Exploring Integration:

Language and Belonging Among Migrant Children in Luxembourgish Primary Schools

Bachelor Thesis

Student name	Katherine Marsh
Student number	022176275E
First supervisor and assessor	Prof. Dr. Isabelle Albert and Prof. Dr. Matthias Böhmer
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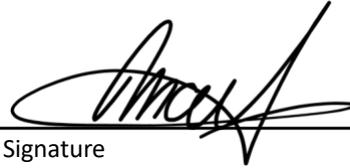
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Abstract

When children have a high proficiency in the school languages and a strong sense of belonging at school, they achieve better academically, are motivated and engaged, form friendships, and report high psychological well-being. This is especially relevant for (newcomer) migrant children, who often face language barriers and report a weaker sense of belonging at school. This qualitative research thus investigates the role of language use and belonging in the integration processes of newcomer migrant children at school, especially regarding their regular classes and language courses. Furthermore, it identifies different factors that facilitate these integration processes into school. What shows the relevance of this research is the limited number of studies on language use, sense of belonging, and their interaction regarding newcomer migrant children, particularly within the Luxembourgish school context. This study draws on semi-structured interviews with six newcomers ($N = 6$), aged 8–11 years old, at their primary school located in a suburban area in south-western Luxembourg, to gain a deeper understanding of their individual experiences regarding integration at school. The data were transcribed and thematically analysed, and six main themes emerged: three on the topic of language use (multilingual practices, feelings towards language learning and use, support in language development and experience) and three on the topic of belonging (first encounters and transitions, feelings towards adaptations, support in feeling included). Their implications, as well as interconnections, are discussed below.

Key words
children; migration background; newcomer; primary school; language; belonging; integration

1. Introduction

Global social, political, and environmental changes, such as economic inequality, educational opportunities, wars, and natural disasters, are driving migration across the world. In 2023, around 4.3 million people from non-European Union (EU) countries migrated to the EU (European Commission, 2025). As of January 1, 2024, 44.7 million residents of the EU were born outside its member states, representing 9.9% of the total EU population (European Commission, 2025). In Luxembourg, one of the smallest but most diverse EU countries, located in the heart of Europe and with a population of 672,050 as of January 1, 2024, more than half of the population (51.2%) is foreign-born, making it the first OECD country with a majority

foreign-born population (Peltier & Klein, 2024; Research Luxembourg, 2025). In 2023, Luxembourg experienced 26,964 new arrivals (Naud, 2024).

This migration reshapes societies in profound ways. For example, in terms of living conditions, migrants often face housing challenges, especially in the initial years. Social relationships are also affected, as migration introduces new languages, religions, and cultures, contributing to overall diversity, which can change community dynamics. Education systems must also evolve by offering language support, promoting intercultural education, and adopting inclusive teaching to address the needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

The education system is a crucial part of children's lives, interacting with family, culture, and policy to shape their development. This is especially important for migrant children, who, upon arriving in a new country, face the challenge of navigating new languages, unfamiliar school systems, cultural differences, and a sense of belonging in their new society. The transition into a different country's education system, therefore, does not always go smoothly, as children from migrant and disadvantaged backgrounds often face persistent educational inequalities and academic underperformance. This is reflected in lower educational attainment and a higher likelihood of leaving school early compared to their native peers (Janta & Harte, 2016). This has been shown to be linked to limited host language proficiency. For instance, a study showed that both newly arrived migrant students, as well as students who were not classified as newly arrived but had another home language, had significantly lower passing rates and higher dropout rates compared to Dutch-speaking students (Seynhaeve et al., 2024). Furthermore, these children often experience limited social mobility. Studies show that immigrants are more likely to face lower employment rates and hold lower occupational status compared to native-born individuals. For instance, in the EU, the unemployment rate among immigrants (12%) is double that of native-born citizens, and immigrants are more prone to being overqualified for their jobs (OECD & European Commission, 2023). Immigrant students also often feel like outsiders and report a lower sense of belonging at school, as shown by a study that reported that immigrant children in England, Germany, and Sweden faced a greater risk of social isolation and being avoided by peers (Raabe, 2019).

All in all, research supports the notion that language proficiency and a sense of belonging are, among others, key factors that contribute to migrant children's mental health, social cohesion, academic success, and overall integration. Thus, this study aims to address these two factors and investigate what role they play in the integration process of newcomer migrant children specifically into the Luxembourgish educational setting. Language use in the context of this study

involves how children acquire, apply, and interact through the languages used in school and in their social environments, while sense of belonging is referred to as the psychological experience of being accepted, valued, and connected within the school environment. The study also aims to identify what aspects can facilitate the integration processes in terms of language and belonging. Hence, the following research questions guide the contents of this research:

1. How do language use and a sense of belonging influence the integration experiences of newcomer migrant children in Luxembourgish primary schools?
2. What types of support facilitate these integration processes for newcomer migrant children?

The value of this study lies in its potential to enhance people's understanding of what newcomer children's integration experiences in Luxembourgish schools look like, as a research gap persists, whereby there is a lack of Luxembourg-specific studies that investigate language use and belonging in the form of participatory research with children. However, as Luxembourg is already one of the most, if not the most, multilingual and multicultural countries in Europe, this diversity also translates into the education system, which makes it an interesting ground for research on how migrant children personally experience their integration into an already multilingual and diverse school environment. For instance, Luxembourg was found to be the only EU country where the majority of primary school pupils (79.6%) were learning two or more foreign languages (French and German were counted as foreign languages), while EU-wide only 6.5% of primary school pupils were learning two or more foreign languages (Euronews, 2024). Additionally, foreign pupils made up 45.9% of all primary school pupils in the 2018/19 school year (Eurydice, 2023).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Previous Research on Language and Integration

2.1.1 How Language Use Influences Integration

Host language proficiency has been recognized as a key factor influencing the integration of migrant children into their schools. Studies have shown that language skills influence educational achievements. For instance, a study by Krämer et al. (2020) analyzed data from ninth-grade students in Luxembourg to examine how language proficiency in German and French affects math performance among different generations of immigrant students. They found that better

reading comprehension in both languages strongly predicted higher math scores, and first- and second-generation immigrant students scored significantly lower than native and third-generation peers. Furthermore, a study by Ming et al. (2025) examined migrant children aged 5–15 in China to explore whether the ability to speak the local urban dialect affected their academic performance. The findings revealed that migrant children who had a stronger ability to speak the local urban dialect performed significantly better academically.

It has also been demonstrated in research that host language proficiency is linked to social connectedness within school environments. A study by Hamel (2022) explored how social participation developed over the course of a school year among fourth-grade students in Germany. The students were classified as either with or without a migration background based on whether the students' first language was German or not. It was found that students with a migration background had significantly fewer stable friendships at both measurement points and that most aspects of social participation (number of friendships, friendship quality, peer acceptance, and self-perception of social inclusion) remained stable throughout the school year. Similar findings were reported by Cavicchio et al. (2020), who explored how national language proficiency affected the social inclusion of fifth-grade immigrant children in Italian primary schools and found that language proficiency was the strongest predictor of social inclusion in terms of peer acceptance and friendship. A study by Yildiz and Başkaya (2024) explored the perspectives of eight middle school teachers in Turkey on challenges with language learning faced by immigrant students. The teachers reported that language barriers hindered immigrant students' social integration with Turkish peers. Misunderstandings arose due to a lack of proficiency in Turkish, which led to conflicts and discomfort. Without the ability to communicate, students often isolated themselves, with some even dropping out of school. Language difficulties also induced bullying and aggression in both immigrant students and their peers. Moreover, immigrant students often formed groups with peers from the same cultural-linguistic background, which further hindered integration.

Furthermore, host language proficiency has been associated with well-being. This is shown in research done by Cavicchiolo et al. (2020), which explored how host language proficiency affects psychological well-being, measured as positive emotional experiences at school, of fifth-grade immigrant children in Italian primary schools. The study found that proficiency in Italian significantly predicted psychological well-being one year later.

2.2.2 What Support Mechanisms Influence Language Use

Support mechanisms that facilitate host language acquisition among migrant children, for instance, relate to home language support. Home language proficiency has been shown to be a supportive mechanism that can enhance host language acquisition. A meta-analysis has found that children who speak their home language can transfer some of their language skills when learning the host language, which happens in four main areas. Children with better phonological skills in their home language performed better in their host language phonological tasks. Home language reading ability was also positively associated with better host language reading. Furthermore, there was a small link between vocabulary in the home language and vocabulary in the host language. Finally, there was a link between the two languages in terms of morphological awareness (Yang et al., 2017).

Furthermore, a study has found that different forms of teacher scaffolding support primary school students with a migration background in acquiring the host language, both in terms of developing fluency and learning academic subjects through that language. The types of scaffolding include verbal scaffolding such as modeling correct pronunciation or using fixed classroom phrases, procedural scaffolding such as guided practice and small-group work, and instructional scaffolding including the use of visuals and body movement. It is also helpful if scaffolding is tailored to the emotional well-being of the students, meaning that the teacher acknowledges emotional reactions, creates a safe space through non-judgmental and supportive responses, and values students' strengths. Furthermore, emphasising participation instead of correctness, which entails encouraging students to speak, even if their answers are not perfect (Heo, 2022). A further study showed that teachers actively supporting students' home language literacy practices is successful in enhancing host language learning. It can be especially helpful to involve bilingual and multilingual teaching assistants to aid with translation and interpretation, as well as to co-teach in the classroom by, for example, comparing sentence structures of the home language to the host language, which helps students understand grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary better in both languages. Additionally, they help affirm students' multilingual identities, which enhances motivation and engagement. Furthermore, it can be effective to use online translation tools like Google Translate to compare the host language to home languages, which helps students become more aware of how languages function, or to utilise the audio function to assist students who could neither read nor write in their home language (Turner et al., 2023).

Research has shown that peer support is effective in enhancing host language acquisition, for instance through authentic peer interactions in class and on the playground. Especially play is an effective language learning context, as it provides a relaxed and enjoyable setting for language learners to experiment, imitate peers, and build confidence. Furthermore, fluent peers can actively support language learners by simplifying language, modeling pronunciation, offering feedback, translating, or clarifying (Gonzales, 2017).

Moreover, migrant pupils are not just silent bystanders in their host language acquisition but actively support their own host language learning through language learning strategies. This has been shown in a study where pupils used social as well as affective language learning strategies to learn the host language. Social language learning strategies included seeking out more proficient peers, for example native speakers, or working together with classmates who are on the same level in terms of host language ability. Affective language learning strategies involved using laughter to work through mistakes when speaking, encouraging each other, as well as helping newcomers (Biermann et al., 2025).

2.2 Previous Research on Sense of Belonging and Integration

2.2.1 How a Sense of Belonging Influences Integration

Although research on the sense of belonging, particularly among migrant children, is scarce, it has still been suggested as an important factor contributing to the integration of migrant children into their schools. It has been associated with greater academic persistence. For instance, a study by Nakhaie et al. (2022) investigated how the school environment, specifically teacher support and peer openness to diversity, influenced the academic persistence of 14–25-year-old newcomer students. It was found that newcomers were more academically persistent when they felt supported by teachers who listened and believed in them, and when their peers were open to cultural differences and were interested in their identities.

