LINGUISTIC PROXIMITY, CULTURAL DISTANCE: RETHINKING INTEGRATION FOR ALGERIAN STUDENTS IN MONTREAL

Leila Kara Mostefa-Boussena [1]
Faculty of Foreign Languages, Department of English
Hassiba Ben Bouali University of Chlef, Algeria
l.boussena@univ-chlef.dz

Abstract. This article investigates the paradox of integration among Algerian students in French-speaking Montreal, where linguistic familiarity with French does not always guarantee social or institutional belonging. Drawing on qualitative data from in-depth interviews, the study examines how students experience the promise and limitations of their language capital within Quebec's unique intercultural and linguistic framework. While French proficiency facilitates formal access to post-secondary and vocational training, students often report challenges related to accent-based discrimination, unfamiliar local codes, and perceived sociocultural distance. A key dimension explored in the study concerns the implicit expectations placed on newcomers to align with Quebec's public culture—especially regarding visible cultural expressions in public space. While personal religious or cultural identities are respected, the public display of such identities, particularly through clothing, can be misinterpreted by segments of the host society as a refusal to integrate or a challenge to the social norm. This perception, frequently voiced in Quebecois media and public discourse, may intensify feelings of cultural misunderstanding or even provoke resistance. The findings suggest that successful integration requires more than linguistic fluency—it demands a critical awareness of how cultural signals are received and interpreted in Quebec's distinct civic context. Positive experiences of institutional support and growing intercultural awareness among students also point to the potential for mutual understanding. The study concludes by calling for culturally responsive integration frameworks that address both structural inclusion and embodied, everyday encounters, while also equipping newcomers with the knowledge to engage with public expectations without compromising personal identity.

Keywords: Algerian students; identity negotiation; integration; inter-culturalism; linguistic capital; Quebec; symbolic exclusion

How to cite the article:

Kara Mostefa-Boussena, L. (2025). Linguistic Proximity, Cultural Distance: Rethinking Integration for Algerian Students in Montreal. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture, and Society (JSLCS)8*(4), pp. 460-472.

---

[1] **Corresponding author :** Leila Kara Mostefa-Boussena , **ORCID**:   https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6901-6543

1. Introduction

Immigration continues to play a pivotal role in shaping the demographic and sociolinguistic landscape of Quebec. In 2024 alone, the province welcomed over 14,330 newcomers, with immigration accounting for nearly all of its population growth and pushing its total population to approximately 5.6% (Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2025). Within this dynamic, Montreal remains a central hub for international migrants, particularly those from French-speaking countries. While countries such as India, China, and the Philippines dominate national immigration figures, Quebec's distinct linguistic profile has attracted a steady flow of migrants from North Africa, including Algeria.

Within this broader migration trend, Algeria has emerged as a consistent contributor to Quebec's Francophone immigration. Between 2023 and 2024, Algeria represented approximately 6% of new permanent residents in Quebec, ranking behind Cameroon, France, Tunisia, and China (Institut de la statistique du Québec [ISQ], 2025). Although Algerians do not form one of the largest immigrant communities numerically, they occupy a notable position among Francophone migrants due to shared linguistic and educational trajectories shaped by historical ties to French-language instruction. This presence is further concentrated in Montreal's professional training institutions and universities, where Algerian students frequently pursue diplomas and degrees as pathways to integration and mobility.

Yet, the transition from linguistic familiarity to full integration is not always straightforward. Despite their strong presence in educational institutions and their apparent linguistic advantage, many Algerian students report complex, and at times contradictory, experiences of integration. This contrast forms the basis of the present study, which investigates the paradoxes of linguistic familiarity by exploring the experiences of Algerian students move through French-speaking academic and social environments in Montreal. Given Algeria's historical use of French in education and administration, Algerian students often arrive with advanced language proficiency. However, this shared language does not always translate into ease of integration. On the contrary, linguistic familiarity may obscure deeper structural barriers related to migration status, cultural expectations, or perceived social origin—what Bourdieu (1991) and later (Darvin & Norton, 2015a) describe as "mis-recognized capital," where linguistic competence is not enough to ensure symbolic inclusion.

