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**Expanding Participation in Hebrew Education:
Lessons Learned from French Immersion**

Abstract

This article explores ideas for innovating the field of Hebrew education (HE) in non-Orthodox day schools in diaspora communities. It proposes strategies and identifies areas of further research to expand the reach of HE schooling to attract new families. These strategies were created through defining and exploring the Toronto HE landscape, and then comparing between HE and French Immersion (FI) programs in Ontario, where the performance and benefits of the latter are found to help inform meaningful reforms in the former. Interviews were subsequently conducted with affiliates of different schools within the FI system in Toronto. Jewish parents were asked about the factors that drew them to register their children in an FI program. Along with an FI teacher and principal, they were also asked to identify successes and challenges of FI practices. Finally, the paper discusses suggestions for future studies and offers ideas to help expand participation in HE and further strengthen the connection of diaspora communities to the Hebrew language.

Résumé

Cet article explore des idées pour innover dans le domaine de l'enseignement de l'hébreu (HE) dans les écoles de jour non orthodoxes au sein des communautés de la diaspora. Il propose des stratégies et identifie des domaines de recherche supplémentaires pour élargir le marché de l'enseignement supérieur et attirer des nouveaux clients. Ces stratégies ont été élaborées en définissant et en explorant le marché de l'enseignement de l'hébreu à Toronto, et à travers une comparaison entre les programmes d'enseignement de l'hébreu et d'immersion française (FI) en Ontario. La performance et les avantages de ce dernier programme ont contribué à développer des réformes significatives pour le premier. Des entrevues ont ensuite été menées auprès d'affiliés de différentes écoles du système d'immersion française à Toronto. Des parents juifs ont été interrogés sur les facteurs qui les ont poussés à inscrire leurs enfants dans ce programme. Ces parents, un enseignant et un directeur de FI, ont aussi été invités à identifier les réussites et les défis des pratiques FI. Enfin, des suggestions d'études futures sont discutées afin de contribuer à développer le marché de l'enseignement de l'hébreu, renforçant ainsi le lien entre les communautés de la diaspora juive et la langue hébraïque.

The significance of Hebrew language learning and proficiency in the Toronto Jewish community lays the foundation for this paper.¹ The first objective of this article is to unearth the priorities guiding Jewish parents in school selection. The second objective is to derive insights from the well-established French Immersion (FI) program in Toronto, with the goal of identifying effective strategies to increase enrollment in Hebrew education (HE) schools.

Identifying a Hebrew Education Landscape for this Study

In Canada, affiliates of HE schools identify Jewish day schools as a primary vehicle for ensuring the cohesiveness and longevity of their Jewish community.² The selection of the city of Toronto for this research was based on its HE population size and stability, determined through the analysis of its steady expansion and the growth in number of institutions over time, as well as current demographic patterns. The first day schools in Toronto were Orthodox and opened in 1947. A Conservative day school developed in the late 1950s and grew in the early 1960s.³ By 1970, 2,700 students were enrolled in day schools, and Reform, Labour Zionist, and additional unaffiliated Jewish schools had emerged in the city. During the 1970s and 1980s, the popularity of all day schools increased rapidly, and they became a prevalent choice for Jewish education in the city. As of 1985, Toronto had 7,055 students enrolled in the elementary level alone, and this growth trend continued until at least 2002.⁴ In the 2018 Survey of Canadian Jews, 43 percent of Toronto's Jewish adults reported having attended Jewish day schools in their youth, a fact that emphasized the broad study of Hebrew language.⁵ Today, the Toronto HE school population is still considered significantly large, with as many as eleven day schools, some with multiple campuses, affiliated with the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, that teach Hebrew.⁶

