Perspectives of Polish adolescent immigrants on the Polish School in Reykjavík: benefits and challenges.

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Thesis for MA degree
Faculty of Education and Diversity
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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my family. First, I dedicate this work to my beloved husband Adam for his patience and understanding. Thank you for the support during this long and difficult journey of writing my Master’s Thesis. Your love and devotion to me and our children is indescribable. I also dedicate this work to my beloved sons. You are my whole life.
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Finally, I wrote this challenging work. The time flew so fast during the writing and so many things were happening that I did not even realise how I overcame all difficulties associated with this work. Although, some situations made me doubt that I would eventually finish this thesis, there were people who supported me, and I would like to thank them.

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Abstract

The issue of immigrants and opportunities for learning their heritage language abroad is intensively debated in the field of education. Scholars debate about the importance of heritage language learning, its benefits and challenges. Previous studies report that heritage language learning improves school achievement and communication within families, as well as contributing to higher self-esteem and ethnic identity and serving as a base for second language acquisition.

This research study investigates Polish immigrant adolescents’ perspectives on attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. The paper addresses the issue of heritage language learning, studying benefits and challenges of attending heritage language classes from the perspective of Polish immigrant adolescents. The study is grounded in a social constructivist perspective that aims to explain how different perspectives and interpretations construct new knowledge. The study involves an ethnographical approach to qualitative research methods by conducting interviews and observations. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and observations. Six Polish immigrant adolescents from the Polish School in Reykjavík were interviewed. 295 minutes were spent on observations in it during classes and free time. Data was systematized, analyzed and interpreted.

Results indicated that although Polish immigrant adolescents encounter many challenges associated with attending the School, the benefits are much more valuable for them. For Polish immigrant adolescents, some of the benefits are associated with improving Polish skills and the importance of heritage language learning. Polish immigrant adolescents report that heritage language learning improves language skills and communication within the family as well as contributing to higher self-esteem. On the other hand, they negate its contribution to greater ethnic identity.
Ágrip

Heit umræða fer fram á sviði menntunar um málefni innflytjenda og möguleika þeirra til að læra móðúrmál sitt utan heimalands síns. Fræðimenn ræða um mikilvægi náms í móðúrmáli, kosti þess og galla. Fyrri rannsóknir sýna fram á að nám í móðúrmáli bætir námsárangur, samskipti innan fjölskyldu, leiðir til betra sjálfsmats og upprunaaðkennis og styrkir grundvöll fyrir frekara nám í öðru tungumáli.

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Preface

This thesis was written solely by me, the undersigned. I have read and understand the University of Iceland Code of Ethics (https://english.hi.is/university/university_of_iceland_code_of_ethics) and have followed them to the best of my knowledge. I have correctly cited to all other works or previous work of my own, including, but not limited to, written works, figures, data or tables. I thank all who have worked with me and take full responsibility for any mistakes contained in this work. Signed:

Double-click the lines below and write in their place. Write your name with a different font in place of the bottom line (e.g., Lucida handwriting) or insert a photo of your own signature.

Reykjavík, 22.06.2019

Malwina Barbara Wejher
1 Introduction to the study

1.1 Significance and the purpose of the study

In the modern world, the problem of migrations and displacement of populations in different territories has become acute in recent years (Walke, Musekamp & Svobodny, 2016). Searching for a new and better life, many migrants go to the countries that have a more stable socio-economic situation. According to statistics, from more than 6 billion people living on the planet, about 150 million (2.5%) live outside the countries in which they were born (Walke, Musekamp & Svobodny, 2016). Immigration often concerns whole families. Adult immigrants have reasons to move to a new country, for instance because of better job opportunities, which is the opposite to immigrant children who often have to leave their friends and have problems with adaptation in the new environment. The most significant problems in the adaptation and survival of migrant students are associated with linguistic and socio-cultural barriers. They include the difficulty of mastering the second language (the language of the mainstream culture) along with the lack of understanding of norms and fundamental values of the new society and culture, ignorance of everyday life and interpersonal communication standards, communication difficulties in the student team and pedagogical staff, and the issues of mastering the educational material (Zielińska et al., 2014). Overall, immigrant students find it difficult to adapt to a community with a different culture. This is supported by Tran’s research in 2015, which examined educational progress of immigrant students in Iceland. Tran (2015) did a study about Vietnamese immigrant students in Icelandic upper schools. Her study examined equality among immigrant students and the role it plays in their education. Tran (2015) employed triangulation of the sources, which included: interviews, observations and the reviewing of policy documents for deeper and clearer understanding of the data. The interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators of schools with students from diverse backgrounds, as well as with Vietnamese immigrant students (Tran, 2015). Her study revealed that the Icelandic Educational System focuses mostly on Icelandic language and culture and does not compromise provision about improving heritage language of immigrant students (Tran, 2015). Moreover, the results indicated that immigrant students are often isolated from their Icelandic peers, due to lack of Icelandic language proficiency (Tran, 2015). Furthermore, Icelandic teachers have insufficient knowledge about pedagogical practices in multicultural
education (Tran, 2015). Although the research revealed that immigrant students who learn Icelandic as a second language were provided with support from teachers and perceived teachers as caring and helpful, their knowledge was often evaluated as deficient by their Icelandic teachers due to lack of Icelandic language proficiency (Tran, 2015). Tran’s research sheds light on immigrant students’ perspectives with emphasis on equity and its importance in school performance.

Furthermore, research in many multicultural societies revealed that marginalization and linguistic discrimination among immigrant students in schools abroad lead to poor school achievement (Zielińska et al., 2014). Baker (2001) notes that in such cases, immigrant students and especially adolescents perceive their heritage language and culture as undesirable, which contributes to heritage language loss. Therefore, it is very important to support heritage language learning among immigrant students. In this regard, heritage language schools can be a significant tool for nurturing heritage language and at the same time ease the process of adaptation to the new environment. However, there is still a lack of heritage language schools or heritage language classes around the world. This is supported by the study which investigated 125 English adolescent immigrants who studied French as a second language. The study revealed that 60.8% of immigrants stopped studying their heritage language after arriving abroad and 52% of them reported that the reason for that was that no heritage language classes were available (Aberdeen, 2016). What’s more, almost 70% of those who developed their heritage language claimed to learn it outside the school system (Aberdeen, 2016). The reason for this is that heritage language schools are often founded and supported by heritage language communities and function independently from regular schools and curriculums (Kim, 2011). The responsibility of heritage language maintenance often lies in immigrants’ hands and lack educational support from a national authority (Aberdeen, 2016). On the other hand, attending heritage language schools is often suggested by immigrant parents and requires additional effort from immigrant students, both because of the additional time they need to spend on learning and the amount of additional material to learn (Kim, 2011). This raises questions about immigrant students’ perspectives on the issue.