Belonging also plays a critical role in psychological well-being. A study by Thompson et al. (2024) on how emotional health changes from 4th grade to 7th grade differed by immigration background, and how peer belonging and school climate influenced these changes, revealed that positive changes in peer belonging and school climate were significantly linked with improvements in emotional health across all groups. When these school-related factors were considered, the emotional health improvements observed among refugee adolescents were no longer statistically distinct, suggesting that peer relationships and school climate played a key role in supporting their well-being. However, the positive effects of peer belonging and school

climate were weaker for immigrant adolescents than for their non-immigrant peers. Further research by Li and Jiang (2018) on how school belonging affected the mental health of 7th-grade migrant children in China revealed that a sense of school belonging was significantly associated with better mental health outcomes. Children who felt more accepted and integrated into their school community reported fewer symptoms of anxiety, depression, and sadness. Importantly, the sense of school belonging fully mediated the relationship between social exclusion and mental health, meaning that while social exclusion on its own did not directly predict poor mental health, it led to a lower sense of belonging, which in turn negatively affected mental health.

2.2.2 What Support Mechanisms Influence Sense of Belonging

Support mechanisms that influence sense of belonging are vast and can be grouped into several categories. First of all, research has found that friendships and peer relationships are important facilitators for migrant students' sense of belonging. While younger children value having kind friends, being included in play, and receiving help with schoolwork, older children emphasize inclusion in conversations and similar interests. For many, friendships with peers from the same cultural or linguistic background are comforting (Martin et al., 2024). A further study regarding peer support finds that peer mediation practices influence the sense of inclusion of migrant students in the classroom. Direct peer mediation practices are, for example, mentoring schemes and group work, which are implemented by teachers for supportive interactions. Indirect peer mediation practices refer to how classroom organization facilitates peer support. Here, seating arrangements, for example, play a role, as students who are seated next to mentors or more helpful peers benefit from more interaction and support. Similarly, the structure of classroom tasks influences opportunities for inclusion (Leite et al., 2024).

In a similar sense, Martin et al. (2024) also found that school culture plays a role in children's sense of belonging. Students value warm, welcoming school environments, including colorful classrooms and inclusive seating arrangements. A positive school atmosphere that promotes tolerance and diversity helps children feel safe and accepted. Štremfel et al. (2024) found similar results, indicating that on the meso level, broader school practices such as classroom climate and the availability of school support services were the most important predictors. Positive classroom environments and inclusive support structures were linked to higher belonging.

Moreover, opportunities for social interaction were also identified as key for developing a strong sense of belonging. It was shown that younger children appreciate playtime, outdoor activities,

and games, while older children value extracurricular activities like sports and school trips or events for social inclusion and feeling part of the school community.

Research also found a positive link between teacher-student relationships and students' sense of belonging. It was found that students who perceive their teachers as friendly, fair, and supportive feel a stronger emotional attachment to their school (Abdulhamed & Beattie, 2024). Similarly, Martin et al. (2024) report that positive relationships with teachers support belonging. Younger students value teachers who are kind and helpful, while older students value informal, trusting relationships where they feel understood and supported. They appreciate it when teachers acknowledge their backgrounds and integrate their cultural experiences into the curriculum, which makes them feel recognized and respected. Štremfel et al. (2024) even report that at the micro level, the most influential predictor of sense of school belonging was the quality of teacher-student relationships, with teacher support and connectedness consistently linked to a stronger sense of belonging. They also found that positive peer and family relationships played a role.

Language support is another key theme that supports a sense of belonging. Children recognize the importance of learning the host languages and value host language support (Martin et al., 2024).

Štremfel et al. (2024) found that on the exo level, community involvement and neighbourhood demographics can influence belonging.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

Participants were pupils, specifically children from diverse cultural backgrounds currently enrolled at a public primary school located in a suburban area in south-western Luxembourg. The sample consisted of six newcomer children ($N = 6$), aged 8–11 years old, with a mean age of 9.5 years ($SD = 1.05$). A detailed description of collected demographic information about the children can be seen in Tables 1 and 2. All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the participants, and pseudonyms have been applied.

The children had been in Luxembourg between six months and 32 months at the time of the interviews, which took place in April 2025, with the children having been in Luxembourg for an

average of 18 months (*SD* = 13.05). The median time since arrival was 16 months. All children at the time of the interviews were enrolled in a regular class *(classe d'attache)* and simultaneously attended language courses *(cours d'accueil)* in either German and/or French, designed to facilitate their integration into a new language environment. They had been enrolled in a regular class and language courses since arriving in Luxembourg; however, four out of six children did not attend the regular class German and/or French lessons, while the other two children attended language lessons in both languages in their regular classes but sporadically received language support in the form of language courses. Their language course attendance was thus tailored to their needs, not only in terms of the language they received support in but also in the time spent there.

Children were included in the study based on whether they were between 8–12 years old and whether they attended the regular class and language courses to assess their integration experiences in both. There was no exclusion criterion regarding language proficiency, and the children did not need to speak any of Luxembourg's national languages perfectly.

Table 1

Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Language(s) Spoken	School Grade
Gabriel	Boy	8	Luxembourgish (A Little); French (Fluently); German (Well); English (Fluently); Lebanese (A Little); Portuguese (Barely); Chinese (A Little); Arabic (Barely)	Cycle 3.1
Yasmine	Girl	11	Luxembourgish (A Little); French (Fluently); German (Well); English (Fluently); Lebanese (Well); Portuguese (A Little); Chinese (Barely); Arabic (A Little)	Cycle 4.2
Rami	Boy	9	Luxembourgish (Very Well/Well); French (Barely); German (Well); Arabic (Fluently)	Cycle 3.1
Khalil	Boy	10	Luxembourgish (Very Well); French (A Little); German (A Little); English (A Little); Arabic (Fluently)	Cycle 3.2
Lucas	Boy	10	Luxembourgish (Well); French (Fluently); German (Well); Chinese (Fluently)	Cycle 4.1

| Luna | Girl | 9 | Luxembourgish (A Little); French (Barely); German (A Little); English (Fluently); Chinese (Barely) | Cycle 3.1 |

Note. The data in this table were obtained from a form completed by the language course teacher.

Table 2

Demographic Information (continued)

Pseudonym	Country of Birth	Country Migrated From	Month and Year of Arrival	Months in Cours d'acceuil and Classe d'attache
Gabriel	Brazil	Angola	September 2024	8-9
Yasmine	Brazil	Angola	September 2024	8-9
Rami	Syria	Syria	August 2022	34
Khalil	Syria	Syria	August 2022	34
Lucas	Belgium	China	March 2023	30
Luna	England	England	November 2024	6-7

Note. The data in this table were obtained from a form completed by the language course teacher.

3.2 Recruitment

For the children to be able to take part in the study, written informed consent had to be obtained from the directorates of primary education, the school principal, the language course teacher, and the children's parents. The children also had to be willing to participate. Ms. Angélique Quintus, who works for the Ministry of Education in Luxembourg, specifically at the *Service de l'intégration et de l'accueil scolaires* (SIA), assisted me throughout the recruitment process.

Firstly, Ms. Quintus contacted the directorates of primary education, and I prepared documents, specifically an official study request letter, information sheets (for directorates and parents), and

a consent form (for directorates and parents), with the help of already existing documents from the ENACTING project sent to me by Prof. Dr. Isabelle Albert and Prof. Dr. Claudine Kirsch, which I adapted to my study. If the directorates verbally agreed when Ms. Quintus contacted them, she informed me, and I sent the corresponding directorates the aforementioned documents.

After obtaining consent from a directorate of primary education, they suggested language course teachers to me from schools in their region who were interested in partaking in the study. I contacted them and sent them the information sheet designed for parents and the parental consent form. One language teacher agreed to cooperate for this study, and knowing the children and their parents personally, she recommended children from her language class that fit the inclusion criteria and were likely to participate; thus, convenience sampling was employed. She then mentioned the study to the parents, sent the parents who were interested the study documents, and later collected the consent forms from the parents and handed them over to me.

In the meantime, I had contacted the school principal for her consent, which she provided. The six children whose parents had given their consent participated in the study. The interviews were conducted in the school building, and for privacy reasons, the names of the school staff as well as the name of the school will not be shared.

3.3 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were deemed the most appropriate qualitative methodology for this study, as they are particularly useful for exploratory research and to gain deep insights into phenomena. Given the limited knowledge on the role of language and belonging in the integration process of migrant pupils into the Luxembourgish school environment, this approach was considered the most effective for uncovering new insights.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews were chosen to explore the lived experiences, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of the participants. This method encourages open conversation, allowing the child, the focus of the study, to share their perspectives directly, ensuring a child-centered approach. A focus group approach was not employed because group discussions might inhibit openness and reduce the willingness of some children to share their experiences in front of their peers. Furthermore, focus groups could introduce biases, as participants may alter their responses based on the influence of others in the group.

The semi-structured interviews began with a short introduction (Appendix A) and were followed by interview questions from a self-constructed interview guide (Appendix B). The interview guide (Appendix B) included two main sections. The first section pertained to understanding integration through language and included questions such as "What was it like when you first started using the school languages?" or "How did you learn the school language(s)? What was it like?". This section also included some questions about reading, such as "What language(s) do you read in?". The second section addressed understanding integration through belonging, examples being "What is your regular class like for you now? How do you feel about it nowadays?" or "Are there any parts during the school day when you feel really happy or like you're really part of your class? Can you tell me about those moments?". Some questions were retrospective in their nature to grasp how experiences of integration have changed since the children were first introduced into their primary schools.

The questions were designed to be direct, clear, age-appropriate, and to promote an informal environment. Moreover, the questions were made to be open-ended, free of technical language, and neutral, to reduce interview bias. Some examples were added to the questions in case the child found it difficult to answer and were only applied in this case. The examples were carefully chosen to avoid influencing participants' responses in a specific direction. As children might not have understood what "sense of belonging" meant, this was bypassed by using words such as "included" and "welcome".

Each semi-structured interview took approximately 30–40 minutes. The interviews took place within lesson hours on a school day at the school building where the children were enrolled. This ensured familiarity with the surroundings and avoided conflicts with outside-school activities. The interviews were conducted in a quiet, empty room during lesson hours to minimize distractions and were conducted in the preferred language of the child. Thus, interviews took place in English, Luxembourgish, and French on April 24th, 2025.

I led the interview, presenting the child with questions from the interview guide (Appendix B) while sitting at a 90-degree angle to the child at a table. This seating plan was chosen to be able to maintain eye contact, however, not seem confrontational, as might be the case sitting directly across from the child. My bachelor thesis supervisor, Prof. Dr. Isabelle Albert, was also present to oversee the interviews and intervene with further questions or assistance if needed. Before commencing the interview, I introduced the study briefly using the introduction template (Appendix A) to help the child feel more at ease and assess their level of comfort. Within this introduction, I, among other things, explained the duration of the interview, the use of audio

recording, and the participant's rights. This included their right to withdraw at any time without negative repercussions and to request access to their data.

Additionally, the introduction assured the child that the interview provides a safe space for them to freely express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. During the interview, I took detailed field notes to capture the child's responses, gain an initial understanding of the data, and facilitate transcription.

No repeated interviews were conducted, and no multiple interview sessions were conducted with the same child to further explore the discussed topics due to the limited time frame of one semester to complete the study.

3.4 Data analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded. The first step of the analysis involved manually transcribing the audio recordings, with the help of the field notes that I had taken. In a second step, each transcript was thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-step framework (2006).

Initially, I thoroughly read the transcripts to establish familiarity with the data. Next, initial codes such as "adaptive multilingual communication," "use of informal digital tools as a source for language acquisition," or "kindness of teachers and peers key for sense of belonging and integration" were identified for each transcript. The codes were then grouped based on similarities and refined as needed through shortening, editing, or merging. The collated codes were organized into subthemes, which were subsequently combined to form overarching main themes within two theme sets, one for language use and integration and the other for sense of belonging and integration.

