The Ready English Accessible for Caregivers at Home (REACH) Pilot

Flexible Language Training for Women Caring for Young Children

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INNOVATION • EXPERIMENTATION • EVALUATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Ready English Accessible for Caregivers at Home (REACH) program is a flexible online language training model targeted for newcomer women caring for children at home. REACH was designed to meet the needs of mothers who could not access other language training services, particularly Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes, due to childcare responsibilities. These barriers include lacking access to childcare and the inflexibility of traditional language training services when children are ill or during other absences related to family demands.

REACH and its curriculum were designed to improve participating women's English language skills and for them to use the information gained in the program to access community services, make informed decisions about their life in Canada, and participate in social networks. These gains should lead to improvements in participants' abilities to advocate for their children's needs, supporting children's development, and result in benefits beyond the participant herself, to her family and her community.

The project was managed by MOSAIC who partnered with two experienced service providers: Achēv in Ontario and Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) in Nova Scotia to ensure that REACH had a national yet locally customizable scope. The partners collaborated on the development of the curriculum and in administering the 9-month pilot training. The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) was the research and evaluation partner responsible for designing and implementing the evaluation of the REACH pilot project. A timeline of the REACH project is presented in Figure 1.

The evaluation of REACH was designed to 1) understand who joined the pilot, 2) assess the successes and challenges of implementing the pilot, during both the development phase as well as the pilot implementation phase, and 3) estimate the outcomes of REACH for participants in terms of improved language skills, increased knowledge of life in Canada, and participation in social networks and Canadian society more broadly. These outcomes are compared to their starting levels when participants first joined REACH and with a comparison group in order to estimate improvements that can, in all likelihood, be associated with participating in REACH.

Figure 1   REACH project timeline

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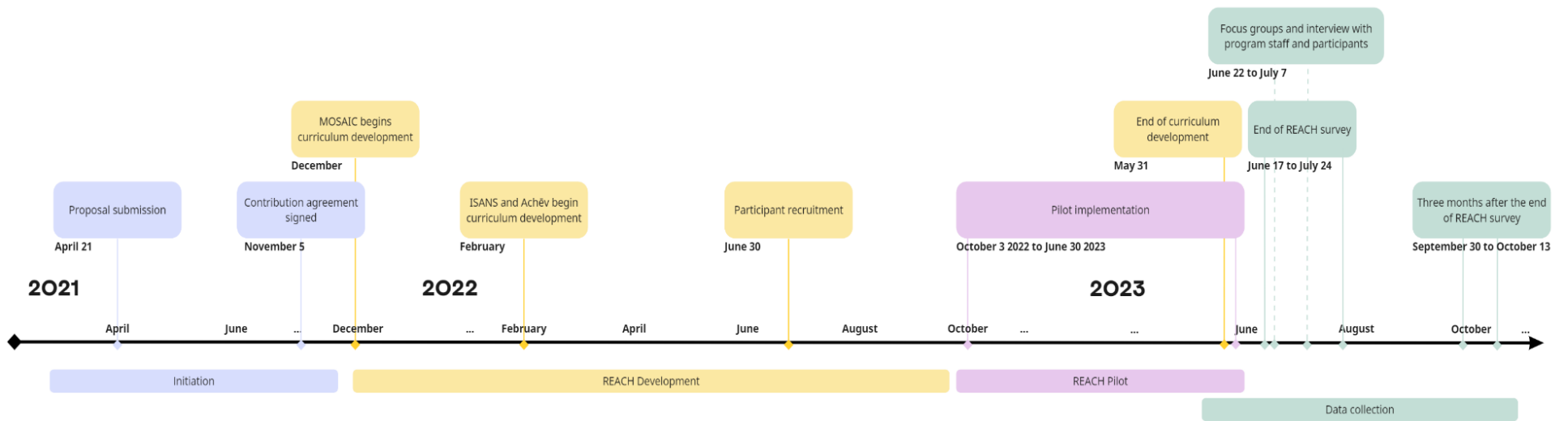
The report is structured as follows. We first describe the characteristics of the women who joined REACH. Next, we discuss the REACH curriculum development, participant recruitment, and the different REACH activities, how they were implemented, what worked well, and challenges encountered. We then present the outcomes of REACH in terms of English language acquisition and beyond, including measures of successful integration in Canada. We conclude with a summary of the findings and lessons learned. A more comprehensive description of the methodology, the detailed results, and the cost study are presented in the appendices.

Overall, we find that REACH achieved its goal of improving the English language skills of participants. After REACH, participants used their new skills to interact with their communities including with neighbours, other mothers, teachers, and doctors. They increased their use of services and their participation in community groups and events, thus supporting their integration into Canada. We summarize the evaluation's findings into five lessons regarding 1) recruitment and retention, 2) flexible programming, 3) English Skills, 4) Using English to improve integration into Canadian society, and 5) the benefits and disadvantages of virtual language instruction.

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REACH PARTICIPANTS

REACH was developed as a flexible English language training program for newcomer women caring for young children at home who may have had difficulty accessing and attending LINC classes. Fifty-six women joined REACH through Achēv, ISANS, and MOSAIC. All of these women are newcomers to Canada and either mothers or stepmothers caring for young (12 years old and younger[1]) children. Although each participant who joined REACH is unique with their own identity and experiences, a summary of participants' characteristics provides insights into who participated in REACH. These characteristics are summarized below.

Age: At the time of joining REACH, the average age of participants was 35. Approximately, 19% of participants were 30 years old or younger, 62% were between 31 and 40 years old, and 19% were 41 years or older.

First language and place of birth: There is a lot of variation in the home countries and languages spoken by REACH participants. Ukrainian is the most prevalent first language among participants with approximately 21% of participants. It is followed by Persian (13%), Tigrigna (13%), Spanish (11%), and Arabic (11%). REACH participants came to Canada from 26 different countries. Approximately, 38% of participants were born in Africa and the Middle East, 24% were born in Asia or the Pacific, 22% were born in Europe, and 16% were born in the Americas.

Family status: When joining REACH, most participants were married or in a common-law relationship (91%) and approximately 79% of participants lived in households with two or more adults, including themselves. Participants, on average, had two children ranging in age from 3.6 months to 19 years with an average age of six years and a mode (the most common age) of around three years old.

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[1]   MOSAIC only recruited women who had children aged six years and younger to join REACH.

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Figure 2   Number of children and their ages
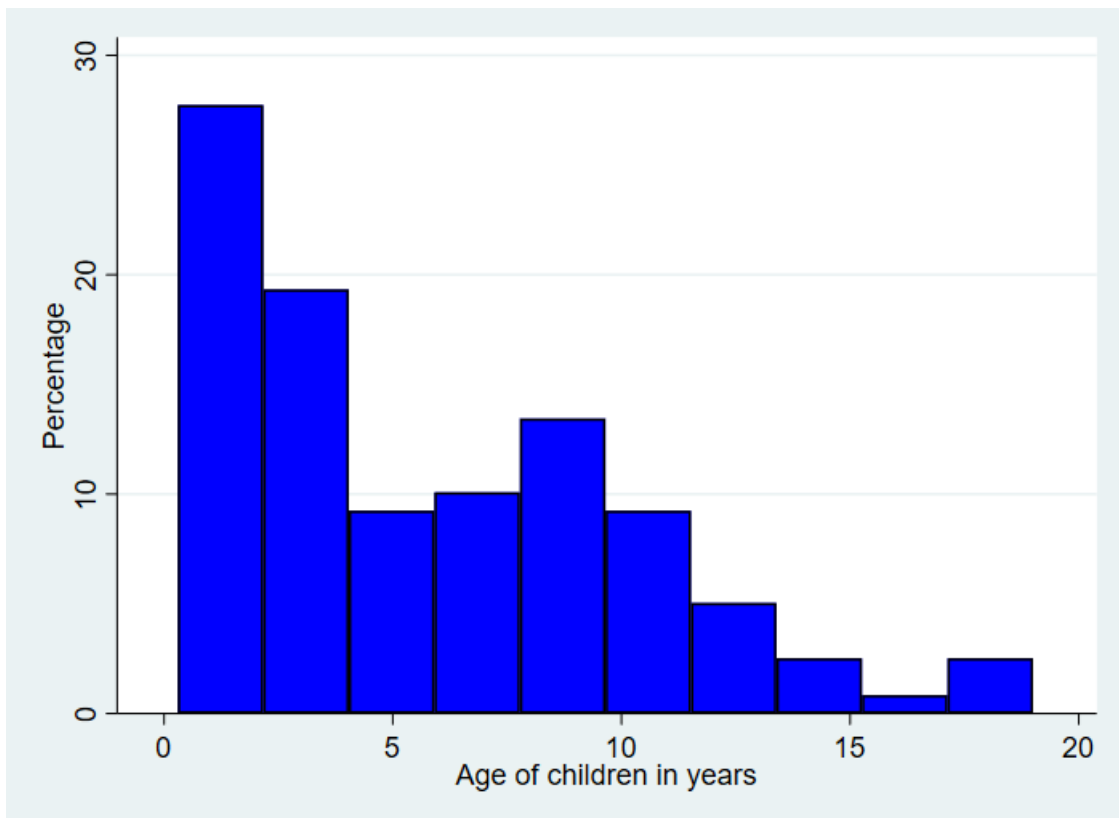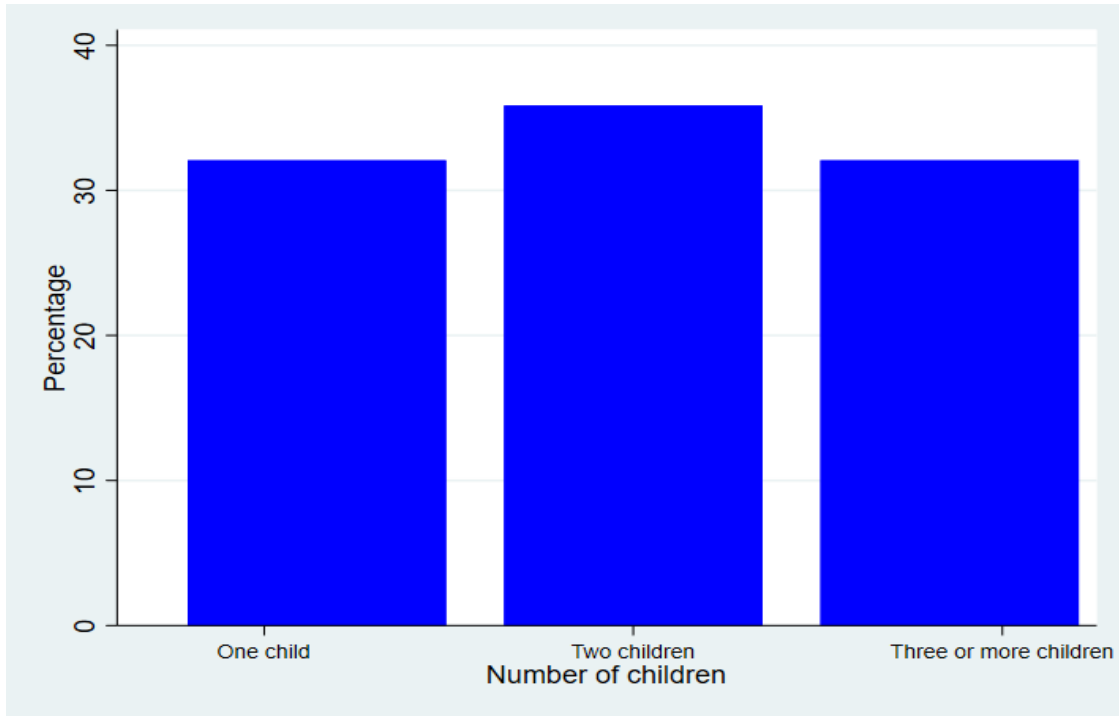
Immigrating to Canada: Most REACH participants immigrated to Canada in the family class (46%). An additional 23% came to Canada as refugees, 17% immigrated to Canada through the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) program, and 13% came to Canada as economic class (principal, spousal, or dependent) or as a student. Although almost half of REACH participants (46%) had been in Canada for less than a year when they joined REACH, many had been in Canada for longer and still had quite low English language levels. Twenty-four percent of participants had been in Canada between one and three years and 30% had been in Canada for more than three years. On average, participants had been in Canada for two years and three months when they joined REACH.