These structural challenges are compounded by another dimension often overlooked in discussions of integration is the public reception of cultural and religious expressions, particularly those made visible through clothing or behavior. While private religious beliefs are broadly respected, public symbols—such as the wearing of the hijab or traditional dress—are sometimes interpreted in Quebec media and political discourse as signs of cultural non-alignment or even rejection of the host society's values. As Premier François Legault declared in June 2022, *"It's important that we don't put all cultures all the same level. We have one culture, Quebec culture"* (Henriques, 2022). Further, in introducing Bill 84, Immigration and French Language Minister Jean-François Roberge emphasized that the legislation articulates a distinct Québec approach to integration and a departure from Canada's official multiculturalism model, asserting that immigrants are expected to engage with Quebec's common culture as defined in the bill (Bill 84, An Act respecting national integration, 2025).

Against this backdrop, this article adopts a qualitative approach, combining semi-structured interviews with Algerian students and an analysis of Quebec's educational and integration frameworks. It seeks to understand how linguistic similarity interacts with institutional structures and social attitudes to either facilitate or hinder integration. Ultimately, the findings challenge the assumption that a shared language guarantees a smoother

integration process, underscoring the complexity of migration experiences in officially bilingual but socioculturally stratified spaces like Montreal.

Building on this conceptual foundation, the article proceeds as follows: the first section reviews key literature on integration theories, Quebec's intercultural model, and the specific dynamics of Algerian migration to Montreal. The second section outlines the methodological framework, detailing the sampling process, interview design, and qualitative analytical procedures. The third section presents the main findings, organized around three central themes: linguistic recognition, institutional inclusion, and identity negotiation. The concluding section offers practical recommendations for policymakers and educators, highlighting the need for integration strategies that account for the paradoxes faced by students who are linguistically prepared but remain socially marginal.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Integration, Belonging, and Linguistic Capital

Scholarship on migration has long emphasized that integration is multidimensional, involving social, cultural, economic, civic, and identity components rather than a single outcome (Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). Within this multidimensional framework, language proficiency emerges as a fundamental enabler, closely tied to several key domains of integration. As Derwing and Waugh (2012) point out, "language proficiency is a fundamental prerequisite for immigrants' participation in the labour market, education system and civic life in Canada" (p. 3), highlighting how language functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a gateway to economic inclusion, educational advancement, and civic engagement.

However, critical sociolinguistic and sociological work complicates the assumption that language competence alone produces belonging. Bourdieu (1991) conceptualizes language as symbolic capital whose value depends on recognition within a given linguistic market; speakers whose varieties, accents, or pragmatic norms diverge from the legitimized form may find their competence discounted. Building on similar lines, Blommaert (2010) argues that linguistic resources are stratified and unevenly evaluated across contexts shaped by globalization, migration, and institutional ideologies. As he explains, "it is not the study of an abstract language, but the study of concrete language resources in which people make different investments and to which they attribute different values and degrees of usefulness. In the context of globalization … patterns of value and use become less predictable" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 28).

This theoretical perspective finds empirical support in research from Canadian and transnational settings, which shows that immigrants who speak the dominant language may nonetheless face exclusion when their linguistic performance indexes racialized or non-local identities. Creese and Kambere (2003, p. 570), for example, recount how African-background women in Canada are marked as "Other" and may even be asked, "What color is your English?", highlighting how racialized perceptions undermine linguistic legitimacy. In a similar vein, Bonny Norton's influential work argues that immigrant language learners' identities—particularly those marked as "other"—shape their access to belonging even when they possess competence in the dominant language. Her concept of *investment* captures how power, identity, and language intersect in exclusionary practices, illustrating that linguistic inclusion is not simply a matter of proficiency but of recognition within hierarchized social structures (Norton, 2013).

When the focus shifts to student populations, the link between language and identity becomes especially dynamic. Acculturation frameworks (Berry, 1997, 2005) show that integration outcomes depend not only on individual adaptation but also on the receiving society's openness to cultural difference. When institutional contexts define "acceptable" linguistic and cultural participation narrowly, the integrative potential of prior language knowledge can be sharply limited (Cummins, 2001; McAndrew, 2012). These theoretical insights are crucial for interpreting the experiences of Algerian students in Montreal who arrive with French competence yet encounter social distance. Such tensions between language, identity, and institutional expectations are particularly pronounced in Quebec, where language policy plays a central role in shaping integration experiences

