

FAMILY SUPPORT FOR HIGH SCHOOL REFUGEE YOUTH IN  
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

by

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores high school refugee youth's family support in Newfoundland and Labrador. Data were collected from three high school teachers, three refugee youth and two of their parents. The findings of this study reveal that many services on academic assistance and social activities for refugee youth are available in the high school and local communities. However, parent participants tend to depend entirely on local communities and high school teachers in terms of their children's academic studies due to language barriers and low educational attainment. This study demonstrates that parents from diverse cultural backgrounds have different perceptions on what constitutes quality education than those of Canadian school teachers. More effort should be made to promote parent-teacher interaction by schools and local communities.

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## Chapter One –Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction of the Study

Years ago, while I was reading a book, an interesting explanation of family left a deep impression on me. The word “FAMILY” as described by the book, is an acronym, meaning “Father and Mother, I Love You.” Family is such a simple word, but I could feel the strong power behind the explanation. It plays such a critical role in terms of a child’s intellectual and academic development. In my case, I am the only child of my parents. They are my family and they have provided me with a safe and engaged living and learning environment. They have financially supported me to come to Canada to pursue my Master’s degree. We meet and talk online every day even though we are not in the same place. I am fortunate that I have received sufficient family support and could choose to come to and stay in Canada. I never imagined how life would be without my parents. However, my personal volunteer experience in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) offered me an opportunity to meet with some high school refugee students who did not have a choice on where to stay when they left their refugee camps.

*A refugee* is defined by the United Nations as an individual who:

owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his



nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (UNHCR, 2013, para. 3).

Some refugee youth came to Canada with their parents while a portion of them came alone or with their siblings. The definition of family to them might be different. In this study, family means the refugee youth's family members such as birth parents and siblings as opposed to host or foster families that are not related by blood. The United Nations defines *youth* as individuals between the age of 15 and 24 (*Definition of Youth*, n.d., p.1). Refugee youth who are enrolled in high schools are normally between the ages of 16 and 19, and they are the targeted participants in this study. I use the term of high school refugee students and refugee youth interchangeably to refer to the same group.

The terms "immigrant" and "refugee" will be used frequently throughout this thesis. There are mainly three categories of immigrants or permanent residents identified by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC): family class, economic immigrants and refugees (*Facts and Figures 2013*, p. 3). Economic immigrants are considered the biggest category. They become permanent residents via the programs of skilled workers, entrepreneurship, investors, provincial/territorial nominees, live-in caregivers, and skilled trades. Under the family class, a citizen or permanent resident of Canada can sponsor one's spouse, partner, dependent children who are under 19 years old, parents and grandparents to come to Canada. Unlike the immigrants

who fall under the economic and family categories and who are able to determine their destinations in Canada, refugees often do not have a choice on where to go. Many refugees have been persecuted and were forced to leave their home country, eventually, arriving in various countries around the world that provide asylum for refugees.

The federal government provides financial support for refugees for one year. The provincial government also provides limited financial support for about three or four months. Local immigrant-serving agencies in Newfoundland and Labrador usually help immigrants and refugees with resettlement by providing language programs, housing arrangements, information on public transportation, and access to education for school-aged individuals. After that, immigrants and refugees need to enter into the local labor market to secure family income, which is not easy.

My direct contact with immigrants and refugees began with my volunteer work, to which I devoted my spare time apart from taking courses on campus. I started my first volunteer work with an immigrant-serving agency in the summer of 2012. During this time, I was responsible for 15 immigrant children between the age of 6 and 10 while their parents were working or learning in the language school. This agency provided several training sessions before I started my volunteer work. I learned how difficult it was for some immigrants to settle down in another

country, a place that they knew nothing about. It becomes more difficult if they do not speak the language or have extremely low language proficiency. The combination of immigrant status, low language proficiency, and a low level of education can cause isolation and neglect from the local people and communities. I worked with other volunteers who were from a local high school working with me. Some of their younger siblings were among the children under our care. I established a friendship with the children and high school volunteers at that time. I observed that some youth took a lot of responsibilities to look after their younger siblings while their parents were busy working or learning English in the language school. Later on, I found that most of the children and youth I was looking after are of refugee background.

After I finished my summer volunteer work, I decided to further explore the life of refugee families and youth, hoping to raise public awareness towards refugees and figure out ways to help those youth with successful settlement and integration. This qualitative study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do refugee youth and family view their life in Newfoundland and Labrador?
2. How do refugee families support their high school youth academically?

#### 1.1.1 Distribution of refugees in Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador

This section provides background information on the distribution of refugees in Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador. Canada is one of the 25 developed countries (United Nations, n.d.) in the world that provide protection and resettlement services for claimed refugees under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. In 2013, roughly 24,000 people were included under the refugee category and accounted for 9.3% of total permanent residents in Canada (CIC, 2014). That number has slightly increased since 2012, which accounted for 9% of the Canadian population. That said, compared to the figures from 2004 to 2006, the refugee population has declined in recent years. Although refugees scatter across Canada, the majority of them concentrate in Canada's Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs), such as Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. The reason why metropolitan areas attract such a large number of refugees may be due to various resettlement services and programs, employment opportunities, climate, and family and friends resources (Hyndman, Schuurman, & Fiedler, 2006, p. 2). Africa and the Middle East are the top two source areas from which refugees come, accounting for 55.1% of the total refugee population. Language seems to be a severe barrier for recently arrived refugees, as almost half could speak neither English nor French (CIC, 2015, p. 19). A lack of sufficient proficiency of the official languages could potentially prevent them from education, employment, networking and other aspects.

In 2011, 146 refugees landed in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, accounting for 21.3% of total immigrants in this province (Statistics Canada, 2013a). The number of refugees in NL is the second largest group among the immigrant population. In 2013, 165 refugees settled in Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador (Statistics Canada, 2013a). However, there is no individual statistics on the number of refugees in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Adult immigrant and refugees in supporting roles are challenged due to language barriers, financial stress, and potentially post-traumatic stress associated with immigration in the integration process. These issues are mirrored in immigrant youth experience and have negative impacts on their education. Thus, further research on the current state of individual and family refugee stability is essential to identify the major integration barriers and potentially improve immigrant livelihood in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

### 1.1.2 Refugee youth in Canada

Youth will become major contributors to Canada's social and economic development in the near future. According to Statistics Canada (2009), children (under 15) and youth accounted for almost one-third (31%) of the Canadian population. Approximately 0.9 million youth below the age of 25 were immigrants in 2006, accounting for 9% of the youth population in this country (Statistics Canada, 2009). Immigrant youth in the age group of 15-24 who came to

Canada between 2006 and 2011 occupied 14.5% of the newcomer population (Statistics Canada, 2011). According to the data tables from the 2011 National Household Survey, youth who came to Canada within the last five years (2006-2011) represented approximately 30% of the total immigrant youth population (Statistic Canada, 2013b).

The age of refugees tend to be younger than that of other immigrant categories. In 2013, according to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2015), almost 5,000 of the roughly 24,000 refugees that came to Canada were between the ages of 15 to 24 (1/4 of refugee population). Over 9,000 of those 24,000 refugees were between the ages of 25 to 44 (40%). These figures suggest that refugees between the age of 15 to 44 are likely either enrolled in the Canadian school system or are a part of a local labor market after landing in this country. Nonetheless, they may find it challenging if low language proficiency and non-transferable foreign credentials are an issue.

### 1.1.3 Immigrant high school students' dropout rates

Receiving a high school diploma is one of the most important accomplishments that youth can achieve, as it provides an opportunity for post-secondary education (university or college) as well as potentially a more financially rewarding job. Several reasons for not completing high school include “socio-economic status, family structure, school type,

geographic locale, excessive employment, and psychological variables such as low self-esteem and aggression” (Hankivsky, 2008, p. 12). More than 86% of youth between the age of 15-24 in Canada held a high school diploma in 2006 (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2013). Jason Gilmore (2010) of Statistics Canada conducted research exploring the recent trends in youth dropout rates. He found that the high school dropout rate has decreased from 16.6% in 1990/1991 to 8.5% in 2009/2010 among youth between the ages of 20 to 24. Further, Gilmore’s (2011) study showed that the dropout rate of youth (20-24) living in big cities (7.9%) was much lower than that outside of metro cities (15.5%) between 2007 and 2010. The high school dropout rates in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador have also decreased significantly in the past 20 years (Gilmore, 2010). Newfoundland and Labrador became the province with the second lowest dropout rate (7.4%) in Canada between 2007 and 2010, following the province of British Columbia (6.2%).

Immigrant youth between the ages of 20 to 24 tend to have lower dropout rates than the Canadian-born youth. Statistics demonstrates that the dropout rate of immigrant youth was 6.2% between 2009 and 2010, while the dropout rate of Canadian-born youth was 9.1% (Gilmore, 2010). The lower dropout rate of immigrant youth may potentially be attributed to their parents’ high value on education and their settlement in big cities where there are sufficient teaching

resources. Nonetheless, there were no statistics on the dropout rate of refugee youth in Canada. This lack of information suggests that further attention on refugee youth's education is needed.

#### 1.1.4 Employment rate of immigrants

In spite of the low dropout rate of immigrant youth, this group has a lower employment rate than their Canadian-born counterparts. The employment rate for immigrant youth, according to a paper published by Statistics Canada, was 49.7% in 2008 and 45.6% in 2011, while the employment rate for Canadian-born youth was 61.6% and 57.4% during the same period (Yssaad, 2012, p. 19).

Statistics of the Canadian labor force demonstrate that in Canada's Atlantic Provinces, the 2011 employment rate of landed immigrants between 15-54 years old was 77.4%, which is lower than that of Canadian-born people (Yssaad, 2012). These statistics also indicate that the employment rate was associated with the length of time that immigrants have settled. The longer they have been in Canada, the higher employment rate they had. For instance, in 2011 the employment rate of immigrants who landed within the past five years was 66.2%, while the percentage of employment for people landed for more than 10 years was 84.7%. Recent immigrants are less likely to be employed than those who have been landed immigrants a longer



period of time, for example, issues with language proficiency, educational attainment, and non-transferable foreign credentials all could lower employment chances.

Despite the landing time of immigrants, the employment rate also varies depending on the immigration category. Immigrants coming as skilled workers have the highest employment rate among all immigrants because there are “higher job vacancy rates in the skilled trades and science-based occupations” (Department of Finance Canada, 2014, p. 6; Government of Canada, 2010; Li, 2008). Nonetheless, refugees landed after six months have the lowest employment rate (23%) amongst the categories although this rate significantly increases after the completion of language courses and educational programs (Li, 2008).

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The population of immigrant youth in Canada has increased in the past five years. Around 9% of the entire youth population was designated foreign-born in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2009). The importance of immigrant family support for their youth, which has been conceptualized by researchers over the past few years, is related to the academic success of youth and their future of being successful citizens in Canada. Families immigrating to a new country may face a number of challenges and difficulties in adapting to the new society.