Employment: Most REACH participants (75%) were not employed when they joined the program.

Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB): REACH was designed for women with CLB levels 3 and 4 and all participants apart from four[2] had a CLB of either 3 or 4 in at least one skill (listening, speaking, reading, and/or writing) when they joined REACH. Potential participants with spiky CLB levels[3] were invited to join if REACH staff determined that, overall, they had the abilities of levels 3 or 4[4] and would benefit from the program. Table 1 below summarizes initial CLB levels of REACH participants, including the breakdown of CLB 3 versus 4 (among those with either of those levels). For both listening and reading, among those with CLB 3 or 4, the majority of participants joined REACH with CLB 4 while the breakdown is more balanced between CLB 3 and CLB 4 for both speaking and writing.

Table 1   Participant pre-REACH CLB levels

CLB Skill	Minimum	Maximum	CLB 3 or 4 (%)	CLB 3 (%)	CLB 4 (%)
Listening	1	5	69	26	74
Speaking	1	5	75	45	55
Reading	1	6	76	29	71
Writing	1	5	77	57	43

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[2]   Two participants had CLB 2 in all four skills, one had CLB 2 in two skills and her CLB for the other two skills was missing, and one participant had CLB 2 in three skills and CLB 1 in one skill. Since the curriculum was benchmarked at CLB 3, clients would be working toward completing CLB 3, so REACH accepted clients who had completed their CLB 2.

[3]   With one or more skills either above or below level 3 or 4.

[4]   REACH staff used protocols of assigning an overall CLB similar to those for assigning an overall CLB in LINC.

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Other English Classes: Approximately 16% of participants were already taking other English classes when they joined REACH. These included LINC classes, conversation classes, and employment-related English classes.

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THE REACH PILOT

REACH was developed to address the observation that newcomer mothers enrolled in LINC were dropping out due to its strict attendance requirements. Childcare conflicts, such as children being sick, prevented mothers from attending LINC classes regularly. MOSAIC identified a need for an online curriculum with online instructor support to assist newcomer mothers in Canada in learning and improving their English. The design and development of the REACH pilot was guided by a Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) lens. The intersecting identity factors of newcomer women caring for young children were specifically considered in curriculum development, the flexible nature of REACH, its hours of study, and its overall design.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

The first 10 months of the REACH project were devoted to curriculum development, though curriculum development activities also continued throughout the pilot phase of the project.[5] REACH curriculum was designed by specialists in LINC curriculum development[6] at Achēv, ISANS, and MOSAIC in a coordinated approach. Themes were divided between organizations with regular communication and meetings to align content and monitor progress.

The REACH curriculum was inspired by and adapted from different components of the LINC curriculum, unit plans and activities from TUTELA, a pan-Canadian online resource for English as a second language (ESL)/French as a second language (FSL) professionals, the Real-World Assessment Task Bank developed by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, and e-activities from the Toronto Catholic District School Board. Themes imbedded into the REACH curriculum were based on the interests and priorities of newcomer mothers in LINC, such as speaking with children's teachers or talking to doctors about health-related issues. In order to help inform the curriculum and design of REACH, a survey with mothers with young children (similar to the target group for REACH), primarily those attending LINC classes at Achēv and MOSAIC, was conducted in January and February 2022. The aim of the survey, comprised of eight questions, was to determine the English needs of mothers with young children (the situations in which they needed to use English), their challenges as newcomer mothers, and the time they had available

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[5]   Development of the initial curriculum continued until one month before the end of the pilot (through
       May 2023). Ongoing editing of the curriculum continued until the end of the pilot (June 30, 2023).

[6]   Specialists in task-based settlement English that is CLB and Portfolio Based Language Assessment
       (PBLA) aligned.

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each day and each week to study English. The results of the survey helped inform the REACH themes and hours of study.[7]

While originally, a total of 12 themes were planned, one theme for every month of the program, due to the shortening of the duration of the pilot due to recruitment challenges described below, ten themes were developed for the REACH curriculum based on mothers' expected needs. Themes were divided between curriculum developers at Achēv, ISANS, and MOSAIC based on the number of hours each were allotted for curriculum development per week. For each theme developed, curriculum developers created communicative tasks related to a task that a newcomer mother might experience in their day-to-day lives. For example, in the health theme, some communicative tasks included talking to doctors about women's health, menstrual cycles and products, or learning about common childhood illnesses. Curriculum developers also worked to make sure that each communicative task followed the Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA)[8] and CLB guidelines and could be completed in 15-minutes. For each theme, after communicative tasks had been developed, curriculum developers created lessons and interactive online activities related to each task.

What worked well?

Staff at MOSAIC initially created one theme as a template and exemplar which helped curriculum developers across all three other organizations efficiently create a consistent curriculum. Curriculum developers shared that having a defined structure to use prevented them from having to spend time on reinventing curriculum structures which they could then spend on creating content. One curriculum developer expanded:

> *"I found that really helpful for a few reasons. One, it saved me time and formatting because it was all there and it didn't change, but two, it also kept me consistent for how things looked and the flow of them because I found when I was just creating things myself and I would work on my own for a few weeks and create 10 activities, I was more likely to kind of drift off somewhere different. So, the end product looked very different than the rest of them, whereas when I kept not redeveloping the wheel but taking what we already had as a frame and then changing ideas, it was faster and more cohesive."*

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[7] Although three hours per week of study was a very popular survey response, project managers decided that REACH should be five hours per week because it would have been difficult for participants to progress in their English learning (and CLB level) with only three hours of study per week.

[8] Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA) is a teaching and assessment model designed to enhance nationwide consistency and standards of quality in English as a Second Language (ESL) training for adult newcomers to Canada (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2023).

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Having one staff member conduct a final revision of every theme developed worked well in keeping the curriculum consistent in terms of language, content, and formatting. After curriculum developers completed developing a theme, they sent their work to one staff member with vast experience with Avenue, the national LINC online learning platform, who was a LearnIT2teach mentor, training instructors to use Avenue. This staff member ensured that all technical components of the theme worked well and provided pedagogical feedback. Curriculum developers noted that having one consistent reviewer giving feedback across all organizations helped to ensure that the curriculum remained cohesive.

According to instructors and curriculum developers, all of the REACH themes were well received by participants as they related directly to the lives of newcomer mothers. REACH curriculum developers recommended including additional themes to future iterations of REACH. Themes related to Canadian culture, housing, and rights as a person, although curriculum developers acknowledged that the language around rights as a person may be too challenging for CLB 3 students, were suggested.

What were some challenges?

Developing a curriculum across three organizations presented several challenges. Miscommunication and a lack of collaboration between organizations resulted in conflicting content within the curriculum. Curriculum developers noted that there were different organizational cultures in each of the three organizations which created differing expectations of the curriculum development process, as well as lack of clarity of everyone's roles. Curriculum developers voiced that there was uncertainty around who provides feedback to whom and how to utilize feedback as each organization had differing expectations and comfort levels of giving and receiving feedback. Additionally, curriculum developers shared that a lot of time and energy was spent on reviewing each other's work and that conflicts in bringing various ideas across several organizations together into one cohesive curriculum resulted in the duplication of work. One curriculum developer explained:

> *"Sometimes I'd have one person look over it. It would get adapted, and it was perfect and someone else would look over it and they would change it. And then the third person would come in and it would be changed for a third time. And sometimes that got a little bit frustrating, but at the same time you need to focus on that you want the best possible product, and regardless of how many iterations it needs to go through, you need to get it to that point regardless."*

Curriculum developers observed that a few other curriculum developers lacked teaching experience, technological skills, and knowledge of PBLA and CLB that were essential in developing a curriculum designed for newcomers with lower levels of English. This lack of

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knowledge and experience resulted in some curriculum developers not completing creating the communicative tasks for their assigned themes on time, and other curriculum developers having to re-create certain components of the curriculum as they did not meet appropriate PBLA and CLB guidelines.

Curriculum developers voiced dissatisfaction regarding the division of themes and differences in the time allocated for each theme between Achēv, ISANS, and MOSAIC. Some curriculum developers worked on their own personal time to complete developing their assigned themes. Curriculum developers shared that it typically took one to two months to develop tasks, lessons, and homework per theme. One organization, however, had only been allotted 7.5 hours a week to develop themes. As these curriculum developers had significantly less time allocated to work on REACH compared to the other two organizations, they explained that they constantly felt like they were behind, and that the expectations of how much work should be done by a deadline was not adjusted. Curriculum developers voiced that, at times, they worked more hours than they were paid for to meet deadlines. To mitigate this challenge, as well as the challenges related to miscommunication and lack of collaboration, a few program staff members recommended one organization develop the curriculum in the future. Having one organization develop the curriculum would ensure consistency as well as reduce miscommunication as curriculum developers would be working under one project manager.