I adopted a reflexive approach throughout the process of data collection and analysis to minimize the influence of personal preconceptions and ensure the study results are not biased.

4. Results

The analysis yielded two sets of themes, one for the construct language use (theme set 1) and the other for the construct sense of belonging (theme set 2). Each of the theme sets encompasses three main themes with several subthemes. For language use, the main themes identified include multilingual practices, feelings towards language learning and use, and support in language

development and experience. For sense of belonging, the main themes identified are first encounters and transitions, feelings towards adaptations, and support in feeling included.

Of course, language and belonging are not two entirely different and separate constructs, they interrelate. These interconnections between the two constructs are portrayed and discussed within the subthemes. It is also to be noted that, due to the different educational paths the children experienced, their stories were also heterogeneous. Each newcomer had their own unique story, which I aimed to display within this section.

4.1 Theme Set 1: Language Use and Integration

This theme set includes how language use influences the integration experiences of newcomer migrant children in Luxembourgish primary schools and what types of support facilitate these processes. First, the types of languages the children speak at home and at school are identified, as well as how they use them. This is followed by their understanding of their experiences with the school languages, concluded by what strengthened their adaptation to their new school in terms of languages. Although the focus of this study was mainly on strengths, throughout the interviews children also sporadically mentioned barriers, which are also included in the analysis.

4.1.1 Multilingual Practices

4.1.1.1 Home Language Practice and Use

All children except for one child mentioned having a multilingual home environment, whereby different family members were linked to different languages. The two siblings, Gabriel and Yasmine, talked about speaking English to each other and to their father, and French to their mother. Interestingly, their father spoke Arabic to them, but they replied to him in English. They are therefore passively exposed to Arabic at home and are able to understand their home language; however, they are unable to speak it. They had lost their ability to speak their heritage language, and the fact that their father continues to speak Arabic to them regardless of the children's limited knowledge of spoken Arabic showed a certain insistence or wish to transfer their heritage language and therefore also a part of their culture to them. Their mother, who was present during Gabriel's interview, also shared multiple times that there is a family aspiration to maintain the linguistic heritage; however, this is limited due to other school languages that take up a dominant space and time constraints. The whole family showed a strong awareness of the discontinuity and loss of the heritage language, and especially the parents seemed to have a strong Arabic cultural-linguistic identity and see Arabic as their family identity. The children also

mentioned their knowledge that their heritage language is not classic Arabic, but Lebanese Arabic, a language variant, and that their family in Lebanon also speaks Arabic to them.

The other pair of siblings, Rami and Khalil, also had Arabic as their heritage language, but in contrast to Gabriel and Yasmine, they were able to understand as well as speak Arabic. Although Rami mentioned speaking only Arabic at home, which would indicate a monolingual home environment where all family members speak the same language, his brother Khalil, in his interview, mentioned speaking German and Luxembourgish with Rami, making their home also a multilingual environment. This was similar to Lucas, who, alongside speaking Chinese at home to his parents, also sometimes spoke Luxembourgish with his brother. Luna spoke English with both of her parents and siblings, but now that the family has moved to Luxembourg, her father, who speaks Luxembourgish fluently, has decided to switch to speaking Luxembourgish with her, her heritage language from her father's side. Migrating to a different country therefore also meant a parental language shift to support integration into the new environment. This also showed parental involvement in the integration process by an insistence or wish to transfer the school language to his daughter, and it is interesting to note how, in Luna's case, the home became an active language learning environment with parental involvement in language education.

4.1.1.2 School Language Practice and Use

Similarly to the home environment, the school environment was also multilingual, with the languages French, Luxembourgish, and German dominating conversation within the school setting. For Gabriel and Yasmine, for whom the Luxembourgish school was a new language environment in terms of German and Luxembourgish but not French, this showed a great adaptability in their language use. They reported speaking a lot of French, a language they know fluently, at school with peers from their regular class and teachers who could speak French. They also spoke English with peers who could not speak French and tried to speak German or Luxembourgish when peers neither spoke French nor English. However, if given the choice of language, they both preferred English, with Yasmine even sharing that she spoke English with her best friends.

Rami and Khalil, who did not speak any of Luxembourg's national languages before arriving in Luxembourg, showed similar adaptability. They both reported speaking Luxembourgish and German; however, Khalil also mentioned using French and some English at school. He particularly reported speaking English and a bit of French with a newcomer peer who could not speak the school language. He also talked about speaking French instead of Luxembourgish with

Gabriel and two of his other friends. His German usage was, however, mainly confined to the context of learning.

Lucas had a strong preference for French and reported speaking French with his friends, but also showed adaptability by mentioning that he spoke Luxembourgish to peers, particularly because he wanted to learn Luxembourgish, and that he mainly spoke German and Luxembourgish to his teachers. Unless he did not understand something, then he would talk in French.

For Luna, English was her default language of interaction, and most of her communication took place in English. Nevertheless, she did mention that she tries to speak some Luxembourgish and German.

4.1.1.3 Home Language Practices at School

Regarding the use of the home language at school, Gabriel and Yasmine relied on French a lot for communication, understanding, and integration, but their use of Arabic at school was very limited. This was due to their limited knowledge of spoken Arabic because they had lost their ability to speak this heritage language, but it was also due to the limited Arabic-speaking peer group, which made Arabic a minority language at school. Although Yasmine reported not using Arabic at all at school, Gabriel talked about sometimes using Arabic when speaking with Rami, who otherwise spoke German and Luxembourgish at school. Gabriel and Rami sometimes supported each other through scaffolding in their home language, as is apparent through this quote:

Gabriel: "Yes, just one or two or three persons know a bit of Arabic. I try to when he doesn't-. I don't know the word in German, because he can just German, Luxembourgish, and Arabic, I try to say the word in Arabic."

Gabriel: "Yeah, when I don't know the word, I use Arabic. When he doesn't know the word and when I don't know the word, he says it in Arabic."

Rami also confirmed the use of Arabic with Gabriel in his interview, showcasing that there was home language use between newcomer children who are friends.

Khalil did not report using Arabic at his current school; however, he talked about how at the first Luxembourgish school he had attended (he had switched schools three times since arriving in Luxembourg), he had a friend from Algeria who taught him how to speak French. He did so by translating from Arabic into French, and Khalil mentioned that this friend still helps him with French to this day.

Khalil: «An hien seet ma "Wanns de wells bonjour soen, wanns de wells bonjour-" hien seet ma op Arabesch, "wanns de wells bonjour soen, da soss du 'bonjour.'"»

Lastly, Lucas, similarly to Gabriel, also mentioned that there was a limited Chinese-speaking peer group at school. Although Chinese was a minority language at school, he occasionally used it to teach his peers some simple words in Chinese:

Lucas: «Parfois, les copains me demandent ce que veut dire ce mot chinois, je lui dis en chinois peut-être.»

4.1.2 Feelings Towards Language Learning and Use

4.1.2.1 Initial Experiences with School Languages

Regarding how the children felt when they were first confronted with the school languages, most of them experienced some initial difficulty. Gabriel mentioned that he was shy at first, and his mother also mentioned that he was preoccupied about how he was going to communicate with people at the beginning. However, he felt more relaxed when he quickly discovered that almost all his peers spoke French, a school language that he knew fluently and which he relied on a lot at the beginning. His sister Yasmine stated that while it was hard to use German and Luxembourgish at the beginning, what made it easier was that she had some prior knowledge of German due to Duolingo. Rami described using the school languages as not so difficult at the beginning, and in contrast to that, Khalil mentioned that he did find it a bit difficult. Lucas also talked about how he mainly relied on speaking French at the beginning. Similarly, Luna also heavily relied on speaking English at the beginning:

Luna: "Well, at first, I felt a little nervous because I feel like I might get a word wrong. And so, I would try like a little bit and not so much."

Luna expresses a certain insecurity about using the school languages at the beginning, which is why she made less of an effort to speak Luxembourgish or German at the beginning.

4.1.2.2 Current Confidence and Skills in School Languages

In contrast to how the children felt about the school languages before, nowadays most children felt more confident using them. Gabriel reported that he had adjusted to the new language environment over time and displayed confidence, particularly in his German and French abilities, over the course of the interview; however, he did say that he did not know German fully yet. Yasmine also mentioned that it was a lot easier nowadays; however, some difficulties remained. She elaborated:

Yasmine: "Yeah, and if the- and I can understand Luxembourgish. But there are still some words where they're hard."

Rami did not notice any changes in his use of Luxembourgish and German, and Khalil had a rather positive attitude towards his current school language use. Lucas talked about how nowadays he can manage speaking in Luxembourgish and that if he does not understand the others, then he can ask them to speak French. Lastly, Luna also displayed increased confidence with the school languages over time:

Luna: "I'm less nervous and I just- I speak more now and I'm quite confident with speaking German and Luxembourgish."

However, Luna also mentioned that although she had started learning French, she only knew a couple of words and phrases, and thus her proficiency in French was lower than her proficiency in Luxembourgish and German.

4.1.2.3 Feelings About Using Home Language at School

When asked about their feelings about using their home languages at school, as all children have or had used their home language(s) at school, the children reported rather positive feelings. Gabriel said that he sometimes liked to use Arabic for mutual understanding with Rami, an Arabic-speaking peer. Yasmine mentioned that she found using French at school easy and that she liked it. Lucas, who taught his friends words in Chinese, similarly said:

Lucas: « Les apprendre ? Oui, pour les apprendre je trouve qu'ils apprennent vite, comme—mes copains ils apprennent vite. Et quand je leur apprends le chinois je trouve aussi facile. »

The sentiment of speaking the home language at school being easy and a positive experience was also shared by Luna:

Luna: "I'm not... I'm actually… I like using English at school because it's easy to speak and some people speak quite a lot of English."

4.1.3 Support in Language Development and Experience

4.1.3.1 Role of the Prior School

All interviewed children had attended previous schools before their current one, and for most of them, the language systems in their prior schools influenced their knowledge of the school languages in their current school. Thereby, the attendance of their previous schools indirectly supported their later language acquisition in Luxembourg. For instance, Yasmine and Gabriel

had a transnational education history, whereby Yasmine had attended three prior schools in Algeria, Lebanon, and Angola, and Gabriel two prior schools in Lebanon and Angola before coming to their current school in Luxembourg. In Angola, they went to a French school for three years, which is where they both primarily learned French. Moreover, the American school they attended in Lebanon had a trilingual curriculum, with one of the languages being French.

Rami and Khalil had an educational history of changing schools three times in Luxembourg. Thus, when they arrived at their current school, they did not rely on the usage of and the translations into Arabic due to their experience at prior Luxembourgish schools, where they had learned Luxembourgish and German. Lucas also had prior knowledge of French due to attending early childhood education in Belgium before moving to China, attending school there, and coming back to Luxembourg. Luna went to school in England, which is why she was the only one with no prior knowledge of the school languages, which can be attributed to the attendance at previous schools.

4.1.3.2 Role of the Current Luxembourgish School

Of course, how the current school is set up is also a major factor influencing children's language integration. Thus, many interviewed children identified formal language learning in the regular class and in the language course as key for school language acquisition. However, many children also mentioned how Luxembourgish was used by a lot of people in the school environment, which led to auditory exposure to the school language and consequently to incidental language learning through exposure to the language at school. Additionally, the interviewed children mentioned that other newcomers besides them, who are also in the process of integrating, also attended the regular class with them.