Immigrant and refugee youth's educational outcome may affect their future academic development and employment opportunities, however, immigrant and refugee parents also encounter challenges of engaging in youth's learning process.

Previous research on parental involvement in immigrant and refugee youth's education has focused on three main topics. Epstein (1995) was the first person to provide the concept of parental involvement. Later on, by using Epstein's six models (1995), several researchers investigated the parental involvement in children's schooling (Altschul, 2011). A number of investigations have also explored the challenges immigrant parents face with involvement in their child's schooling, such as low language proficiency and education attainment (Chuang, Rasmi, & Friesen, 2011). Other studies have examined how parental involvement influence immigrant youth's academic outcome (Carranza, You, Chhuon, & Hudley, 2009). In addition, researchers have also investigated the significance of parental involvement in different cultures and found that immigrant parents from different cultural backgrounds are involved in their child's education in different ways (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009).

Numerous research on immigrant and refugee youth focused on Canada's Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) in Canada (for example, Anisef, Brown, Sweet, & Walters, 2010;

Kayaalp, 2013; Quirke, 2012; Shields, Rahi, & Scholtz, 2006). However, minimal attention has been paid to the Atlantic Provinces and cities where services and support may not be as sufficient as those in larger areas in Canada. In addition, most of the existing studies are quantitative, with limited in-depth thoughts about how to improve immigrant and refugee youth support and settlement in local communities.

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

This study on refugee family support for their youth could become an important resource for high school teachers, service providers, and local communities in successfully assisting immigrant families with settlement and adaptation. Within the school system, high school teachers and guidance counselors can benefit from this research by considering the findings on working with immigrant students, understanding their needs, and addressing the issues they have. Also, by collaborating and communicating with immigrant youth's parents, high school teachers could help immigrant youth to achieve academic goals and eventually obtain their high school diplomas. Government and immigration service providers will potentially gain insight from the findings of this study. This may help them better understand what other effort can be made in order to assist refugee parents to support their children's education in Newfoundland and

Labrador.

#### 1.4 Overview of the Thesis

Following the introduction chapter, I will review the current literature on the difficulties and barriers that immigrant and refugee families are encountering and the influence of immigrant family support for their children. The second chapter will highlight the literature on how immigrant and refugee families collaborate with schools to support their youth as well as the encouragement and expectations on immigrant youth from their parents. It also demonstrates the meaning of parental support in the context of different cultural backgrounds. Chapter Three describes the rationale of qualitative research methods. It also provides the procedures of how data is collected and analyzed for this study. Chapter Four summarizes the research findings, which contain several themes concluded from the data analysis. Chapter Five presents my insights into the themes and recommendations for stakeholders such as government, schools, and service providers. Furthermore, the strengths and limitations of this study are provided as a guidance of future research.

## Chapter Two –Review of the literature

### 2.1 Introduction

Canada is known as a multicultural country and has attracted numerous immigrants from various places in the past few decades. It may take a long period of time for immigrant families to be familiar with their new surroundings after they moved to Canada. At the same time, they may encounter various difficulties and challenges. For example, immigrant parents or refugee parents may be faced with language barriers, employment issues, and likely new social and medical systems. Their children may find it hard to adapt to the education system and may take some time to improve their English proficiency in order to cope with the mainstream curriculum in the school. Meanwhile, immigrant students are at risk of dropping out of school if they lack social support, English language skills, and academic and social engagement with schools. Chuang and Moreno (2011) point out that “parents play an important role in children’s schooling and education” (p. 239). Family support or lack thereof has a direct influence on immigrant youth’s success as Canadian citizens in the future.

This research study focuses on the support for high school refugee youth from their families, schools, and immigrant-serving agencies in Newfoundland. In this chapter, I review

recent literature on six themes: 1) difficulties and challenges that immigrant families have, 2) education and employment trajectories of immigrant youth, 3) parental involvement in immigrant youth schooling and parent-youth interaction, 4) parent-school-community partnership, 5) significance of parents' expectations in different cultures, and 6) specific issues with refugees and refugee families.

## 2.2 Immigrant Families: Difficulties and Challenges

Canada is one of the most popular countries for immigration due to its high quality of life, health care and welfare systems, and educational and employment opportunities. Furthermore, it provides opportunities for family-based immigration. However, immigrant families may experience overwhelming pressure and challenges when settling and integrating into their new environment. Jimeno et al. (2010) revealed that immigrant families in Ottawa had to deal with settlement and integration issues such as family disruption, lack of services for refugees, housing, and intergenerational conflicts. These issues may have severe impacts on the future life of immigrants.

Upon their arrival, one of the main issues that immigrant parents need to address is to secure employment. A number of studies discuss the employment challenges faced by immigrant

parents in the Canadian context such as language barriers, educational attainment, and nontransferable foreign credentials (e.g., Shields & Behrman, 2004; Taylor & Krahn, 2013). These challenges may potentially lower the chance of being employed, which may result in low socio-economic status of immigrant families. Sakamoto, Chin and Young (2010) highlight the disconnection between skilled immigrants and employers as mainly attributed to immigrants' lack of "Canadian experience" and soft skills, which refer to the "interpersonal, communication, behavioral and organizational skills" (WorkBC, 2014, p.1). The findings in Taylor and Krahn's (2013) study revealed that even though some immigrant parents were well-educated and professional in their home country, they could only attain low-end jobs because their professional skills were not recognized in Canadian labor market, which resulted in low-income for their families (Taylor & Krahn, 2013). A report written by Wilson et al. (2011) contains ten stories of immigrant families in Canada who were struggling to find secure employment positions. Their findings illustrate that these individuals were unable to find stable employment and secure income due to factors like systemic discrimination and non-recognized foreign credentials. The poor employment situation that these individuals encountered have severe health implications for themselves, as well as their family and children.

Low level of education is another challenge that prevents immigrants from finding a

decent job. Shields and Behrman's (2004) findings suggest that immigrant parents received insufficient wages and limited benefits because of low educational attainment. Parents were often engaged in sporadic low-income and long-working labor in order to support their family. Furthermore, parents' low levels of education and poor employment situation may have major implications for their children's academic and social development. They are less likely to help their children with academic studies and are unable to spend much time with their children. Chaudry, Pedroza, and Sandstrom (2012) further demonstrate that parents' employment had a negative impact on the quality of early childcare and education for immigrant students. Parents tend to consider employment as a priority over their child's education, which potentially have negative consequences on their academic performances (Hagelskamp, Suárez-Orozco, & Hughes, 2010). These potential impacts will be discussed in the following section.

### 2.3 Immigrant Youth: Education and Employment

Immigrant youth's educational performances have been frequently discussed in recent years. The official statistics from Statistics Canada show that the dropout rates of immigrant students between 2009 and 2010 were lower than that of Canadian-born counterparts (Gilmore, 2010). However, some studies have demonstrated that immigrant students have an overall higher



dropout rate than Canadian-born students (Abu-Ayyash & Brochu, 2006; Ichikawa & Jamieson, 1999; Watt & Roessingh, 1994). This study will assess certain variables such as ethnicity, language, age, social contexts and so on in order to understand immigrant youth educational issues.

Immigrant youth's academic trajectories are affected by many factors, as Jimeno et al. (2010) identified, including lack of support from parents, language barriers, identity confusions, and their transitions from school to work (Jimeno et al., 2010). A mixed-methods longitudinal study was conducted by Suárez-Orozco et al. (2010) to identify potential factors that led to immigrant students' academic trajectories in the United States. The results illustrate that two thirds of the participants' academic performance declined and students who had low academic engagement and English proficiency were more likely to become low achievers. The same study further suggests that family, school, and individual characteristics are associated with immigrant students' educational performance (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). Furthermore, Rossiter and Rossiter's (2009) study supplemented that family risk factors—such as family poverty, mental health problems, lack of essential interaction with children—had a negative impact on youth's academic performance resulting in an increase in risk of involvement in illegal activity. They further suggest that individual risk factors, including “pre-migration violence and trauma”, were

attributed to the likelihood of youth violence and criminal behavior (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009, p. 417). These reasons may potentially affect youth's behaviors at school, dropout rates, academic performance, and future plans after graduation from high schools.

Language proficiency is also a crucial aspect of immigrant youth's academic performance, which would likely have serious implications for their future as successful Canadian citizens (Chow, 2000; Chuang et al. 2011). Likewise, the educational well-being of immigrants is related to the age when they immigrated. The younger they come, the faster they integrate to the new environment. It is easier and faster for younger generations to adapt to the new language and social contexts than older ones. Corak (2011) from Statistics Canada conducted a project on educational outcome of immigrant youth. The results demonstrated that immigrants from Portugal that arrived in Canada after the age of 15 had the highest dropout rates, reaching more than 60% (Corak, 2011). This high percentage may indicate that immigrant youth are more likely to enter to the Canadian labor market with poor educational backgrounds.

Schools are also an important place that influences immigrant youth's educational attainment. Gibson and Carrasco's (2009) study illustrates that immigrant students have been marginalized under the unwelcoming school systems in both the United States and Spain even

though both of the countries embrace the cultural diversity that immigrants provided. Education is an equal opportunity for both immigrant students and local students. Therefore, schools need to take initiatives to raise cultural awareness and tolerance among administrative staff, teachers as well as local students.

Youth's plans after graduation from high school are also critical for their future. Some of them may decide to pursue post-secondary education while some may enter into the labor market after completion of high school. Immigrant youth may find it difficult to have a decent job with a high school diploma. Statistics reveal that immigrant youth aged 15-24 have a higher unemployment rate than that of their Canadian-born counterparts ("Youth Unemployment in Canada", 2014). More specifically, the employment rate of immigrants who recently arrived in Canada reached its lowest point in 2011 (Yssaad, 2012), which does not help with the situation. Although Canada is known as a multicultural country that provides equal opportunities to people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, sometimes immigrants still feel they are judged by their appearance, accent and other aspects. Lauer, Wilkinson, Yan, Sin, and Tsang (2012a) explored the employment experiences of 82 immigrant youth in four Canadian cities. The results demonstrated that immigrant youth encountered greater challenges finding employment than Canadian-born youth as a result of language barriers and racial discrimination. For example, one

of immigrant participants who worked in a financial company felt frustrated that his clients did not trust him to handle their money because he had a “new Canadian” accent (Lauer et al., 2012a). Unfortunately, this is not a single case. Many immigrant participants have similar employment experiences (Lauer et al., 2012a).