2.2 Quebec's Language Regime and Intercultural Model

Quebec's integration trajectory differs from Canada's federal multicultural policy by foregrounding the protection of French as the common public language while affirming pluralism within that linguistic frame (Gagnon & Iacovino, 2003). The Charter of the French Language (Bill 101, C-11, 1977/2025) established French as the normal and everyday language of education, work, and government. Subsequent debates—including the 2007–08 Bouchard–Taylor Commission on reasonable accommodation—reaffirmed that linguistic cohesion must coexist with cultural diversity (Cooper, 2020). More recently, Bill 96 (*Loi sur la langue officielle et commune du Québec*, 2022, chap. 14) strengthened French language requirements in education, public services, and the workplace, intensifying policy attention to francization for immigrants (Loi sur la langue officielle et commune du Québec, 2022, chap. 14).

Building on this legislative foundation, Quebec's inter-culturalism is often described as majority-language–anchored pluralism: diversity is welcomed, but French remains non-negotiable as the common public code. As Gagnon and Iacovino (2007) explain, Quebec's inter-culturalism is rooted in a French-language–anchored public sphere. Similarly, Rocher and Labelle (2010, pp. 179–203) describe how diversity is accepted provided that French remains the unifying language. Within this model, francophone immigrants are theoretically well positioned: possessing French-language skills should grant smoother institutional access than is available to non-Francophones.

Yet, the lived realities of integration reveal important limitations to this assumption. Research suggests that linguistic alignment does not guarantee equitable treatment. Gauvin and Bilodeau (2025) find that accented speech or visible markers of difference—such as skin colour or non-local pronunciation—can significantly diminish perceived credibility, thereby undermining the inclusiveness that the francophone integration model is intended to foster. Such evaluative bias is particularly evident in postsecondary and professional training contexts, where language assessments—calibrated to Quebec norms—play a decisive role in credential recognition, licensing, and placement. For Algerian students, this dual structure produces ambivalent outcomes: while shared language offers formal access, subtle forms of exclusion can persist in faculty and peer evaluations.

2.3 Algerian and Maghrebi Immigration to Quebec: Cultural Proximity, and Racialization

Migration from the Maghreb—especially Algeria (3,735), Morocco (3,420), and Tunisia (1,055)—has gained visibility within Canada's francophone immigration flow, though the actual numbers remain modest compared with larger global source countries, even outside Quebec (IRCC, 2024). Broader data show that, outside Quebec, approximately 132,195 French-speaking immigrants were admitted over the past two decades, signaling a growing but still limited demographic footprint (IRCC, 2024). Historical ties to French colonial

education endowed many Algerian migrants with established French literacy prior to migration (Benrabah, 2007). However, ethnographic and policy studies reveal that linguistic proximity does not erase racialized difference: North African and Arab Muslim populations in Quebec often report discrimination in employment, housing, and institutional interactions despite their French fluency (Helly, 2004). Research on Montreal's urban diversity further documents patterns of symbolic inclusion coupled with practical exclusion affecting visible minority Francophones (Lenoir-Achdjian, Mace, & Sadiqi, 2009).

This dynamic becomes particularly pronounced in educational contexts. For youth and students, school and training settings operate as key arenas where social hierarchies are re-articulated through language norms, curriculum, and peer interaction (Potvin, 2010, pp. 210–216; McAndrew et al., 2015). In Quebec, studies consistently document how immigrant students—particularly those of Maghrebi or broader racialized backgrounds—often face streaming into adult general education or vocational tracks, even when their prior qualifications merit otherwise (Potvin & Leclercq, 2014). Moreover, linguistic prejudice, including accent-based stereotyping and the marginalization of so-called non-standard French, exerts a significant influence on academic trajectories (Chin, 2010). These experiences align with broader patterns of systemic gate-keeping in credential recognition and labor market access among francophone immigrants (Darchinian & Magnan, 2020).

Within this landscape, standardized language assessments add another layer of complexity. Tests such as the Test de Connaissance du Français (TCF) function as gate-keeping mechanisms for educational and occupational access, but they also serve as enablers for linguistic inclusion. Algerian students who must pass the TCF to be eligible for university or DEP programs often arrive with validated language capital, a prerequisite that facilitates formal entry into Quebec institutions. In Quebec, French is an integral part of everyday life; proficiency in the language is essential for daily functioning, facilitating both social integration and active participation in the province's development (Quebec.ca, n.d., Author's translation). Yet, success on these tests does not always shield students from social exclusion based on accent, race, or cultural unfamiliarity (Potvin, 2010).