Indeed, in 2014, Zielińska, Kowzan & Ragnarsdóttir conducted a study that focused on student perspectives, reasons and experiences of attending the Polish heritage language schools in Iceland and England. Their study used focus-group interviews with a total of 62
students aged between 9 and 18 from heritage language schools in Iceland and England. Each focus group included 5-12 students and each interview lasted for 8 to 41 minutes. Interview questions were open-ended. During interviews in the English heritage language schools, a teacher or assistant teacher was present during interviews, which could have made the group less keen to talk. Results have shown that the main reason for attending heritage language schools are parents’ especially mothers’ suggestions. In Iceland, mothers’ suggestions were based on the possibility of returning to Poland. In England, on the other hand, students had the possibility of taking external exams in Polish and therefore to collect points in the regular school system. Other mentioned reasons were similar in both schools and included the opportunity to meet other Poles and learning Polish in order to write and read in Polish. Most of the participants stated that they have both Polish and non-Polish friends; however, some of them assessed friendships with Polish friends to be more valuable. Some suggested problems with finding non-Polish friends due to different beliefs. In addition, participants complained about not being allowed to speak their heritage language in Icelandic and English secondary schools. The reason for this was that teachers wanted everyone to understand them and to not exclude anyone from the conversation. The Polish adolescent immigrants felt this was unjust. An important reason for attending heritage language schools in Iceland was a difference in academic level between Poland and Iceland. Some of the Polish participants confessed that they had already learnt in Poland everything that they were learning in Iceland, therefore they felt bored in Icelandic schools. Although, they liked practical activities, such as woodwork, cooking and swimming which were offered in Icelandic schools, they demonstrated willingness to learn something more in order to be able to study at university (Zielińska et al, 2014).

The study done in 2011 by Berman, Lefever and Woźnicka investigated attitudes of Polish adolescents towards languages. The aim of the study was to explore their motivation to learn Icelandic language and to maintain heritage language. The study employed four Polish immigrant adolescents aged between 12 and 13 years. All of them had shared some characteristics, such as having lived in Iceland for no longer than 4 years and learning in the Polish Schools in Reykjavik. Semi-structured interviews with open and closed-ended questions were used for the purpose of the study. Interviews included issues such as Polish adolescent immigrants’ attitudes towards learning both Icelandic, Polish and culture. Interviews were conducted both in Polish and Icelandic in order to evaluate participants’ proficiency and
attitudes towards those languages. The results showed that Polish adolescent immigrants were keen to learn both Icelandic and Polish languages. They were aware of the importance of Icelandic language in their social interactions with Icelandic friends and in school. They also realized the importance of their heritage language learning in communication with family and Polish friends, as well as for the purpose of translating for their parents. The research demonstrated that it was easier for the participants to talk about their experiences and emotions in their heritage language. Furthermore, the results revealed that attending the Polish Schools in Reykjavík was perceived as a positive experience for all of the participants. One of them confessed that he chose to go to the Polish Schools in Reykjavik rather than sports trainings with Icelandic peers (Berman et al, 2011).

Several studies in Iceland explored the importance of heritage language learning. In 2011, Woźnicka & Berman researched how heritage language affects proficiency in Icelandic. They interviewed fifteen Polish immigrant children aged 7 and 8. The results have shown that Polish played an important role in parent-child interactions and that home activities in Polish, for example, reading, develop children’s language skills that can be transferred to Icelandic language learning (Woźnicka & Berman, 2011). The results demonstrated that heritage language is an important factor for acquiring a second language.

Similarly, in 2013, Mosty, Lefever and Ragnarsdóttir carried out a study in Iceland which revealed other benefits of heritage language learning. They did a study about parents’ perspectives towards heritage language of their preschool children. The purpose of the study was to explore immigrant parents’ perspectives on their children’s heritage language and how this was facilitated in the home environment. The study employed questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with parents of children who attended a preschool in Reykjavík. At the time of the study, 84% of children enrolled in the preschool were of immigrant background. Participants were from various backgrounds, including Polish. The results of the study demonstrated that 95% of immigrant parents believed that it is important for their children to learn heritage language. They believed that by knowing their heritage language, their children would have increased educational opportunities and better communication with family. Moreover, half of the participants believed that heritage language learning increases cognitive development of their children and strengthens cultural identity. Some of the parents stated that heritage language learning was important for their children because of future plans about returning to their home country. The study revealed that immigrant
parents have a good knowledge about the importance of heritage language learning and the ways to facilitate it in the home environment. Participants were aware of the value of reading and communicating with their children in heritage language, as well as using music or television programmes to promote heritage language development for their children (Mosty et al, 2013). The study demonstrates positive attitudes of immigrant parents toward heritage language learning by their children and that they have knowledge about ways to improve it. However, participants of the study were parents of immigrant preschool children, who make decisions for their young children. Therefore, the study shed light on the reasons why parents of immigrant children decide to send their children to heritage language schools.

A different perspective was taken by Aberdeen (2016), who conducted a study on heritage language schools in Alberta. Her study demonstrated views of heritage language schools’ leaders in Alberta on the operation of heritage language schools. The purpose of the study was to get insight into the heritage language schools leaders’ perspectives and provide recommendations for the development of heritage language schools. The study was based on interviews with leaders of heritage language schools and elders of the heritage language community. Participants were chosen on the recommendation of the International Heritage Language Association (IHLA) and Southern Alberta Heritage Languages Association (SAHLA). Some of the participants taught heritage language in Alberta, whereas others affiliated to the heritage language community. The data was collected through various sources, namely; face-to-face interviews, focus group interviews and personal field notes. The study revealed that according to leaders of heritage language schools in Alberta, attending heritage language schools contributes to heritage language improvement, literacy, culture and self-identity development. In addition, results have shown that heritage language schools provide more educational and working opportunities for immigrant students (Aberdeen, 2016). Aberdeen’s study indeed provided recommendations for the development of heritage language schools but was based on perspectives of heritage language community leaders.