## 2.4 Parental Involvement in Youth Education

### 2.4.1 Types of parental involvement and immigrant parents’ challenges

Family is considered as one of the most important “developmental contexts” for youth (Qin & Han, 2011). Parents are instrumental in supporting youth on all aspects of intellectual and educational development. Joyce Epstein was one of the first people to develop models of parental involvement in children’s education. Parental involvement is claimed to be significantly influential on children’s educational success (Pomerantz & Moorman, 2010; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002, 2005). It is well established that higher academic performance is achieved when parents commit to their children’s studies (Chuang & Moreno, 2011; Rogers, Theule, Ryan, Adam, & Keating, 2009; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010; Wills & Cleary, 1996). Carreón, Drake, and Barton (2005) conducted a study on the challenges that immigrant parents have as they try to engage in their children’s education in the United States. For example, an immigrant parent

participant who was a Spanish speaker in the study had a difficult time communicating with her children's school due to language issues. She could not talk to the school staff until the translator was called to the school. Thus, she and other immigrant parents felt "disrespected and devalued" by the school due to the lack of bilingual staff (Carreón et al., 2005). The benefits of "parents' presence" in their children's schooling were highlighted by parents although they were not able to provide much support. Without parental involvement, based on the quantitative data from Wright and Levitt's study (2014), immigrant students tend to have significantly lower academic competence and achievement expectations than youth with parental involvement. Baum and Flores's study (2011) further found that immigrant youth are more likely to struggle in the postsecondary education if their parents were not "in a position to help them prepare for and navigate the postsecondary system" (p. 186). Based on Epstein (1995) theories, parental involvement includes six major types:

1. Parenting: Parents should know how to support their children at different ages and grade levels. Parents are responsible for establishing a good environment at home for children to learn at home.
2. Communicating: Parents should attend parent-teacher interviews and communicate with

school teachers in order to know their children's educational outcome and behaviors at school.

3. Volunteering: Parents are able to volunteer their time and effort at school
4. Learning at home: Parents are able know how to help their children at home with school subjects, skill development, and family activities.
5. Decision making: Parents are able to be involved in certain parent organizations, school councils and networking events.
6. Collaborating with the community: Parents are able to receive resources and services through the connection to local communities.

These six types of parental involvement point out parents' primary responsibilities for their children's education and imply potential challenges. For example, communication challenges may exist if parents emigrated from another country and do not speak the same language as teachers do, which may affect the quality of communication between immigrant parents and school teachers. Another challenge is collaborating with the community. If a family is new to the community, they may not know the services and programs available for both

parents and children such as mentoring and extracurricular activities. In a nutshell, youth learning can be hindered or enriched by the degree of the “triangular partnership” between school, family, and community (Chuang & Moreno, 2011; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002).

#### 2.4.2 Socioeconomic status, education level and language barriers.

While parental involvement plays a critical role in youth’s academic performance, immigrant parents may not be able to engage in their children’s schooling due to several factors such as the socioeconomic status of the family, parents’ education level and their English language proficiency. Ji and Koblinsky’s (2009) research investigated immigrant Chinese parental involvement in their children’s schooling in the United States. The majority of parent participants were low-income and did not have university/college degree. The result showed that although most parents had high expectations on their children, they were unable to provide academic support for their children due to limited English proficiency and long working hours. In addition, the study revealed that immigrant Chinese parents’ lack of knowledge of their children’s academic performance led to the lack of communication with school teachers. A study carried out by Bitew and Ferguson (2008) also demonstrated that the Ethiopian-Australian parents were of “low socioeconomic status, and lack of time”, and they struggled “to survive within new and unfamiliar working, educational and cultural contexts” (p. 161). As a result, they

were unable to provide support for their children, which led to a higher risk of immigrant children's dropping out of school.

Parents' level of education attainment and language proficiency are also considered as salient barriers to help youth with their schooling. Shumow, Lyutykh, and Schemidt's (2011) research examined parental involvement for 344 high school students from diverse social and cultural background. They found that parents from lower socioeconomic status and educational background as well as those from immigrant and ethnic minorities are less involved in youth's science study. Moreover, parents are less likely to attend school events and interact with school teachers due to their low education levels and language barriers (Shumow et al., 2011). On the contrary, "higher income, White, native-born" parents are actively engaged in attending school events. In addition, the findings also indicate that home-based involvement is more essential and influential to children's academic performances. Sometimes, immigrant parents' language proficiency can hinder their ability to help their children with their school work, as the study of Aspiazu, Bauer, and Spillett (1998) showed Hispanic parents in the United States. Kao's (2004) study on the educational outcome of immigrant youth also proved that the level of educational attainment of immigrant parents had a positive relation to immigrant youth's academic outcome.



Support through social network can play an equal role in helping youth academic work. Crosnoe and Turley (2008) reviewed current literature on immigration and education and discussed that socioeconomic advantage, to some extent, could bring better academic outcome for immigrant students. For instance, students coming from Asian immigrant families are often outperformers, which is potentially related to their parents' high level of educational attainment, high expectations on their children, and figuring out ways to "marshal supplemental resources to help" their children (Crosnoe & Turley, 2008, p. 135). Li, Holloway, Bempechat and Loh's (2008) study draws a different conclusion for the influence of parental involvement associated with children's academic outcome. Their study investigated how education was facilitated among Chinese immigrant youth in low-income families in the United States. The results showed that the majority of Asian American participants possessed relative high academic achievement without direct parental involvement. Instead, those youth received academic support through social networks including designated helper, peer models, and extended kin (Li et al., 2008).

#### 2.4.3 Parent-youth relationship and interaction

Conflict between generations of immigrants may exist during the process of acculturation in the new country. The younger generation usually adapts to the new social and cultural

environment faster than the older generation which may preserve their previous values and traditions. Nevertheless, the culture clash and conflict between immigrant parents and youth may potentially affect their relationship. The parent-youth relationship and interaction may play a significant role on youth development and academic outcomes. For example, Aldous (2006) found that parent-child interactions were related to children's reading and mathematics scores. Moreover, mother's engagement in children's schoolwork was more critical than father's. Dinh, Sarason, and Sarason (1994) explored the parent-child relationships in Vietnamese immigrant families in the United States. The results showed that Vietnamese-born immigrants had less positive parent-student relationships than their American-born counterparts (Dinh et al., 1994).

Successful programs or models have been established to promote parent-youth relationship among immigrant families. Xiong, Detzner, Keuster, Eliason, and Allen (2006) examined a Helping Youth Succeed (HYS) program implemented in the U.S. for immigrants from Southeast Asian countries with the aim of addressing conflicts between immigrant parents and their children. The program was eventually used as a curriculum that enabled parents to "develop bicultural ways of thinking about and solving parenting problems" (Xiong et al., 2006, p. 9).

## 2.5 Family-School-Community Partnership

The collaboration between family, school, and local communities is also considered a critical aspect for immigrant youth's success. A study conducted by Epstein and Sheldon (2002) investigated the influence of family, school, and community partnership activities on students' absence and attendance rates. The results indicated that schools that were trying to facilitate strong family, school, and community partnerships sustained and increased students' attendance rate. However, the findings may not be generalizable to immigrant parents. Later on, a number of studies have explored such collaboration with immigrant families and illuminated current issues on the collaboration between immigrant parents, schools and community. For example, Chuang and Moreno (2011) discussed the challenging situation between immigrant parents and schools. They found that discontinuities existed between the school and home. According to Jimeno et al. (2010), "Teachers and immigrant families have different expectations on the role of parents, teachers, students' behavior and structure of the family. This communication gap disenfranchises parents and confuses teachers" (p. 19). Bitew and Ferguson's study (2008) pointed out that there was a lack of contact between Ethiopian-Australian parents and their children's school. Many participants believe that students may make greater progress if more support was provided. The authors indicate that the school, teachers, and parents needed to work

together in order to better help immigrant students achieve academic success.

Epstein's (1995) last types of parental involvement is to collaborate with local communities. Parents should not only involve in their children's schools, but also connect with local communities such as neighbors, churches, and immigrant-serving agencies. Lu, Marks, and Apavaloiae (2012) purposively selected 22 Chinese Christian couples who actively engaged in the religious services and discovered that faith involvement is influential to "child development and parent-child relationships" (p. 123). However, it is also concerning that certain types of immigrant youth are less likely to attend religion-related activities with parents. For example, Madyun and Lee (2010) explored how religious involvement influences immigrant families' parent-child communication on youth's schooling. The findings demonstrated that immigrant youth with ESL status tend to be less engaged in religious services than those with non-ESL status. Likewise, immigrant youth from lower socioeconomic families were less likely to go to church with their parents. Fortunately, there are other ways to engage immigrant children. Aspiazu et al. (1998) examined an education model created by a Hispanic community in the United States to provide after-school tutoring and enhance Hispanic students' academic performance as well as the adult ESL program. According to parental feedback, with the help of this community educational center, most of their children's academic performance had seen an

improvement on many aspects such as attitude towards study, homework completion, English language proficiency, and progress in specific subjects (Aspiazu et al., 1998).

## 2.6 Beliefs of Education in Different Cultures

Sufficient studies have demonstrated that immigrant youth work harder and have achieved higher academic performances due to high family values and parental expectations on them (Chow, 2000; Crystal, et al., 1994; Mau, 1995; Qin, & Han, 2011; Wong, 1990). Even though some immigrant parents are poorly educated, they greatly encouraged their children to receive higher education (Støren, 2011). As it was discussed in previous sections, educational attainment is closely associated with employment opportunities. The higher levels of education a person receives, the greater possibility that he/she can obtain a high-paid job. Thus, parents who are less educated sometimes have higher expectations on their children since they want their children to have a better future.

Parents' expectations and their value of education may vary in different cultural settings. According to Chuang and Moreno (2011), "immigrant parents bring their own cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors regarding their role with respect to their children's education and schooling. These preexisting values and practices may align or conflict with those of the schools"

(p. 239). Therefore, parents may come across many challenges while trying to support their children's academic study and facilitate the communication with teachers. Meanwhile, those immigrant youth may find it difficult to cope with their academic study without their parents' support. Immigrants from East Asian countries are usually considered to have high value of education. Parents tend to have high expectations on their children and tend to be more engaged in their children's education. A four-year longitudinal study conducted by Huntsinger and Jose (2009) investigated three types of parent involvement on second-generation immigrant youth's schooling among Chinese American (CA) and European American (EA) families. The findings demonstrated that CA parents were more engaged in teaching youth at home than EA parents were. However, CA parents volunteered less than EA parents did at schools. Compared to East Asian immigrants, immigrant parents from Southeast Asian countries tend to have lower educational attainment, which may impact on their engagement in their child's learning process. A study conducted by Coll et al. (2002) involved three groups of immigrant participants coming from Portugal, the Dominican and Cambodia. The result revealed that although all of the three groups of people had high expectations of their child, the Cambodian group had the lowest parent involvement among the three groups due to cultural and linguistic differences between Cambodia and the United States.

Gorman's (1998) explored the relationship between cultural contexts and parenting techniques. He investigated the parenting style of eight immigrant Chinese mothers in the United States. The results revealed that the parenting style of Chinese immigrants was different from that of the American mainstream. The majority of immigrant Chinese mothers agreed that parental "protective watchfulness and involvement in their children's daily activities" were critical to immigrant youth's success (p. 77). Peguero (2011) conducted a project on exploring immigrant youth's involvement in extracurricular activities. The study showed that Asian American students were more likely to participate in academic activities while Latino American students tend to focus on sports. This phenomenon reflected how they internalized the values and beliefs of education from their family through up-bringing.