Finally, qualitative research underscores the affective and identity-based dimensions of these experiences. Studies with immigrant-background youth in Quebec highlight the identity strain that arises when institutional norms collide with their lived multilingual practices. Such findings reinforce the view that integration is not solely a matter of linguistic adaptation but also of negotiating belonging within complex interpersonal and cultural landscapes (Darchinian & Magnan, 2020).

2.4 Language Ideologies, Standardization, and Institutional Expectations in Quebec Education

Even when newcomers demonstrate functional French proficiency, institutions often privilege standardized Quebec French through law and policy, which can sideline transnational francophone repertoires. The Charter of the French Language (Bill 101/96) now mandates that colleges and universities adopt and enforce formal language policies, linking certain credentials to demonstrable French proficiency (Charter of the French Language, 2025).

These legislative requirements intersect with the expanding francization system, which is intended to support linguistic integration but can also create new barriers. While government data cite record participation, increasing wait times have turned parts of the system into bureaucratic obstacles that do not always align with learners' actual competencies. As Berrada (2024) notes, 80% of students entering from outside Quebec are now required to

demonstrate level-5 French proficiency, equivalent to an intermediate level, before obtaining their degree.

Although benchmarks such as the Échelle Québécoise are valuable for placement purposes (Francoflex, 2025), their alignment with actual academic or professional language demands remains contested. For instance, such scales typically assess general communicative ability, which may not adequately reflect the language requirements of specific professional or disciplinary contexts—an acknowledged validity limitation when broad proficiency frameworks are applied outside their intended general-use domain (Douglas, 2000).

The practical application of these standards further illustrates how institutional expectations shape student experiences. Measures such as new French course and exit requirements in CEGEPs demonstrate how language policy is operationalized in ways that directly influence student pathways, credential attainment, and everyday language use (Dawson College, 2025; Charte de la langue française, C-11, s.d., Gouvernement du Québec).

2.5 Student Integration, Belonging, and Identity Negotiation

Educational settings are central sites of socialization where immigrant youth construct belonging across linguistic, ethnic, and civic dimensions (Darvin & Norton, 2015b). In Quebec, research shows that inclusive pedagogies, peer networks, and recognition of prior learning support immigrant student retention and identity affirmation (McAndrew et al., 2015; Vatz Laaroussi et al., 2008). Conversely, when immigrant language or culture is discussed in negative or limiting ways, students often feel less engaged, and their abilities may be overlooked (Potvin, 2010). For francophone immigrants of Maghrebi origin, religion, racialization, and geopolitics may intersect with linguistic identity, challenging the assumption that simply speaking the same language automatically ensures comfort or acceptance (Eid, 2012).

It is within this complex interplay of factors that the present article positions its inquiry. Specifically, it focuses on Algerian students in Montreal's French-speaking postsecondary and vocational environments, examining how they interpret the promise and limits of linguistic familiarity in relation to institutional access, peer interaction, and emerging identities. By centering student voices, it addresses a gap in the literature, which has documented policy frameworks and broad integration outcomes, yet offers fewer qualitative accounts of francophone immigrant students who arrive linguistically equipped but remain socially peripheral (McAndrew, 2019; Labelle, 2010; Potvin, 2010).

3. Methodology

This section outlines the methodological choices that guided the study, beginning with the context in which it was conducted, followed by the research design, data collection, and interpretive approach used to analyse participants' experiences.

3.1 Context of the study

This research is situated in French-speaking Montreal, a city characterized by both its Francophone majority and its multicultural student population. Algerian students form one of the largest groups of international Francophone students in Quebec, arriving with strong linguistic capital due to their prior mastery of French. Despite this apparent advantage, many encounter subtle barriers related to identity negotiation, symbolic exclusion, and intercultural adaptation within academic and social environments. Montreal thus represents a particularly relevant context to examine the paradox of integration for students who already speak the host society's dominant language, yet face challenges in translating linguistic familiarity into full social and institutional inclusion.