Definitions and Current Trends in Hebrew Education in Toronto Schools

This study opted to examine non-Orthodox day schools, a decision intended to facilitate a more focused exploration within a defined subset of Toronto's educational context. To identify the type of HE under examination, I turned to the Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education that coined the term "the Hebrews" to encompass the diverse range of Hebrew texts taught in diaspora communities, including Biblical, Mishnaic, Medieval, and Modern Hebrew.⁷ A 2017 study by Pomson and Wertheimer surveyed forty-one schools across Canada and the United States to examine the expectations and perspectives of students, parents, and teachers in American Jewish day schools. It found that non-Orthodox parents prioritize the study of Modern Hebrew over Classical Hebrew, placing greater emphasis on communication over the study of sacred texts and prayer.⁸ HE students also prioritize the study of Modern Hebrew, both in Orthodox and non-Orthodox schools, favouring it for its practical application, such as effective communication during visits to Israel.⁹ In studying Modern Hebrew, non-Orthodox parents prioritize its cultural and cognitive benefits to their children, such as establishing a connection with Israel and the cognitive benefits associated with learning a second language.¹⁰ The focus of this study on non-Orthodox HE is therefore placed on Modern Hebrew instruction, and the themes of learning language for practical, cultural, and cognitive purposes will be reviewed in greater depth throughout this paper.

Further distinction in Modern Hebrew education is made by examining two different types of Modern Hebrew learners in North America: heritage learners and foreign-language learners. Both types of Hebrew learners are defined by their living in countries where Hebrew is not the dominant language. However, heritage learners have exposure to Hebrew outside of school, such as through family members or social circles, whereas foreign-language learners do not.¹¹ Unfortunately, the number of non-Orthodox Jews who perceive themselves to be heritage learners versus foreign-language learners in Canada or in Toronto has not been measured. However, the 2011 Census offers a finding that sheds some light on the question, showing that out of 178,365 Jews living in the Greater Toronto Area, only 17,210 identified as Israelis.¹² It is assumed that approximately 10 percent of Jews in the Greater Toronto Area may be considered heritage speakers, and presumably an even lower proportion than that access non-Orthodox HE as heritage learners. Most Hebrew learning programs available in day schools in Toronto today are primarily designed for Hebrew as foreign-language learners, with optional Hebrew enrichment offered in some institutions and to a small number of students who are heritage speakers.¹³ Accordingly, the HE families in this study are non-Orthodox students and parents who are foreign-language learners of Modern Hebrew.

Pomson and Wertheimer's study also highlights a trend in attitudes towards Hebrew instruction. They found that as students get older, students, parents, and teachers perceive a decline in enthusiasm and proficiency between grades 5 and 7, which is in keeping with education scholars' findings of diminished enthusiasm for school-learning by adolescents.¹⁴ In light of this phenomenon, schools in Toronto are making strides to communicate that Hebrew matters, an approach supported by the Pomson and Wertheimer study.¹⁵ One approach gaining traction among schools in North America is the proficiency approach for Modern Hebrew instruction. (It should be noted that the Pomson and Wertheimer study did not find the language proficiency approach to have a significant influence on the satisfaction of parents or students, but that question was not the focus of their study and therefore needs to be further explored.¹⁶) The proficiency approach utilizes the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) levels of achievement scale to measure language acquisition, and aims to improve the level of instruction and Hebrew acquisition for students.¹⁷ Following in the footsteps of Bialik Hebrew Day School since 2022, and under the current efforts of the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, Jewish day schools in Toronto have recently begun to administer Avant, a standardized ACTFL test, to their students to help measure, and subsequently improve, the level of Hebrew instruction and students' Hebrew proficiency.¹⁸ This investment sends a firm message to students, parents, teachers, and school and board leadership that HE matters and is worthy of objective assessment. This paper will explore additional strategies for addressing the level of enthusiasm for Hebrew, as well as language proficiency, in the results and discussion section.