A number of researchers explored parental involvement of Latino families. The U.S. Government gives the definition of Hispanic or Latino individuals as being "persons who trace their origin or descent to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America, and other Spanish cultures" (Office of Management and budget, 1997, p.1). Gao (2004) concluded that most immigrant youth participants from Hispanic families tend to be more willing to live near their parents. Carranza et al. (2009) investigated how Mexican American parents' involvement influenced youth academic achievement and aspirations. The findings demonstrated that parental

expectation has a direct influence on Mexican American students' GPA and academic aspirations. Students who "perceive higher parental expectations" and "higher academic aspirations and GPAs" tend to be closer to the "assimilated bicultural level" (Carranza et al., 2009, p. 325-326). Altschul's (2011) study is also related to Mexican American immigrants. He examined Epstein's six types of parental involvement on Mexican American youth's academic performance. The results illustrate that home-based involvement including "assisting children with homework, discussing school-related matters with children, and engaging with children in intellectual activities" was positively related to students' academic achievement among Mexican American families (Altschul, 2011, p. 160). Meanwhile, the findings indicate that "investment of financial resources toward children's intellectual development through extracurricular instruction and educational resources in the home" are also influential to youth's academic performance (p. 166). Loera, Rueda, and Nakamoto (2011) investigated the potential influence of parental involvement on their child's reading, motivation for reading, and schooling among low-income Latino families in the United States. 128 parents and youth from Latino families participated in the study. The results demonstrated that parental involvement significantly influenced youth's schoolwork. Most parents reported higher levels of involvement in their youth's schoolwork. Meanwhile, the results showed that youth were more motivated to read when their parents



committed to their reading progression (Loera et al., 2011).

## 2.7 Refugee Youth and Refugee Families

While immigrants are prepared to immigrate in Canada, refugees usually do not have the choice to decide which country they are heading to. Instead, refugees are often relocated to countries that provide asylum. Resettling in a new country is challenging and starting a new life means a “bombardment of absolute different cultural practices, nutrition, housing, education, peer groups, and even family dynamics” (Steward & Dallaire, 2011, p. 49). The challenges and difficulties that immigrants face may apply to refugees such as education, financial resources and employment. However, refugees may encounter more severe issues such as traumatic experiences, mental health, resettlement stress, racism and discrimination, and so on. Those issues may impact refugees’ well-being and success in the future.

Studies focused on migration have showed that the process of international migration may result in the risk of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression (Ballew, 2012; Perreira & Ornelas, 2013). Specifically, research on refugees has demonstrated that a large number of refugees are affected by traumatic experiences and mental health issues (Bhui et al., 2003; Carlson & Rosser-Hogan, 1994; Kopinak, 1998; George, 2012; Mollica, 2001; Rousseau,

Mekki-Berrada, & Moreau, 2001; Weaver & Burns, 2001). Refugee individuals need to overcome many difficulties after resettlement in a new country. Kopinak's (1998) study involved eight participants who were Bosnian refugees and who settled in Canada. They encountered resettlement issues such as "loss, resolution of grief, trauma and its sequelae, family disruption and reuniting, language, occupation, initiating and forming new social supports" (p. 126).

Another study conducted by Bhui et al. (2003) demonstrated that the anxiety and depression that Somali refugees had were attributed to "a shortage of food, being lost in a war, being close to death" (p. 40) as well as poor health conditions. In addition, the study revealed that several refugee participants had suicidal thoughts due to unemployment (Bhui et al., 2003).

Refugee youth encounter a higher risk of academic and employment challenges than Canadian-born and immigrant youth under economic class and family class. A study conducted by Lauer et al. (2012b) investigates the transition of school-to-work of immigrant youth in high school. They found that immigrant youth, especially coming as refugees, fell behind in their education compared to Canadian-born peers. Refugee youth tend to have a higher dropout rate than other immigrant youth who fall under family class or economic class. The findings indicate that language barriers and grade placement were associated with their post-secondary education and employment (Lauer et al., 2012b). McLellan (2009) explored the life of Cambodian refugees

in Ontario and found out that Cambodian refugee youth were marginalized and less involved in education. The majority of parents of those youth were unable to provide them with “concrete guidance regarding school, or the discipline to help them navigate competing demands of school, work, and social activities” (McLellan, 2009, p. 158). Further, family separation and trauma, experienced by refugee youth, may negatively impact on their academic outcome and mental health. A study on Latin American and African refugee families conducted by Rousseau et al. (2001) revealed that refugee youth felt “disoriented” and “overwhelmed by unspeakably painful memories” (p. 56). Likewise, Perreira and Ornelas (2013) found that refugee youth who were separated from their parents were more likely to experience a “potentially traumatic event” (p. 998). Their findings also revealed that “post-migration trauma and the development of PTSD symptoms” were potentially associated with “discrimination and neighborhood disorder” (Perreira & Ornelas, 2013, p. 998). Furthermore, Montgomery and Foldspang (2001) explored traumatic experiences of Middle East refugees. Their findings showed that refugee youth tend to have sleep disturbance due to their traumatic experience and indicated the importance of family environment for refugee youth’s sleep disturbance.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the number of services and programs for immigrants and refugees is increasing since the past two decades. Bassler (1990) reviewed English language

programs for refugees in Newfoundland and Labrador and found that there were four programs that refugees could access: CEIC (Canada Employment and Immigration Commission), English as a Second Language (ESL) Program, the Settlement Language Training Program (SLTP), the Volunteer Tutor Program, and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) preparation course. However, she indicated that all four programs couldn't meet the demand of refugees. Thereafter, service providers began to offer various support programs to meet the increasing demand of immigrants settled in this province. For example, the Association for New Canadians (ANC), which is funded by both federal and provincial government, provides many settlement and integration services such as Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), language training, and employment services. Likewise, the Refugee Immigrant Advisory Council (RIAC) is a non-profit organization that "advocates on behalf of refugee claimants in the province and offers advice and support" (Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism, 2007, p. 8). Multicultural Women's Organization of Newfoundland and Labrador (MWONL) is a provincial based organization that provides support for women from diverse immigrant backgrounds. In order to support school-aged immigrants, the local k-12 schools provide ESL courses for those with low English language proficiency. Meanwhile, the Settlement Workers in the Schools (SWIS) from ANC assists "refugee and immigrant students and their families' transition into a new culture

and school environment” (ANC, 2015).

Even though many programs are in place to assist immigrant and refugee families’ settlement and integration in Newfoundland and Labrador, research on exploring the life of immigrant and refugee families and support for their youth in this province is hard to find. This qualitative study is designed to bridge this gap. Methodology details will be introduced in the following chapter.

## Chapter Three –Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with the description of research methodology adopted in the study and the rationale for the study design. The process of how the participants were approached and recruited is then presented. Data collection methods and the procedures of data analysis are described in the last two sections of this chapter.

### 3.2 Research Design

A qualitative research approach was employed in order to explore parents' involvement in their children's education. According to Creswell (2012), "qualitative research is best suited to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore" (p. 16). Patton (2001) compared qualitative research methods with quantitative methods and found that the former explores issues in an in-depth and detailed way. Therefore, the study will address the research questions raised in Chapter Two.

The study applies a case study design. Merriam (1988) defined case study in qualitative research as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or

social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive and heuristic, and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources” (p. 16). The intention of utilizing a case study design is to “develop an in-depth understanding of a case or an issue, and researchers collect as many types of data as possible to develop this understanding” (Creswell, 2012, p. 488). In a case study, data collection and data analysis are explored iteratively (Creswell, 2012; Hartley, 2004).

Case study designs have been categorized into two main types by researchers, which are single-case designs and multiple-case designs (Rowley, 2002; Yin, 2009). Multiple-case study designs provide the opportunity for the researchers to “explore the phenomena under study through the use of a replication strategy” (Zach, 2006). The study is composed of three cases, Case A, B and C.

### 3.3 Participant Recruitment

High school immigrant youth, their parents or guardians, and school teachers were the targeted participants in this study. Multiple participants were engaged to “provide accounts from different perspectives about an experience” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 140). Data is triangulated through the interviews with teachers, parents and students.

Eight participants were recruited from a high school in Newfoundland including three teachers, three refugee students and two of their parents. After the proposal of this study was reviewed and approved by the ethical committee from the university, a research request was sent to the school board for approval. After that, principals of two high schools in Newfoundland were contacted for research approval. However, only one principal of the two high schools responded and confirmed my research request. Newfoundland's population density and its closed knit community make confidentiality very important. There are only a few high schools here and fewer that deal with immigrant students. Therefore, in order to protect the confidentiality of this school, it is named as the High School. Then the recruitment letter along with interview questions were attached and sent to the teachers in the High School. Eventually, three teachers responded to my email and agreed to an interview. In order to protect the confidentiality of teacher participants, teachers will be coded as Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher C.

TABLE 1

*Demographic information for the three high school teachers*

Code Name	Gender	Education Background	Work experience
Teacher A	Male	Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Education, Master of Education	About 25 years
Teacher B	Male	Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor	At least 5 years



of Education			
Teacher C	Female	Linguistic degree	About 20 years

Teacher A has been working in this High School for 7 years. He was very experienced in dealing with both international students and immigrant students. His current work in the High School was to coordinate a tutoring program, provide students with advice on their academic study, career, and post-secondary study. In addition, he was also leading an international organization in the High School. Teacher B was doing his master of education in a Canadian university. He was known as helping immigrant students to bridge their educational gap in the High School. Teacher C has been providing extra academic support for immigrant students for more than four years. She was specialized in teaching newcomer students English.

According to the teachers' responses, students in the High School consisted of three categories. The first category is local students who were born and grew up in Newfoundland. The second category is considered international students or exchange students. They come from their home countries to Newfoundland and study in the High School for as short as a semester and as long as a year or two. They live in homestay houses whose owners are their guardians. Some international students apply to Canadian universities after graduating from the High School. The third category is regarded as landed immigrants that are permanent residents as soon

as they come to Canada. It includes students that are coming with their families as economy class and refugees. The research target in this study is the third category.

Initially, five immigrant students in the High School responded to me. They expressed their interest in my study and agreed to have an individual face-to-face interview. However, one student's mother was too busy with work that she couldn't make the time for an interview. Thus, the student chose to withdraw from the study. Another student's mother refused to participate in the study. Whereas, three immigrant students who were refugees were considered as student participants in this study. I will call them Student A, Student B and Student C respectively for confidentiality purposes.

