reflect upon how to balance the advantages of explicit instruction that includes the use of languages other than French and the need to use French as the language of the class. This may also be an area for future research. Further, the post-questionnaire results showed an increase in teachers' confidence to respond to individual students' needs which may prove beneficial in light of the *Right to Read* report (2022) that underscored a need to focus on students in difficulty in particular. Although the goal in organizing the PD sessions in a flexible way so as to respond to teachers' needs, by the board selecting the topic and by responding to teachers' request for more information on the science of reading, as shown beneficial to impact practice (e.g., Stille et al., 2016) as opposed to prescriptive PD (Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008), such flexibility limited the pre- and post- questionnaire to mirror the PD topics with great detail to the extent that would otherwise be possible with more prescriptive PD. Despite these limitations, the collaborative approach to PD may have been more impactful on teacher practice than one designed without the flexibility to address teachers' expressed needs at the time.

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