Previous research on immigrant students in Iceland focused either on parental perspectives or lacked challenges of attending heritage language schools. According to Woźnicka & Berman (2011), the limitation of their study was that it was mainly based on parents’ reports. They studied only parent-child interactions and they also suggested that research on other types of interactions and language input should be studied, such as interactions with peers and teachers (Woźnicka & Berman, 2011). Aberdeen’s (2014) study
was based on the perspectives of heritage language community leaders but did not compromise students’ perspectives on heritage language learning or the benefits or challenges associated with it. The study of Zielińska et al. (2014) focused mostly on the reasons for attending heritage language schools in Iceland and England and comparisons between those two schools. However, this study did not include Polish adolescent immigrants perspectives on challenges of attending the heritage language schools. Therefore, previous research studies are not sufficient to clarify whether Polish adolescent immigrants benefit from attending the heritage language schools and what are their perspectives on issues associated with attending the heritage language schools. Immigrant students’ perspectives on attending heritage language schools are often omitted in research.

My research, on the other hand, investigates Polish adolescent immigrants’ perspectives on attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. The paper addresses the issue of heritage language learning, studying the benefits and challenges of attending heritage language classes from Polish adolescent immigrants’ perspectives. The purpose of my study is to explore what Polish adolescent immigrants gain from attending the Polish School, and what challenges they encounter in this school. Exploring benefits and challenges of attending heritage language schools from immigrant students’ perspectives is a hugely urgent issue, especially in Iceland where there is a large number of Polish immigrants and the Polish School in Reykjavík is constantly developing. In 2009, 21 million Polish immigrants lived abroad (Polish Ministry of Education, 2009). A large number of Polish immigrants move to Iceland, where they have an opportunity to work. Research carried out by Þórarinsdóttir (2011) demonstrated that almost half of Polish immigrants intend to return to Poland (as cited in Berman et al., 2011). The intention of returning to Poland can motivate parents of Polish immigrants to encourage their children to learn Polish. Discovering opinions of Polish immigrant students on attending the Polish School in Reykjavík will give immigrant parents awareness of issues associated with heritage language learning and attending heritage language schools. My study can clarify adolescent immigrants’ perspective on the importance of heritage language learning and shed light on implicit positive and negative aspects of attending heritage language schools. Perhaps it will allow immigrant parents to understand their children’s choices. My study can allow teachers and educationalists to comprehend what Polish adolescent immigrants gain from attending the Polish School in Reykjavík, and thus support other researchers’ understanding and spark further studies.
1.2 Personal motivation

I came to Iceland when I was 17 years old. I did not finish upper secondary school in Poland, but I tried to continue my education in Iceland. It was a challenge, because I could not speak any Icelandic and spoke hardly any English. I attended Icelandic schools and left several times because of my lack of knowledge in Icelandic, therefore I spent several years without attending school. Later, I found the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program in Hamrahlíð College-Menntaskólinn við Hamrahlíð-which was conducted in English. Hamrahlíð College is the only Icelandic upper secondary school that organizes instruction in English. The Diploma Programe at Hamrahlíð College prepares students for study at university level by promoting creative and critical thinking. All students on the Diploma Program are obliged to complete 6 subjects, 3 at standard and 3 at higher level. Moreover, there is a requirement of completing the 3 core elements of the Program which are theory of knowledge; creativity, activity and service (CAS) and extended essay.

Although the Program was very difficult and my English was very limited, I decided to give it a try, so I could finish my upper secondary education. In the beginning it was very difficult because I understood very little. I was even thinking about giving up at one point because I felt it was too much for me. To complete the service part of the CAS project, I volunteered in the Red Cross in Reykjavík with the project for immigrant students and reported my experiences and thoughts in a journal. The project aimed to support Polish adolescent immigrants who had just moved to Iceland and lacked proficiency in Icelandic and to help them to adapt to the new environment. The Red Cross provided Polish adolescent immigrants with workshops, during which they could play and talk in Polish in order to relax after studying at Icelandic schools. Polish volunteers were also there to talk to the Polish immigrant children in their heritage language (home language), as well as to listen to them and play games with them. At that time, I experienced a lot of trust and hope from those children. I noticed how difficult it was for them to adapt and function in the new community. I tried my best to make them feel comfortable and important. I need to admit that it was very difficult sometimes, because those children were often confused and lost in the new environment. They often complained that they did not understand Icelandic or felt inferior to their Icelandic classmates.
Two years later the first Polish School in Reykjavík was founded. Many of my friends began to think about enrolling their children in this School. I did not have any children at the time, but I wondered whether enrolling children in the Polish School would have any benefits. I thought that it would definitely be beneficial for children whose parents intended to return to Poland, but I was skeptical about those who intended to stay in Iceland. I began to wonder about my protégés from the Red Cross, and whether attending this School would be beneficial for them. When it began to develop in terms of the number of attending students and working teachers, I began to wonder even more. Various thoughts cumulated in my mind, such as: What are the reasons for sending children to the Polish School in Reykjavík? Does the School meet parents and students’ expectations, for example in improving Polish skills? What are the opinions of Polish adolescent immigrants about attending the Polish School? What are the benefits and challenges of attending this School?