TABLE 2

*Demographic information for the three immigrant high school students*

Code name	Gender	Age	Country of Origin	Year coming to Canada	Grade Level
Student A	Male	17	Nepal	2009	Grade 12
Student B	Male	17	Colombia	2008	Grade 12
Student C	Female	19	Congo	2012	Grade 11

Student A was living with his parents and older brother who graduated from the same high school. Student B was living with his parents, his younger brother and two younger sisters. Student C came to Canada with her older brother. Her brother moved to Alberta for employment

after he finished high school. She was living by herself in Newfoundland.

Parents were approached after I met with the three students. Student A's father is code named as Parent A while Student B's mother is named as Parent B for convenience of discussion.

However, Student C does not have parents and her only brother was out of touch. Thus, two parents were regarded as parent participants in the study.

TABLE 3

*Demographic information for two immigrant parents*

Code Name	Gender	Country of Origin	Year coming to Canada	Mother Tongue	Current status
Parent A	Male	Bhutan	2009	Nepali	Learning English in a language school
Parent B	Female	Colombia	2006	Spanish	Studying in a college

The interview with Parent A took place in his home. He was from Bhutan and came to Canada with his wife and two sons in 2009. He used to teach Nepali in his home country. He was learning English in a local language school that is operated by an immigrant-serving agency.

Parent B, originally from Colombia, is Student B's mom. She came to Canada in 2006 with her husband and two daughters. She was a religious teacher in Colombia. She was studying at a college in Newfoundland and Labrador.

### 3.4 Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with eight people. As DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) have pointed out, “interviews are among the most familiar strategies for collecting qualitative data” (p. 314). For researchers, interviews are “essential tools” because “the preconceptions, perceptions and beliefs of social actors in educational settings form an inescapably important part of the backdrop of social interaction” (Scott & Usher, 2011, p. 115). Interviews also provide “in-depth information pertaining to participants’ experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic” (Turner, 2010, p. 754). During the interview, the interviewer is free to start the conversation that he/she thinks is suitable, to ask questions appropriately structured, to explain the questions and check the answers with interviewees, “to prompt the respondent to elucidate further if necessary, and to establish his own style of conversation” (Corbetta, 2003, p. 270). DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) emphasized the necessity of developing a relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, summarizing that “rapport involves trust and a respect for the interviewee and the information he or she shares” (p. 316) while King (2004) pointed out that the relationship with interviewees was regarded as “part of the research process” and “shaping the course of the interview” (p. 11). Therefore, participants can “best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past

research findings” (Creswell, 2012, p. 218) by responding to the questions.

All interviews were based on the interview protocol that was distributed to the participants prior to the interviews. The interview protocol contains potential topics and open-ended interview questions. It continued to be modified and tailored for every interview (Hoepft, 1997; King, 2004) with the unique background and experience of each participant. All interviews took place in the summer and fall of 2014. These interviews were based on the participants’ schedules and lasted approximately one hour. After the interviews with teachers, I obtained the contact information of students who were landed immigrants. The recruitment letter and interview protocol were sent to those immigrant students. Student participants were recruited based on who replied to my email and agreed to be interviewed, and whose parents also agreed with an interview. All interviews were audiotaped for the purpose of transcriptions and analysis.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

After collecting all data, the interviews were transcribed into word documents and saved in my password-protected laptop that only I have access to. Then the transcripts of students and parents were saved in three folders named as Case A, Case B, and Case C. In this study, teacher’s transcripts were considered as supporting documents and saved in a folder named as

Teacher's Supporting Transcripts. Each folder was labeled with participants' code names, interview date, time, and my name in case of confusion and ambiguity.

I transcribed all the data and read through them multiple times. Creswell (2008) called this initial process as "preliminary exploratory analysis" (p. 250). He pointed out that the aim of this process is to be acquainted with the data and have a general sense of the transcripts.

Important information was highlighted and notes were taken in the margins of the transcripts in order to make it convenient for me to further analyze the data in the next step.

Open coding can be recognized as one of the data analysis procedures in qualitative research. It consists of "labeling concepts, defining and developing categories based on their properties and dimensions" (Khandkar, 2009, p. 1). Data was coded either line-by-line or sentence-by-sentence in order to develop thoughts and categories. Line-by-line coding was necessary because some of the participants in this study delivered long and content-rich sentences. With the help of my notes and comments, I created a chart for each transcript and add related quotes and thoughts. Then I was able to identify some of the themes from the charts. After that, similar perceptions or feedback patterns shared by participants were classified into one category. Each theme was generated based on each category of key words. New categories

of data were sorted in order and put into new folders and connected to related categories of key words.

Axial coding, advocated by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, is defined as “the act of relating categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124). It follows open coding as a complex analyzing process that involves “re-examination of the categories identified to determine how they are linked” (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 55). Based on the categories summarized in open coding, I reorganized the categories and subcategories according to relativeness and importance, finding out how the categories were related to each other. I added my insights to the existing data and the data was more systematically analyzed so that the findings would make sense to the reader. The next chapter will present some of the major findings analyzed from the transcripts.

## Chapter Four—Findings

This study explores specifically the current life of three refugee youth studying in the High School (as defined in Chapter 3) in Newfoundland and Labrador and their family support. Eight participants were recruited from the High School: three teachers, three students and two of their parents. An unintentional aspect of this research was that all student participants and their parents were not only immigrants, but also refugees. According to the teacher participants, refugee students are usually the ones who need more attention and support than the general immigrant students who come in as economic and family class. This chapter will present the findings of the interviews on refugee youth's current life in Canada, available support systems, and family dynamics.

### 4.1 Better Life in Canada than in Home Country

The interviews with three immigrant students and two parents revealed that they came to Canada as refugees. Canada is one of the countries in the world that provides protection and resettlement services for claimed refugees. In 2013, roughly 24,000 protected persons, composed of government-assisted refugees (GARs), privately sponsored refugees, landed refugees, and refugee dependents, came to Canada. This accounted for 9.3 percent of total permanent residents



(CIC, 2014).

Refugee youth and family members flee their home countries and seek asylum due to the unsafe and unstable living environment they are in, such as “political, religious, or ethnic strife and persecution” (Fong, 2007, p. 4). According to UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), by the end of 2013 around 51.2 million people were “forcibly displaced” around the world (UNHCR, 2013, p. 2). Among them, about 16.7 million individuals were considered refugees, which is the highest it has been since 2001. Pakistan (1,616,500), Islamic Republic of Iran (857,400), and Lebanon (856,500) are the top 3 countries that hosted refugees.

Canada is often considered a better place to live for refugee families most of time. All of the refugee participants in this study agreed that their current life was much better than it was in their home countries. For example, Parent A had been living in a refugee camp for almost 15 years. He became an elementary Nepali teacher during his time at the refugee camp. His son, Student A, received his education in the camp and English was part of the curriculum. Eventually in 2008, Parent A, his wife and two sons came to Canada together with his siblings and their family members. He stated his life was “better than the refugee life.” In another example, Parent B came with her husband, her two daughters, and three sisters in-law in 2006.

Later in 2008, her two sons made the trip to Newfoundland. She believed that her children and the whole family had more opportunities in Canada than in Colombia.

Unlike Cases A and B, Student C had a very sorrowful and unfortunate experience of how her family members were persecuted in Congo. She was separated from her parents and one of her brothers. She escaped from the Congo with her other brother and fled to two different countries prior to landing in Canada in 2012. She expressed satisfaction with her life in Canada, claiming that, “[m]y life here is good. It is better than where I was because I was in the [refugee] camp. Before I left my country, I went from two different countries.” Even though she previously had an educational gap and is older than a regular high school student, she was put into the High School. Compared with exilic life in the past, she was greatly satisfied with her current life in Newfoundland despite the fact that she did not know if her parents and brother were still alive or not. During the interview with her in the High School, I could tell that she was unhappy and missed her parents and the brother who were left behind. This is probably compounded by the fact that the brother who she traveled with to Canada left after high school to seek employment in Alberta. Seeing other students with parents around, she often felt that things would not be so difficult for her if she had parents living with her. As she stated:

If my parents were here, that would not be this way. Especially sometimes when you

see some people, they are joking with their job. Like today they want to go to work, tomorrow they do not want to do. Then what if you lose your job? What are you going to do? “Oh, my father is there. He is going to do this for me”. It just makes me feel bad.

Even though she feels sad and lonely at times, she is contented with the stable and safe life as well as quality education that she receives. She is hopeful that her future in Canada will be more prosperous than her previous life in the refugee camp. I would not refer to Student C in certain sections regarding family support because these situations do not apply to her.

Even when refugees come to Canada as a whole family, Teacher B believes that they still encounter difficulties to meet their basic needs: “I mean there is real issues that they have. Financial issues, transportation getting to school, paying rent, affording food, having people that can support them and help them with their work. They are struggling with the basics.”

#### 4.2 Support Available for Immigrant Students at the High School

The support from schools and teachers is usually crucial to students’ academic success. When school-aged immigrants land in Canada, they become involved in the Canadian school system. For immigrant students who are English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, it may not be easy to achieve academic goals. They need to improve their English language proficiency before entering into mainstream classes. According to the interviews with teachers and students,

the High School provides many accessible support and service programs for immigrant students.

Once an immigrant student registers in the High School, the first order of business, according to Teacher A, is orientation. Basically, teachers will talk to the student about course selection, the rules and responsibilities of the school prior to taking him/her to the classroom and introducing him/her to subject teachers. Meanwhile, if there happens to be immigrant students who come from the same country or who speak the same language, the school will pair them up until the newcomer student becomes accustomed to the school environment. If the immigrant student has very low English language proficiency, the school will look for a translator. If a new student feels lonely, teachers and other students will accompany him/her during lunchtime.

When Student B arrived, he was matched with an “international ambassador” who was a local student volunteering to work with newcomers. He spent the whole week with the ambassador, following him to classes, having lunch with him, and spending time with him. Later on, Student B decided to be an international ambassador, hoping to help more newcomer students in the school. Student B described the benefits: “Every time a student will come from a different country, my classmate and I will receive him or her, and we will help him not to get too much stressful, not to get lost in the hall ways.”

According to student participants in this study, teachers in the High School are always helpful and supportive in their academic study. Students are their priority and they make time for those students no matter how busy they are. Language is often a barrier for immigrant students' academic study in the High School; therefore, teachers take that into account in their teaching and assessment methods. For instance, in exams Student A and Student B sometimes had trouble with the words and phrases in the questions. Therefore, they were allowed to use dictionaries or ask for the teacher's clarification during the exams. Students who do not have parents or siblings in the country often need more help and support with their academic study. In this situation, teachers are often the best people to communicate with. As Student C claimed, "When I have some personal issue, I think this is too much. I cannot even handle it by myself. I tell some teachers and they are trying to help me."