Another aspect of the current school that is helpful for language acquisition in particular is regular or daily reading at school. The younger children from Cycle Three, namely Gabriel, Rami, and Luna, had daily, structured five-minute reading sessions in the morning at school in their regular class. The older children from Cycle Four, namely Yasmine, Khalil, and Lucas, instead had regular, structured 30-minute reading sessions at school during the periods when the children could work on their weekly learning tasks within the regular class. Books for the reading sessions could be chosen autonomously and could be brought from home or from the library.

Also, within the regular class, the children regularly read for exercises and would sometimes visit the school library. The school library was thus a resource for books for the children. However, it was limited in terms of what it offered for pupils, as few books were allowed to be taken from the school library, which, in Gabriel's and Yasmine's case, had reduced the number of books

they read. Additionally, the library provided no books in certain languages like Arabic, which meant that children were not able to borrow books in their home languages, and the focus in terms of reading was mainly on acquiring the school languages.

4.1.3.3 Role of Self

The newcomers also identified strategies that they use to cope with the new language environment and acquire the school languages. A strategy that was often stated related to translation. Most newcomers, when needed, asked the teacher to translate something into a language the newcomer knew fluently to aid understanding, and if the teacher could not speak the language, then they asked for an explanation. Furthermore, some newcomers utilized informal digital tools and media as a source of language acquisition. For instance, Gabriel and Yasmine utilized Duolingo, an app for language learning, to learn German once they knew that they were going to move to Luxembourg to prepare themselves for the new language at their new school and country. They both mentioned it as a very effective method, which led them to acquire prior knowledge in German before coming to Luxembourg, which then made language acquisition easier. Lucas described watching Netflix in German as a source of language acquisition. The children, however, mentioned that there was no Duolingo for Luxembourgish and that there was a lack of Luxembourgish media on Netflix.

Although most interviewed newcomers still relied a lot on languages they were fluent in for comprehension, all of them made active efforts to speak in languages they were not fluent in. For example, Yasmine described how she would try to explain something in German if the person did not speak a language she was fluent in:

Yasmine: "Well, I try to make him understand, like explaining it or showing that an action will make him understand it. When I'm- when I'm talking with somebody and I don't know how to say the word in German, well I try to explain to him what I mean or like something, like an action he might understand."

A final strategy that the children used, which was explored in this interview, was the influence of reading on language acquisition. All children except for Rami liked to read and regularly read at home and during their free time. Many showed enjoyment in or even an intrinsic motivation for reading and particularly enjoyed narrative reading like Harry Potter or interest-based reading like Pokémon. Reading was reported to be driven by curiosity, immersion into exciting stories, and an escape from the real world. But it was also seen as a calming activity and accessible downtime and overall had a strong emotional benefit. Interestingly, Luna mentioned that language proficiency, however, could be a barrier to reading enjoyment. Nevertheless, many children also read for the purpose of school language learning on their own accord, and all children except for

Rami practiced bilingual or trilingual reading. Many children, however, did not read in their home languages, neither Gabriel and Yasmine nor Rami and Khalil read in Arabic, and Lucas did not report reading in Chinese. Thus, a discontinuity of home language literacy practices was visible.

4.1.3.4 Role of Parents

Parents also influenced children's school language acquisition. Gabriel and Yasmine's parents, for instance, were involved in their pre-arrival language preparation for the new school and country by encouraging them to use Duolingo for German language acquisition and providing them with the digital tools on which they were able to use the application. However, Gabriel's mother also elaborated that strict parental regulation of screen time and exposure, limited to one hour a week, was in place, and there was no television at home. Instead, Gabriel and Yasmine's parents encouraged offline activities such as reading; for example, they were allowed to watch the films once they had read the books on which the films were based.

The parents also invested in the children's reading by buying them books in multiple languages, as library resources at their location were limited. This was also the case for Lucas and Luna, who both reported their parents buying them books. These books then subsequently became a tool to support the children's language acquisition, as seen in this quote from Luna:

Luna: "Yeah, currently my dad is making me read German books so I- because I finished all my English books, so I'm currently reading German books."

Furthermore, Luna talked about how her father had switched from speaking English to speaking only Luxembourgish to her to teach her the language of the new school and country. He also actively helped her with her schoolwork from the language course and gave her extra work to advance more rapidly in the languages:

Luna: "Because usually the things that we learn I've gone over like once with my dad."

Katherine: "Mhm. So do you sometimes like get extra work because you're already advanced?"

Luna: "Yeah, well, from my dad I get extra work…"

Katherine: "Ohhh."

Luna: "But not from school."

Thus, for Luna, her home had become a language learning environment due to the strong parental involvement of her father in her language education, teaching her both Luxembourgish and German at home.

4.1.3.5 Role of Teachers

Teachers also played a role in the language integration experiences of newcomers. First, the children noted that they obtained a lot of their school language knowledge through attending the language course and the regular class. The teachers used several strategies to support newcomers. For instance, they offered support through multilingual teaching in the language class and regular class. This consisted of using Luxembourgish alongside German, meaning that they switched languages to aid acquisition in both languages. Another way that teachers supported newcomer pupils in both the language class and regular class was through translation into English or French, languages newcomers knew fluently, to aid understanding. However, what some newcomers mentioned as problematic about this is that the language course teacher always translated because she was unaware of their level of understanding.

Yasmine: "Well, the teacher usually translates in French. She doesn't know how much I understand, so she just always translates."

However, what the children identified as helpful in the language course for their language learning was the use of board and card games:

Luna: "It would- it's something like you have to- snakes and ladders, well not like that. You would have to roll a die and then move your figure and when you land on a picture you have to say what that picture is in Deutsch."

Visual aids, such as the use of pictures, were also identified as helpful:

M. Reuter: (to Rami) „Kanns de dech nach un eng cool Spill erënneren, wat dir gehollef huet?"

Rami: (nods)

M. Reuter: „Zum Beispill?"

Rami: „Emm, Biller vun Déieren."

Furthermore, the children identified using iPads at home for language and grammar practice as helpful. Here, the language course teacher would upload tasks onto a learning app, which children could complete at home to aid their language acquisition. Luna also reported the use of iPads during the mathematics class of the regular class, as the teacher had allowed newcomers to use iPads during the class for autonomous translating. Furthermore, Luna also mentioned that

they received homework in mathematics but that she needed more homework on languages for at-home practice, and that no extra work was given by the language course teacher if the student was more advanced.

Lastly, regarding the language course, Lucas mentioned that although he spoke French in the regular class, his teacher and peers began to teach him Luxembourgish and speak to him in Luxembourgish. This resulted from the fact that the teacher told his classmates to talk to him in Luxembourgish.

4.1.3.6 Role of Peers

Peers also majorly contributed to the language learning of newcomers. Newcomers often received support from regular class peers in languages they knew fluently, if they had difficulty understanding something. They also sometimes received support from other newcomers in both the language course and the regular class. The classmates helped each other through translation, and Gabriel even talked about how friends of his from the regular class would spell out a word if he did not understand their translations.

Gabriel: "My friend Kai and—and we do another friend who can English, he spells the word in English if I didn't really get it because his accent is not really English. He's Hungarian."

However, peer support was not just limited to translating, as some actively taught the languages to the newcomers. In the case of Khalil, a peer at his prior school actively taught him French. His friend 'modelled' how something was supposed to be said, and he repeated it:

Khalil: «An hien seet ma «Wanns de wells bonjour soen- » hien seet ma op Arabesch: «wanns de wells bonjour soen da soss du 'bonjour'.»»

In Lucas' case, his peers actively spoke to him in Luxembourgish after a teacher advised them to do so. Moreover, language learning from peers also took place incidentally, when peers talked to newcomers, included them during play, or even when the newcomer just overheard peers talking in the school languages.

4.1.3.7 Role of the Maison Relais

Lastly, regarding support systems for language learning, the maison relais was found to play a key role in language acquisition for newcomers. All interviewed newcomer children frequented the maison relais and often spent their afternoons there. The support staff often used French and especially Luxembourgish to talk to the children, and the children were surrounded by peers who

spoke in the school languages. Thus, this created an ideal informal environment for language immersion, which many children reported led to greater language acquisition.

4.2 Theme Set 2: Sense of Belonging and Integration

This theme set includes how a sense of belonging influences the integration experiences of newcomer migrant children in Luxembourgish primary schools and what types of support facilitate these processes. First, the daily and general school life of newcomer children is described, as well as how they experience the language course and the regular class. Then follow their experiences adjusting to the new school environment and feeling included. This is concluded by what facilitated their sense of belonging at their new school.

4.2.1 First Encounters and Transitions

4.2.1.1 Daily and General School Life

The newcomers in this study were all enrolled in a regular class but also, to different degrees, attended language courses in either German and/or French. When asked what a typical day at school looked like for them, they mentioned that they began the school day with a morning circle routine, where they recapped tasks from the day before and the teacher explained the tasks for the current day. In the morning, the younger children also mentioned having five-minute reading sessions, while the older children had 30-minute reading sessions integrated into their weekly learning task periods.

Regarding the weekly learning tasks, each week children received tailored learning plans assigned by the teacher. These included differentiated learning goals for the core subjects, for example, a task related to German grammar practice. The children had to complete these tasks over the course of the week. After they had completed them, they could check them off. Both the regular class teacher and the language course teacher supported the work on weekly tasks, and they had weekly learning task periods where they only worked on these tasks for two hours.

Furthermore, the children had structured subjects like mathematics, science, and French with their regular class, and even sometimes sporadic Luxembourgish lessons. All of them participated in almost all subjects; however, they were taken out of the regular class during German and/or French to receive parallel separate language support in those languages in small groups. In the language courses, they received intensive integration support through language

instruction that targeted the foundations. The extent of language support for each newcomer varied, and differentiated language instruction plans were in place for the newcomers.

Gabriel and Yasmine both received language instruction in German in the same language course. While Gabriel reported receiving daily language support, Yasmine mentioned that there were some exceptions to it:

Yasmine: "Not every day. Umm next week we won't have on yeah on Monday because we're going to Schoulfoire and not when we have swimming we don't go. And there's one day in Monday that we have sports, so we don't do accueil. It depends on what we have in the day."

Luna had first received language support in both German and French, but now she only received language support in German and was attending the same language course as Gabriel and Yasmine. All three children had arrived recently. On the other hand, Rami, Khalil, and Lucas had all arrived in Luxembourg a few years ago; thus, they had been participating in language courses for more than two years. While Rami and Khalil had both attended language courses first for French and then for German at their previous Luxembourgish schools, Rami had also first received German support at his current school. However, after improvements were seen, he switched to only sporadically receiving language support in French. Khalil was obtaining daily language support in both German and French at the time of this interview, and Lucas received German language support once a week.

Beyond academics, the curriculum included arts such as music and projects such as practical workshops, sports with various kinds of sports, computer programming, and media-based learning through the German television program LogoTV. All newcomers also frequented the maison relais every day, some even before school, during lunch breaks, and after school, and reported playing with their peers during breaks.

4. 2.1.2 First Experiences in Cours d'Acceuil

Regarding their experiences from when the newcomers first joined their language courses, Gabriel talked about how his teacher had a positive perception of his German skills and called him "not a normal beginner" because she was unaware that he had already done Duolingo for German. He also mentioned that the teacher had a positive perception of Yasmine, his sister, and Luna as well, but recalled that the other children in the language course were not so advanced. He also said that it was often not clear to them what they needed to do for an exercise.

Yasmine also recounted that the language course was easier than she had thought because of her prior German knowledge due to Duolingo. However, she also mentioned that she found reading difficult because she did not know how to pronounce it correctly, but that this did not make her feel worried. She said:

Yasmine: "I traveled a lot into so many countries, so sometimes I know how it goes. This is my fourth school."