RECRUITMENT AND ITS CHALLENGES

When REACH was initially proposed in 2020, waitlists for LINC classes and for associated childcare support services were long. The proposed REACH recruitment strategy was to offer REACH to women caring for young children on those waitlists. However, by summer 2021 when REACH recruitment began, those waitlists were either very short or non-existent. Therefore, the REACH service provider organizations developed new recruitment strategies.

Achēv, ISANS, and MOSAIC each recruited participants for REACH using many different methods. Program staff reached out to and shared posters and brochures with other settlement organizations, community organizations, language assessment centres, churches, and school boards, as well as individuals on waitlists for LINC programs. Program staff at MOSAIC also reached out to other, non-language, departments at MOSAIC to present to their management teams about REACH so that they could refer eligible clients. Despite extensively trying to recruit participants into the program, recruitment numbers were low, which led organizations to expand their recruiting techniques to include social media such as Facebook and Twitter/X. Program staff noted that using social media platforms recruited several more participants.

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Recruitment challenges

Program staff shared that one challenge in recruitment came from screening forms that participants were required to complete to determine if they were eligible for REACH. Although program staff tried to draft the screening form to be language appropriate for individuals with CLB levels 1, 2, and 3 while also capturing all required information, some program staff mentioned that it may not have been completely accessible to all potential participants. One program staff member noted that the process of enrolling in REACH may have been too cumbersome and potential participants may have been deterred from participating in the program due to the paperwork. According to program staff, the eligibility criteria were also too limited, including the CLB levels, the age requirements of children, and being eligible for IRCC-funded services, to be able to recruit the targeted number of participants.

Another recruitment challenge mentioned by program staff was that some potential REACH participants who were eligible to participate decided not to join the program for several different reasons. These include miscommunication about the format of REACH (e.g., participant wanting to join an in-person program, but the program was only offered online), participants finding employment and not having enough time for REACH, and participants not wanting to commit to some of the components of the program. For instance, while many participants wanted to engage in one-on-one sessions with instructors, some were not interested in participating in asynchronous learning, or vice versa.

Given that REACH was targeted to women with CLB levels 3 or 4, potential participants were required to know and have proof of their CLB levels when joining. However, many did not already have an assessment (the Canadian Language Benchmark Placement Test (CLBPT)) completed when they were considering joining REACH, especially those who were very newly arrived to Canada. During the REACH recruitment period, wait times at CLB testing centres were substantial. For example, approximately six weeks in Metro Vancouver. Moreover, the online CLB self-assessment tool (for reading and listening) was not widely used at this time. Therefore, with IRCC approval, experienced instructors at MOSAIC developed a placement test, solely for the purpose of determining enrollment in REACH. Tests were marked by experienced instructors at all three organizations who had received specific training on how to accurately mark the tests. However, clients still needed to take an official CLPBT placement test, when they could access it.

REACH ACTIVITIES

REACH implementation began in early October 2022 with nine months of programming finishing at the end of June 2023. Achēv, ISANS, and MOSAIC each implemented REACH separately with their participants. However, the main project components, including research activities, were coordinated with regular meetings of project staff across all three organizations

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and with SRDC. At each organization, each REACH participant was assigned to one of
two REACH instructors. At MOSAIC, this assignment was based on initial English level so that
participants with similar skills were in the same cohort.

Next, we describe the different REACH activities and participant satisfaction with those activities
and, overall, with REACH.

Overall

REACH was designed as a flexible alternative to LINC classes for women with busy and
unpredictable schedules due, in part, to childcare responsibilities. Approximately, 94% of
participants who completed a first follow-up survey at the end of the pilot, reported that they
enjoyed the flexibility of being able to study anytime that was convenient for them.

Seventy percent of participants completed REACH. Of the participants who withdrew from
REACH and who responded to the first follow-up survey, reasons for withdrawing include to
take LINC classes, to work, and for other reasons. None reported that they had withdrawn
because they did not like REACH. These findings were echoed in the focus groups with REACH
participants, including some who had dropped out of the program, and with REACH staff who
explained that reasons for not continuing with the program included participants finding
employment, joining a LINC program, and not having enough time to complete program
activities due to caring for young children.

In order to contextualize these withdrawal rates, we compare them to the withdrawal rates of
women with similar characteristics from LINC classes. We used administrative data from ISANS
and MOSAIC to calculate the withdrawal rates of women aged 25-50 in LINC level 3 and 4
classes.[9] However, the data does not identify whether the LINC student is caring for young
children. Therefore, one might expect the withdrawal rate of REACH participants to be higher
than these comparisons had they instead taken a LINC class. The withdrawal rates from REACH
are similar to these LINC withdrawal rates which vary between 12.1% and 42.9% depending on
the organization and type of class (AM/PM versus evening). Overall, the comparable LINC
withdrawal rate is 20.6%, somewhat lower than the 30% for REACH over a similar time period.

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[9]   We use administrative data from MOSAIC and ISANS LINC students from AM and PM classes and
      from evening classes. We compare withdrawal rates from September 2022 (when REACH began) for a
      period that includes approximately the same number of hours of study as REACH (228 hours). From
      MOSAIC, we also have data for women aged 25-50 with CLB 3 or 4 who have children in childcare or
      on the waitlist for childcare. We calculate their withdrawal rate from September 2022 until June 2023,
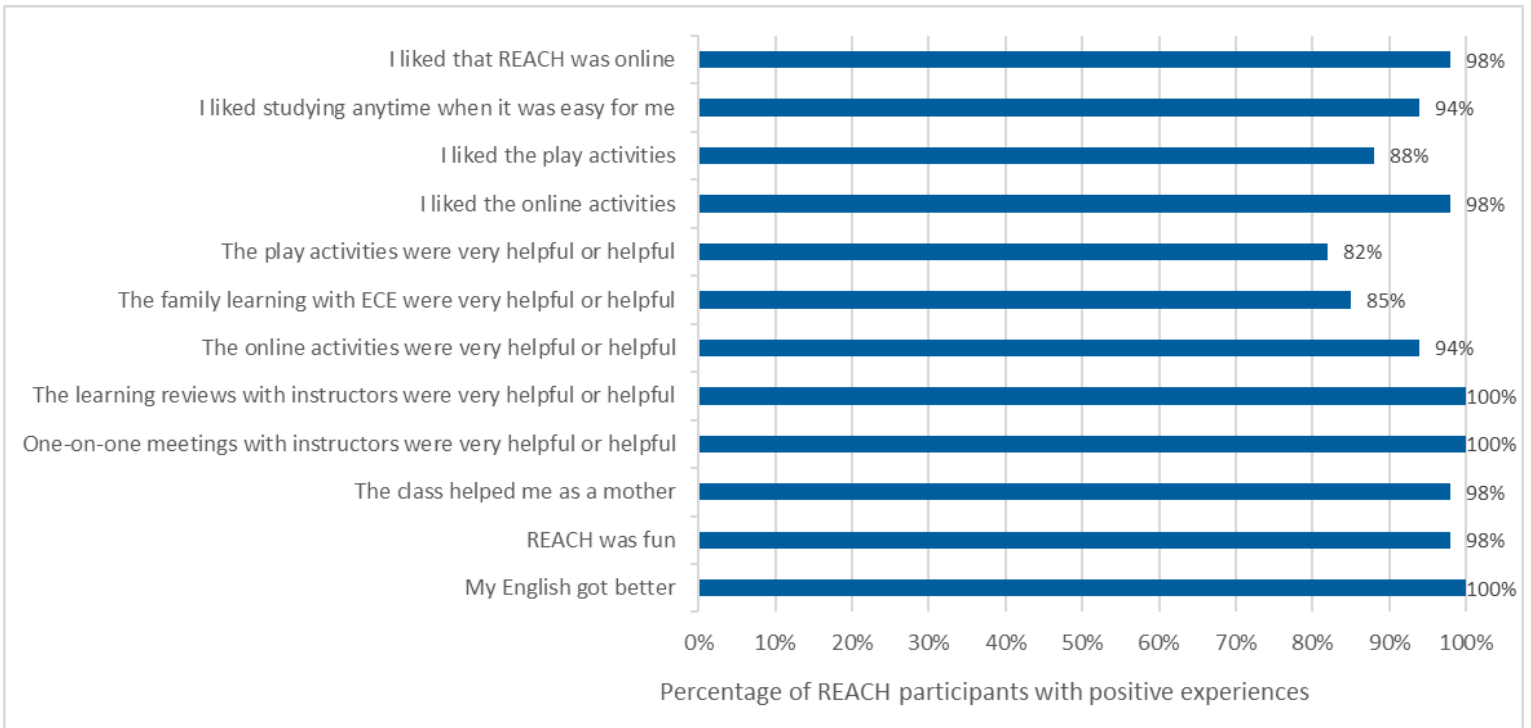   the time period of the REACH pilot.

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Overall, REACH met most participants' needs and expectations which were to improve their English language skills, be more comfortable using English with their neighbours, with their children's teachers, and with doctors, and to learn new vocabulary. Many participants appreciated that REACH taught them English that they could use in their daily lives. Program staff shared that one of the main components of REACH was to have learning materials specifically tailored for mothers. They received positive feedback from participants that learning English in a way that was relevant to their lives was particularly useful, such as learning how to talk about a recipe in English with friends.

During focus groups, several participants noted that they wished the program was longer so that they could continue to improve their English skills. One participant noted that "*continuity is very important in learning English especially when you are at home.*" Participants at Achēv and ISANS recommended that students be divided into different groups based on their levels of English, as those participants with more advanced levels of English found the homework too easy. Most participants voiced their recommendation that REACH continue and be offered for more advanced English levels.

Program staff noted that many participants asked instructors if they could receive a certificate or report card to prove their language skills for the purposes of obtaining citizenship or employment. Several participants during the focus groups also made recommendations for REACH to provide its participants with a certificate of completion. As participants were offered certificates of completion from REACH, we interpret this finding as participants wanting official IRCC recognized Progress Reports, which could be used to access other LINC programs, as well as Official IRCC certificates, which could be used to apply for citizenship.