In September 2023, Rosov Consulting conducted a study of HE day schools similar to Pomson and Wertheimer's, albeit on a smaller scale. This study, commissioned by the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto and shared exclusively with its affiliated schools, aimed to establish a platform for the UJA's initiative to intensify and improve the methods of Hebrew instruction in local schools. Although the Rosov study has not been made public, I was able to review its findings as associate director of Jewish studies at Bialik Hebrew Day School, a UJA affiliate school. The Rosov study confirms several of Pomson and Wertheimer's findings, including that the study of Modern Hebrew is more important to parents and students in non-Orthodox schools than the study of Classical Hebrew; that 79 percent of parents place the greatest value on the cognitive benefits associated with learning a second language; that most students (68 percent) value the study of Modern Hebrew for its effectiveness as a communication tool during visits to Israel and for communicating with Hebrew speakers; and that younger students (in grade 5) tend to report higher proficiency and satisfaction from the Hebrew program than older students (in grade 8).¹⁹

Further findings from the recent Rosov Consulting research warrant further investigation, particularly within the Toronto community. These include the perception of parents and students that day school Hebrew education in Toronto is moderately effective rather than highly effective; the observation that barely half of parents express satisfaction with their children's Hebrew education experience; the expressed need among teachers for access to more authentic resources to enhance student learning and foster connections with Israel; and the identified necessity for high-quality, targeted professional development for Hebrew teachers to address diverse student learning needs, alongside the requirement for assistance in adapting curriculum materials to suit various student populations.²⁰ Although this study's release was internal, its findings have the potential to inform future research on Hebrew language learning in Toronto. Consequently, they have been incorporated into the conclusion section of this paper.

Comparing Hebrew Education to Another Successful Language Learning Environment

A Canadian learning environment that was identified as particularly successful in the field of language instruction is one-way (foreign-language) immersion schools, establishing the rationale for the comparative study to follow. Ontario's FI language program—where from half to all of the provincial curriculum is taught in French—was the first of its kind worldwide, dating back to 1965. FI schools are found to contribute to the development of functional proficiency in the immersion language at no expense to learners' first language. Furthermore, students' academic achievement and majority-language development at these schools are equal to, or greater than, those of non-immersion students.²¹ Ontario standardized testing (EQAO) found that

in grade 3, FI students scored virtually the same in mathematics and slightly better on literacy tests than non-immersion students. By grade 6, FI students outperformed those in the regular program in all skill areas with notable differences.²² While a correlation exists between student academic achievement and FI attendance, this does not indicate causality, and may not indicate students' improved cognitive abilities as they accumulate hours in second-language instruction. Another possible explanation is that the rigour of the program may only retain students who are already predisposed to do well in standardized tests. Supporting struggling students is addressed in the discussion section of this paper, and further study beyond the scope of this research is required to better understand this correlation.

Findings of academic achievements and language development abilities of immersion students meet the priorities noted by HE students and parents in the study by Pomson and Wertheimer. Namely, by developing functional proficiency, they align with the practical value that day school students attribute to HE, and they align with the value of increased cognitive ability that day-school parents attribute to HE. This is one reason why FI schools are a viable choice for a comparative study to inform the field of HE. Another shared property is that both FI and HE schools focus on *foreign-language learners*. Given the proven success of one-way immersion schools and the similarities between HE and FI schools, FI schools were chosen as the place to conduct the interview portion of this paper. Lessons learned from examining Ontario's FI schools can then be implemented in HE schools to attract new families.

Studying French Immersion Customers as Hebrew Education Non-Customers

To create sustainable business practices in capital markets, it is imperative to comprehend and engage with both active and potential beneficiary groups, namely customers and non-customers.²³ In light of insights into HE customers gained through existing scholarship, interviews were conducted with FI parents, an FI teacher and an FI principal—all of whom also fall into the category of HE non-customers—to discern their observations and priorities in choosing to affiliate with an FI school. In this case, non-customers are defined as those who are not currently interested in investing in HE, but may potentially do so in the future.²⁴

The subsequent sections delve into the interviews conducted and the strategies discerned within the established and successful language-learning milieu of FI schools. Additionally, attention is directed towards appealing to and attracting current non-customers of HE schools.