Since Rami and Khalil had been enrolled in language courses in three different schools, they were asked what the language courses were like across schools and reported rather positive experiences, except Khalil was hesitant regarding his second Luxembourgish school and mentioned that he did not remember anyone from the language course group and simply participated. Similarly to Yasmine, Lucas also mentioned that he did not find the language course very difficult. However, he did mention having problems with German when he arrived here. Luna mentioned that she felt a bit worried and scared when she first joined the language class.

4.2.1.3 Current Experiences in Cours d'Acceuil

Regarding how the children currently felt about their language courses, Gabriel now felt more integrated into the language course because he was familiar with the exercises and was able to understand the task instructions better. Yasmine also mentioned that she enjoyed the language course and said that they were a small group and thus more silent and did not take a lot of time. Rami and Khalil both still had positive attitudes towards the language courses in their current school. However, Khalil said that he struggled with reading and writing in German. Lucas complemented this by saying that they receive intensive integration support through language instruction that targets the foundations. Finally, Luna talked about why she enjoyed the language course nowadays:

Luna: "I like that all the staff that work... that do the cours d'accueil are really friendly and kind. And I find the Deutsch that we learn there really easy."

As opposed to when she first joined the language course and reported feeling worried and scared, she had adjusted to the language course over time.

4.2.1.4 First Experiences in Classe d'Attache

It was also assessed how the newcomer children felt when they first joined the regular class to determine their sense of belonging in the regular class when they first arrived. Gabriel shared that he had difficulties integrating into the regular class at the beginning. Here, similarly to when he first joined the language course, he also had difficulties understanding the task instructions and struggled with the instructional language. Furthermore, he stated:

Gabriel: "When I started it was a bit difficult there because I didn't know a lot of German and Luxembourgish, so they needed to translate more into French."

He followed up by saying that his class teacher encouraged him to ask for translations and explanations and offered support when needed, but that tension arose between him and the teacher when everything needed to be translated. Gabriel stated the reason being that it was difficult for the teacher to explain a whole sentence as opposed to a word. Additionally, his mother shared that he had difficulties adapting to educational routines like the weekly learning plan, which was new for him.

Yasmine mentioned that she was shy when she first joined the regular class and that she, similarly to Gabriel, was unaware of the school's routines. Rami did not express having difficulties adjusting to the regular class and initially reported welcoming peer interactions; similarly, his brother also did not mention having difficulties, apart from initial nervousness across the three schools they had attended. Lucas also did not report any difficulties. Similarly to Gabriel, Luna also mentioned language barriers as an initial integration challenge:

Luna: "Because when I first did the regular class I felt a bit more worried because I thought my German wasn't good enough yet."

4.2.1.5 Current Experiences in Classe d'Attache

When asked to elaborate on how they felt about their regular class now, most children displayed a positive experience. Gabriel said that he has more friends now, and when the two Cycle 3 classes are mixed up next year, he will remain in the same class as his friends. His mother also added that this is especially important, as it is difficult to constantly have to readapt when migrating to a new country. Yasmine described being in the regular class as easier compared to before. While Rami indicated feeling positively about the regular class, Khalil shared that he was friends with children from his regular class and the parallel class. Lucas denied having any current difficulties in his regular class and said:

Lucas: « Là-bas je me sens- parce que la classe est relax et décorée, et je me sens bien parce que là-bas beaucoup de personnes qui sont gentils. Et on apprend des choses intéressantes. »

Katherine: « Comme quoi ? »

Lucas: « Comme français 'salut c'est magique'. »

He mentioned a positive atmosphere, kind teachers and peers, as well as learning from interesting schoolbooks as reasons why he feels positively about his regular class. He also further stated, just like Gabriel, that he felt relieved about remaining in the same class as his friends:

Lucas: « Donc on a mélangé les deux classes. Ça veut dire on a mélangé un peu de classes d'autres chez nous et notre classe un peu de personnes chez des autres. C'est-à-dire on a mélangé les personnes, mais je suis toujours avec mes amis dans la classe et je suis content de la chance d'être dans une classe. »

4.2.2 Feelings Towards Adaptations

4.2.2.1 Differences Between Current and Prior School(s)

Besides Rami, all children remarked on differences between their prior educational contexts and their current school. In Gabriel's interview, he and his mother named a few differences between the schools. For instance, they mentioned that at his last school in Angola, there were many loose papers, which disrupted learning, while at his current school, they had structured school books that supported engagement and understanding and made parental help possible. Loose materials were also better organized at the current school. They also mentioned that in their neighbourhood in Luxembourg, which was close to the school, it was possible to randomly meet friends from school in the community, while previously they would have had to organise meetups and there were fewer neighbourhood-based friendships. Different school hours were also mentioned, and that the previous schools did not have a maison relais. The last two aspects were also mentioned by Yasmine. In addition, Yasmine stated that one of her previous schools had no real cafeteria, whereas here they ate lunch and played at the maison relais. She also mentioned that within the realm of the maison relais, the older children would sometimes be taken to a youth center to play.

Khalil mentioned that he experienced social exclusion at his second school in Luxembourg and that he had difficulties finding friends, as opposed to his current Luxembourgish school where peers are nicer:

Khalil: « Well déi Jongen déi waren um (school name). Keen ass mäin Frënd, nëmmen een ass mäin Frënd. »

Lucas mentioned that his previous school in China was more difficult in terms of academics and that there was no change in the teachers at his prior school when they were promoted to a higher grade for the whole duration of primary school. He also mentioned that there were fewer activities at his prior school and fewer opportunities to have fun or enjoy oneself, and more activities at his current Luxembourgish school. He exemplified this with sports by describing

how sports in China were not games and the idea was not for it to be fun, whereas in the Luxembourgish school, sports were gamified. Furthermore, he explained that the teachers in Luxembourg were nicer compared to the teachers in China and also mentioned that the school was bigger and had a maison relais, a place where they could eat and play together, like Yasmine said, which did not exist at his school in China:

Lucas: « Et ici les sports sont des jeux et des profs sont différents, sont gentils comme ça. Là-bas aussi c'est gentil mais ici- »

Katherine: « Plus strict peut-être ? »

Lucas: « Oui un peu plus strict. Et ici c'est mieux, l'école est plus grande comme ça, et il y a le maison relais, là-bas il n'y a pas de maison relais, c'est comme on mange et on part. Il n'y a pas de jeux, il n'y a pas de- on ne peut pas s'amuser, voilà. »

There were, however, also some aspects that he valued about his previous school. For instance, that he was able to speak Chinese with his peers and that there was not such frequent change of seating arrangements, as opposed to Luxembourg where seating arrangements are changed frequently.

Luna also mentioned the existence of a maison relais as a key difference between her previous and her current school. Additionally, she mentioned it was different how teachers dealt with students' questions when they worked on worksheets, and for this, she preferred her school in England, as the teacher would come to the student's desk if the student had a question. In contrast, at her current school, children had to go to the teacher's desk if they had a question, where there often was a queue, which affected her working time.

4.2.2.2 Experiences Adjusting to Differences in Schooling

All children adjusted relatively smoothly to the new school, and some mentioned an immediate sense of comfort. For Gabriel, the maison relais seemed to have been particularly easy to adjust to due to its enjoyable informal setting. Yasmine mentioned that she found adapting to the new routines challenging at the beginning due to unfamiliarity but that she adapted over time. She added that her teacher had shown her around, but that there was not much time to explain everything. She had learned over time by observing others:

Katherine: "And how did you learn how everything works?"

Yasmine: "Being every day and looking at how everyone is doing it."

Lucas stated that he felt overwhelmed by the differences at first, but that having been enrolled in early childhood education in Belgium made the new school environment less unfamiliar. Luna displayed resilience when adapting to the new educational environment and said that she quickly got used to the new routines. She did add that there was a possibility that she had not come across all existing differences yet and mentioned that she received peer support in orientation on her first day at the school:

Luna: "Because Sara for the first day she would tell me, she told me all the rules. Well, mostly the ones that were quite important and some that we usually won't come across. So…"

Katherine: "Like what did she say for example?"

Luna: "For example, not like all the rules wrote but something about what we need to do, umm like during the Pause when the whistle blows, we have to go back to class. In England it was a bit different."

4.2.2.3 Enjoyable Moments at Current School

When asked about things they enjoyed at school, within the regular class Gabriel mentioned enjoying creative subjects like music. He also enjoyed subjects where French was spoken, one of them being mathematics, where he enjoyed subject components that were gamified, such as repetition (10 verbs) or level-based exercises (Schnellrechnen). Yasmine similarly also valued creative subjects like arts. She also labelled mathematics as her favourite subject and found active subjects like sports, particularly swimming, enjoyable. Rami and Khalil also both talked about mathematics being their favourite subject. Rami reasoned it by saying:

Katherine: Firwat hues de Mathe gäer?

Amir: Well, et liicht ass.

This signifies how Rami enjoyed subjects that he considered easy and that he was good at. Lucas also stated that mathematics was his favourite subject and named components such as geometry and calculations. Luna, like Yasmine, reported enjoying active subjects like sports. She also stated that she enjoyed mathematics, as she, like Rami, considered it easy and was good at it.

Within the language course, Gabriel mentioned enjoying language learning through creative projects such as lapbooks and the use of formal digital learning apps as a source of language acquisition. However, he preferred Duolingo over the formal learning apps. Yasmine also enjoyed creative language learning in terms of games but also mentioned enjoying the language course because she was able to see her best friend there. Luna also spoke about the language course and stated it as her favourite course, also because she found it easy. Here she particularly

enjoyed creative language learning through games. When asked to state an example of a game, she said:

Luna: "It would- it's something like you have to- snakes and ladders, well not like that. You would have to roll a die and then move your figure and when you land on a picture you have to say what that picture is in Deutsch."

She added that she enjoyed the language course regardless of the activity type, due to learning at the same time with other newcomers, the positive classroom climate, and the friendliness of teachers and peers in the language course.

4.2.2.4 Experiences Making Friends at the Beginning

Gabriel noted that he found it moderately challenging making friends at the beginning. He reasoned it by saying how he did not know what languages the others spoke, and how during a school visit and on his first day of school, when a teacher asked the pupils what languages they spoke, it helped him discover shared language skills with peers. It was also mentioned how other children approached him during his school tour. Yasmine also mentioned it being hard to make friends at first due to limited knowledge of the school languages. She mentioned that, similarly to Gabriel, peers approached her and they became friends over time.

Rami and Khalil mentioned no difficulty finding friends at the beginning, and Rami also added that he became friends with peers by them approaching him and them playing football together. Lucas recalled how he became friends with his best friend and said that during a sports lesson a boy asked if he was his friend, to which he said yes. Additionally, he mentioned that he became friends with others due to being in the same class as them, them also speaking French, and them being his best friend's friends. Furthermore, he said that he became friends with peers from other classes due to them playing and sharing jokes. He said that it was his peers that approached him and explained:

Lucas: Parce que je suis différent parce que je suis venu de Chine et il n'y a pas beaucoup de Chinois ici.

As for Luna, she mentioned that she immediately had a friend, as the same girl who had approached Gabriel during his school visit had also approached her and asked her to play with them. She also talked about how the other children were aware that she was new, as newcomers are introduced to their classmates during a school tour.