Just then, my interest in conducting this research blossomed. The experience of volunteering in the Red Cross made me think about the Polish adolescent immigrants who attend Icelandic schools, often with limited proficiency in Icelandic. I can identify with Polish adolescent immigrants, because I have had a comparable experience, I attended Icelandic schools and left several times because I did not understand any Icelandic. I remember how challenging it was. Only at Hamrahlíð College did I have more educational opportunities, because I could communicate in English. However, when I attended Hamrahlíð College there was no Polish school where I could find support or Polish friends. Nowadays, the Polish School in Reykjavík is available to Polish immigrants and they attend it for several reasons. Perhaps it can be assumed that Polish immigrant benefit from attending it in terms of heritage language learning, getting support and making new friendships. On the other hand, literature about attending heritage language schools by immigrant children suggest that they may not enjoy attending heritage language schools because of lack of free time or additional homework. Thus, I am interested in exploring Polish adolescent immigrants’ perspectives on benefits and challenges associated with attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. Therefore, I would like to examine Polish adolescent immigrants’ opinions and perspectives on this issue.
1.3 Background to the study

Poles are the largest immigrant group in Iceland and account for 3.6% of the whole population and 37.7% of all immigrants in Iceland. There were 11,988 Poles in Iceland on January 1, 2016 (Statistics Iceland, 2016). During the period of strong economic growth in Iceland, which continued until 2007, many Polish immigrants decided to bring their families to Iceland. At that time the number of Polish immigrants in Iceland grew by 81% (Zaorska, 2012). However, the latest data demonstrate a massive return of Polish immigrants to their home country. A survey conducted in 2011 among Poles who returned to Poland in 2009 reveals that 23.3% of Poles went back due to job loss and 33.5% declared that they left Poland with the intention of returning (Juta, 2012). Only 14.5% stated that they returned for family reasons (Juta, 2012). Returning of Polish immigrants to their home country requires Polish immigrant students to learn their heritage language. Therefore, Polish heritage language schools (schools that teach Polish) need to be founded around the world in order to maintain Polish. According to the Center for the Development of Polish Education Abroad, there are Polish heritage language schools in 35 countries (Ośrodek Rozwoju Polskiej Edukacji za Granicą, n. d.). In the 2016/2017 school year, there were 17,000 students in those schools and around 600 teachers (Ośrodek Rozwoju Polskiej Edukacji za Granicą, n. d.). One such Polish school is located in Reykjavík. It began in 1998, when the Polish cultural association established a small Polish School in the Reykjavík area (Zielińska, Kowzan & Ragnarsdóttir, 2014). Only seven students were attending the School at the time. Due to the expansion of the Polish population and a significant percentage of Polish children, a new Polish School in Reykjavík was established in 2008 (Zielińska et al., 2014). Since then, the School has developed in terms of curriculum (Szkola Polska w Reykjaviku, n. d.), as well as the number of students attending the School reaching over 200 students in 2017 (M. Sienkiewicz, personal communication, November 11, 2017). The Polish School in Reykjavík was founded from an idea initiated by the Polish Consulate (Szkola Polska w Reykjaviku, n. d.). There were attempts to register the school as a School Consultation Center in Poland, but with no success (Szkola Polska w Reykjaviku, n. d.). Therefore, parents and teachers decided to create an Association of Friends of the Polish School, which controls the Polish School in Reykjavík (Szkola Polska w Reykjaviku, n. d.).

The School provides Polish language classes for children with Polish origin aged from 5 to 16 years (Szkola Polska w Reykjaviku, n. d.). Polish history, geography, culture and knowledge
about society are also taught at this School (M. Sienkiewicz, personal communication, November 11, 2017). It operates on Saturdays in facilities provided by the Icelandic Compulsory School, Fellaskóli (Szkóła Polska w Reykjavíku, n. d.). The Polish School in Reykjavík also has a Polish psychologist and a speech therapist who can provide students with support if needed (Szkóła Polska w Reykjavíku, n. d.). The main goal of the School is to teach Polish immigrants their heritage language in order to help them function in the Icelandic educational system and Icelandic society (M. Sienkiewicz, personal communication, November 11, 2017). Increased understanding between Polish immigrants and Icelandic society and reduction of prejudice are other goals of this School (M. Sienkiewicz, personal communication, November 11, 2017). The Polish School in Reykjavík administrates the Polish library, which already has 4500 Polish titles (M. Sienkiewicz, personal communication, November 11, 2017) and tries to cooperate with Icelandic libraries to facilitate access to Polish books, as according to law Icelandic libraries should have and order books in heritage language for foreigners (M. Sienkiewicz, personal communication, November 11, 2017). The Polish School in Reykjavík cooperates with Icelandic schools and preschools, providing help in communication with students and their parents (M. Sienkiewicz, personal communication, November 11, 2017). In addition, the Polish School promotes knowledge about Polish culture and way of thinking in Icelandic educational settings to support teachers in understanding their students, employees and friends (M. Sienkiewicz, personal communication, November 11, 2017). It collaborates with Móðurmál (the Association on Bilingualism) to promote the importance of heritage language (M. Sienkiewicz, personal communication, November 11, 2017). It also cooperates with the counsellor in the Human Rights Office in Reykjavík (M. Sienkiewicz, personal communication, November 11, 2017). The Polish School in Reykjavík is a heritage language school (a school that teaches heritage language). It does not have the status of either a Polish or Icelandic school, but functions as a primary Polish school with similar curriculum (Szkóła Polska w Reykjavíku, n. d.). Although it is not subjected to the Icelandic school system and curriculum, it co-operates with Icelandic Schools in terms of Polish language development among Polish adolescent immigrants.

Icelandic law provides equal access to education for all citizens and individuals who have authorized residence in the country. Equal access to education is guaranteed by law for all individuals until 18 years old (Constitution of the Republic of Iceland, No. 33/1944). Pedagogical practice of the Icelandic schools is specified by the 2008 Compulsory School Act
and the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide that, among other things, lists values such as equality, tolerance, forgiveness and respect for human values (Compulsory School Act, 2008; Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2011). However, the 2008 Compulsory School Act is mostly directed to one religious ideology and language (Compulsory School Act, 2008), which prevents other religions from contributing to the educational system. The 2008 Compulsory School Act, on which the curriculum is based, and the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools maintain a traditional ideology concerning immigrant students. Although equality is an essential guideline, the main focus of the Icelandic Curriculum is on Icelandic language and Icelandic cultural heritage (Compulsory School Act, 2008; Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2011). What’s more, the Act does not include provision about improving the heritage language (any language other than Icelandic) of the students with Icelandic as a second language. The Icelandic schools are only encouraged to offer students education in their heritage language but are not responsible or obliged to do so. Icelandic schools are also only encouraged to assist parents in maintaining their children’s heritage language (Compulsory School Act, 2008. No. 91/2008). Although the importance of the heritage language learning is stated in the 2008 Compulsory School Act, the responsibility for nurturing the heritage language lies mostly with the parents (Compulsory School Act, 2008. No. 91/2008). The Icelandic school system does not provide heritage language learning classes for immigrant students but recognizes study at language schools as electives (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2011). In the case of immigrant students, study at such schools can be recognized as the equivalent of learning Danish or English (Ministry of Education & Science and Culture, 2011). In my conversation with Monika Sienkiewicz—the principal of the Polish School in Reykjavík, she admits that Polish adolescent immigrants in the Polish School have the opportunity to learn their heritage language as an alternative to learning Danish. Polish adolescent immigrants in grades 7 and 8 in Icelandic primary schools have the opportunity to choose between studying the Danish in Icelandic schools and Polish in the Polish School in Reykjavík. If the student decides to attend Polish language classes instead of Danish language classes, his/her presence in the Polish School is compulsory and grades from the Polish language classes are transferred to Icelandic schools and included on the certificate instead of the Danish grade (M. Sienkiewicz, personal communication, November 11, 2017). Providing such an alternative is beneficial for Polish adolescent immigrants and their parents. Polish adolescent immigrants are not overwhelmed with too
many subjects and homework in the Polish School and parents of Polish adolescent immigrants share the responsibility of nurturing the Polish heritage language with the Polish School in Reykjavík. The opportunity to study Polish in the Polish School instead of Danish allows Polish adolescent immigrants to maintain their heritage language and culture without neglecting the Icelandic language. Although, the School is outside of the Icelandic school system, it cooperates with Icelandic schools to provide opportunities for Polish adolescent immigrants to learn their heritage language.
2 Theoretical and conceptual framework