French Immersion Interviews

Objective and Participants

Here, I aim to explore the reasons behind the success of FI approaches and methodologies, and how they could inform innovations in HE schools, in Toronto and beyond. The study used a qualitative field research design. Seven individuals affiliated with the FI system were interviewed: five parents who currently send one or more of their children to an FI elementary school, one teacher at an FI elementary school, and one principal of an FI elementary school.

To ensure that the sample adequately represented a variety of sectors within the FI education system, participants were sought who had varying roles in FI schools, who were affiliated with several different FI schools, and who had a varying number of children of their own or taught children in different grades, ranging from kindergarten through to grade 8. The study also ensured that participants fit the HE population that was identified as the focus of this study, with all parents identifying as non-Orthodox Jews, all participants working in or sending their children to secular FI schools as opposed to Catholic ones, and all having children or working with students who were primarily learners of French as a foreign language.

Data Collection Methods

Since this study sought to provide ideas for innovations in HE, it used open-ended questions regarding why things at FI schools work from the perspectives of parents, a teacher and a principal to guide dialogues that helped to shape informed, nuanced, and diverse suggestions. Since no publications were found that compare FI and HE learning environments in schools, interviewing FI affiliates elicited preliminary subjective feedback that can later be used to produce further research questions and hypotheses for future studies.

The study employed semi-structured interviews to draw out such feedback and explore different perspectives on the effectiveness of FI schools. Each participant responded to a minimum of three quantifiable questions and seven open-ended questions. Some participants were asked additional questions reflecting their affiliation to the FI system, for clarity or to delve more deeply into their responses. The interview questions are detailed in Appendix A, and further information about them can be found in the Results and Discussion section. Interview durations ranged from fifteen minutes to one hour, depending on participants' familiarity with the FI educational system. Teachers and principals tended to have longer interviews than parents, showcasing deeper knowledge and providing more nuanced responses. Recordings were made of four of the parent interviews and the FI teacher interview, and tran-

scripts were taken from the interviews with the fifth parent and the FI principal.

Reliability, Validity and Limitations

Reliability of research aligns with consistency and refers to the replicability of the processes and the results.²⁵ For the open-ended questions asked, the study used a qualitative analysis, where subjective judgement was used to analyze the findings in this research that are not quantifiable. The open-ended questions contributed to the reliability of the study by examining ideas put forth in scholarship about the successes of FI, highlighting properties that are either shared or contrasted between HE schools that need to be explored further, and identifying areas where further research is necessary.

Validity in the context of a qualitative research is the degree to which the research accurately reflects that which is being studied.²⁶ The interviews in this study meet criteria of credibility since it studied FI schools both in literature and through interviews; presented some of the research findings to participants and asked for their feedback; and conducted follow-up interviews with some participants to clarify ambiguities.

A limitation of this study is the relative lack of published quantitative data on the specific HE population in Toronto it targets. One exception is the Rosov Consulting study mentioned previously. Its findings, however, were strictly internal, accessible only by the UJA Federation and the leadership of affiliated schools in Toronto. Additional publicly available research, conducted within the specific Toronto community identified for this study, may serve to support or question the assumptions made herein.

Results and Discussion

The interviews provided insights into three properties of FI schools that were not previously explored in academic scholarship, including the amount of time invested in language instruction, the type of language program offered, and homework policies. These findings inform potential policy changes and innovative strategies for introducing new approaches in HE schools. The research also found a significant difference between academic and financial accessibility in HE and FI schools, and similarities between the priorities of parents at HE and FI schools. These comparisons are also used to make recommendations for innovations in HE, and for expanding the population base of HE schools. Ultimately, the purpose of these suggestions is to grow the HE pool, thereby strengthening the connection between diaspora communities and the Hebrew language.