Besides teachers' help, tutoring programs and after school sessions mentioned by Teacher A are also accessible for immigrant students. Students can also inquire about peer tutoring services if they struggle with any academic work. Peer tutoring mentioned by Teacher C is basically a one-on-one tutoring service for students. Moreover, two tutors that graduated from the High School and who are currently studying in the Memorial University are also hired full-time to help students prepare for their final exams. There is also a tutoring program called

“Tutoring for Tuition” that is beneficial to students who need academic assistance. It is a program that high school students can apply for to become tutors. After accumulating a numbers of tutoring hours, their first-year university tuition fees are deducted. Likewise, every Monday students have a homework session where they can do their work and get help from the teachers. Teacher B organizes an after-school program especially for international and immigrant students on every Wednesday. Students are able to get help with any subject. All of the three student participants attend the after-school program every Wednesday. Student B described the program as, “a couple of teachers that stay after school and help the students with the courses that they are struggling with.” As a matter of fact, it is more than a couple of teachers. Student volunteers offer their help as well.

#### 4.3 Help and Support from Service Providers and Communities

Outside of the High School, service providers such as the government, immigrant-serving agencies and local churches also offer a lot of assistance to immigrant families. Before protected persons come to Canada, they need to have medical examinations, prepare travel documents, and the most importantly, purchase their flight tickets. The Immigration Loans Program (ILP) administered by the Canadian government subsidizes the costs of the immigration process,

which is repaid by those families after they come to Canada. The Government of Canada also manages Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) which provides financial support for claimed refugees for a year. The agency also arranges social workers in the local schools to help immigrant students with the transition into the Canadian school system. The Immigrant-serving Agency (the Agency, as defined) in this study, funded by both the federal and the provincial government, helps immigrants with settlement and integration into this province. The Agency has a list of services including providing translators, ESL training and assessment programs, and career services. In addition, there are also various programs tailored for immigrant women, youth and children.

All participants of the three cases in this study expressed that they had received a lot of beneficial support from the immigrant-serving agency such as language programs, academic support, and after-school social events. Parent A came to Canada with limited English language proficiency. After completing a language assessment, Parent A started to learn English in the language school opened by the Agency. There are 6 levels in total and he was at level 5 now. His wife was also learning English at the same language school and was at level 2. Student A received free academic support in the form of a math tutor from the Agency. The volunteer had the experience of teaching in the university and he came to Student A's home to teach him. The

process of getting a tutor is fairly easy, according to Student A, “we just have to fill the form and they will look for volunteer which help you in many subjects.” In partnership with local schools, the Agency operates the after-school program (mentioned above) managed by Teacher A in the High School.

The Agency also provides youth with a series of engagement programs, developing immigrant students’ social and communication skills. By participating in these events, immigrant youth get a chance to meet with others and make new friends. According to Student A:

Sometimes there are some events going on...like the youth group. We go different places and sometimes we went play soccer. We do many things like there are party going on...where we gather other students like...international students. We meet and play games like them.

When Parent B and her family came to Newfoundland, the agency brought translators to the airport because none of them could speak English. She learned English in the language school for 7 months; however, she stopped her English studies because she needed more time to look after her two daughters. Student B applied for a volunteer to help him with English from the immigrant-serving Agency after he landed in Canada. Local churches are also welcoming and supportive network for new immigrants. A local church in Newfoundland supported Parent B’s family. She described this support: “When I came here, this church supported us. They pay for



us the tickets and they help the most time... they wait for us at the airport. They say 'Welcome to Canada'." She also mentioned that a volunteer from the church came to her home and taught Student B English once a week when he came to Newfoundland.

The agency also provides help to immigrants who do not have parents here. Because of Student C's living situation, she required a part-time job to pay for her living costs. The Immigrant-serving Agency helped Student C acquire part-time employment by providing a letter of recommendation. Sometimes when the Immigrant-serving Agency has new immigrants that speak the same language as Student C, she is called to help them with interpretation. Further, she also volunteered in the Agency as criteria for her career course.

#### 4.4 Interaction between Parents and Youth at Home

The interpretation and the results of the study on the interactions between parents and youth at home is based on answers obtained through the interview process. The results showed that participants in both Case A and Case B had a good relationship with family members and enjoyed quality family time. For example, Student A said that he enjoyed conversations with his parents and visiting his relatives. Parent A stated that he also enjoyed the time with his children and sometimes they watched movies or studied school work together. In Case B, family

interaction occurred less often than in Case A. Student B did not have too much time with family because he was doing a part-time job on Saturdays: “It is now that I started working. I do not spend that much time with them.” In the evenings of weekdays, Parent B’s family sometimes watched TV together, or Parent B helped her children with homework if she understood. There was a family time every weekend in Case B’s family as mentioned by both Student B and Parent B. Student B enjoyed doing activities with his parents and siblings whenever he had time. For Parent B, looking after her four children was challenging, especially with the two younger daughters who required more attention. She enjoyed talking about family activities, “we have the family day... every weekend. Sometimes, we went to watch a movie, or go outside or here doing some karaoke with children.”

Compared with Case A and Case B, Case C is quite different because Student C does not have family except for her brother. She said that she had a dispute with her brother because he wanted her to move to Alberta with him; however, Student C did not want to. Later on, she lost contact with him. When she was asked if she received any financial support from her brother, she stated that he did not support her. Instead, she said that her neighbors who were also a refugee family from Ethiopia provided her with support. The neighbor mother took care of her two children, one of which was Student C’s classmate. The mother usually dropped her daughter

and Student C off at school in the morning and they walked home together after school.

#### 4.5 Academic Support for Youth from Family

Studies reviewed in Chapter two have revealed the importance of family support for immigrant youth (Altschul, 2011; Hagelskamp & Hughes, 2010; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Kao, 2004; Plunkett et al. , 2009). The impact of parental support is diverse such as on youth's academic outcome and youth development. In this study, the participants' responses demonstrate how immigrant youth are supported by their families after school.

Students are supported by teachers at school, however, after school their parents may not be able to help them with their schoolwork due to limited English language proficiency and insufficient educational background. Parent A expressed that he was unable to help with his children's homework because it was too difficult for him: "they ask me some subjects. It is difficult to me." Instead, he asked the Agency to help his sons with their schoolwork: "They start some subject-based volunteer. They provide us volunteer. They help our children with their education."

When I asked Student A if his parents or other members in the family had helped him with homework, he replied: "Mostly they [parents] are also learning English, so... my brother

used to help me with math when I was in grade 10.” Obviously, his parents were not able to help him. Instead, he was tutored by his brother for a while. The tutoring stopped as his brother became busy with work.

From Parent B’s eyes, student B is quite independent in the family. He is the oldest among his siblings. When Parent B was not available, Student B always helped his mother to look after his younger brother and two younger sisters. Overall, Parent B thought highly of Student B: “He is really really responsible. He is only the most help ... when I cannot help, he helps.” This circumstance is familiar to Teacher B who stated that older siblings usually look after younger ones in the family.

In terms of homework, Student B said that he used to discuss it with his parents when he was in junior high school. He was able to deal with his schoolwork with the help of the tutor. He wanted to be a pilot in the future, so he would need to attend a flying school after graduating from the High School. Flying school has a very high requirement for applicants’ academic work so he needed to work hard and keep his marks high:

Back in junior high, there were some courses that I had to discuss with my parents. But now, it is just I have to do it myself. It is just how it is... Sometimes, I really ask them, they [parents] will help me and they will understand what the subject was about. Sometimes, it was too complex and it was something that they never had seen when

they were studying. Because now education has changed a lot. Therefore, they were not able to help me, but I would have a tutor that would come.

Compared with Case A and Case B, Student C has a different situation because she does not have any family members in Newfoundland. She could only go for teachers' help if she struggled with her schoolwork. Teacher B fully understood how difficult immigrant students' life was without parents. Teacher B found the following:

A lot of them are coming here without their family, first of all. They do not have family here. No support, they are on their own. ... Living on their own, their own apartment, their own job, getting money from the government, having to work part-time and pay the Canadian government back for their air fair. We got students here who are in seriously; they are on their own. 17,18,19 years old, no parent's support.

The interviews with student participants revealed that they held different views about the importance of marks. Parents are very concerned about their children's marks. Parent A seemed to be really responsible for his children. Even though he did not have the capability to teach them, he did keep track of his children's marks aiming to know how his children were doing at school:

I'm curious on my children's mark... I'm always asking. Then they do not want to show. Sometimes, I open their bag and then I look... mark is very important. Low mark, they are unable to pass the public exam. Public exam is not easy... that's why I'm curious [about] their mark. I want their marks more.

Student A himself also paid much attention to his marks. He was responsible for his study. If it was low, he knew that he might need to work harder on schoolwork. He said that he showed

his report cards to his family; however, he did not want his family to know if he did not do well with his study, “If it is even bad, I just throw it”. Talking about his education in the future, his responses demonstrated that his choices of future education depended on his marks. If his marks were excellent, he would apply for a university. If not, Student A would do a computer-related program in a college after graduating from the High School. Student B had a similar perspective on marks to Student A. He thought the marks he gained illuminated his academic outcome. He would need to study hard if he gained lower marks. His mother, Parent B, monitored her children’s schooling via computer. The schools in Newfoundland and Labrador usually provide an online system that parents can log into and access their children’s attendance, behavior, and marks uploaded by teachers. Parent B regarded Student B as a very responsible and independent person who did not need much of her attention. Instead, she claimed that she needed to spend more time in monitoring her other three children.

Lack of family support and the pressure from parents, Student C had a different perspective on the exam scores. She thought that scores could not fully represent her academic outcome. Instead, she highlighted that fully understanding what she learnt was more important than paying attention to her scores. Only if she understood the knowledge, did she know how to make a progress on her academic study in the future. As she explained:

It is to understand because today if I am crying about the mark, I can get the mark, but what about if next time I'm going. Because we are crying for the marks so that we can go faster. We finish high school and we can go to university. What if I did not understand these things in high school? When I go to university, it becomes stupid. What I need is just to understand these things.

She knew that she and her elder brother had gone through many difficulties before they immigrated to Canada. It was an invaluable opportunity for her to come and settle in Canada. Study was a priority to her "The very very important thing that made me come here, and what I have to do is just to study."

When asked about parent participants' thoughts on the importance of education, both Parent A and Parent B spoke highly of education, especially emphasizing the importance of education to their children. Parent A used to be a teacher in his country where education was highly valued. He said: "[e]ducation is very important to my children. I encourage them to learn. In 21st century is competition time. They [my children] need to learn hard. They need to improve education. Education is the internal eyes." Parent A was acquainted with the education system in Nepal. He explained that their public exam was called SLC (School Leaving Certificate), describing how important and how difficult it was for Nepali students. Student A stated that his father was always encouraging him to study hard so that he could have a promising future: "If you have a good job, you will be good. Nothing can affect you." Parent A

firmly insisted that he would continue to support his sons' post-secondary education. Student A firmly believed that his parents would considerably fund him when he went to college.

Similar to Parent A, Parent B also has a quite high educational attainment and she was a teacher in Colombia. She spoke highly of education. When I asked her if education was important to her children and why, as she stated:

Yes, really important. Because they get in the college or, they need prepare for the future ... except the marks, they need all and the most important is math because it is the base for their career. They need all that respect for the older persons. They are need good friendship. Respect for the people...when they study, they have more opportunity, they have more friends.