3.2 Research Design

This study employs a semi-structured interview format to gather in-depth narratives from participants. This design was selected for its adaptability, enabling respondents to elaborate on themes concerning linguistic adaptation, institutional encounters, and personal strategies for integration. Interview questions were thematically aligned with the literature review and organized into three domains: (1) language and communication, (2) educational experiences, and (3) identity negotiation.

Guided by an interpretive paradigm, the research proceeds from the premise that social reality is co-constructed through interaction and is best understood via participants' subjective accounts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). This focus on meaning-making was central to addressing the study's core question: To what extent does linguistic familiarity facilitate or constrain integration for Algerian students within Montreal's Francophone institutions?

3.3 Sampling and Participants

This study draws on a sample of 24 Algerian students, recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling made it possible to target participants whose educational paths aligned with the study's objectives. Snowball sampling, where existing participants suggest new ones from within their networks, proved especially useful for reaching individuals who might have remained outside the scope of formal, institution-based recruitment channels (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981)

Of the 24 participants, eighteen were enrolled in professional training programs (Diplôme d'études professionnelles – DEP), while six were pursuing university degrees in Francophone institutions. This distribution reflects a broader demographic trend: many Algerian immigrants in Quebec, particularly those who have arrived in recent years, choose vocational education as a practical route toward employment and legal status (Benhadjoudja, 2019).

Data collection was carried out during two fieldwork periods—October 2024 and June 2025—following a longer phase of preliminary observation initiated in November 2023. The research combined visits to DEP institutions and other educational settings in Montreal with interactions in community and workplace contexts where Algerian students were employed part-time. Participants were recruited through community centers, educational institutions, and peer networks.

Participants ranged in age from 19 to 35, with a gender balance of 13 men and 11 women. All interviews were conducted in French, the primary language used for both education and institutional interactions.

3.4 Data Collection and Procedures

Each participant took part in a one-on-one semi-structured interview lasting approximately 45 to 75 minutes, conducted either in person during field visits or remotely via secure video-conferencing platforms. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim to preserve the depth and authenticity of responses.

Ethical clearance was secured from the relevant institutional review board, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. The consent process clearly explained participants' rights, including confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

The interview guide was organized around three thematic domains, each aligned with the aims of the study:

1. Linguistic integration – covering perceptions of fluency and accent, and everyday interactions.

2. Institutional experiences – including access to support services, experiences of discrimination, and attitudes of educators.

3. Cultural and identity dimensions – exploring sense of belonging, cultural dissonance, and the role of peer relationships.

This semi-structured format was intentionally selected for its balance of guidance and flexibility; it enabled consistency across interviews while allowing participants to express rich and nuanced perspectives on their integration journeys. Semi-structured interviews are widely used in qualitative research to explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in depth, and to capture sensitive, personal experiences (Yin, 2017).

3.5 Coding and Analysis

Following the completion of transcription, the interview data were examined through thematic analysis, a flexible approach for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytic process began with open coding, which involved generating initial descriptive labels closely tied to participants' words and experiences. This was followed by axial coding, during which related codes were clustered into higher-order categories, including symbolic linguistic recognition, institutional gate-keeping, and cultural dissonance.

To manage and organize this process efficiently, NVivo (2023) software was used to systematize the coding, facilitate cross-referencing between themes, and ensure easy retrieval of coded segments—enhancing both the transparency and auditability of the analysis.

Finally, to strengthen the credibility of the findings, member checking was conducted with a subset of five participants. They were invited to review thematic summaries and provide feedback, confirming both the accuracy and the personal resonance of the interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4. Results

The analysis of twenty-four interviews with Algerian students in Montreal—primarily enrolled in DEP programs and, to a lesser extent, in university studies—revealed a set of interrelated challenges to their integration. Although all participants had demonstrated French proficiency through the Test de Connaissance du Français (TCF), as required for immigration, study, or work permit eligibility (Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration [MIFI], 2023), many nevertheless experienced a persistent sense of linguistic and cultural exclusion upon arrival in Quebec. This paradox highlights the gap between formal linguistic validation and informal social recognition, particularly in contexts where accent, pragmatic competence, and cultural behaviour strongly influence perceptions of belonging. The requirement to present results from tests recognized by the MIFI, such as the TCF, illustrates how official language policy privileges formal certification even when real-world communicative competence may differ from test performance.