REACH participants reported being very satisfied with the program overall and with all of its activities. In the first follow-up survey, participants were asked their satisfaction with REACH and its activities as well as how helpful it was for them. The percentage of participants who reported that they liked REACH or an activity a lot or some are presented in Figure 2. As mothers, around 98% of participants reported that REACH had helped them as a parent. Similarly, 98% of participants had found REACH to be fun and all participants reported that it had helped them improve their English.

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Figure 3   Satisfaction with REACH

Bar chart titled "Percentage of REACH participants with positive experiences":

Statement	Percentage
I liked that REACH was online	98%
I liked studying anytime when it was easy for me	94%
I liked the play activities	88%
I liked the online activities	98%
The play activities were very helpful or helpful	82%
The family learning with ECE were very helpful or helpful	85%
The online activities were very helpful or helpful	94%
The learning reviews with instructors were very helpful or helpful	100%
One-on-one meetings with instructors were very helpful or helpful	100%
The class helped me as a mother	98%
REACH was fun	98%
My English got better	100%

Devices and digital assistance

Participants used different devices to engage in REACH with 36% using more than one type of
device over the duration of the pilot. The most commonly used device was a laptop (53%),
followed by a phone (42%), a computer (27%), and a tablet (13%). MOSAIC loaned devices to
use for the duration of the pilot to participants who had none[10] with approximately 25% of
MOSAIC participants borrowing a device for REACH.

Several participants had low digital literacy skills. Instructors from all three organizations would
help participants solve their issues using content that MOSAIC previously developed for digital
literacy support. The materials were learner friendly (aimed at CLB 2) and were uploaded
directly to the REACH online classroom for participants and onto the instructor version of the
Moodle course. MOSAIC also has two digital literacy facilitators, through their Settlement
program. Facilitators go to clients' homes and help them in person, in their first language if
needed. Two REACH clients received one visit each and support was provided in their

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[10]   No potential participant from ISANS required a loaned device. As Achēv recruited participants across
       Canada, they did not loan devices for the pilot and required all potential participants to have access to
       one.

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first language. Eighty-nine percent of participants stated that they had received some form of assistance in using their device for REACH. This assistance came from their REACH instructor (100% of those who had received assistance), other staff from Achēv, ISANS, or MOSAIC (79%), their family and friends (74%), and other sources (32%). Program staff reported that 35% of participants needed a lot or some digital help with the remaining 65% of participants only needing a little or no support.

Asynchronous learning

MOSAIC, Achēv, and ISANS implemented asynchronous learning through Moodle, an online learning platform. Based on participants' learning paces and needs, and the instructor's learning plan, instructors could control which lessons participants could see by hiding and unhiding selected lessons on Moodle. Each lesson was designed to take approximately 15 minutes to complete, and participants were generally expected to complete 15-20 lessons per week for a total of approximately five hours of study.

There was a lot of variation across both weeks and participants in the percentages of online activities completed, demonstrating the importance of the flexibility of REACH. As presented in Table 2, on average, participants did 80-100% of online activities 24% of the weeks of REACH and more than 100% of the recommended activities 13% of the weeks of REACH. However, participants also did no online activities, on average, 30% of the weeks of REACH. Most participants reported that they found the 5-hours of recommended study per week to be just right (64%), 23% found it to be too long and 14% too short.

Table 2   REACH activity attendance

Activity	Percentage
Percentage of weeks with no online activities	30%
Percentage of weeks with 0 to 50% of online activities	21%
Percentage of weeks with 50 to 80% of online activities	12%
Percentage of weeks with 80 to 100% of online activities	24%
Percentage of weeks with more than 100% of online activities	13%
One-on-one sessions attended	60%
Learning consolidation sessions attended	46%
Family learning sessions attended	44%

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In the focus groups, many participants shared that they enjoyed participating in the program online. Participants enjoyed watching and listening to instructional videos and practicing speaking and hearing it back. A few participants said that learning on Moodle was challenging and not user friendly. These participants shared that the learning platform was difficult to navigate and too complicated to complete tasks, such as having too many buttons to press or not being able to find where to do homework. Two participants also noted that they were not comfortable using a computer as they did not have prior experience, and they resorted to completing the online work on their phones. Ninety-eight percent of participants who completed the first follow-up survey reported that they liked that REACH was available online and the online activities themselves while 94% of participants reported finding the online activities very helpful or helpful. Most participants (67%) found the duration of the 15-minute online activities just right while 23% found them too short and 9% found them too long.

All participants appreciated the flexibility of learning English online at home and on their own time. Participating in an online program provided participants with opportunities to learn English at any convenient time and anywhere that worked for them. Participants also enjoyed being able to use different devices, such as their laptops, phones, or tablets to suit their needs. Several participants noted completing homework in the evenings after their children went to bed as it was the only free time they had. One participant elaborated:

> *"There are no words to describe how convenient and flexible the program is. Even if you have a sick child, you can join the class on other days. It's not something you have to attend on specific days or times. And if your child is crying or something, you can do your homework at any time. I had days when I did my homework at midnight. The option is here and it's possible. Even if I miss one class, I can join another. They made it convenient and flexible for the mothers. I didn't miss anything because of my children."*

A few participants mentioned that they could not participate in LINC classes or other language programs because they did not offer daycare, and participants had no one else to look after their children. Many participants shared that had REACH not been online, they would not have been able to participate as they needed to care for their young children at home, and daycare was often not an option. One participant shared the following viewpoint when she was asked about why she had joined REACH:

> *"I wanted to do REACH because I didn't want to send my kids to daycare. I wanted to stay home because my children are too small. I was looking for a flexible program and was looking to have time. Because I pick up and drop off my daughter to and from school, and when she is in school, I am home with my baby. So, it seemed to me more practical to do REACH and be able to do my homework at home."*

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Program staff noted that while engaging in online activities independently worked well for many participants, particularly those with CLB 4, asynchronous learning was a barrier to learning English for many others. Program staff indicated that participants with lower English levels (CLB 3), low digital skills, and a lack of free time struggled to engage with online activities the most. Instructors worked with those participants in the on-on-one sessions to review the online learning materials and to help them practice reading to navigate Moodle.

One particular challenge program staff experienced was the need to frequently follow up with participants to complete their online activities. Instructors observed that participants seemed to enjoy one-on-one sessions or learning review sessions more than online activities which led to some participants not prioritizing completing their online tasks. One instructor explained that she had to personally send weekly reminders to several participants to complete their online activities. A program manager added that it was a challenge finding a balance between accommodating the needs of participants and ensuring that participants were engaging in and completing tasks.

One-on-one sessions

The REACH pilot design included one-on-one sessions with instructors, typically for one hour per week. During these sessions, instructors provided support specific to participants' needs. For example, instructors reviewed questions participants had about the week's learning materials, addressed particular challenges participants were having with English, or engaged in role playing where participants could practice speaking English with the support of instructors, such as going to the doctor's office. During one-on-one sessions, instructors also addressed participants' unique settlement and employment needs. Instructors often commented on this aspect of the one-on-one sessions during their pilot check-in meetings. On average, participants attended a one-on-one session 60% of the weeks they were offered (Table 2). All participants (100%) said that they found the one-on-one meetings with instructors to be either very helpful or helpful.

During the focus groups, almost all participants reported that they found speaking with their instructors the most helpful way to practice and improve their English skills. Participants shared that instructors would help participants correct their spoken English, as well as answer any questions participants had about the homework or their personal lives. Participants also valued that all of the instructors were kind, patient, and flexible. For example, one participant appreciated that her instructor was understanding when she had to reschedule their one-on-one meeting because her children were sick. Several participants recommended additional one-on-one meetings with instructors, such as meeting for more than one hour or meeting more than once a week.

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*"Seeing my [instructor] face-to-face in Zoom was very helpful for me because
this is the way that I can practice English by talking to someone, not just reading
and listening. I just want to speak with someone. You can improve your listening
whenever you're talking with someone. My favourite part of the program was
talking with my [instructor], and spending time with her in order to learn new
words. That was important for me because I found myself learning better when
talking with someone. I'm always looking for chances to talk with someone."*

Program staff shared that the connection between instructors and students helped in program
retention. Instructors not only helped students learn English but also often provided emotional
support. Instructors also personalized the curriculum according to students' needs by adjusting
the learning material to make it easier or more challenging, which according to program staff
helped student retention in the program. Program staff explained that ten students per
instructor was an ideal group size, allowing instructors to provide a sufficient level of support
and connection to participants. They noted that cohorts larger than ten would, however, limit an
instructor's ability to provide enough individual support to each student. During the pilot, the
number of students per instructor ranged from 6 to 13.

Learning consolidation sessions

MOSAIC delivered learning consolidation sessions on Saturdays online and in-person, alternating
weekly. Students were divided into two cohorts, in which one cohort would be in-person and the
second cohort would be online for one week, and the following week, the modes of delivery
would switch. For in-person learning consolidation sessions, instructors and early childhood
educators (ECEs) were present. Children were welcome to attend the sessions on Saturday,
where they would interact with the ECEs and other children of REACH participants while
participants were in another room for their session.

Achēv and ISANS delivered their learning consolidation sessions on Saturdays online. Each
session was one hour in duration. Program staff noted, however, that while learning
consolidation sessions were generally delivered well, attendance was low. Sometimes, only a
couple of students attended, and these students then received one-on-one supports from
instructors. Program staff noted that most students had scheduling conflicts or childcare
responsibilities that prohibited them from attending the learning consolidation sessions. Overall,
attendance at the learning consolidation sessions was, on average, 46% of the weeks during
which they were offered (Table 2). Although attendance was relatively low, many participants,
especially those who participated in the learning consolidation sessions in-person, shared that
they enjoyed learning English with their instructors and others face to face.

Many participants who attended learning consolidation sessions in-person voiced that because their children were being supervised by ECEs, they enjoyed being able to learn English without being distracted by their children. Participants enjoyed seeing their instructors and other students in-person and asking instructors questions about the learning material or talking about personal issues. One instructor shared that the in-person sessions were invaluable to a participant who was closely monitored at home, as she could not express certain issues during their one-on-one sessions because of family members who may have been listening at home. Similarly, one program staff member explained that, for many of the participants, attending the in-person learning consolidation sessions was the only time they left their homes and met other mothers.