She told her children that they needed to study hard and go to college or university after graduating from high school. It is necessary for them to receive higher education that will be beneficial to their future. However, Parent B thought that the education in Canada is easier than that in Colombia. She set up some examples to show the different education system in those two countries:

Because they do not bring homework. The most important is the project. In my country, you need to study every night, for each subject, homework. During the day, they will take 6 subjects. In the night, [they need to do] 6 homework...When you do some paper, you need really clear and good writing, but when I check my homework with my children's, sometimes it is dirty.

Although people's perspective toward education may differ in different cultures, both of



the two immigrant parent participants in this study held a positive view that education is of importance to their children and they encourage their children to study hard. Just like what

Teacher A said:

I think there is a big expectation that immigrant students, their parents expect them to do well and to work hard. The value for education is very high because they believe that education is the key to their success. There is a great value placed on that. That comes across in immigrant students added it toward learning.

Without parents, Student C could only praised herself, “Usually, I do a great job. I praised myself. In school, I’m smart.” She wanted to finish school and find a job to earn some money so that she could go back to Africa to look for her parents and brother. She hoped that her parents and brother were still alive so that she could reunite with them.

Both Parent A and Parent B value education and have high expectations of their children; however, they still have barriers and difficulties in academically supporting their children after school. Teacher B concluded that besides encouraging their children and expecting them to succeed in their academic study, it seems that parent participants were unable to provide support by themselves at home due to limited language ability and financial insufficiency:

Most of the parents really do push their children to go to school. They get upset if they are not coming, but they are not able to provide the support in terms of even driving them to the school or money or homework support.

Teacher C held a similar view towards parental support among immigrant families. She

thought that parents “do not have the skills to help them. They do not necessarily understand that supportive role.” As a result, she preferred to talk to students directly on their schooling.

#### 4.6 Parent-Teacher Interaction

One of the goals of this study is to look into the interaction between immigrant parents and school teachers. The responses of participants revealed that both parents were keeping touch with their youth’s teachers. The parent-teacher interview, mentioned by Parent A, was a common way for parents to communicate with teachers. Unlike the traditional parent-teacher interview where parents come to schools and talk to teachers, the interview mentioned in this study is tailored for immigrant parents, especially refugee parents. For example, Parent A and other immigrant parents who had low English language proficiency spent most of their time every day learning English in the language school. The schoolteachers would come to the language school and hold the parent-teacher interview there. Parent A described what a parent-teacher interview was like in the language school:

Their teacher is every term after, they come in [language] school. They show us your children marks like. The subjects your child is weak. The subject is good. They show us your son mathematic teacher, also English teacher. They ask your son difficulty to us. We interact with teacher.

Teacher C thought the parent-teacher interview was a great success. She said that

teachers showed “the report cards and some of the work they’ve been working on, talk about the good things and anything that they may need to work on, any issues we are having or they are having. It is good.” Teacher A gave the reason why the parent-teacher interview for immigrant parents was held in the language school. She explained, “They are comfortable in that area [language school] rather than coming to the school which is a little intimidating for them.”

Nevertheless, for parents who could not speak English, both Teacher B and Teacher C mentioned that the Immigrant-serving Agency arranged translators during the parent-teacher interview. Student A told me that his father had the experience of being a translator for his sister who did not know English. Thus, the teacher talked to Parent A about his niece’s education and then Parent A explained what the teacher said to his sister in Nepali. Nevertheless, Parent A said that he did not have any barriers while communicating with the teachers, “I understand their tone, their voice, I understood.” Apart from the parent-teacher interviews, Parent A expressed that he communicated with the social workers in the High School employed by the Immigrant-serving Agency to discuss their children’s education.

Parent B had a different experience of communication with her children’s teachers. She often tracked her children’s daily performance via an online system. Although she expressed that she preferred face-to-face communication with school teachers, she felt upset because of her

heavy Spanish accent: “The most time I understand when the people speak with me. But sometimes the people have problems understanding me because I have problems with pronunciation.” Previously, she kept in touch with Student B’s junior high school teacher because “she was really nice.” Parent B described how she was helpful: “Sometimes I came here and spoke with her. She helped... She knew everything about the school.”

Unlike Cases A and B, Student C has “double roles” in school: a student and a parent for herself. Teachers in the High School regard refugee students who do not have parents as young adults, thinking that these individuals are able to be responsible for themselves. Teacher C found that the situation that Student C was involved in was not an individual case.

#### 4.7 Social Activities of Immigrant Families

This study also explored social activities that immigrant youth were doing at school and after school. In addition, parents’ networking was also investigated. Except for learning English in the language school, Parent A spent most of his spare time at home, doing housework, watching TV, and listening to international news. “I’m just audience. I have nothing to do.” Since two of his brothers had moved to other provinces of Canada, he sometimes visited his brother and sister who were still living in Newfoundland. When talking about interacting with

local students, Student A expressed that they were very friendly and welcoming and he often played soccer with them. As for the after-school activities, Student A reported that he went home most of the time; however, he had participated in some activities held by the immigrant-serving agency. He also volunteered for a multicultural event where he set up a booth introducing his home country. He also did some work-out exercise in a fitness center to stay fit. On weekends, he would visit his cousin, play soccer or ride bicycles if the weather permitted.

Parent B was quite busy looking after her four children, especially her two younger daughters that needed extra attention. Since her daughters' teacher recommended a reading website, she read for her daughters every evening to enhance their English reading comprehension:

My daughters need more help because a couple of years ago, they got a problem with their reading. The pronunciation, they need more time, I mean I spend more time with them. Sometimes they need use the website, reading and pronunciation. I need check.

While talking about her social networking, she said that she had some connections with immigrant parents who came from her neighbor countries:

The most time, from the immigrant-serving agency. When the twins play soccer or when they have activities, or when Student B has multicultural [event]... I know people from my country and close countries... Sometimes we meet in a party, maybe the children's birthday.

Student B said he used to play soccer at the school; however, he had an incident with his

right foot and after that, he could not play it any longer, which made him very upset. He had a tight schedule after school: going home, eating supper and preparing to go to the gym.

Student C seemed quite alone after school. If she did not work, she spent most of her time staying at home. However, she sometimes went to her friend's house and helped to look after the children while her friend went to work:

Where I used to live before, my friend. She has three kids and she works night shifts, Friday and Saturday. It is not like a baby-sitter, but I can say it is a baby-sitter because I go there look after the kids so that they sleep.

#### 4.8 Family Responsibilities

Although the financial situation is different in the three cases, parent participants were unable to provide sufficient financial resources for the family. Instead, their youth had to do part-time work in order to financially support the families. Parent A and his wife were learning English in the language school. They could not work because of low language proficiency and non-transferable skills (Parent A's previous credentials for teaching were not recognized in Canada). When asked about the financial resources, Parent A said that the government was giving financial assistance to his family; however, the amount of money given by the government was less than sufficient to support a whole family. Thus, Student A's elder brother

was working on weekends to support the family. Student A used to do a part-time job in 2012 for almost a year:

I used to do the courier thing like delivering paper to each home so they get paper at their house... It is just like 5 minute work only. I just had to delivery paper for 10 houses, so it was like really small area where I put that paper. I just keep putting by running. It just takes 5 minutes.

He wanted to make extra money for his family. When asked if the job affected his study, he said that it did not because it was an easy job. Student B hoped that he could get a part-time job in summer. However, a couple of months after the interview, I actually met him working as a checkout assistant in a local grocery store when I was shopping. It seemed that he was quite happy with his work.

Parent B did not work because she was studying in a college in the daytime. After school, she needed to look after her four children. When talking about her family income, she said that her husband supported the whole family, however, according to her description, her husband did multiple jobs and his working time was also flexible:

He worked in snow cleaning. Sometimes he drove a truck. Sometimes have the task for driving. Sometimes the other people drive the taxi. He gets the schedule for driving ... He sometimes works in the weekend, sometimes in the week.

Student B was doing a part-time job as a crew member in the food industry. He only needed to work for 7 hours every Saturday. He believed that the part-time job he was doing gave

him a break from being at school: “It gives me time to relax and keep my mind open.”

Student C needed money to pay for the basics of living, such as her rent, phone bills, food, etc. Unfortunately, her brother working in Alberta did not give any money to support her; therefore, she started her first part-time job in a printing house. Nevertheless, she stopped working there because of her health condition: “I was taking medication. I was taking anti-biotics. If I drink it at daytime in school, I became so weak. They told me to drink at night. I cannot drink at night when I had work there.” The doctor also told her that she had low blood pressure and suggested her to eat liver and beans. Then in December of 2013, she had her second part-time job as a food server in a fast food chain. Later, she found that her working hours decreased:

They told me they are going to add more hours. Instead of adding hours, they reduce hours and now they’ve reduced it. They have stopped it. I used to work two times a week... When it was in February, I began work once in a week. After that, I begin to work once in two weeks.

Till the day of our interview, she said that she had not been called back to work for a month. She did not know why this situation happened, “They haven’t called me for a month. I asked my supervisor, ‘Did I do anything wrong?’ She said, ‘No, I did not fire you. When we need you, I will call you’.” She seemed quite upset about it because she needed to earn money to



support herself. To her, losing a job means she did not have money to cover all of her living costs.

According to the teacher participants with regard to family responsibility for immigrant students, refugee students had a much heavier burden on their shoulders than other immigrants. Teacher B pointed out that almost all immigrant students had a part-time job. Teacher C had students who were the bread earners of the family. They would usually leave school earlier because they had to get to work on time, as Teacher C explained, because their parents were “expecting them to support... I have students who are working in the restaurants in the evenings, too. They may be dish washing or whatever until 2 o’clock in the morning.” When asked why most immigrant students were doing part-time work, Teacher B explained: “They need the money. They need the money for rent. They have sometimes trouble getting income support and housing. There is trouble with transportation. They cannot get to school sometimes.”

Immigrant students, specifically refugee students, have to bear heavier burdens than their Canadian peers. Financial resources are the major concern to some immigrant families as some immigrant parents may not be able to work. Therefore, their children are forced to work in order to support the whole family. Long and exhausting working hours may potentially lead to youth

health issues, less focus on their academic studies, and potentially affect their future career.

This chapter presents the major findings in this study including available support for immigrant youth at the High School, academic support from immigrant families, family interaction, parent-teacher interaction, and family responsibilities. These findings also reveal some issues associated with supporting immigrant youth from the school and their parents, such as a shortage of teachers working with immigrant students, limited support from immigrant parents, a lack of parent-teacher interaction. Some of these issues are worthy of further elaboration and will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter Five – Discussion, Implications and Conclusions

Parents' engagement with youth education is closely associated with youth academic success. Parents coming from diverse social and cultural backgrounds often have different expectations regarding parental involvement and the value of education. In the context of newly-landed immigrant families, they may have difficulties providing sufficient academic support for their children due to issues with language proficiency and educational attainment. Some immigrant youth live on their own without parental involvement, which results in a lack of educational and financial support from family members. Parent-teacher communication is also an important aspect for supporting youth educational success. The results of this study identified a number of issues related to parental support and immigrant youth academic success. This chapter will provide recommendations to address these issues which can be useful to immigrant parents, teachers, local communities, and policy-makers.