Taken together, these findings reveal that Algerian students' experiences of integration in Montreal are shaped not only by their certified proficiency in French but also by complex cultural, institutional, and relational dynamics. While language remains a central factor, students' testimonies point to broader processes of symbolic exclusion, social evaluation, and identity negotiation that extend beyond linguistic competence. The subsequent discussion

situates these results within existing theoretical frameworks, highlighting the paradox of linguistic familiarity and its limits in fostering full social and institutional inclusion.

5. Discussion

The findings highlight a central paradox: linguistic proficiency, formally validated through tests such as the TCF, does not automatically translate into social belonging or institutional ease. This aligns with Blommaert's (2010) argument that linguistic capital is not universally transferable; legitimacy often depends less on structural correctness than on who is speaking, with accented or racialized speakers more likely to have their competence questioned. Similarly, Duchêne (2011) emphasizes that language can serve both as a gateway and a barrier in neo-liberal societies, where integration is officially framed in terms of merit but informally governed by implicit norms of appropriateness and sameness.

The cultural misalignments reported by participants reinforce findings from intercultural communication research, which show that integration difficulties frequently arise from unspoken behavioural codes rather than overt language deficits (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). For example, relational practices rooted in Algerian norms of physical closeness and familiarity were sometimes misread in Quebec as excessive intimacy or unprofessional behaviour, generating feelings of discomfort and self-surveillance among students. These experiences underscore the need for orientation programs and pedagogical initiatives that explicitly address nonverbal codes, interactional expectations, and the diversity of francophone repertoires, rather than focusing narrowly on grammatical or lexical proficiency (Guilherme, 2002; Dervin & Gao, 2021).

Institutional gaps further compound these challenges. Students with certified French proficiency are often excluded from francisation and language support systems on the assumption that they no longer require assistance, yet they remain exposed to subtle exclusion, accent-based discrimination, and opaque bureaucratic requirements. Their "liminal" status—neither fully foreign nor fully Québécois—echoes Lustig and Koester's (2010) notion of partial visibility in host societies, where some aspects of identity are recognized while others remain marginalized.

Finally, the strategies of adaptation described by participants—ranging from accent modification and selective self-silencing to seeking solidarity in peer networks and community spaces—demonstrate that integration is not a unilateral process but a relational one. Dervin and Gao (2021) emphasize that successful integration depends as much on the readiness of host institutions and communities to interpret difference generously as on newcomers' willingness to adapt. The findings therefore highlight the importance of institutional initiatives that move beyond linguistic testing toward intercultural training, anti-discrimination mechanisms, and inclusive policies that address both visible and invisible barriers to belonging.

6. Limitations

While this study provides important insights into the interplay between linguistic familiarity and integration processes, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size of 24 participants—while adequate for an in-depth qualitative inquiry—limits statistical generalizability and may not capture the full diversity of Algerian or broader Maghrebi trajectories in Quebec. Second, the over-representation of vocational training (DEP) students may bias the analysis toward a particular institutional pathway, potentially under-representing university-level and CEGEP experiences. Third, the reliance on purposive and snowball sampling likely favoured more socially connected students, potentially under-representing those who are more isolated or less engaged in community and institutional networks.

Fourth, data collection was restricted to Montreal and conducted during a specific period (2023–2025) marked by significant policy changes, including Bill 96 and francisation reforms. Experiences in other regions or cohorts might differ under alternative policy or labour market conditions. Finally, the analysis is based primarily on self-reported narratives, which, while essential for an interpretive approach, may be influenced by recall bias, social desirability, or the dynamics of the interview context.

These constraints do not diminish the value of the findings; rather, they highlight the need for complementary studies that include diverse regions, institutional settings, and methodological approaches (e.g., classroom observation, longitudinal designs) to further explore how linguistic familiarity intersects with structural and symbolic dimensions of integration in Quebec.

7. Conclusion

This study explored the integration experiences of Algerian students in French-speaking Montreal, focusing on those who, despite arriving with certified proficiency in French, continue to face cultural, social, and institutional barriers. The findings reveal a key paradox: linguistic familiarity, often assumed to confer an advantage, does not automatically ensure social inclusion or a sense of belonging. Instead, students navigate a landscape of subtle exclusions rooted in accent-based discrimination, cultural misalignment, and institutional blind spots.