4.2.2.5 Experiences Making Friends Now

Regarding how the ability to make friends at school had changed over time, most children mentioned that they found it easier to make friends than at the beginning. Gabriel, for instance,

mentioned that he now knows all of his peers, and Yasmine said that she had a good group of friends. Rami and Khalil also indicated no difficulties. Lucas expressed that he found it easier to make friends nowadays and that he had many friends in his neighbourhood. It was only Luna for whom making friends became harder. She mentioned that she sometimes had conflicts with a friend, and regarding new friends, she said:

Luna: "I find it not so easy because I feel like I never know what to say and how to do it."

4.2.3 Support in Feeling Included

4.2.3.1 Role of the Prior School

Previous school experiences can be a supporting factor in how newcomer children establish their sense of belonging at their current school. A transnational educational history has helped, for instance, Yasmine in developing confidence in adapting to a new school environment. Additionally, for many of the interviewed children, previous schooling has served as a tool for the acquisition of current school languages, which may have contributed to their sense of belonging at their current school. For instance, in the case of Rami and Khalil, exposure to Luxembourgish and German in their two previous Luxembourgish schools perhaps helped in acquiring a sense of belonging at their current school. Familiarity with a similar school system due to a prior school with similar routines, for instance, in the case of Lucas, who attended early childhood education in Belgium, also reduces adjustment difficulties.

4.2.3.2 Role of the Current Luxembourgish School

The organisation of newcomers' current school can also play a role in supporting their sense of belonging. Enrolment in a regular class was continuously indicated as important for students' sense of belonging, as children described its welcoming atmosphere and the opportunity to form peer relationships. A formal welcoming process, such as a school visit before officially joining, was also important. Children recalled being shown the classroom, introduced to peers, and having classmates introduce themselves, which made the transition smoother. When asked about suggestions on what can be done for students in general to feel more included, Luna said:

Luna: "I feel like they could- at the beginning they could, umm, like help them a bit more because they might not understand and feel a little bit worried."

4.2.3.3 Role of Self

It was found that newcomers played an active role in establishing their own sense of belonging through certain strategies. Gabriel and Yasmine engaged in language preparation before entering

school using Duolingo, which eased both language acquisition and their sense of belonging, as they were able to interact better with peers who neither spoke English nor French and found the language courses in German easy. Moreover, Yasmine mentioned that certain seating arrangements helped her feel more included:

Katherine: "And can you think of something that helped you to feel better in the regular class?"

Yasmine: "Sitting at the table where also people who understand German and Luxembourgish."

Furthermore, expressing one's own ideas was a strategy mentioned by Luna that contributed to a sense of belonging. However, due to language barriers, she was sometimes not able to express her own ideas in the regular class, which led to her feeling less included:

Luna: "Well, I do get included, but I don't feel so included because usually, if we're working in groups, I can't really- none of them will really speak English and so... I can't really say my ideas."

Katherine: "Do they all speak German and Luxembourgish but no English?"

Luna: "Yeah. So, I try to speak German, but I don't think my German is good enough yet to like say things- like, I mean, like say my ideas yet."

She even added that she felt more included in the language course, due to being able to express herself.

4.2.3.4 Role of Teachers

Teachers were critical in shaping newcomers' sense of belonging. One of the most often reported aspects was the kindness and friendliness of teachers. Teacher kindness was perceived as essential for a sense of belonging. Positive student-teacher relationships were mentioned as central to children's integration. Teachers' inclusive instructional strategies also played a role. Many provided support when newcomers struggled to understand instructions or content, whether through explanations, multilingual strategies, or language switching. Luna reported about her regular class teacher, for example:

Luna: "I think it's because the teacher- she would usually speak English or Deutsch to me, but if I don't understand, she would explain it in English so that I felt like- I felt a bit more included."

Furthermore, teachers translated information into a language the student was fluent in, and in some cases, Yasmine's teachers strategically seated her next to another newcomer to foster comfort:

Yasmine: "She only speaks French, so she's a beginner like me. So, I feel more comfortable being with someone like me."

Some teachers also praised newcomers for speaking, even when their answers were imperfect, encouraging participation. Inclusion during lessons and the opportunity to express one's own ideas, regardless of language level, were thus crucial, as were inquiries into a student's task progress and explaining the school routines during school visits.

4.2.3.5 Role of Peers

Peer support for helping newcomers' sense of belonging included helping them navigate the unfamiliar school environment by explaining the school routines and offering informal guidance. Additionally, being included in group exercises and having peers to pair up with during classroom activities enhanced newcomers' sense of belonging. Furthermore, the newcomers reported that peers explained instructions or offered translations when they struggled with comprehension. Similarly, peer-initiated inclusion, such as being approached by peers and being invited to join them during play, was shown to build rapport. Playing football was found to be especially helpful for boys to feel included. However, peer inclusion was also found to be sometimes influenced by whether the newcomer was perceived as fitting into the existing group. In addition, gender dynamics played a role, especially for boys. Nevertheless, friendships were formed between newcomers and between newcomers and peers from the regular class; however, friendships evolved mostly among children with shared language skills. Overall, the interviewed children perceived their peers in this school as kind and friendly, which supported their sense of belonging. However, as a suggestion, Luna mentioned how peer-buddy systems could be helpful for newcomers to feel more included initially, which currently did not exist at the school.

4.2.3.6 Role of the Maison Relais

The maison relais has also been identified as a facilitator of newcomers' sense of belonging. Many of the interviewed children expressed positive attitudes towards the maison relais, associating it with enjoyable experiences, friendships, and a relaxed atmosphere. Friendships formed in the maison relais further strengthen children's social belonging. The ability to eat, play, and participate in outdoor or creative activities with classmates fosters a sense of belonging.

4.2.3.7 Role of the Community

Finally, the local community plays an important role in reinforcing the sense of belonging for newcomer children, as school friendships extend into the neighbourhood. Through the regular class, children often formed friendships that carried over into their everyday life outside of

school. When school peers live nearby, opportunities for spontaneous social interactions are created, such as playing together in the neighbourhood or meeting friends outside of school.

5. Discussion

5.1 Language Use and Integration

All children in some way had multilingual environments at home, and most spoke languages at home that were very different from European languages, such as Arabic or Chinese, which can make language acquisition and integration into the school more difficult, as shown by Borgonovi & Ferrara (2020), who found that a greater difference between a student's home language and school language resulted in lower academic performance. What perhaps makes it easier is the fact that at least one of the dominant school languages, meaning French, German, or Luxembourgish, had already been integrated into the home environment beforehand or was newly added to the languages spoken at home, either by speaking with parents or siblings. This was the case for all interviewed children, as Yasmine and Gabriel already knew French fluently from speaking with their mother as well as from attending a French school in Algeria, and Lucas already fluently knew French due to being born in Belgium and attending early childhood education there. These three children also reported better language integration compared to the other three children, who did not already fluently speak one of the school languages. Luna and the brothers Rami and Khalil struggled more with the school languages, although Luna's father switched from speaking English to speaking Luxembourgish with her, and Rami and Khalil, according to Khalil, were speaking Luxembourgish and German with each other at home. This enables them to practice the school languages at home, which might be helpful for language acquisition. Therefore, it seems as though the time of exposure to the school languages, whether it was early in childhood, also plays a role in subsequent Luxembourgish school integration. The fact that all children in some capacity spoke school languages at home also shows how much influence the school language environment has on the home language environment. In this sense, it is also interesting to note that Yasmine's and Gabriel's preference to speak English to each other was also shaped by prior schooling, as for a while they were enrolled in an international school in Lebanon where the main language used was English. However, the downside of the school language transfer is that it unfortunately contributes to the neglect and consequent loss of the heritage language. Cho (2015), who investigated how second-generation Korean-American adolescents perceived the development and maintenance of their heritage

language, found that although many participants had early exposure to Korean at home, most eventually shifted to English. This shift was especially noticeable in sibling interactions, where 90% reported using mostly or only English. Overall, 90% of participants reported that English was their dominant language instead of Korean. This is unfortunate, as it has been shown across studies that a good knowledge of the heritage language can lead to faster acquisition of new languages (Yang et al., 2017).

How the newcomer children adapted to this partly or completely new language environment at school was twofold. Either their peers' and teachers' language skills mostly drove their language choices, or it was their own language skills that determined the languages they used at school. Gabriel, Yasmine, Rami, Khalil, and Lucas mainly adapted the languages they used based on the language abilities of their conversation partners. They showed adaptive multilingual communication and strategic use of multiple languages. Luna was a bit different in that sense because she mainly used English as a communication medium at school. Thus, her own language skills mostly determined her language choice, although she also made an active effort to speak some Luxembourgish and German. As English was spoken by quite a lot of people at school, she might not have been so reliant on speaking the school languages to be understood by others, as was the case for Rami and Khalil, who reported not having many Arabic-speaking peers at school and might have been more 'forced' to learn the school languages to be able to express themselves within the school community. Thus, successful school language acquisition depends on whether children have sufficient opportunities to practice speaking the school languages with others and whether they demonstrate a strong intrinsic motivation to learn and use those languages. This includes making efforts to speak the school languages, even if they are not yet fluent, rather than consistently reverting to a language they feel more comfortable with. Interestingly, many of these children indirectly mentioned that their peers from the regular class are also not always able to speak all three of the school languages. This might be positive for newcomers, as it might signal to them that they are not alone in the school language learning process and that many of their peers are also still learning to speak the school languages, which might make them feel less left out or different from their peers.

The interviewed children differed significantly in the use of their home language(s). While Yasmine and Gabriel used French, one of the school languages and spoken by 88.9% of Luxembourg's population, daily, and while Luna mostly spoke in English, the lingua franca of communication across the world, spoken by 60% of the Luxembourgish population, home language use was more selective for Arabic, spoken by 1.2% of Luxembourg's population, and

Chinese, spoken by 0.5% of Luxembourg's population (languageknowledge.eu, 2024). In the case of Gabriel and Rami, Arabic was used to establish peer understanding and to learn through the shared home language. Gabriel especially used Arabic, even though he is not fluent in it, to compensate for words he did not know in Luxembourgish and German. This enabled him to both improve his Luxembourgish and German and helped establish a friendship with Rami. In Khalil's case, it was similar, whereby a friendship with an Arabic-speaking peer in his first Luxembourgish school led to repetition- and modelling-based learning of French from this peer. Lucas, on the other hand, occasionally translated French words into Chinese upon request from his peers. Thus, especially for children who do not already speak one of the school languages as their home language and who do not speak a global language such as English, it could be important to use their home language(s) at school when first arriving to be able to acquire the school language(s) faster, as they are able to connect their home language(s) to linguistic elements of the school language(s). At the same time, using the home language(s) at school might enable newcomers to build rapport with peers who share the same home language(s) or with peers who are curious to learn about the newcomers' home language(s), which can lead to reciprocal language learning.

Most children described having initial difficulties using the school languages they were not fluent in. Rami was the only child who did not express having had difficulties with the school languages initially. However, because the language course teacher was also present during the interview with Rami, after the interviews had concluded, she mentioned that it had been very difficult for Rami to adapt to the school's language system and that he possibly had difficulties understanding some questions or expressing his answers during the interview. Thus, it is important for teachers and school staff to be conscious of this and to check in on the child, support them emotionally, and encourage them to use the school languages despite not being fluent in them, which may lead to better language acquisition over time.