### 5.1 Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study demonstrate that the three refugee youth participants have received adequate academic and social support from the teachers in the High School, the Immigrant-serving Agency, and the local community. However, family support was missing in

Case C, and parents in Case A and Case B were not able to give sufficient educational support to their youth due to their limited language proficiency and educational attainment. These two parents thought that they were sufficiently involved in their youth's education. They were attentive to their children's marks, they tracked attendance online at home, they valued education, and they believed that higher academic success could provide their youth with a better future. Focusing on their youth's marks and attending parent-teacher interviews does not, however, mean that they were fully engaged in their youth's schooling. The lack of parental involvement demonstrated by Parent A and Parent B is not unique and represents a prevalent issue among immigrant parents. Teacher B expressed that immigrant youth lacked parental involvement, as he claimed, "[if] there was more parental involvement, or the parents were able to be more involved in the education outcome, we'll definitely be better."

Immigrant parents and teachers may hold different views on the meaning of parental involvement and the quality of education. Lyons's (2010) study on exploring the value of education among African and Hispanic parents illustrated that parents' values on education are deeply "rooted in their own experience with education" (p. 117) and they believe that education is the 'blueprint' for the future and linked to economic success for their children. These fundamental values and beliefs are common among immigrant families; however, there are

notable differences between these values and those associated with the Canadian system. One difference lies in that parents perceive educational success as being associated with the marks that youth achieved on exams, which may directly influence their future post-secondary education and employment opportunities. Both parent and student participants in Case A and Case B thought that grades were the most important attributes in education and reflect students' academic success. This is consistent with Zhou's (2013) study on exploring Chinese immigrant parents' concerns with their children's education. The findings revealed that Chinese immigrant parents tend to pay more attention to their children's marks and ranking and this becomes the major topic in parent-teacher conferences. However, teachers believe that parents need to do more than simply emphasize academics. Successful educational outcome is not merely reflected by grades, but rather, full understanding of what is being taught and its importance to students. In this regard, Student C (who had neither parental support nor influence) was in line with the teachers, stating that understanding the information she was taught was more important than the marks she received.

Another issue in question is that youth's social interaction, physical needs, emotional needs, and psychological well-being are also important for them to become successful individuals in the future. These needs potentially require parents' attention. A quality education

is to “acquire essential life skills, the power of knowledge and most importantly, the freedom and ability to determine our future” (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2003). This view is expressed nicely by a high school teacher who claimed that education is about “creating an imagined citizen to uphold societal values that are important to Canadians” while a former teacher agreed that education “reinforces values, but emphasizes the significance of community and the role education plays in helping young people become contributing members of a democratic society”(“Tomorrow’s Classroom”, 2011). It is necessary for parents to understand the meaning of education in North America, and specifically in Canada. Maybe this is an area in which educators and parents can work closely together.

The findings of this study also indicate that instead of active involvement, parents tend to depend on school teachers and the Immigrant-serving Agency to support their children’s academic studies. Teacher C’s experience is a case in point. The parent of a student asked her to “take care of” the student, saying, “you are their mama”. It was a metaphor of trust, but also a transfer of responsibility. It seems that immigrant parents, especially parents who have low educational attainment and language proficiency, tend to shift the responsibility of youth’s education to the teachers. From their perspective, parents may think the process of education is attributed to the collaboration between teachers and students. Thus, the function of parents is

minimized, which is well represented in the literature. For example, Chuang, Rasmi, and Friesen's (2011) study reported that immigrant parents considered the school as "having the primary responsibility of educating their children" (p. 158). They thought highly of education and respected teachers that were considered the authority on education. Nevertheless, some teachers regarded it as "lack of care" (Chuang et al., 2011, p. 158). In the Canadian educational system, parents also need to take primary responsibility in the education of their youth (Government of Canada, 2014). The school system is implemented to assist parents to educate their youth. In fact, as well as academic support, parents are able to support in other ways such as providing a positive learning environment (Li, 2007; DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005) and as Teacher B supplemented, parents can ensure a quiet time in the evening for youth to study and provide necessary tools such as a computer.

Despite the insufficient assistance that immigrant parents provided, the findings of this study also demonstrated that the two parents (Case A and Case B) did not have much communication with the teachers except for the parent-teacher interview every year. Meeting the teachers once a year suggests a lack of interaction with teachers concerning their youth's schooling, however, it is not necessarily because immigrant parents did not want to communicate with schoolteachers. Instead, parents often feel restrained by their low language proficiency and

fear of communication. Teacher A described the frustration that immigrant parents had during the parent-teacher interviews which local parents did not: “The language is, and then is the intimidation, feeling intimidated just because they are not sure what questions to ask, what the right questions are.” Immigrant parents may feel “threatened, intimidated, or unwanted” (Olivos, 2006, p. 55) to participate in school-based activities with their children. This phenomenon may be attributed to a lack of communication and collaboration between teachers and parents on their youth’s education. At times, miscommunication between immigrant parents and teachers can be caused by culture and linguistic barriers. Parent B expressed that she did not like to talk to teachers because “they [teachers] do not understand me.” Unlike the majority of immigrant youth who have parents with them, a number of immigrant students without family in Newfoundland have to depend on help from teachers and newcomer service providers. These youth are not only high school students but also their own guardians/parents, which means they have to take care of everything such as rental payment, bill payment, and part-time work to facilitate financial sustainability. In such cases, teachers of all subjects should commit to discussing all aspects of this new education system with these youth and endeavor to help them address academic issues as well as their daily needs.

Eliminating the language barriers that parents have may potentially improve the quality



of communication with schoolteachers. Instead of using traditional ways such as newsletters, report cards, and phone calls to communicate with parents, Graham-Clay (2005) suggested using modern ways to connect with parents by involving technology in parent-teacher communication such as through websites, videos and voice mails. Fortunately, parents in this study knew how to use a computer and tracked their children's attendance and learning progress via an online system. Nevertheless, for immigrant parents who have never used computers, teaching them how to use it is the first step to network with teachers. She also recommended the use of bilingual communication, providing "written communication in several languages to ensure the greatest access to the parent community" (Graham-Clay, 2005, p. 124). This suggestion, while well-intended and reasonable, may pose a challenge to teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador as most of them are English-speaking unilingual. However, it can be a future goal for educators to achieve by hiring multilingual teachers, offering sessions to current teachers as part of their professional development activities, and using translation services.

Although teachers should take the initiative to reach out to parents who are less engaged in their children's education, teachers' support sometimes is limited by the available time and staff as Teacher A explained his situation: "The time to take to connect specifically with an individual family is just not going to happen. Not enough people in school to do that work."

With the exception of meeting and talking to parents at the parent-teacher interview, it is difficult for teachers to reach out to parents and do home visits. Teachers specialized in helping immigrant students bridge the educational gap may want to devote most of their time to their students. For example, Teacher B in this study really wanted to spend more time with students who needed extra attention, however, he expressed that the time belonging to students was “stolen” when the school assigned him irrelevant duties in that semester: “That reduces my ability to service my students”, he said, also pointing out that “[t]here is a lot of things that you can get caught up in the education system that takes away from your time with students”. One way to address this issue is that the school administrative personnel may reconsider the workload of teachers who work with immigrant students and recruit volunteers.

Helping immigrant youth to succeed in schools is a challenging task, which requires the collaboration of their parents, school teachers, and local communities. In order to collaborate with immigrant parents to support immigrant youth’s education, the schools may need to keep a positive relationship with immigrant parents and the local communities. Extra attention should be paid to these youth in terms of their academic achievement as well as daily needs. Some excellent practices and programs identified by Borrero, Lee, and Padilla (2013) and Hara and Burke (1998) suggested that schools should establish a parental involvement program in which

parents can learn some basic techniques on developing youth's writing skills, reading with children, teaching via art and other techniques. They further recommended that schools should build a leadership team of teachers, school administrators and supporting staff and implement innovative student programs such as a second language program and an afterschool program (Borrero, 2013). However, there is a concern that teachers may communicate with parents from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds by using "their own cultural lenses" (Colombo, 2004, p. 2). Even though this point was not explicitly expressed in this study, it is a concern worthy of further discussion and exploration by educators and researchers. One way to address this issue is to provide training sessions for both English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teachers and mainstream teachers to increase cultural awareness and tolerance. Furthermore, schools should provide "preparation programs" to school staff including administrative officers, ESL teachers and mainstream teachers (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 65). Olivos (2006) suggested that schools should be conscious of how "particular groups perceive their interactions with the schools and with school personnel" (p. 55). These suggestions may potentially be beneficial to promoting immigrant youth success in schools.

## 5.2 Conclusions and Limitations of the Study

This study has explored the life of refugee families and support for high school refugee youth in Newfoundland, with a focus on parental support from refugee families. Based on the stories of the refugee participants' previous experiences, their current life is a lot better than it was in their home countries. Various academic and social support programs are available for immigrant high school youth. They are supported by school teachers, immigrant-serving agencies and local communities, such as churches. Parents are engaged in their children's education by paying attention to their grades and encouraging them to have higher academic achievement. However, there is a gap between parents' expectations of involvement and that of the educational system. This results from different understandings of what constitutes quality education in different cultural contexts. Furthermore, refugee parents in this study are unable to provide assistance in their children's academic work. To some extent, parents may need more frequent communication with schoolteachers instead of simply attending the annual parent-teacher interview. With regard to the education of youth, refugee parents tend to be more dependent on school teachers and immigrant-serving agencies. This study also found that more attention should be directed toward youth coming to Canada without their parents.

There are three main limitations of this study. First, all participants of this study were

from the same High School in Newfoundland. The study only involves three cases, which is a small sampling amount. Thus, the findings may not be generalizable to a larger context. Second, student participants were approached and recruited with the school teachers' help. Parents were connected through those students. I learnt that all three cases were refugees during the interview. Immigrant families, depending on which category they are in, may have different needs and challenges in supporting immigrant youth. Therefore, the findings may not be applicable to all immigrant families. Third, the findings of this study are based on an interview method alone. As a result, they might be one-dimensional.

Future studies should engage a larger group of immigrant families, including both various economic classes and refugees, to add more validity and reliability to the findings. Efforts should be made to explore how family support for immigrant youth differs in various family contexts in terms of difficulties and barriers, parental involvement, interaction at home, and family-school collaboration. In addition, the methods of collecting data should be diverse. Data can also be obtained from surveys, observations, and audiovisual materials.

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