Most participants had passed the Test de Connaissance du Français (TCF) and reported linguistic competence in academic or administrative contexts. Yet many struggled in social interactions, not due to vocabulary or grammar deficits, but because of cultural pragmatics and interpersonal norms—elements seldom addressed in integration or orientation programs. Gestures of solidarity, such as tactile friendliness or unsolicited sharing, were sometimes misinterpreted as intrusive or inappropriate, reinforcing the distinction between linguistic access (functional proficiency) and communicative integration (being recognized as a legitimate, "normal" speaker in everyday interactions).

The study also illuminates promising practices and adaptive strategies. Participants with access to intercultural training, inclusive classroom environments, or peer support networks reported more positive experiences, echoing research advocating for orientation and teaching practices attentive to intersecting identities. These cases affirm that integration is a reciprocal process, requiring both institutional responsiveness and newcomer agency.

Ultimately, the study underscores the limits of linguistic familiarity as a proxy for integration. Algerian students in Montreal occupy a distinctive position: linguistically prepared yet socially peripheral, fluent yet still perceived as foreign. Their experiences demonstrate that belonging is not merely spoken—it is lived, felt, and negotiated through everyday interactions that shape a society's sense of inclusion.

Recommendations

In light of these findings, the article proposes the following recommendations:

1. Expand Integration Programs Beyond Language Acquisition: For immigrants who already speak the host language, integration support should extend to cultural codes, behavioral norms, and institutional literacy. This is especially relevant in French-speaking Quebec, where language policies sometimes obscure the need for social inclusion strategies tailored to immigrants from Francophone countries.

2. Address Accent and Pragmatic Discrimination: Educational institutions and employers should be sensitized to the legitimacy of different French varieties. Awareness campaigns and

training can help reduce the social penalties associated with Maghrebi accents or culturally distinct communication styles.

3. Promote Intercultural Dialogue in Vocational and University Settings: Schools offering DEP and higher education programs should include structured spaces for cultural exchange, such as discussion circles, mentorship programs, or intercultural awareness workshops. These interventions could mitigate stereotypes and foster greater mutual understanding among diverse student bodies.

4. Recognize the Specificity of "Already Fluent" Immigrants: Policymakers and program designers should differentiate between linguistic newcomers and those who, like many Algerian students, arrive with a high level of French but still experience social and institutional marginalization. This group requires nuanced support, particularly around adapting to expectations and perceived proximity to local norms.

5. Conduct Further Research Across Provinces: While this study focused on Montreal, its insights may not capture the full range of experiences in other parts of Canada, especially in Anglophone provinces. Future research should investigate whether similar dynamics emerge in English-speaking contexts, and whether linguistic distance correlates with more visible integration efforts.

Ultimately, this article highlights the limits of linguistic familiarity as a proxy for integration and underscores the need for more context-sensitive and culturally responsive policies. Algerian students in Montreal straddle a unique position: they are linguistically prepared yet socially peripheral, fluent yet foreign. Their experiences remind us that belonging is not merely spoken—it is lived, felt, and negotiated in the everyday encounters that shape a society's sense of inclusion.

References

Benhadjoudja, L. (2019). *Enjeux de la formation professionnelle pour les nouveaux arrivants au Québec*. Presses de l'Université du Québec.

Benrabah, M. (2007). Language maintenance and spread : French in Algeria. *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, *10 (1–2)*, 193‑215. https://doi.org/10.1386/ijfs.10.1and2.193_1

Berrada, M. (2024, janvier 31). Is Quebec's plan to mandate non-francophone students to reach an intermediate level of French justified? *University Affairs*. https://universityaffairs.ca/news/is-quebecs-plan-to-mandate-non-francophone-students-to-reach-an-intermediate-level-of-french-justified/

Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, *46*(1), 5–34. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x

Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *29*(6), 697–712. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.013

Biernacki, P., & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball Sampling: Problems and Techniques of Chain Referral Sampling. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *10*(2), 141‑163. https://doi.org/10.1177/004912418101000205

Blommaert. (2010). A messy new marketplace. In *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*. Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power* (G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trad.; Thompson, John B.). Harvard University Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Taylor & Francis*, *3*(2), 77‑101.Charte de la langue française (C-11). https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Charter of the French Language (C-11). (2025). Gouvernement du Québec. https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cs/c-11

Chin, W. Y. (2010). Linguistic profiling in education: How accent bias denies equal educational opportunity. *The Scholar: St. Mary's Law Review on Race and Social Justice, 12*(3), 355–383.