The children overall felt improvements in their school language use compared to before. This is also reflected in a study by Evans et al. (2016), which showed that most English as an Additional Language (EAL) students clearly progressed in their spoken English over time, as evidenced by improved speaking skills and increased confidence in speaking English. However, difficulties remained in vocabulary and comprehension even after more than two years since arrival, which was the case for Rami, Khalil, and Lucas. This highlights the importance of continuing language courses beyond one or two years, as it cannot be assumed that newcomer children will achieve full proficiency in all three school languages within such a short timeframe. A study by Zang and Winke (2024) found that, on average, children who speak another language at home and start

learning English at school in kindergarten need about five years to become proficient in English, but even after six years, one-third of the children were still not proficient. The children showed both inter- and intra-individual differences in their language proficiency. While some children had better proficiency in French, others had better proficiency in German or Luxembourgish, and one child could differ greatly in their proficiency across French, German, and Luxembourgish.

At this school, all children seemed to have positive feelings about using their home language, indicating that newcomers are not discriminated against based on their home languages. Their peers also seemed to have positive attitudes towards the newcomers' home languages, as some children recounted that they would teach their peers words from their home language.

The attendance of prior schools with the same school languages can be one supporting factor in newcomers' language integration process at their new schools. For five out of the six children, formal schooling was a source of language acquisition of at least one of the current school's languages. This is helpful, as it enables not only faster language integration in terms of academic and social integration, but it also possibly enables a greater sense of belonging, as it allows them to find peer connections more quickly. For example, the newcomer children who already speak French can immediately follow the lessons where French is the language of instruction and can, for instance, find a French-speaking peer group, as was the case for Lucas, who, at the current school, according to the teacher, had a *francophone* friend group.

In Luxembourg, newcomer children attend the language course for language instruction while also being enrolled in the regular class for other subjects like arts, science, or sports. The fact that many of the children identified formal and informal language immersion at school as a factor that supported their school language acquisition also underlines the importance of a school system where newcomers are not fully secluded solely in the language course but also have the opportunity to interact with native-speaking peers and take part in the regular classroom, which could enhance their language acquisition and also their sense of belonging to the school. Additionally, the presence of other newcomers in the langauge course may also lead to the newcomers feeling less alone and different, and that they can attend the same regular class with their friends from the language course. It has been shown in many studies how being secluded from native-speaking peers impacts newcomers' chances to learn the language and engage academically. Thus, this system in Luxembourg is helpful for the children.

One way newcomers try to make sense of the new school languages is by asking the teacher or peers for translations and support. Furthermore, with the rise of digitalisation, digital tools and

media have become accessible to children as well. With regard to language learning, many people nowadays learn languages by using the app Duolingo. A study by Kazu and Kuvvetli (2025) investigated how Duolingo affects language proficiency in 10th-grade students and found significant improvements in listening, speaking, reading, and writing for the Duolingo group compared to the control group. Furthermore, a study on Netflix showed that watching self-selected German TV shows improved students' listening skills and their ability to learn new vocabulary. It also supported what they learned in an intermediate German course (Alm, 2021). These exposures should nevertheless be implemented with caution and regulated by the parents. Of course, it is also effective when children themselves attempt to speak in the school languages despite not speaking them fluently, as this can lead to significant improvements in their language skills and therefore should be encouraged. This is also supported in a review by Ilqar (2025), whereby the key principles of full English immersion include active communication, where the focus is on expressing oneself over being grammatically perfect, and tolerance of mistakes, where errors are seen as normal, creating a low-stress environment. Lastly, most children showed a positive attitude towards reading. However, many of the interviewed children did not practice reading in certain home languages like Arabic or Chinese.

Parents of the interviewed children used several strategies to support their child's school language learning. While Gabriel and Yasmine's parents, for example, who did not speak German, supported them by encouraging them to use Duolingo and by buying them books, Luna's father, who was English but spoke Luxembourgish fluently, helped her by speaking to her in the target language, assisting her with her schoolwork, and giving her new tasks to practice. These are helpful strategies by parents to support their children in their language acquisition, and it has been proven in studies that children whose parents support them in language learning succeed better in school. For instance, a longitudinal study by St. Clair et al. (2012) examined the long-term impact of a parent involvement training program on the language and literacy skills of migrant children and showed that at the end of Grade 1, as well as at the end of Grade 5 or 6, the intervention group scored significantly higher gains in language development. Yet this also highlights an inequality, as Rami and Khalil, for example, according to the teacher, did not receive as much support, and children who have parents that are not so involved or who do not have the resources to be more involved are at a disadvantage because they may not have access to resources that promote their child's language development. It is especially important for the school and maybe even the government to aid these children so that they can have equal opportunities as the children who receive more parental support and who have more financial resources.

The newcomers reported that a lot of their language learning resulted from teacher-based education. The teachers used strategies such as multilingual teaching, translating, gamified and visual learning, the use of digital tools, and language immersion practices. All of these were key to the interviewed newcomers' language acquisition and have been proven as effective methods in previous studies for aiding language acquisition (Veerman et al., 2025; Halwani, 2017; McCaughey & Rosenberg, 2024). However, two key problems had been identified regarding the teaching practices in this school: First, there was seemingly a lack of assessment of the newcomers' language level prior to cours d'accueil commencement, which would have possibly been helpful for more differentiated teaching. Second, as mentioned by the cours d'accueil teacher after the interview, there were big differences in the achievement level of newcomers in her class: there were those who advanced fast and those who were still struggling. However, those who were more advanced perceived the cours d'accueil as very easy, and they received no additional work to further their language acquisition. Maybe it would thus be helpful to teach newcomers in a more differentiated way, whereby they can work on different tasks based on their level and have optional tasks to complete if they are already advanced or particularly motivated to learn the languages.

Peer-supported language learning was key for newcomers' language acquisition, but also for their overall integration and sense of belonging. This support was either offered through translations, teaching of the language, or immersion into the language. Especially language immersion has been found in the literature to be key for language acquisition and an advantage of educational systems where children are also enrolled in the regular class, as it provides constant, meaningful exposure to the target languages, helping newcomers develop fluency in a natural way. It supports faster language acquisition, better academic outcomes, and social integration.

The maison relais in Luxembourg is an after-school care centre for children aged 3–12, which offers meals, activities, and homework help before and after school, and during holidays (Freeman, 2025). It supports language development by offering a multilingual, social environment where children learn through play, interaction, and routines, providing natural exposure to the school languages. Thus, it is advisable for newcomer children to visit such centres to boost their language learning.

5.2 Sense of Belonging and Integration

How the children described their daily school lives shows that, apart from the language courses, they are integrated into every aspect of school life. They may even miss language courses to take

part in activities that the other children participate in, like the Schoulfoire or swimming. This enables a greater sense of belonging, as opposed to an educational system where newcomer children are completely segregated from their native-speaking peers and the school community, sometimes to the extent that they are not invited to school activities and events that native peers attend (Aarsæther, 2021).

Overall, the children seemed to have had rather positive first experiences in the language courses, but some also reported having difficulties at the beginning. Gabriel mentioned that his teacher had a positive perception of him, as well as of Yasmine and Luna. Studies show that positive teacher perceptions can foster a sense of belonging and a feeling of being included and part of the lesson, while negative teacher perceptions can lead to feelings of exclusion (Abdulhamed & Beattie, 2024). Gabriel also talked about how the task instructions were unclear to him when he first joined the language course. It may thus be important for teachers to give newcomer-friendly instructions, not only because this may enhance their academic performance, but also because it may make them feel immediately academically included. Children who constantly do not understand what must be done in class might feel ashamed or different from the other children who know what to do and thus report a lower sense of belonging. A study by Cassar and Tonna (2018) found that because the instruction was delivered in Maltese for many subjects, and for other subjects the textbooks were in English, this led to a sense of confusion, frustration, and disconnection from the learning process in the classroom for migrant students. Thus, it is important to note that, generally, language proficiency makes pupils feel more included in the course.

Children's integration into the language course remained positive over time, even though some academic difficulties persisted. Some reported feeling more integrated now compared to when they first joined the language course. In Gabriel's case, for example, it came with better familiarity with the tasks; in Yasmine's case, with a feeling of being at ease in a small group; and in Luna's case, with teacher kindness and academic competence.

Several children mentioned having initial difficulties integrating into the regular class, which implies a lack of a full sense of belonging at first. Limited school language proficiency was identified as a barrier to belonging, as well as unfamiliarity with the school routines and initial shyness. What is interesting to note is the link between language and belonging that is displayed here, as a lack of language proficiency contributed to a lower sense of belonging initially.

All children reported feeling a greater sense of belonging in the regular class than before. This can be seen by the fact that several children reported having good social belonging in the regular

class, with Gabriel even mentioning that he had more friends than at the beginning. Gabriel and Lucas also underlined the importance of these friendships in the regular class, expressing happiness about remaining in the same class with them, which also portrays a sense of belonging in the classroom. Other contributing factors to a sense of belonging in the regular class included familiarity with the school routines, a good classroom atmosphere, kind teachers and peers, engaging learning content, as well as the ability to communicate with peers. Similar factors are named in the literature as contributing to newcomers' sense of belonging in the classroom (Martin et al., 2024).

Asking the children about differences between schools helped uncover at which school, at what times, and in what way children felt more included. These comparisons made it possible to identify experiences that fostered their sense of belonging in the different school contexts. For instance, regarding academic belonging, structured school materials with clear organization in the current school increased academic integration. Furthermore, the kindness of teachers at the current school may also be key for academic belonging. However, the ability to continue working on a worksheet while waiting for teacher support might have been an aspect that enabled academic integration at a previous school and should perhaps be implemented at this school as well. The possibility to meet school friends in the neighbourhood or to socialise at the Maison Relais at the current school may positively impact social belonging. Overall, however, the children seemed to feel a greater sense of belonging at their Luxembourgish school compared to their prior school contexts.

Although all children reported having adapted to the new school environment over time, what seemingly accelerated the process was if the child was already familiar with the school environment beforehand, for instance, due to similar prior schooling experience, or was immediately made familiar with the environment upon arrival, for example through informal orientation guidance from a classmate. In contrast, Yasmine, who was not familiarized to the same extent at the beginning, reported more adaptation difficulties and relied on strategies such as observational learning and peer modelling for adaptation.

The children in this study stated that creative, gamified, and active subjects were particularly enjoyable. Interestingly, they seemed to especially enjoy subjects for which little German knowledge, the main language of instruction in Luxembourgish primary schools (MENJE, 2024), was needed. They all stated that mathematics was particularly enjoyable, and some explained this by saying they were good at it and found it easy. Gabriel even said that he enjoyed subjects taught in French, a language he speaks fluently. There thus seems to be a link between language

and a sense of enjoyment or even belonging, as subjects where the children do not have to rely on their school language skills are viewed as particularly enjoyable. It is also important to note how the children valued creative school language learning, for example through games, and how a positive and friendly atmosphere during language courses may also contribute to a higher sense of belonging during that course.

As peer relationships have been strongly linked to a sense of belonging at school (Martin et al., 2024), the children were also asked what it was like for them to make friends at the beginning. Although some children had no problems finding friends, others mentioned difficulties and attributed them to language barriers. This also shows the connection between language and a sense of belonging, as language knowledge is key to social connection, which is again important for being able to form a sense of belonging at school. Some also indicated that, as newcomers, they did not approach others, perhaps due to their newcomer status, and that their peers approached them. This was mentioned across all interviewed children. Thus, what facilitated making friendships at the beginning was the discovery of shared language skills, peers approaching the newcomer, and peers inviting the newcomer to play games, such as football. It is also important to note here that, according to the teacher, football was crucial for establishing peer relationships. She even mentioned how those who did not enjoy playing football did not have the same opportunities to find friends, especially among boys. Other factors that facilitated making friendships were being enrolled in a regular class, being introduced to peers' social networks, and humor. Additionally, what is interesting is that there seemed to have been peers who actively approached and included newcomers. This kind of inclusive behavior from children should be supported by teachers and parents.