> *"[…] there were some people that this was their lifeline. This was the only time they left their house. One woman, she always looked fantastic and she's like this is the only time I leave my house. This is the only time I dress up. She showed up beautiful, the lipstick, the whole outfit every single time. There were some clients that had no other community, so they came every week."* (program manager)

Although participants enjoyed learning from instructors in-person, many shared that they were not able to attend learning consolidation sessions in-person because it was difficult to travel and bring their children to the language centre. If participants could not attend the session in-person, they were given the option to join an online session.

Program staff who facilitated learning consolidation sessions in-person and online shared that these sessions were well received by many participants who attended. Instructors engaged in discussions with participants that were related to the weekly themes. For example, if participants learned about making requests, instructors discussed how to ask for directions or how to ask for help searching for an item at the grocery store. A few participants, however, noted that it was sometimes difficult to engage in the learning consolidation sessions because of children at home. Program staff from Achēv noted that one of the benefits of having learning consolidation sessions occur online was that there were opportunities for students from many areas across Canada to participate.

Family learning sessions

Family learning sessions took place before or after the learning consolidation sessions on Saturdays for Achēv and MOSAIC and Tuesdays or Thursdays for ISANS. ECE facilitators reviewed play learning activities, discussed parenting topics, or engaged in connections to community services with participants, such as visiting the library to obtain library cards. Guest speakers also attended family learning sessions to speak with participants about various topics that may have pertained to their needs such as accessing a food bank, a cloth diaper lending

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service, and how to save money at home. Program staff from Achēv noted that, unlike ISANS and MOSAIC, because participants were from different provinces, it was challenging to find appropriate connections to community services and resources and to find guest speakers, because these services and resources differ across Canada. Average attendance at family learning sessions was very similar to attendance at the learning consolidation sessions that took place on the same day with participants attendance 44% of the sessions offered. Although, like the learning consolidation sessions, attendance was relatively low but 85% of participants reported that the family learning sessions were very helpful or helpful.

Several participants mentioned that they received useful information during the family learning sessions about childcare and ways to spend time with children or communicate with children, such as helping a child cope with anger. Another topic of value to participants included learning about how much time children should spend watching screens. Although the information provided during family learning sessions was generally perceived to be useful by participants, a few participants noted that it was too much information provided in one day.

Play activities

Many participants shared that they appreciated learning about fun activities to do with their children from ECE instructors. Participants noted that their children loved doing the play activities, participants learned new parenting approaches and were able to spend quality time with their children, and the play activities were a good way to communicate with children.

> *"It was so beautiful, and I applied the activities to my children. We did activities that taught the children about five senses, and even took videos of my children and shared it with my [instructor]. I enjoyed these activities so much. Even when the children came back from school, they asked me 'mom, what type of activity are we doing today?'"*

Eighty-eight percent of the participants reported that they liked the play activities a lot or somewhat and 82% of participants found them to be very helpful or helpful. A few participants with older children recommended that play activities be offered for a wider range of ages, as the play activities were not interesting for their children. As REACH was originally designed for women with children aged 0-6 years old, the play activities were also specifically designed for childhood development and the interests of children in this age range. However, given low recruitment, both Achēv and ISANS expanded the eligibility criteria to women caring for children aged 0-12 years old. Some activities, such as taking a walk outside and observing the nature you see, were appropriate for children of all ages. However, others may have been less of interest to older children.

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Further English instruction

After REACH, many participants wanted to continue English language learning. Three months after the end of REACH, at the time of the second follow-up survey, 64% of REACH participants were taking English classes, either online, in person, or both/hybrid. Most of these English language classes were LINC (52%) or LINC Home Study (16%). Other classes include English conversation, English for a job/work, and ESL classes. Participants also reported they spent approximately 10 hours a week studying English, double the recommended time allocated per week to REACH. Another 22% of participants were on a waitlist for an English class. Therefore, **REACH appears to have been a starting point or part of participants' journeys in learning English which continued beyond REACH.**

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OUTCOMES

We are interested in understanding changes REACH participants have experienced after joining REACH. We analyse average changes in measures of English skills and use, digital skills, and life in Canada. We measure these outcomes when participants joined REACH, at the end of REACH, and three months later. The data immediately at the end of REACH allows us to analyse the immediate outcomes of REACH while the data three months later allow us to analyse the intermediate outcomes of REACH. We use a mixed methods approach and supplement these survey findings with administrative data and qualitative data from focus groups with program participants and staff. A more fulsome description of the methodology is provided in Appendix A and detailed results are presented in Appendix B.

However, these changes in outcomes do not identify the impacts of REACH. We do not know what would have happened to participants had they not participated in REACH (the counterfactual). We estimate this counterfactual with a sample with similar characteristics to REACH participants but who did not participate in REACH. We refer to this sample as comparison group members. Current and waitlist language clients from Achēv, ISANS, and MOSAIC who identify as women, are between the ages of 25 and 40, with children aged 12 and under (6 for MOSAIC), eligible for IRCC-funded services, and with CLB 3 or 4 were invited to complete a survey at the same time as the survey REACH participants completed at the end of the program[11]. In addition to analyzing changes in outcomes for participants after REACH, we also investigate average differences between REACH participants and comparison group members at the end of REACH and three months later.

LANGUAGE

The primary outcome of REACH is improvements in participants' English language skills. We measure these skills in several different ways, each measuring different aspects of language skills. They include CLB progression, assessments taken as part of REACH, frequency of use of English, and self-reported ease using English in daily activities.

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[11]   The comparison group was added after the beginning of the REACH pilot. They, therefore, did not complete a survey at the same time as participants completed their initial survey before joining REACH.

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CLB progression

We calculate the percentage of participants who progressed at least one CLB level in at least one skill between the time they joined REACH and the end of the program. Approximately, 36% of REACH participants progressed at least 1 CLB level in at least 1 skill after joining REACH. Table 3 summarizes the percentage of REACH participants who progressed in each skill and in at least one skill. There is some variation across skills with fewer participants progressing in listening and reading compared to speaking and writing. However, the percentage who progressed in at least one skill is much higher than each skill individually, indicating that different participants progressed in different skills as opposed to generally the same participants progressing in multiple skills.

Table 3   CLB progression

	Percentage of participants who progressed
Listening	13
Speaking	18
Reading	13
Writing	22
At least one skill	36

We compare these progression rates with those of women with similar characteristics in LINC Home Study (both Ontario and Canada) and LINC AM/PM and evening classes at MOSAIC. Although, we cannot identify women caring for young children in these classes, we use those aged 25-50 with initial CLB levels of either 3 or 4 as comparisons for REACH participants. We use the percentage of these students from Achēv LINC Home Study Ontario and Canada and LINC AM/PM and evening classes at MOSAIC who progressed at least 1 CLB level in at least 1 skill during the same time period as REACH and with a similar number of hours of study.[12] There is a lot of variation in these percentages across both times periods and organization. For MOSAIC LINC students, the percentage varies between none and 10.8% with an overall average of 8.1%. For Achēv LINC Home Study students, the percentage varies between 46.6% and 76.0%

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[12]   The number of hours per week in LINC Home Study is similar to that of REACH. However, REACH was a nine-month pilot while the data available for Achēv LINC Home Study students is for a period of 6 months and a period of 12 months. Therefore, the 9-month progression rate for LINC Home Study is likely to fall somewhere in between the two.

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with an overall average of 56.5% (66.0%) within six months (12 months). Therefore, REACH participants are progressing at relatively similar rates, even though they are likely to have more barriers than LINC students.

As part of REACH, participants completed four English language assessments at the beginning and at the end of the program. The assessments, in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, were designed to measure changes in participants' English language skills during REACH. We observe large improvements in all four scores over this time period. However, it is important to note that not all participants completed the assessments, and the sample size is small. For the sub-sample who did complete the assessments, participants' average listening scores increased from 68% to 78%, speaking scores increased from 51% to 69%, reading scores increased from 60% to 82%, and writing scores from 56% to 71%.

Listening

When joining REACH, participants were asked how easily they could understand four different scenarios in English. For example, understanding the weather news on radio or television. On average, only 29% of participants found understanding the four scenarios easy or very easy. This percentage increased to 66% at the end of REACH and remained about the same, 64%, three months later.

A few participants explained that through participating in REACH, they were now able to listen and understand English, such as answering cashiers if they asked them a question or answering a doctor's question without needing an interpreter. One participant shared:

> *"Even my doctor noticed that my English was getting better. Even when I have an interpreter with me, I can answer questions without waiting for the interpreter to translate."*

Participants and program staff noted that participants improved their listening skills after engaging in listening activities on the online learning platform. Curriculum developers noted that narrating lessons was intentional because participants did not have many opportunities to hear English at home. They wanted to provide participants with as many opportunities to hear English as possible. Instructors also shared that they observed improvements in participants' listening skills during one-on-one sessions. Instructors said that many participants did not engage in conversation during their initial one-on-one meetings because participants could not understand beyond "hello" and "how are you?". As participants gained English skills, they were able to listen to the instructors and engage in dialogue. One instructor said that, during one-on-one sessions, a participant shared that she went to the bank and listened and understood what the banker was explaining about Registered Education Savings Plans (RESPs) and could also ask follow-up questions.

However, when we compare the percentage of REACH participants who found the listening scenarios very easy or easy with the same percentage of comparison group members, we do not find a statistically significant difference at either the end of REACH or three months after.

Speaking

All participants and many program staff identified that learning to speak English or improving speaking skills was one of the main benefits of REACH. The program helped participants to be confident in speaking to neighbours, their children's teachers, parents of their children's friends, landlords, cashiers at grocery stores, and bank employees. For example, one participant explained that prior to REACH, she had found it difficult to speak to her daughter's teacher. After participating in the program, the participant was able to call and notify the school if her daughter needed to miss school and the reason. A few participants noted that before participating in REACH, they did not speak to neighbours or could only ask about the weather. After the program, these participants felt confident to start conversations with people they met. Program staff added that learning conversational level English to be able to comfortably speak with neighbours helped to reduce participants' feelings of isolation.