This chapter offers a literature review where I will present the current literature and research related to my topic to provide context. My review of literature is presented in three sections which discuss heritage language, heritage language schools and adolescence; the benefits of heritage language learning; and challenges associated with attending heritage language schools and heritage language learning. In this chapter, I will explore theories and concepts associated with heritage language learning and attending heritage language schools. Understanding those theories and concepts enabled me to make sense of the data. My understanding of immigrant students’ perspectives will be guided by conceptual and contextual details of this chapter.

2.1 Heritage language, heritage language schools and adolescence

Heritage language is a language that one identifies with personally (Aberdeen, 2016). Heritage language is most often learned at home and is sometimes not fully developed by the individual (Brown, 2009), either because of the second language (a language that is official in the country) or the language used by the majority of the society (Mosty, Lefever & Ragnarsdóttir, 2013). Kelleher (2010) indicates that heritage language is associated with immigrants who speak, write, read or understand a language other than the dominant language. On the other hand, Ball (2011) indicates that heritage language can either be the language that was learnt first or the language that is known best. Heritage language can be referred to as a first language. In this thesis, heritage language means Polish.

Immigrant children are often exposed to learning two languages at the same time (Mosty, Lefever & Ragnarsdóttir, 2013). First of all, immigrant children usually speak their heritage language because it is used at home. Furthermore, they are obliged to attend primary schools in the host country in which classes are conducted in the second language. Immigrant students have difficulties understanding the second language, especially in the beginning. When classes are conducted in the language that learners do not know we are dealing with “submersion” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Benson (2004) compares this experience to holding learners in the water without teaching them how to swim. Submersion makes learning a difficult task because students mostly sit silently or repeat mechanically after other students
or teachers. Submersion leads to frustration, discomfort or failure (Benson, 2004). To avoid submersion, both heritage and second language should be practised at the same time by immigrant students (Benson, 2004). Learning heritage language means avoiding submersion and improves an immigrant student’s educational achievement. Immigrant students benefit by gaining a literacy skill in a familiar language, which they can transfer to as a second language (Benson, 2004). Therefore, learning heritage language is very important for immigrant students. According to Cummins (2001), learning heritage language is not only about learning the language itself, but also about learning concepts and intellectual skills that function in both languages. This is called Cummins’ Common Underlying Proficiency model and assumes that conceptual knowledge can be transferred between the heritage language and the second language (Cummins, 1996). For example, students who learned to tell the time in their heritage language are able to tell it in their second language even if they only know numbers in the second language (Cummins, 2001). They already have an intellectual skill for telling time and they can transfer this skill between languages. This denies the false assumption that immigrant students have insufficient logical and critical thinking abilities. Their ability to express themselves is limited due to the lack of proficiency in the second language, whereas they have no problems with expressing themselves in the heritage language in which they are fluent (Cummins, 1996). Cummins (2001) believes that adolescents have the ability to transfer knowledge and skills from their heritage language to a second language. Nevertheless, Cummins (2001) stresses that such transfer is possible only when heritage language is taught effectively, including literacy. It is not sufficient to read, talk and tell stories to immigrant children in their heritage language, as the children also need to develop reading and writing skills (Cummins, 2001). Brown (2009) believes that parental involvement in teaching their children heritage language is crucial but limited. Some immigrant parents do not have sufficient time, patience, abilities or resources to teach heritage language to their children. Heritage language schools can educate immigrant children in the fields in which their parents have limited knowledge, like for instance grammar. Therefore, they can offer effective learning and seem to have appropriate alternatives.

Heritage language schools are schools that are established to teach heritage language and culture to the learners who do not live in their heritage country but identify with their heritage language or culture (Aberdeen, 2016). Heritage language schools are established in
response to immigrants’ needs in the society in which they live (Aberdeen, 2016). They are often founded and supported by heritage language communities and therefore function independently from regular schools and curricula and often operate on weekends, beyond the regular school hours. Attending heritage language schools requires an additional effort from immigrant students, both because of the additional time they need to spend on learning and the amount of additional material to learn (Kim, 2011). Students of heritage language schools need to devote extra time in order to learn additional material and do additional homework. Although attending heritage language schools helps to retain heritage language (Yousefi, 2016), it can be challenging for immigrant students, especially at certain times of life, such as adolescence.