Most children found it easy to make friends nowadays and seemed to have a good sense of social belonging at school. Overall, they also found it easier to approach peers, except for Luna, who mentioned having fluctuating friendships and showed hesitation about how to approach peers. This might indicate that shyness, perhaps due to language barriers, can be a hindrance for newcomers in forming new friendships, which has implications for their sense of belonging.

Regarding support mechanisms facilitating a sense of belonging, the prior school may play a contributing role, as children who frequently changed schools may have normalised the experience of adapting to new systems, perhaps leading to fewer difficulties in acquiring a sense of belonging at their new school, as they may be less anxious about another unfamiliar linguistic environment. Additionally, prior knowledge of school languages in general can give children a head start, as it makes participating in lessons and social interaction easier, which in turn might

enhance their sense of belonging at school. Finally, familiarity with similar school systems may also contribute to a higher initial sense of belonging.

The current school contributed to a sense of belonging for newcomer children in that they were part of a regular class and, apart from attending language courses for a small portion of the school day, they were fully included in every activity. Additionally, school visits were important for making initial contact with peers and establishing a sense of familiarity.

Agency also plays an important role in the development of a sense of belonging at school (Štremfel et al., 2024). The children in this study mentioned different strategies they used to enhance their sense of belonging, and these were mostly connected to language, meaning that language proficiency was seen as a tool for inclusion. Thus, some children used Duolingo to acquire the language or strategically sat next to peers who could speak the school languages to support them through translations. Luna also expressed how the ability to express one's own ideas contributed to a sense of belonging.

Teachers employed a number of strategies that supported newcomers' sense of inclusion. They provided support through explanations, translations, multilingual strategies, language switching, strategic seating arrangements, as well as praising newcomers for speaking in languages they were not fluent in, giving them opportunities to express their ideas, monitoring their task progress, and leading school visits.

Peers were found to be a major factor contributing to the sense of belonging of the interviewed newcomers. Peers helped newcomers feel included by offering informal initial guidance, including them during group work, through explanations and translations, inviting newcomers to join them during play, and by showing kindness and friendliness towards newcomers, which was especially crucial. Peer-buddy systems have been offered as a suggestion to improve initial belonging among newcomers.

The maison relais is a key element of the school environment where a sense of belonging can be established in an informal setting through eating, playing, and participating in activities with classmates.

Lastly, having friends in the neighbourhood who are also friends from school extends the sense of belonging established at school into community life. Thus, even when older children move on from primary to secondary school, the ability to spend time with familiar peers outside of school remains.

5.3 Limitations

This study does not claim to be exhaustive, and it is likely that additional factors influence the language use and sense of belonging of newcomer children that were not captured here. Several limitations should be noted.

First, in three of the six interviews, another adult with a personal connection to the child, either a parent or a teacher, was present alongside Prof. Dr. Isabelle Albert and me. This may have influenced what the children felt comfortable sharing. Future studies should aim to avoid such potential biases.

Second, the study relied solely on self-reported data gathered through semi-structured interviews. While this approach provided valuable insights, it may have introduced subjectivity. Thus, incorporating more objective data, such as school records or language assessments, could strengthen the findings. Although such mixed-method approaches were beyond the scope of this bachelor thesis, future research could benefit from their inclusion.

Another limitation concerns the participant group, which primarily included high-achieving students. These children may have been more articulate and confident in expressing themselves at school, which may have led to more positive experiences. To better capture the experiences of children who are still developing their language skills, alternative methods should be considered, such as creative or visual tools, for example, the photo elicitation technique.

The school involved in the study appeared to be a highly supportive environment, which may not be representative of all schools. The school's willingness to participate in this study and to be open to critique suggests a positive school climate, which could bias the findings. Gaining access to schools where integration may be more challenging could, however, prove difficult. Therefore, indirect data collection methods, such as anonymous questionnaires or online platforms, might provide valuable insights without requiring direct school participation.

Moreover, two children in the study, Rami and Khalil, had limited expressive abilities and may not have fully understood the interview questions. For children with similar linguistic or cognitive challenges, semi-structured interviews may not be the most appropriate method. Their limited participation could skew the findings, as academically stronger children may dominate the narrative while those facing greater difficulties remain unheard. This highlights the need for more individualized research methods, particularly for groups who may struggle to articulate their experiences or who may feel reluctant to discuss sensitive topics with unfamiliar adults.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how newcomer children in a Luxembourgish primary school navigate language use and develop a sense of belonging. The findings show that inclusive classroom practices, supportive peer and teacher relationships, and informal spaces like the maison relais play a key role in fostering belonging and language development. Children also actively used individual strategies to adapt. However, among others, differences in language background, prior schooling, and parental support shaped individual experiences. While the school offered a highly supportive environment, further research is needed to explore more Luxembourgish school settings and student populations.

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Appendix

Appendix A

INTRODUCTION

Hi, I'm Katherine, and I'm a university student studying Psychology. I'm doing a project for my studies about how children who move to Luxembourg from different countries, like you, settle into their new schools. This is Ms. Albert, my supervisor, and she's here to help with the interview today.

The interview will take about 30 minutes. I'm going to audio record our conversation, but your answers will be kept private, so no one will know who said what. I'll also take notes on my laptop while we talk. At the end, you'll get a little surprise as a thank you!

You have a few important rights:

- You can stop the interview at any time if you don't feel comfortable.

- You can also ask to see your answers later if you want.

If you have any questions, please ask. You're the expert, and I really want to hear your thoughts!

Thanks for helping out today! Are you ready to start?

Appendix B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participant Code: P.01

SECTION 1: UNDERSTANDING INTEGRATION THROUGH LANGUAGE

Q1: What language(s) do you usually speak at home with your family?

(For example, do you speak Portuguese with your mum and dad, but sometimes use French when your cousin visits?)

Q1a: Who do you speak each one with at home?

(Like maybe you speak Arabic with your grandma, but French with your little brother because he doesn't know Arabic so well?)

Q2: What language(s) do you speak at school?

(Do you speak Luxembourgish or German in class, but maybe French or another language with your friends at recess?)

Q2a: Who do you speak each one with at school?

(For example, do you speak Luxembourgish with your teacher, but maybe English with a friend from the UK?)

Q3: What was it like when you first started using the school language(s)? How did you feel about it back then?

(Was it maybe a bit confusing or scary at first, like not understanding much German in the beginning?)

Q4: What is it like for you now when you speak the school language(s)? Has anything changed? How do you feel about it now?

(Do you feel more confident now, maybe even help others in class sometimes?)

Q5: Do you ever use your home language(s) at school? If so, when, and how do you use it/them?

(Do you ever use your home language, like when you're playing football with friends who speak the same language?)

Q5a: (If the child does) How do you feel about using your home language(s) at school?

(Do you feel happy because it's easier to express yourself, or maybe unsure because not everyone speaks it?)

Q6: How did you learn the school language(s)? What was it like?

(Did you learn Luxembourgish from your teacher, or maybe by watching TV shows? Was it fun, or was it a bit hard at the start?)

Q7: What do you do if you don't understand something at school or if it's hard to say something in the school language(s)? Who helps you, and how do they help?

(Can you remember a time like that—maybe in math when you didn't understand the words, and your teacher helped by drawing pictures? Or maybe a classmate helped you?)

Q8: Do you like reading?

(Do you like stories about animals or adventures, or maybe you find reading a bit boring?)

Q8a: How often do you read?

(Do you read almost every night before bed, or only when the teacher asks you to?)

Q8b: Why do you read?

(Do you read because you like stories, or maybe because it helps you learn new words?)

Q8c: (If the child likes to read) What do you enjoy about reading?

(Do you like that you can imagine new worlds, or that the stories are funny or exciting?)

Q8d: Where do you usually get your books from?

(Do you get books from the school library, or maybe someone at home buys them for you?)

Q8e: What languages do you read in?

(Do you read in French, or maybe in English too if there are pictures?)

Q8f: How do you feel when you're reading?

(Do you feel calm or like you're in another world? Or do you sometimes feel stuck if there are hard words?)

SECTION 2: UNDERSTANDING INTEGRATION THROUGH BELONGING

Q1: Can you tell me what a normal day at school is like for you?

Like, what do you usually do from the moment you arrive until the end of the day? Do you have a routine that you like?

Q2: What was it like when you first started in the cours d'acceuil/language courses? How did you feel about it/them back then?

Was it maybe exciting or a bit scary at first? Did you know anyone there?

Q2a: What are the cours d'acceuil/language courses like for you now? How do you feel about them nowadays?

Do you feel more confident now in those classes? Do you enjoy them more?

Q2b: Can you think of something that helped you feel welcome or included in the cours d'acceuil? Can you tell me how that helped you?

Like maybe a teacher who was really kind, or another student who helped you?

Q2c: Can you think of anything else that helped you feel included in the cours d'acceuil?

Maybe playing games together, or when everyone worked in small groups?

Q3: What was it like when you joined your regular class for the first time? How did you feel about it back then?

Did you feel nervous, excited, or maybe shy? Was it very different from the cours d'accueil?

Q3a: What is your regular class like for you now? How you feel about it nowadays?

Do you feel more part of the group now? Are there things you enjoy more?

Q3b: Can you think of something that helped you feel part of the regular class? Can you tell me how it helped you?

Like maybe someone invited you to play, or the teacher let you do something fun?

_____

Q3c: Can you think of anything else that helped you feel included in the regular class?

Maybe you worked on a project together with classmates?

_____

Q4: Can you tell me about things or routines that are different at your new school in Luxembourg compared to the school you went to before?

Like maybe the way the schedule works, the subjects you have, or how you eat lunch?

_____

Q4a: Can you think of anything else that is different at your new school?

Maybe how you talk to the teacher, or how breaks work?

_____

Q4b: What was it like getting used to those new things or routines?

Was it hard at first, or did someone help you understand the new rules?

Can you think of something that made it easier to get used to your new school? Like a friend who explained things or a teacher who showed you around?

_____

Q5: What do you enjoy most about your lessons in general? Why do you like it?

Do you like drawing, learning new words, doing science experiments, or maybe playing games?

_____

Q6: Are there any parts during the school day when you feel really happy or like you're really part of your class? Can you tell me about those moments?

Like maybe during group work, at recess, or when the whole class laughs together?

_____

Q7: Can you tell me about something your teachers, classmates, or friends do that makes you feel included or welcome in class?

Like when someone explains something to you, plays with you, or just says hi?

Q8: Is there anything else that makes you feel part of the school community?

Like a school event you took part in, or wearing the same school t-shirt as everyone else?

Q9: When you first started school here, what was it like to make friends? Can you think of anything that helped you?

Was it easy or hard? Did someone come talk to you first, or did you meet someone at recess?

Q9a: What is it like to make friends nowadays?

Is it easier now? Do you feel like you have a good group of friends?

SECTION 3: SUMMARY

Q1: What do you think schools, teachers, or classmates could do to help new students learn the school language(s) better?

Like, if a new student came who didn't speak much Luxembourgish or French yet, what do you think could help them? Maybe games, buddies, or special lessons?

Q2: What do you think schools, teachers, or classmates could do to help new students feel more included in the class?

What would help a new kid feel like they belong in the class? Like maybe if someone invited them to play, or a teacher explained things slowly?

Q3: Is there anything else you'd like to share about what it's been like learning the school language(s) or feeling included at school?

Is there anything important that we didn't talk about yet that you'd like to tell me? Like a memory or story about your school or classmates?