Many participants shared that they learned how to make medical appointments for themselves and their children, as well as to describe medical issues to doctors or dentists. One participant described how her instructor helped her to explain her son's dental problems to the dentist:

> *"My [instructor] helped me in the beginning when I had to bring my son to the dentist. I didn't know how to say and what to say to the dentist. My [instructor] gave me a lot of information, a lot of vocabulary, and we even practiced speaking dental situations at the dentist office, which was very supportive and helpful."*

Program staff also observed that participants' confidence and level of comfort in speaking English had increased over the course of the program. Program staff spoke about how initially, participants had thought that learning English was too difficult or impossible, and many participants felt discouraged when they made mistakes. As participants progressed through REACH, they became more confident speaking English. One instructor shared an example of a participant who decided to take up volunteering because she became confident speaking English whereas before REACH, the participant had never believed she could volunteer anywhere due to language barriers. The participant came across an opportunity to start her own business selling cakes through the volunteer work she did, and she is now in the process of getting her food certification. Another instructor elaborated,

> *"I found that a lot of students when they started the program, they were very focused on how to avoid mistakes which kind of slowed them down. The program and the materials in the curriculum, it made them think more about*

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*communication. It doesn't have to be perfect. I just need to get my point across
and it's going to be fine, and this is what we were focusing on, even in our
consolidation sessions. So, throughout time, I had clients telling me, now I feel
more comfortable. I feel more confident communicating with people. [They] can
even ask clarification questions because a lot of them would even feel kind of
embarrassed if they don't understand what other people are saying and they
don't know how to ask for clarification."*

These improvements in speaking and in confidence in speaking English were also observed in
the survey data. When joining REACH, participants were asked how easily they could speak
English during four different scenarios. For example, saying hello to a neighbour in English. On
average, 34% of participants initially found all four speaking scenarios easy or very easy. After
participating in REACH, this percentage increased to 74% but reduced slightly to 68%
three months after REACH ended.

We find that more REACH participants found the speaking scenarios easy or very easy after
completing REACH and three months later compared to comparison group members. This
difference is quite large at, approximately, 18 percentage points immediately after REACH and,
approximately, 16 percentage points three months later.

Reading

Several participants reported that REACH helped them to improve their reading skills. A few
participants noted that learning new vocabulary was useful for them, and one participant said
that she learned how to read recipes and ingredients. Another participant shared that she
learned to read her children's report cards whereas before the program, reading and
understanding them was challenging for her. She explained that,

*"Back home, we just got grades, but in Canada, it's different. The ranking is
different. It wasn't about reading the English but understanding it."*

Program staff also noted improvements in participants' reading skills. For example, participants
learned to read and respond to text messages. Similar to the participant above, one program
manager shared an example of an achievement they observed from participants included being
able to read and understand their children's report cards.

*"[…] one client mentioned how she had always read her children's report cards in
her first country because she was very concerned about their education and in
the two years she had been in Canada, she had not been able to read a report card
for her children. And after this she was able to read a report card for her
children. She had the language to talk to the teacher, she understood, like*

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*[program manager] said, the cultural context around that, because they looked
very different than they were in her house. So, it wasn't the only the language,
but the cultural context too that allowed her to understand and then
communicate with the teacher. So, I think that's an example of an achievement. It
was the language, but also the cultural context that allowed clients to
communicate and to do tasks that they were not able to do before that were very
meaningful in their lives."*

When participants joined REACH, they were asked how easily they could read in English in
four different scenarios, such as, reading an English book to their child. Initially, only 31% of
participants found all four reading scenarios to be very easy or easy. After REACH, this
percentage increased to 71% and remained about the same, 74%, three months later. Moreover,
when we compare the percentage of REACH participants who found the reading scenarios to be
very easy or easy with the percentage of comparison group members, we find more of the
REACH participants, approximately 16 percentage points, found the reading scenarios very easy
or easy after completing REACH. This difference increases slightly to approximately
19 percentage points three months later.

Writing

A few participants voiced that their writing skills improved by participating in REACH.
Participants indicated that their writing structures improved, and they also learned to write and
reply to emails in English. Program staff also noted participants' improvements in writing skills,
including typing, particularly for CLB 1 and 2 participants. One instructor explained,

*"And then the typing, there was just a lot of words on a page with weird enters
and spaces and sometimes punctuation, but sometimes none and it'll be like
word, 7 spaces, period, three spaces, another word. And now when I look at their
writing, it looks like English. Sure, there's grammatical errors or spelling
mistakes, but it's just so much more identifiable, and it's the same with the
speaking."*

In the surveys, participants were asked how easy four English writing scenarios were when they
joined REACH and afterwards. For example, writing their personal information on a form.
Similar to listening, speaking, and reading, when joining REACH, only 31% of the participants
found the writing scenarios to be very easy or easy. After REACH, this percentage increased to
74% and remained about the same, 70%, three months later.

When we compare the percentage of REACH participants who found the writing scenarios very
easy or easy with the same percentage of comparison group members, we find that more REACH

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participants, approximately 20 percentage points, found the writing scenarios very easy or easy after completing REACH and three months later.

Use of English

When joining REACH, participants were asked how often they use English in four different scenarios. For example, writing notes, letters, or emails in English. Fifty-nine percent of participants reported that in all four scenarios, on average, they used English every day, a few times a week, or once a week (compared to less than once a week). After REACH, this percentage increased to 87% and remained about the same, 86%, three months later.

However, when we compare the percentage of REACH participants who reported that their frequency of English use was every day, a few times a week, or once a week, with the same percentage of comparison group members, we do not find a statistically significant difference at either the end of REACH or three months after.

Overall, we see improvements in participants' English language skills after joining REACH. These include CLB progression and improvements in ease of completing reading, writing, listening, and speaking tasks in English and in the use of English in daily activities. Measures of these participant outcomes are similar or higher than those of comparison group members. Overall, REACH achieved its primarily goal of improving participants' English. Next, we investigate whether these improvements helped participants integrate into Canadian society.

DIGITAL SKILLS

In addition to gaining English skills, REACH participants learned digital literacy skills through REACH. Program staff explained that they worked with participants to Google information such as finding information about Canadian dental benefits. Participants were then able to independently search for their needs on Google and navigate the platform and others. Participants also learned to draft and send emails through REACH.

When joining REACH, participants were asked how easily they could use their digital skills in three different scenarios: searching on the internet, using email, and typing homework. Approximately, 58% of participants found all three digital skills scenarios, on average, to be easy or very easy. After REACH, this percentage increased to 89% and remained about the same, 82%, three months later. Comparing REACH participants with comparison group members, we find that significantly more REACH participants found the digital skills scenarios to be easy or very easy, 19 percentage points more after the completion of REACH and 18 percentage points three months later.

LIFE IN CANADA

Sense of belonging and social networks

In the surveys, participants were asked about their sense of belonging to their neighbourhood, city, province, and Canada. At the beginning of REACH, on average, 41% of participants had a strong sense of belonging. We see no statistically significant increase in sense of belonging after REACH or three months later. Similarly, when we compare the percentage of REACH participants who had a strong sense of belonging with the same percentage of comparison group members, we do not find a statistically significant difference at either the end of REACH or three months later.

A few participants expressed that they enjoyed meeting other mothers in the program and appreciated the new friendships they made. For example, one participant shared that she made a friend with another participant in the program, and they spent a lot of time practicing English together. Another participant noted,

> *"It was nice to encounter with different cultures, meeting people from different countries. It helped me to meet other people. And my daughter as well because she also met other kids."*

Program staff similarly reported that they observed friendships being developed in REACH. Program staff said that many participants faced challenges in their personal lives, and they leaned on other participants for peer support. Because many participants did not have family or friends in Canada, they relied on other participants in REACH to share challenges and receive and provide advice. Program staff also heard from participants that because they had developed conversational skills, participants made friends with other mothers at their children's schools or with mothers in the park.

A few program staff acknowledged that participants were still isolated and did not have friends in Canada even after participating in the program. They explained that it could be due to some participants being introverted or as a result of family control. One instructor said,

> *"This is an area where my students still almost all of them are like I don't have friends, I don't have family, I don't have community here. [...] And so, we talk about things like going to the library, signing up for a class or volunteering. And when you do these things repeatedly, that's how you make a friend. But I think this is an area that maybe my students didn't meet their needs. So, they're still saying that this is the need that they have where they want more community in this country."*

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In order to foster more friendships among participants, program staff recommended that they include a field trip once a month at a public place where ECEs were not needed. This activity would allow participants to meet together in a non-formal environment.

As participants spent a lot of one-on-one time with instructors, several participants shared that they saw their instructors as more than just instructors but also as friends. These participants valued the emotional support that instructors provided them. One participant further explained,

> *"The [instructors] were like our friends and not only our English [instructors].*
> *They taught us how to live in a new country which is so important for me as a*
> *newcomer in this country."*

This is reflected in the percentage of participants who stayed in contact with other participants and with their instructors three months after the end of REACH. Thirty-nine percent of REACH participants stayed in touch (a lot or sometimes) with other participants by calling, emailing, texting, or on WhatsApp, 15% did not stay in touch often, and 46% did not stay in touch. Participants also stayed in touch with instructors. Forty-three percent of participants stayed in touch with REACH instructors often, 21% stayed in touch with instructors but not often, and 36% did not stay in contact with REACH instructors.

In the surveys, participants were also asked about their ability to get help from friends and family in Canada for household activities, advice, and emotional support. When they joined REACH, approximately 49% of participants could always get help. We do not find any statistically significant difference in the percentage of participants who found help from friends and family after joining REACH or between REACH participants and the comparison group. However, REACH participants who reported they could get assistance when they joined REACH explained that the help came from family (87%), friends (58%), neighbours (12%), and people at church (14%). At the end of the REACH and three months later, of those participants who could get help, the percentage who were able to get help from friends, neighbours, coworkers, people at church, and classmates increased, and so, the relative importance of help from family decreased. This compositional change may have resulted from their participation in REACH which introduced participants to their classmates and encouraged them to speak to others, including friends, neighbours, coworkers, and people at church, in English.

Although we do not observe a significant change in participants' abilities to get help in Canada, we do see an increase in the number of people who could help them with household activities, advice, and emotional support. When joining REACH, forty-three percent of participants had four or more people who could help them with household activities, advice, and emotional support. This increased to 58% at the end of REACH but reduced back to close its initial level, to

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47%, three months later. Similar percentages of the comparison group have four or more people who are able to provide support (57% and then 52% three months later).[13]

We also study whether the people who are able to help participants know one another. This is a measure of social network density. A less dense network, with fewer people knowing one another, is an indication of a broader social circle and is often seen as a positive outcome. When starting REACH, 56% of those who could help participants knew everyone or most of each other. There is no statistically significant change after REACH, three months later, or compared to the comparison group.