Adolescence is a difficult period in the life of an individual and is characterized by a search for a place in life (Stavem, 2014). Adolescence is a time when teenagers try to manage time according to their beliefs and convictions. Therefore, they often object to their parents disagreeing with them. Oh & Fulligni (2010) believe that development of identity and social roles occurs in adolescence. They add that heritage language proficiency should be stable at this age, therefore it is a critical period to investigate issues associated with language learning. Spending free time on additional activities such as learning heritage language can be the reason for family quarrels for adolescents. Immigrant students, who study the second language in schools abroad, are exposed to the stress of socio-cultural adaptation to new conditions in addition to the difficulties of adolescence. Consequently, the majority of teenage immigrants experience stress in new schools and have inadequate self-esteem, which indicates maladjustment of the individual (Stavem, 2014). The second language school teacher in a number of cases cannot influence this process due to behavioral and language barriers interacting with the immigrant adolescent, which aggravates the already tricky socio-psychological state of the individual. In this regard, an important problem arises in the definition of such a system of social and pedagogical activity that would ensure the correction of the experience and behaviour of immigrants and the identification of the socio-educational conditions that contribute to the successful adaptation of the personality of a migrant teenager to a new life situation. It can be assumed that heritage language schools can influence successful adaptation of immigrants to the new environment.
2.2 Benefits of attending heritage language schools.

International studies have shown that immigrant students are often marginalized and do not succeed in compulsory schools in their host country (Zielińska et al., 2014). The lack of linguistic proficiency in the second language results in discrimination and categorization (Zielińska et al., 2014). According to Cummins (2001), nurturing the heritage language is essential for immigrant students if they are to function in a new school environment and learn a second language. Attendance of heritage language schools by immigrant children allows parents to communicate with their children (Aberdeen, 2015) and sense their social and psychological needs because they work toward a common goal: the improvement of heritage language proficiency of their children (Fishman, 1991). Therefore, attending heritage language schools is beneficial for both immigrant children and their parents. The study made by Mosty et al. sheds light on what motivates immigrant parents to teach their children the heritage language. Their results demonstrated that parents believe that heritage language learning is important for developing a sense of cultural background and identity and to establish connections with family, as well as for their children’s social and emotional well-being.

2.2.1 Heritage language learning improves communication within families

Scholars emphasize the importance of heritage language learning. Oh & Fuligni (2010) believe that losing heritage language can result in disruption in the parent-child relationship. As immigrant children begin to attend schools in the host country they began to learn the second language and use it more often than the heritage language, even at home. Due to this phenomenon, immigrant parents have to use the second language when conversing with their children even if their proficiency in the second language is limited. This causes problems with expressing their feelings and thoughts fully to their children, which in turn results in inferior relationships between families and more family conflicts (Oh & Fuligni, 2010). Furthermore, due to language barriers parents often cannot share cultural and moral values if their children lack sufficient proficiency in the heritage language.

Research has shown that even everyday communication within families can be disrupted by language barriers, which can result in problems with expressing emotions, goals or achievements (Oh & Fuligni, 2010). This idea is supported by a large-scale study done by
Portes and Hao in 2002. The study included 5,262 respondents of 77 different backgrounds. Participants were native-born immigrant adolescents, mostly from Latin America and Asia. The study was conducted in Miami, Florida and San Diego and employed national surveys. The results showed that immigrants who confirmed that they speak their heritage language well experienced less family conflict and more family solidarity (Portes & Hao, 2002). English monolinguals, together with those who were limited in both languages, reported having more family conflicts (Portes & Hao, 2002). Moreover, Oh and Fuligni (2010) refer to a study of families from Asian, Filipino and Latin American backgrounds. The results of the study indicated that the best comprehension and attachment between immigrant adolescents and their parents was observed in families who spoke the heritage language with each other compared with families who used the second language or a combination of both heritage and second language at home (Tseng & Fuligni, 2000).

Oh and Fuligni (2010) conducted a study in which, among other things, they investigated the association between the quality of parent-adolescent relationship in immigrant families, heritage language proficiency and language use. The research was conducted in three public high schools in the Los Angeles area and a total of 783 students from those schools participated in the research. The research was divided into three parts to investigate language use and proficiency, family relationship and ethnic identity. For the purpose of measuring the language proficiency, participants were asked to designate their proficiency in heritage language and rate it using a five-point scale. In order to measure the language use patterns, adolescents were asked to specify the language their parents usually spoke to them and the language they used themselves to speak with parents and siblings and separately with their friends. This was done in order to determine the context in which immigrant adolescents use the heritage language and the second language. To measure family relationships, participants were asked to complete a ten-point scale separately for each parent and a three-point scale about frequency of discussion with parents. The results showed that heritage language proficiency is a significant factor in family relationships.

Similar results were demonstrated by the study of Carreira & Kagan in 2011. The study aimed to examine goals and attitudes to heritage language learning of college-level heritage language learners. For respondents, the most important benefit of knowing the heritage language was to be able to communicate with family and friends. This included for example
spending summer in a heritage country and being able to communicate with grandparents and old friends, or for making new friendships (Carreira & Kagan, 2011).

In Iceland, Woźnicka & Berman (2011) researched how heritage language affects proficiency in Icelandic. They interviewed fifteen Polish immigrant children aged between 7 and 8. Their study employed both semi-structured interviews that were completed by immigrant parents and Icelandic language grades. The results showed that Polish played an important role in parent-child interactions and that home activities in Polish, for example reading, develop children’s language skills that can be transferred to Icelandic language learning (Woźnicka & Berman, 2011).

Moreover, heritage language in immigrant families is also used in more formal situations, like doctors’ appointments or visits to the bank. Parents often require their children to act as translators, because they often exaggerate their children’s proficiency in second language and do not realize the importance of heritage language in translations. To assist parents in situations in which they are obliged to translate, immigrant children need to have sufficient proficiency and input in both heritage language and the second language (Aberdeen, 2015). It is very difficult to act as translator having limited proficiency in one of the languages.

2.2.2 Heritage language learning as a base for second language learning

Immigrant children living abroad are obliged to attend schools in which they learn second language, which often results in them becoming proficient in the second language (Yousefi, 2016). This can be supported by a study carried out by Portes and Rumbaut (2001) in which over 5,000 second-generation adolescents in Florida and California participated (as cited in Oh & Fulligni, 2010). The study revealed that only 30% of the 5,000 participants felt they were fluent in their heritage language, whereas over 70% preferred to speak their second language (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, as cited in Oh & Fuligni, 2010). Thus, immigrants often master their second language over their heritage language. During second language acquisition, heritage language is employed less often than the second language, which influences heritage language vocabulary decline (Levy, Mc Veigh, Marful, Anderson, 2007). Cummins (2001) states that the ability to communicate in heritage language can be lost 2–3 years after beginning school abroad, if pupils have no opportunities to practise their heritage language. Although learning second language for immigrant students is important for integration and
comprehension in school and daily life, learning heritage language is the most effective method for learning second language (Cummins, 2001).