Time Invested in Language Instruction and Language Program Type

Two of the three identified properties of FI schools are closely related, namely the time invested in language instruction and the type of language program offered. Participants in this study linked both to academic rigour, so they will be discussed together.

First, the amount of time invested at FI schools in subject-learning, with French as the language of instruction, is significant, ranging between 50 and 100 percent. Second, the type of program offered at FI schools aligns with the provincial curriculum taught in public schools, albeit delivered largely in French. This alignment teaches that instructional time in FI schools is devoted both to the acquisition of French language and of general studies content in French; hence the term French immersion.

The FI principal and teacher explained that in FI school boards, 100 percent of instructional time is spent in French from kindergarten until grade 3, and is then reduced to at least 50 percent of the program in grades 4 and up. In contrast, the time invested in Hebrew learning in HE schools is dictated by the school and varies significantly between the different schools, ranging anywhere from a few periods a week to 50 percent of the instructional time per day.²⁷ Further, the principal in this FI study shared that there are non-negotiable subjects that must be taught in French in grades 4 and up, including math, social studies, and science, though some exceptions can be made when necessary. In his school, for example, the science teacher had to leave part way through the year, and it was decided with support from the school's superintendent that the teacher's replacement would teach science in English, since the neighbourhood FI high school also teaches science in English. Hebrew learning in HE schools, on the other hand, does not integrate with the provincial curriculum. Instead, the focus in Hebrew studies is typically on the Hebrew language itself or on learning Jewish studies subjects in Hebrew.

During the interviews, a parent highlighted FI schools' approach to teaching the regular Ontario curriculum in French favourably: "I'm happy that they use the regular Ontario curriculum so that my daughter does not miss out on learning that her peers in [English language] public school learn. Ultimately, kids these days can learn almost anything online. But language is different. It is directly related to interpersonal communication and to relationship building, so speaking more languages can open many doors socially."

Another parent highlighted the academic rigour derived from the challenge of learning in a foreign language as an educational benefit of FI: "The learning environment is more studious, and students are far more invested in their studies. They

learn to overcome challenges since they need to listen and respond to French all day long. Not every child in non-French public schools develops these skills.”

While the challenge of learning in a foreign language is present in both FI and HE programs, what seems to distinguish FI is that students need to obtain information essential to their general knowledge in a foreign language. Aligned with the anecdotes above, the parents, teacher, and principal in the study all shared the perspective that learning core subjects in French adds to the academic rigour that students experience. When asked specifically about the benefits of academic rigour, two participants highlighted that it contributes to brain development, and five attributed it to the development of important skills, including language, communication, and life skills.

Academic rigour, however, does not come without its challenges. Two parents did acknowledge that their children struggled at one point with the academic rigour of FI. One parent, familiar with both the FI and HE systems, shared her daughter’s experience in grade 1: “While the first six months’ blitz of French is hard, more so on the parents because you need to encourage your child, I know from my daughter and her friends that most kids adapt very quickly. Learning French all day, 100 percent of the time, means that within a year the child speaks French pretty fluently. Hebrew schools only dream about such accomplishments.” Upon discussing the matter of instruction in French as a challenge with the FI principal and teacher, they both conveyed that while the majority of students successfully navigate this challenge, there is a small percentage of students each year who face this challenge with more difficulty. Parents of these students may opt to withdraw their children from the school on their own or may be invited to engage in discussions with the school about their children’s placement in FI, always with the students’ well-being in mind.

From an academic achievement lens, the perspective that the FI program and instructional time have academic benefits aligns with the discussed findings in scholarship about FI students achieving higher EQAO results. FI schools are perceived as being just as successful, if not more, in teaching children than schools where English is the primary language of instruction. These findings, however, must be interpreted with the awareness that language challenges do not usually come about in a vacuum, and students who face academic challenges with French may also encounter difficulties in other subjects. As confirmed by the teacher and principal, such students may choose to leave the school. This specific scenario warrants more in-depth study to draw conclusive statements about the relationship between student retention, studying in a foreign language, and academic achievement.