Knowledge of life in Canada

When joining REACH, participants were asked if they were able to complete six different tasks in Canada. For example, find a doctor, hospital, or clinic. Only 31% of participants found, on average, all six scenarios either very easy or easy. This percentage increased to 65% after participants completed REACH and remained similar three months later at 59%. These post-REACH percentages are similar to the knowledge of life in Canada of comparison group members.

Program staff also shared that, through REACH, participants learned about making medical appointments for ongoing preventative care and women's health, such as getting a mammogram or finding information about birth control. One program staff member explained,

> *"Another one that I thought was an achievement is that BC passed a law during the program for free birth control and so the instructors were able to communicate that and quite a few clients were able… this was something that they had really wanted, but they didn't know anything about, didn't know really anything about women's health in general, had no language to communicate about that. So, […] after knowing more about women's health, knowing that this was available, they were able to avail themselves of that service and those free contraception that they would not have been able to do otherwise."*

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[13] These changes and differences with the comparison group are only descriptive. We did not test whether or not they are statistically significant.

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Services and community participation

Several program staff observed that participants benefited from being connected to community services. Guest speakers played an important role in providing resources to participants, such as information about skills training and obtaining higher education in Canada. One program manager reflected on one participant who had health issues and needed help to find appropriate health care supports. Through REACH, the participant was able to obtain information for health care supports in her first language to be able to communicate her health care needs. Participants also obtained important information from instructors, during one-on-one sessions and learning consolidation sessions, about childcare benefits, having a bank account in their name, getting a driver's license, and getting and using insurance. MOSAIC instructors also connected participants with settlement workers at MOSAIC.

When joining REACH, only 19% of participants found it very easy or easy to find services in Canada (settlement services, housing services, language services, employment-related services, and legal services). This percentage increased to 56% at the end of REACH but dropped 10 percentage points, to 46%, three months later. In the six months prior to joining REACH, 51% of participants had used these services and we do not find a statistically significant change in usage at the end of REACH or three months later. Nor do we find any statistically significant differences when we compare the percentage of REACH participants who found it easy or very easy to find settlement services or in their use of settlement services at the end of REACH or three months later with those of comparison group members.

Additionally, within the library unit of REACH, participants at MOSAIC visited the library and obtained library cards. Participants were able to find services and resources that were offered by the library, such as English conversation circles to practice English with other learners, services for newcomers to Canada, and certificate programs offered through colleges.

At the start of REACH, approximately 45% of participants had been to community spaces or events (for example, recreation centers, libraries, community events, groups) at least once in the previous six months. This percentage increased to 69% after participants completed REACH and remained approximately the same three months later. We also find statistically significant differences in average participation in these events between REACH participants and comparison group members at the end of REACH. REACH participants were 11 percentage points more likely to have been to community spaces or events than comparison group members. However, this difference disappears three months later.

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CONCLUSIONS

The Ready English Accessible for Caregivers at Home (REACH) program is a flexible online language training model for newcomer women caring for children at home. REACH and its curriculum were designed to improve participating women's English language skills and for them to use the knowledge and information gained in the program to access community services, make informed decisions about their life in Canada, and participate in social networks.

The project was managed by MOSAIC who partnered with Achēv and ISANS in developing and administering the 9-month pilot training (October 2022-June 2023). REACH recruited 56 women with CLB 3 or 4 to participate in the pilot which included asynchronous learning activities, one-on-one sessions with instructors, group learning consolidation sessions, and family learning sessions. The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation was the research and evaluation partner responsible for designing and implementing the evaluation of the REACH pilot project.

The evaluation of REACH was designed to 1) understand who joined the pilot, 2) assess the successes and challenges of implementing the pilot, during both the development phase as well as the pilot implementation phase, and 3) estimate the outcomes of REACH for participants in terms of improved language skills, increased knowledge of life in Canada, and participation in social networks and Canadian society more broadly. These outcomes were compared to their starting levels when participants first joined REACH and with a comparison group in order to estimate improvements that can, in all likelihood, be associated with participating in REACH.

We summarize the findings into five main lessons learned:

1. **Recruitment and retention**:

   Due to the targeted nature of REACH, recruitment was challenging. Reaching newcomer women caring for young children, with CLB levels of 3 or 4, who have not already inquired about language classes is essential but time consuming. REACH was designed for women who could not easily participate in LINC classes. Therefore, it is important that recruitment reaches beyond LINC waitlists and women who have already reached out to language instruction providers. Social media and reaching out to community groups, ethno-cultural groups, and religious institutions and groups are all useful recruitment methods but require time and effort. Moreover, wait times and lack of childcare availability for taking CLB assessments to determine if potential participants matched the recruitment criteria both delayed recruitment and deterred some potential participants from joining. REACH adopted a more flexible approach to initial language assessments which was important in increasing recruitment.

During the 9-month pilot, approximately 30% of participants withdrew from REACH early. They did so to take LINC classes or for a variety of personal reasons. This percentage is slightly higher than the 20.6% LINC withdrawal rate of women aged 25-50 in LINC level 3 and 4 classes over a similar time period. Given, that REACH targeted women who could not access LINC classes due to their multiple barriers, the flexibility of REACH was successful in creating an environment that supported their learning and limited withdrawals.

2. **Flexible programming**:

Providing flexibility to newcomer mothers through asynchronous learning opportunities is crucial for their continued participation in REACH and their successful learning and in improving their English language skills. As many newcomer mothers are responsible for the majority of household tasks and childcare, many participants would often study English early in the morning, after putting their children to bed, or late at night when there were fewer distractions.

3. **English skills**:

The primary objective of REACH is to improve the English skills of participants. Approximately, 36% of REACH participants progressed at least 1 CLB level in at least 1 skill after joining REACH, similar to the progression rates of similar LINC students. We also find improvements in REACH participants' ease of completing reading, writing, listening, and speaking tasks in English and increases in their use of English in daily activities. Measures of these participant outcomes are similar or higher than those of comparison group members. Overall, REACH achieved its primarily goal of improving participants' English.

4. **Using English to improve integration into Canadian society**:

REACH's curriculum was designed specifically for women caring for young children; to be applicable to their lives. This differs from traditional LINC classes. REACH program staff identified that newcomer mothers benefited from learning the English required for everyday activities such as making doctors appointments, speaking with children's teachers, and conversing with other mothers and neighbours. This helped them make friends, gave them the abilities to complete important tasks, including the ability to use public transportation, and in turn, integrate into Canadian society. After joining REACH, we also see participants increasing their participation in local community events and groups and accessing services.

5. **Benefits and disadvantages of virtual instruction**:

The vast majority of REACH activities were virtual. This allowed participants to learn when they were available and to vary the time they spent on REACH depending on their particular

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circumstances on a given day or in a given week. It also made it easier for those for whom transportation may have been challenging had activities been in person.

In addition to gaining English skills through REACH, participants also learned digital literacy skills. Participants learned to Google information and draft and send emails and texts. We see increases in participants' digital skills after REACH and when we compare REACH participants with comparison group members.

However, virtual English language instruction does have some limitations. Firstly, it requires participants to have access to a device and reliable internet. They also need some initial digital skills and/or support in the use of digital tools. This should be an important consideration in the design, recruitment for, and delivery of similar programming.

Moreover, both REACH participants and program staff described the importance of face-to-face language learning in addition to independent asynchronous learning. Learning one-on-one with language instructors and in group settings with other mothers provided critical opportunities for participants to practice their speaking and listening skills with someone who could provide feedback, as well as clarify concerns about the learning materials or with whom they could share personal concerns and receive support. This could be achieved either virtually, in-person, or hybrid.

Overall, REACH provided flexible virtual English language instruction to women caring for young children with CLB levels 3 or 4 and achieved its goal of improving the English language skills of participants. After REACH, participants used their new skills to interact with their communities including with neighbours, other mothers, teachers, and doctors. They increased their use of services and their participation in community groups and events, thus supporting their integration into Canada.

Further research is needed to understand how effective programs similar to REACH would be if adapted for higher CLB levels or for different populations with similarly high barriers to traditional language instruction, such as migrant workers or seniors.

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APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of REACH uses a mixed methods approach. The qualitative analysis includes focus groups with both REACH participants and program staff from Achēv, ISANS, and MOSAIC. The quantitative analysis includes pre- and post-surveys and administrative data collection from all three participating organizations. Moreover, comparison data was collected through both surveys and administrative data. Given the small sample size, we are unable to investigate differential findings for REACH participants with distinct identity factors. Results, both qualitative and quantitative, are presented for all REACH participants as averages or individually.

The surveys collected socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, their participation in English language courses (other than REACH), satisfaction with REACH (participants only), and potential outcomes of REACH (English skills, digital skills, life in Canada). The administrative data collection included initial and post-REACH CLB levels, REACH English assessment results, and participation in REACH activities including attendance and dropouts.

QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

We conducted five focus groups in June and July 2023, one in each of the most widely spoken languages amongst participants: Persian, Ukrainian, Tigrinya, Arabic, and Spanish. All focus groups were completed virtually. A total of 24 REACH participants participated in focus groups. Two participants' data have been removed from the analysis and reporting as they received REACH programming while residing in Quebec. Since many participants had low levels of English and may have been more comfortable speaking in their own language, a real-time translator was present for each of the focus groups who would translate the questions from English to the participants' language, and participants' responses back to English. While we asked translators to translate participants' responses as directly as possible, the data and quotes used should be considered as an interpretation of the perspectives of participants.

We also conducted three focus groups and one interview with REACH program staff at Achēv, ISANS, and MOSAIC in June 2023. These focus groups were divided into discussions with 1) program managers and program support workers, 2) curriculum developers, and 3) language instructors. A total of 17 program staff participated in the virtual focus groups and interview.

We completed the focus group and interview notes by listening to the audio-recordings and referring to the transcriptions. A codebook was developed using the focus group and interview questions, as well as what we had initially heard from focus groups and interviews. All focus groups and interviews were coded using Excel. The final codebook contained four main themes, namely: a) what worked well in implementing REACH (program staff) or participating in REACH

(participants), b) challenges of implementing REACH (program staff) or barriers in participating and engaging in REACH (participants), c) outcomes and benefits of REACH, and d) recommendations to improve REACH to address gaps identified by program staff and participants. Summaries were prepared by highlighting common and diverging themes and patterns across participants and program staff and using verbatim and translated quotations.

QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Given the small number of participants who joined the pilot, the analysis and reporting only present characteristics and results overall for REACH and not by service provider organization or demographic characteristic.

We use data from the initial survey of participants when they joined REACH and administrative data collected from Achēv, ISANS, and MOSAIC throughout the pilot, to summarize the characteristics of participants. We tabulate frequencies, percentages, or means for the sample of program participants, if the sample sizes are sufficient (minimum of 5 observations per category[14]). All REACH participants completed the baseline survey.

In order to check whether comparison group members are a good estimate of the counterfactual for REACH participants, we test for any statistically significant differences between their average characteristics. Since comparison members did not complete a survey at the beginning of REACH, we compare only those characteristics that are unlikely to have changed over the period of REACH. They include age, marital status, number of children, age of youngest child, immigration category, and length of time in Canada. However, it is important to note that we cannot test for all possible differences between REACH participants and comparison group members. Therefore, these tests can only reject the validity of the comparison group as a good estimate of what would have occurred to REACH participants. The p-value of the F-test for the joint statistical significance of differences in these characteristics is 0.05 but no individual characteristic is statistically significantly different at the 5% significance level.

Although all REACH participants completed a baseline survey, only approximately 80% responded to the survey at the end of REACH and 75% responded to the survey three months later. We reached out to 274 potential comparison group members and only 36 were eligible and completed the survey at the end of REACH. This low response rate, of only 13%, is suggestive that those who chose to answer the survey are unlikely to be representative of all potential comparison group members and, thus, the validity of their use as a counterfactual for REACH participants is questionable. Of those who responded to that survey, approximately 86% responded to the survey three months later.

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[14]   When possible, if there were fewer than five observations, categories were combined.

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We also summarize REACH program participation and satisfaction and other English language course enrollment. We tabulate frequencies, percentages, or means for the sample of program participants, if the sample sizes are sufficient (minimum of 5 observations per category[15]). For the outcomes analysis, we first compare the CLB progression and exit results of REACH participants with LINC comparison samples as described in the report. For all other outcomes, we test for statistically significant average changes in each outcome indicator against a two-sided alternative using t-tests. We use the 10% significance level in reporting. We also compare average outcome levels of program and comparison group members. We test for statistically significant differences in each outcome indicator against a two-sided alternative using t-tests. If the REACH participant and comparison group initial characteristics are not balanced (at the 5% significance level), these differences are estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS) including control variables (those for which the t-test was rejected) and robust standard errors. However, this was never the case. For each outcome, average changes and differences are analyzed at the end of REACH and three months later. Variable creation and data cleaning details are available upon request.

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[15]   When possible, if there were fewer than five observations, categories were combined.

APPENDIX B: DETAILED RESULTS

Table 4   REACH participant average changes in outcomes

	When joining REACH (%) (1)	At the end of REACH (%) (2)	Difference (2) - (1)	Statistical significance	Number of observations	When joining REACH (%) (3)	Three months after the end of REACH (%) (4)	Difference (4) - (3)	Statistical significance	Number of observations
English										
Listening	29	66	37	***	45	30	64	35	***	42
Speaking	34	74	41	***	45	34	68	34	***	42
Reading	46	71	25	***	45	43	74	31	***	42
Writing	31	74	43	***	45	30	70	40	***	42
Use of English	59	87	28	***	45	58	86	28	***	42
Digital skills	58	89	31	***	44	56	82	26	***	41
Life in Canada										
Sense of belonging	41	54	13		43	38	48	11		40
Able to get help from friends and family	54	50	-4		40	49	52	3		38

	When joining REACH (%) (1)	At the end of REACH (%) (2)	Difference (2) - (1)	Statistical significance	Number of observations	When joining REACH (%) (3)	Three months after the end of REACH (%) (4)	Difference (4) - (3)	Statistical significance	Number of observations
Number of people who can help (4 or more)	43	58	15		40	39	47	8		38
Helpers know one another (some, not many, or none)	44	41	-3		34	45	41	-3		29
Knowledge of life in Canada	31	65	34	***	45	33	59	26	***	42
Ability to find settlement services	19	56	36	***	43	23	46	23	***	42
Use of settlement services	52	61	9		42	54	53	-1		41
Community participation	45	69	24	***	44	45	64	19	***	39

Note: ***, **, * indicates statistically significant at the 1% ,5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

Table 5   Differences in outcomes between REACH participants and comparison group members

	At the End of REACH						Three Months After the End of REACH					
	REACH participants	Comparison group members	Difference	Statistical significance	Number of participant observations	Number of comparison group observations	REACH participants	Comparison group members	Difference	Statistical significance	Number of participant observations	Number of comparison group members
Language												
Listening	54	66	12		45	36	52	64	12		42	31
Speaking	56	74	18	**	45	36	52	68	16	*	42	31
Reading	55	71	16	*	45	36	55	74	19	*	42	31
Writing	53	74	20	**	45	36	49	70	20	**	42	31
Use of English	79	87	9		45	36	79	86	7		42	31
Digital skills	69	89	19	**	45	36	63	82	18	**	42	31
Life in Canada												
Sense of belonging	46	52	6		45	36	57	47	-10		41	31
Able to get help from friends and family	46	47	1		43	36	42	51	9		40	30

	At the End of REACH						Three Months After the End of REACH					
	REACH participants	Comparison group members	Difference	Statistical significance	Number of participant observations	Number of comparison group observations	REACH participants	Comparison group members	Difference	Statistical significance	Number of participant observations	Number of comparison group members
Number of people who can help (4 or more)	39	57	18		44	36	52	45	-6		42	31
Helpers know one another (some, not many, or none)	39	49	9		39	28	48	49	1		35	23
Knowledge of life in Canada	55	65	9		45	36	47	59	12		42	31
Ability to find settlement services	41	55	14		45	36	45	46	1		42	31
Use of settlement services	52	61	9		43	35	48	51	4		42	31
Community Participation	69	58	11	*	45	36	63	62	1		41	31

Note: ***, **, * indicates statistically significant at the 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

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APPENDIX C: COST STUDY

The evaluation of REACH includes a basic cost study. REACH costs include its design, management, delivery, and evaluation. The cost study first removes the evaluation and research costs[16] as they would not be required for future program delivery. The remaining costs are divided into two categories: Development costs and delivery costs. Development costs are fixed costs associated with curriculum development and are independent of the number of REACH participants. If REACH were to be continued, these costs would not be required as the curriculum has already been developed. However, if REACH were to be adapted to different learners beyond newcomer women caring for young children at home and/or extended beyond CLB levels 3 and 4, these costs would need to be considered. Yet, they would likely be lower than the development costs of REACH as the curriculum could be adapted instead of created from zero.

We report both the total cost of REACH as well as the costs by category and per client. The costs per client are compared to LINC costs for a similar number of hours of study. Given that these LINC costs are not adjusted for inflation, we do not adjust the costs of REACH for inflation over the three-year project period (fiscal year 2021/2022 to fiscal year 2023/2024). Table 6 presents these REACH costs. Given that REACH was developed jointly by Achēv, ISANS, and MOSAIC, all costs are presented for the entire REACH pilot and not separately by organization.

All costs incurred in the first fiscal year of the project are associated with development as the programming did not begin until the second fiscal year of the project. The costs of curriculum development include salaries, including benefits, training, professional, and consultant fees, and overhead costs. Curriculum development was undertaken by curriculum developers, online developers, and ECE developers. The total cost of the development of REACH was $529,449 or $9,454 per participant.

During the second and third fiscal years of the project, program delivery expenses included salaries, including benefits, of project managers, administrative staff, instructors, and early childhood educators. It also included direct costs of program delivery, such as supplies for in-person play activities and honoraria for guest speakers, overhead costs, and administrative costs. The total program delivery cost of REACH is $10,580 per participant. Had REACH achieved its targeted recruitment goal of 30 participants per organization, the total program delivery

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[16]   Payments to SRDC for the evaluation of REACH as well as honoraria to clients participating in data collection activities are removed from the cost study. However, time spent by Achēv, ISANS, and MOSAIC staff in research activities were not collected and, therefore, cannot be removed from the cost study.

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expenses would have been similar as no additional staff would have been hired. In that scenario, the program delivery costs would have been much less, at $6,583 per participant.

Summing the development and delivery costs of REACH, the total cost of REACH is $20,035 per participant. This cost is substantially higher than the costs of LINC over a similar period. However, the relevant comparison is between the ongoing delivery costs of REACH ($10,580 per participant), excluding the development costs, and LINC costs as LINC is an ongoing program. We have the cost per participant of two similar LINC programs.

The first is the cost per participant of the LINC Home Study program offered by Achēv during the period from October 2022 until June 2023. The cost includes instructor salaries, which can include other activities in addition to teaching, and other activities in the delivery of services not directly related to teaching and is divided by the number of unique clients who were active in the program during that period. The cost per participant of LINC Home Study during this period was $815.

The second is the projected cost per participant of LINC at MOSAIC for April 2023-March 2024, which does not overlap with the REACH pilot period and is a few months longer. This cost is projected at $2,968. MOSAIC also included the delivery of REACH in their response to IRCC's call for proposals. MOSAIC projected the cost per participant of REACH for fiscal year 2025/26 to be $1,746.92[17] per participant for 43 weeks of programming with a class size of 15[18] participants.[19]

Table 6   REACH costs

	Total cost	Cost per participant
Curriculum development	$529,449	$9,454
Program delivery	$592,507	$10,580
Total	$1,121,956	$20,035

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[17] In MOSAIC's response to IRCC's call for proposals, REACH was not submitted as a separate proposal. Therefore, this amount was estimated by extracting the costs associated with delivering REACH from the total proposal budget.

[18] Class size would remain at 15 students, but MOSAIC anticipates serving 45 clients over this period given that some students will graduate, and others will dropout and MOSAIC will allow for continuous student intake.

[19] The primary reason for the large difference between this budgeted amount and the cost of the delivery of REACH during the pilot was the salary of one full time project manager. This was necessary during the implementation and evaluation of the new pilot program but is no longer required for the continued implementation of REACH.

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