Many scholars indicate that heritage language provides a basis for learning second language, therefore it is necessary for immigrant students to learn their heritage language well. Cummins (2001) believes that maintaining the heritage language is essential for students' linguistic development in second language. Guvercin (2010) argues that heritage language develops stronger literacy abilities and offers a better start in school. Therefore, the children whose parents read and tell stories constantly are better prepared for school and succeed educationally (Guvercin, 2010). Children who maintain their heritage language have more opportunities to succeed in school than those who simply assimilate to the mainstream culture (Yu, 2015).

Nekatibeb (2005) performed a case study on the impact of learning through the heritage language on academic achievement in grade 8 students in Ethiopia. Until the 1990s, Amharic language was a language that was used for instruction in educational institutions in Ethiopia (Nekatibeb, 2005). Because learning through the heritage language is a new phenomenon in Ethiopia, it was relevant to explore the impact of heritage language learning on academic achievement. More than 8,000 students from 213 Ethiopian schools participated in the research. The purpose of the study was to compare the academic achievement of students who studied Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics in their heritage language and students who studied the same subjects in their second language. The results indicated a significant difference in scores in favor of the students using the heritage language. They scored 10.7% higher in biology, 6.42% higher in chemistry, 7.95% higher in physics and 4.18% higher in mathematics (Nekatibeb, 2005). The results were also used to study the extent to which heritage language learning facilitates second language learning. The study further revealed that learning academic subjects through heritage language and learning heritage language itself as a subject enhance second language learning (Nekatibeb, 2005).

Similar results can be found in the study done by Frutos, Rus and Allah in 2016 that aimed to analyze the influence of heritage language learning in the academic achievement of immigrant students in secondary education. A total of 117 immigrant students from South America, Africa, Europe, Central America and Asia participated in the research. Data was collected through questionnaires and analyzed through statistical tests. The results demonstrated that there were no differences in general competences between students from
different backgrounds, regardless of whether they used heritage language or second language at home. The issue is different when it comes to school performance, because students who learnt through the medium of their heritage language scored higher than those who used second language (Frutos et al., 2016).

2.2.3 Heritage language learning as a tool in developing ethnic identity and self-esteem

Ethnic identity is a sense of belonging to an ethnic group with shared language, traditions, values and religion and is formatted through interaction with others (Yu, 2015). Bilingual or bicultural children need a supportive environment to develop their identity, because they are exposed to differences and expectations from two differing cultures. In addition, bilingual children feel the need to adopt the majority culture and conform to it because they tend to believe that the majority group holds more prestige and status (Brown, 2009). The identity of heritage language speakers includes the process of continuous negotiation and self-positioning in a multicultural environment, in which language proficiency and choices indicate affiliation with and connection to language groups. Heritage language speakers need to decide their position relative to heritage and mainstream cultures in various situations by negotiation of their language choices. This involves constant subject positioning with the self and the other (Van & Vinogradova, 2010). In other words, learning heritage language gives bilinguals an opportunity to select and develop their ethnic identity. Lack of proficiency in the heritage language can result in isolation from cultural communities that can result in problems with developing ethnic identity (Oh & Fuligni, 2010). Moreover, knowing heritage language well allows immigrant students to participate more fully in their cultural communities and to identify or not with the heritage cultural community (Oh & Fuligni, 2010). This is supported by the study of Bankston & Zhou (1995) in which Armenian-American adolescents with high proficiency in their heritage language reported higher levels of ethnic identity. Similarly, higher levels of ethnic identity occurred in Vietnamese American adolescents with higher levels of literacy in their heritage language (Phinney, Romero, Nava & Huang, 2001).

Scholars claim that there is a relationship between heritage language proficiency, ethnic identity and self-esteem, which can contribute to children’s school performance. Formation of ethnic identity plays a significant role in the development of self-esteem. Self-esteem is
associated with self-related emotions and cognition which influence perception of competence, coping with challenges, skills and social support. Positive self-esteem contributes to success, trusting relationships and academic achievement, whereas negative self-esteem can influence psychological and social problems (Yu, 2015). Yu (2015) conducted a study on the correlation between heritage language proficiency and ethnic identity, as well as heritage language proficiency and self-esteem. A total of 83 students from three heritage Chinese schools in the United States participated in the research. For the data collection, the researcher used the so-called Self Perception of Chinese Language Learning Survey and the Self-Evaluated Chinese Language Fluency Questionnaire. The results demonstrated a significant correlation between Chinese heritage language proficiency and ethnic identity. Similarly, the results confirmed that there was a relationship between Chinese heritage language proficiency and self-esteem (Yu, 2015).

In Iceland, the study made by Mosty et al. (2013) demonstrated that immigrant’s parents associate heritage language with identity and self-esteem. They believe that heritage language development is important for shaping ethnic identity and self-esteem in their children. The study also revealed that it was easier for immigrant students to talk about their experiences and emotions in their heritage language. This is because heritage language has an extremely significant role in shaping our emotions and thoughts. Children hear it from their parents, not only when they are not able to speak but also before being born, in the womb. Speaking in heritage language triggers a connection between heart, brain and tongue. The sound of the mother tongue in the ear releases emotions because their meaning in the brain and heart gives us trust and confidence (Guvercin, 2010). Guvercin (2010) supports the idea with a study of fifteen Italian interpreters who were working for the European Union and translating English and Italian. When interpreters heard their heritage language (Italian) their brain activity was much stronger (Guvercin, 2010). Nelson Mandela said: “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”
2.3 Challenges associated with heritage language schools and heritage language learning

Research has shown that many immigrant students do not succeed well in schools due to language barriers. This can be confirmed by the statistics from Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) for Iceland for 2006, 2009, and 2012 that attest a performance gap between immigrants and Icelandic students at the end of compulsory education.

Attending heritage language schools and learning heritage language can be challenging for immigrant students. According to Aberdeen (2015) immigrant students often are not keen to attend heritage language schools, even if they are not proficient in their heritage language (Aberdeen, 2015). A study conducted in 2010 investigated attitudes of Korean students to heritage language schools and revealed that students complained about lack of free time and additional homework (Brown, 2011). Moreover, children reported that attending heritage language schools did not improve their heritage language proficiency (Brown, 2011). Korean students confessed that they did not feel the need to attend heritage language schools. Their parents’ motivation for sending children to heritage language schools was the feeling that they were not able to transmit the heritage language sufficiently to their children (Brown, 2011). However, heritage language schools cope with several problems that can be challenging for immigrant students.