Nevertheless, given the noticeable difference in the type of programming offered, in the time invested in language learning between FI and HE schools, and acknowledg-

ing both the perceived and measured academic rigour and success of students in FI schools, HE schools should contemplate integrating more of the Ontario curriculum in Hebrew. If implemented, further study could examine whether such inclusion of general studies in Hebrew enhances proficiency, fosters a sense of academic rigour, and contributes to the attraction of students to HE schools.

Homework Policy

A third minor yet significant observation from this research is the absence of a uniform policy for administering homework to FI students. In the interviews, four of the five parents reported not speaking French, and three of them later expressed that a challenge with the FI system is not being able to assist their children with schoolwork. A fourth parent shared that their family's school has implemented a no-homework policy that has reduced the burden for her as a non-French-speaking parent. While homework may contribute to learners' French proficiency, a potential risk is the strain on parents, which in return strains the relationship between the home and the school. The effectiveness of homework policies in attracting or retaining participants is beyond the scope of this paper, but given that it was significant enough for four parents to voluntarily raise it as a challenge, it seems worth additional exploration in future studies. Upon further investigation, if the identified advantages of homework outweigh the identified challenges, it would be important to examine possible innovative measures to help alleviate the challenges, such as the difficulty for parents in assisting with homework.

Academic and Financial Accessibility

Starting with academic accessibility, participants' responses regarding language challenges faced by FI students led me to initiate a discussion with the FI principal about the need for language-focused schools to provide support for students who struggle with language acquisition but remain in such schools. The principal noted that limited resources, a challenge for publicly funded FI schools, hinder their ability to provide adequate academic support. This year, his school was allocated just one full-time resource teacher who is responsible for supporting the unique learning profiles of all six hundred students in the school. Given the size of the job, the principal explained that the resource teacher is unable to support students who struggle with language acquisition alone, or students who as newcomers to Canada are novice learners of both French and English. The finding that FI schools are unable to support recent arrivals to the country as much as desired, particularly considering Canada's reputation as a country that attracts a large number of immigrants, raises questions about the academic accessibility of FI programs for newcomers.

Access to learning support in publicly funded schools can differ significantly from that in private day schools, since the latter can benefit from financial resources derived from tuition fees, donations, endowments, and other non-governmental contributions. This disparity may be attributed in part to the greater financial capacity of the private school community to attract direct donations. For example, Bialik Hebrew Day School is financially capable of allocating significant resources to employ twenty-two full-time resource teachers, with at least half trained to address language acquisition gaps, supporting a student body of 1,500. The student-to-resource teacher ratio is 1:75 at Bialik, compared to 1:600 at the FI school, highlighting a substantial difference. Not all HE schools are as large or as well-funded as Bialik, which stands as the largest non-Orthodox, junior kindergarten to grade 8 day school in the Toronto community.²⁸ Nevertheless, these findings identify a potential appeal for HE schools among students facing learning challenges who can benefit from a more robust resource department, particularly in schools that have the financial means and choose to allocate funding towards resource support. Resource support as a motivator to register children in HE or FI was neither measured in this study nor mentioned in the Pomson and Wertheimer study as a priority for HE affiliates, indicating the need for further exploration to fully understand its significance.

The private funding of HE schools may enhance their attractiveness if expanded educational supports are offered, but it can also pose an affordability barrier. FI schools, being publicly funded, are financially accessible to the general public, whereas the private funding model of HE schools can render them inaccessible to many. A survey conducted in North America identified tuition costs as the primary barrier to enrollment in the day school system.²⁹ Given the issue's significance, day schools should address financial accessibility actively and creatively, such as by working to establish trusts and tuition-support options for all potential families in need. Another avenue to explore is collaborating with philanthropists and innovators in HE to produce a strategic plan for expanding the HE population. Such plans might encompass FI-inspired innovations, such as those being explored in this paper, that could attract parents who have non-financial reasons for not registering their children for HE.