Cooper, C. (2020). *Bouchard–Taylor Commission on reasonable accommodation in Quebec*. Canadian Encyclopedia.

Creese, G., & Kambere, E. N. (2003). What colour is your English? *Canadian Review of Sociology, 40*(5), 565–573. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-618X.2003.tb00005.x

Cummins, J. (2001). *Language, power, and pedagogy*. Multilingual Matters.

Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 35*, 36–56. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190514000191

Darchinian, F., & Magnan, M.-O. (2020). Boundaries through post-secondary orientation. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies, 7*(2), 50–67. https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/326

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2017). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage.

Derwing, T. M., & Waugh, E. (2012). *Language skills and the social integration of Canada's adult immigrants* (IRPP Study No. 31). Institute for Research on Public Policy.

Douglas, D. (2000). *Assessing languages for specific purposes*. Cambridge University Press.

Eid, P. (2012). *Mesurer la discrimination à l'embauche*. Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse.

Francoflex. (2025, April 8). Québec francisation scale (1-12) vs. CEFR scale explained (A1-C2). https://francoflex.com/en/blog/resources/quebec-francisation-scale-1-12-vs-cefr-scale-explained-a1-c2-explained

Gagnon, A.-G., & Iacovino, R. (2003). Le projet interculturel québécois. In A.-G. Gagnon (Ed.), *Québec: État et société* (pp. 413–438). Québec Amérique.

Gagnon, A.-G., & Iacovino, R. (2007). *Federalism, citizenship, and Quebec*. University of Toronto Press.

Gauvin, J.-P., & Bilodeau, A. (2025). Une crédibilité variable. *Recherches sociographiques, 66*(1), 119–143. https://doi.org/10.7202/1117186ar

Helly, D. (2004). Flux migratoires des pays musulmans. In U. Manço (Ed.), *L'islam entre discrimination et reconnaissance* (pp. 257–288). L'Harmattan.

Institut de la statistique du Québec. (2025). *Migrations internationales et interprovinciales*.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.

Loi sur la langue officielle et commune du Québec, le français (Bill 96), ch. 14 (Québec, 2022). Retrieved from https://www.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/Fichiers_client/lois_et_reglements/LoisAnnuelles/fr/2022/2022C14F.PDF.

McAndrew, M. (2012). Linguistic integration and equality of opportunity. In *Fragile majorities and education* (pp. 111–149). McGill–Queen's University Press.

McAndrew, M., et al. (2015). *La réussite éducative des élèves issus de l'immigration*. Presses de l'Université de Montréal.

Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration. (2025). *Demonstrate your knowledge of French through the Skilled Worker Selection Program*. Gouvernement du Québec. https://www.quebec.ca/en/immigration/permanent/skilled-workers/skilled-worker-selection-program/requirements/knowledge-french

National Assembly of Québec. (2025). *Bill 84, An Act respecting integration into the Québec nation* (43e législature, 1re session). https://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-84-43-1.html

Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning*. Multilingual Matters.

Penninx, R., & Garcés-Mascareñas, B. (2016). Integration as a concept and policy tool. In *Integration processes and policies in Europe* (pp. 11–29). Springer.

Potvin, M. (2010). Interethnic relations and racism in Quebec. In *Quebec questions* (pp. 271–296). Oxford University Press.

Potvin, M., & Leclercq, J.-B. (2014). Trajectoires scolaires des jeunes issus de l'immigration. *Revue des sciences de l'éducation, 40*(2), 309–349. https://doi.org/10.7202/1028423ar

QSR International. (2023). *NVivo* (Version 14) [Software].

Rocher, F., & Labelle, M. (2010). L'interculturalisme comme modèle. In *La diversité québécoise en débat* (pp. 179–203). Québec Amérique.

Vatz Laaroussi, M., Kanouté, F., & Rachédi, L. (2008). Familles immigrantes et réussite scolaire. *Revue des sciences de l'éducation, 34*(2), 291–311. https://doi.org/10.7202/019681ar

Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications* (6th ed.). Sage.