Building on insights about FI schools' academic and financial accessibility, instructional time and array of subjects, a suggested experiment would be to launch a pilot program in HE schools that mirrors FI program guidelines, with a substantial increase to Hebrew instruction time, including teaching general education subjects of the Ontario curriculum in Hebrew. This pilot would offer resource support comparable to what well-funded HE schools offer today, while continuing to work with partners to provide financial support to potential participants who require it.

Prioritizing the Practicality of Hebrew Education

Parents asked in this study about their reasons to send their children to FI schools all emphasized one or more notions of French as a practical language. It is Canada's second tongue, children can use it in their everyday lives, and it opens doors in the job market. One of Canada's official languages, French is the first language for 22.8 percent of the Canadian population.³⁰ Its status contrasts with that of Hebrew. The study by Pomson and Wertheimer found that while students value Hebrew for its practicality, parents prefer it for its contribution to cultural connections and cognitive ability. It is important to note that this study asked FI parents about overall reasons for sending children to FI, while the question posed in the Pomson and Wertheimer study addresses reasons to learn Hebrew specifically. The possibly telling fact remains, however, that parents did not prioritize the practicality of Hebrew in the study by Pomson and Wertheimer over other reasons.

To better understand the difference between priorities of FI parents and those of HE parents, the parents in this study were further asked whether they would send their children to a HE school if it were public, resembled the FI model exactly in terms of program type and time dedicated to language instruction, but taught Hebrew as a second language instead of French. Interestingly, four out of the five answered that they would not, while the fifth parent emphasized that attending day school holds cultural significance to him due to the role Hebrew plays for the Jewish people. More specific questions need to be posed to FI and HE participants to better understand possible implications of this variance in FI and HE parent priorities and values on the ability to grow the HE population. It is possible that a significant group of non-participants of HE are parents who emphasize the practicality of the language of instruction, perhaps over the cultural aspects of language, cognitive development and academic achievement. In other words, parents might be more interested in HE if they saw Hebrew as a more practical language to learn.

Jewish education would be seen as more practical if there were more investment in creating spaces for Hebrew to become culturally relevant and immediate, both inside and outside the school; FI programs in Ontario face an analogous problem. Some HE schools already experiment with this in one or more ways, such as by taking students to Israel; participating in the *ShinShinim* (the Hebrew acronym for *shnat sheirut*, or "year of service") program that brings Israeli high school graduates for a year of service abroad and encourages them to speak Hebrew to students; or introducing linguistic landscapes that present Hebrew throughout the physical space of the school. These initiatives make Hebrew more relevant and should receive the attention of school leadership and the financial support to be sustained and expanded upon.

HE schools should also, as discussed, find ways to invest in increased Hebrew instruction time by expanding the repertoire of subjects taught in Hebrew. The FI school principal suggested exploring opportunities for teaching highly practical language skills that students can readily apply in Hebrew. For instance, arts, music, and physical education curricula are well-suited for Hebrew language instruction due to the expressive and immediate nature of these subjects. In addition, the incorporation of more Hebrew into unstructured school time, as well as into extracurricular sports leagues and tournaments for children and families to participate in, could increase the applicability, relevance, and use of Hebrew for students. Future studies may delve into more groundbreaking innovations aimed at elevating the practicality of Hebrew.

Conclusion

This paper addresses innovating HE in non-Orthodox day schools in diaspora communities, with a focus on the Toronto Jewish population. By exploring the significance of Hebrew language learning and proficiency, it aims to understand the priorities guiding Jewish parents in school selection, contributing to the maintenance and growth of enrollment in HE schools. The study utilizes a comparative analysis to the successful FI program in Ontario to capture and evaluate the priorities of its participants, and to offer insights into the programs' strengths and weaknesses. In so doing, it incorporates the views of FI parents, a teacher, and a principal, and sheds light on strategies to attract new families to HE schools.

HE schools should consider the following recommendations for diverse and successful Hebrew learning experiences, selecting proposals that best align with their community:

Continue to investigate, measure, and enhance Hebrew programs, incorporating Hebrew language acquisition theory at HE schools. Work to better understand parents' and students' perception of the effectiveness of HE programs and their satisfaction with the HE experience. Identify authentic teaching resources to further student learning and adapt materials to suit various student populations. Invest in the professional development of staff in order to empower them to address student needs, and incorporate successful language teaching models, such as the proficiency approach. They should also invest in standardized testing, such as ACTFL testing.

Increase Hebrew instructional time. This can be done by introducing more of the Ontario curriculum into Hebrew instruction, aligning with the academic rigour observed in the FI model. Explore the introduction of subjects in Hebrew that allow more real-life contexts for language use, such as the arts, music, and physical education.

Increase academic and financial accessibility. Provide academic support to students who struggle with language acquisition, including ESL students. Address financial accessibility challenges by exploring potential partnerships for tuition support.

Increase the practical use of Hebrew for students. Expand opportunities for students to speak Hebrew outside of the classroom. Develop initiatives for students and other members of the community that make Hebrew relevant such as trips to Israel, a ShinShinim program, linguistic landscapes, extracurricular activities, and sports leagues.

Further, the study generated the following suggestions for future research:

Initiate a pilot program in HE schools, with curricular guidelines that mirror those of FI schools. Evaluate its relationship with participants' values and priorities, and its impact on Hebrew proficiency, academic rigour and student retention.

Examine the influence of homework policies on learning outcomes, and their role in attracting or retaining participants. Investigate the relationship between homework in the foreign language taught at the school and student language acquisition. Assess potential benefits against the challenge parents face in supporting their children with Hebrew homework. Examine possible innovative measures to help alleviate the difficulty for parents in assisting with homework.

Identify additional programs and platforms to increase the time of Hebrew exposure in HE schools, and the practicality of Hebrew language outside of HE schools. Explore additional avenues to integrate Hebrew into the school day, as well as innovative approaches to elevate the practicality of Hebrew in diaspora communities.

Delve more deeply into the academic and financial accessibility of FI programs. Consider if and how HE programs may speak to students facing language acquisition challenges and newcomers to the country.

By sharing these recommendations to consider, as well as suggestions for future studies, this study adds to research in the field of HE on steps to be taken to successfully expand the HE population, and with it, the commitment of Jewish diaspora communities to Hebrew learning.

Appendix A: French Immersion (FI) Interview Questions

Quantifiable Questions

This study explores what can be gleaned from the FI environment to enhance Hebrew education at day schools. Before discussing FI, are you familiar with the Jewish day school system where Hebrew is taught?

Which school do your children attend, and what grades are they in? Or, what school do you work at, and what grades do you teach? What grades are taught in your school?

How long have your children been enrolled in FI? (parents only)

Do your children have exposure to French outside of school? (parents only)

Have your children ever attended a non-FI school? (parents only)

Open-Ended Questions

What motivated your decision to work, or enrol your children, in FI?

What aspects would you like to see emphasized in your school's, or your children's, school's language education program?

Do you believe that the program's goals are being achieved?

What benefits do you perceive that your children, or your students, are receiving from a FI education?

What challenges do you think your children, or your students, encounter within the FI system?

Depending on the depth of details provided by participants, the following follow-up question was sometimes posed: Can you think of any additional academic, social or opportunities-related benefits or challenges?

If you or your children have experience with another type of educational system, how would you compare the schools academically and socially?

What lessons do you believe Hebrew day schools could learn from the FI environment? (only posed to participants who answered "Yes" to Question 1).

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This statement is derived from knowledge gained by the author through her role in a Toronto day school.

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