One challenge associated with heritage language schools’ programs is the need for funding (Liu, Musica, Koscak, Vinogradova & López, 2011). Because heritage language schools are often established by heritage language communities and function independently from regular schools and curricula, their functioning depends on tuition fees. However, in many cases tuition fees are not sufficient for sustaining successful programs (Liu et al., 2011). Due to lack of money, heritage language schools cannot provide reading or educational material for their students (Liu et al., 2011), which puts additional costs on immigrant parents.

Lack of funding can be associated with employing unqualified teachers, or paying them inadequate salaries (Liu et al., 2011). Working on a voluntary basis or with minimal pay can result in a lack of teachers in heritage language schools and, in consequence, with immigrant parents serving as teachers (Liu et al., 2011). Taking into consideration that it is difficult to find immigrant parents with teaching credentials (Liu et al., 2011); the instruction might not be appropriate or provide sufficient knowledge to immigrant students. Furthermore, teachers are often not well prepared to work with immigrant students from various backgrounds (Liu
et al., 2011). Immigrant students may use non-prestige varieties of their heritage language or a stigmatized variety of heritage language (Liu et al., 2011), which puts the teacher in a demanding situation. The diversity of immigrant students’ backgrounds and language skills manifest a challenge for selecting appropriate educational methodologies and curricula (Liu et al., 2011). Teaching materials used in heritage language schools often come from the home countries and have a little or no relevance to immigrant students’ lives (Liu et al., 2011).

Low tuition fees contribute to another problem, namely finding a meeting space (Liu et al., 2011). Heritage language schools have to find places free of charge or with low rent (Liu et al., 2011), which often are not equipped with educational aids that are sufficient for conducting classes.

Hiring parents or teachers who usually have another job and work in heritage language schools voluntarily or for minimal pay is associated with conducting heritage language classes on weekends or after regular school (Liu et al., 2011). This is a challenge for immigrant students who are not motivated to attend heritage language schools on weekends, because they are prevented from doing extracurricular activities (Liu et al., 2011). In addition, operating on weekends brings another challenge, namely limited instructional time (Liu et al., 2011). Teachers are faced with the challenge of passing a great amount of knowledge in a short time, which rebounds on immigrant students.

According to Liu et al. (2011), one of the challenges of heritage language schools is collaboration with compulsory schools of the host country. It is believed that if compulsory schools of the host country granted credits obtained in heritage language schools, this would motivate immigrant students learning their heritage language (Liu et al., 2011).

Indeed, there are not many research papers about the challenges of attending heritage language schools and heritage language learning. Research focuses mostly on teachers of the host country, who are faced with the challenge of teaching immigrant students and not on challenges faced by immigrant students who attend heritage language schools. Therefore, it is important to explore the topic from immigrant students’ perspectives in order to clarify the issue of benefits and challenges of attending heritage language schools.
2.4 Research question

Taking into consideration previous research, there is question of immigrant children’s perspective on the issue. In this thesis perspective means thoughts and experiences of immigrant students that are associated with attending heritage language schools. Additionally, by perspectives I mean their motivations and attitudes to heritage language and the Polish School in Reykjavík. Using the opportunity of living abroad, I decided to investigate benefits and challenges associated with attending the Polish School in Reykjavík from the perspectives of Polish immigrant adolescents. My research question for this study is:

What are Polish immigrant adolescents’ perspectives on benefits and challenges associated with attending the Polish School in Reykjavík?
3 Methodology

My study is grounded in a social constructivist approach that aims to explain how cultural factors and past experiences construct different perspectives and interpretations and thus contribute to construction of knowledge (Lichtman, 2013). The research goal is to identify and interpret the subjective meanings about supplementary education in Iceland. The study concentrates on both the level of microanalysis of individual cases and the states of social interaction. Epistemologically, my study relates to theories that heritage language learning is significant in various aspects of human life and that heritage language schools contribute to heritage language learning.

I employed critical ethnography to analyze the data on perspectives of students with Polish background in the context of benefits and challenges of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. Ethnography is a methodology of qualitative research that describes a group or culture (Sangasubana, 2011). Ethnography involves multiple data collection, such as interviews or observations in their natural setting (Sangasubana, 2011), as the main guidance of ethnography is entering the participants’ world (Lichtman, 2013). Ethnographic research allows one to collect the data about what people believe about certain phenomena and how they behave in a certain environment (Lichtman, 2013; Sangasubana, 2011). For this reason, the data analysis and interpretation can be challenging (Sangasubana, 2011). In ethnographic approach, the researcher is both an observer and participant in the environment and phenomenon being studied (Lichtman, 2013; Sangasubana, 2011).

This research is a qualitative study of perspectives of Polish adolescent immigrants about studying at the Polish School in Reykjavík. Qualitative research is about examining the topic from multiple perspectives and using opportunities to collect the most comprehensive data (Creswell, 2014) about the motives of behaviour and the attitudes of people (Lichtman, 2013). Qualitative research allows for understanding people’s emotions, thoughts and interactions (Silverman, 2005) and enables in-depth description and understanding of human experience (Lichtman, 2013). In the qualitative research method, data is collected in the natural setting, i.e. in the place where the phenomenon is experienced. Qualitative methodology helps to find new data about participants of research (Creswell, 2014). The participant of research is an individual or a close community of individuals with their specific social features. In this study, the participant is the Polish adolescent immigrants, who study in
the Polish School and the methods of collecting the data are in-depth interviews and participant observations.

My research is about understanding Polish adolescent immigrants’ motivation about attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. Interviews with Polish adolescent immigrants and observations during classes and free time in the School allowed me to get a better insight into their attitudes toward attending it and attitudes regarding heritage language learning. The intention of my study was to get an insider perspective on attitudes of Polish adolescent immigrants about attending the Polish School in Reykjavík.

My values from various identities affected the insider and the outsider of my fieldwork. I am a middle-aged female researcher, I am a student, I am an immigrant of Polish origin and I worked with the Red Cross project with Polish immigrant children. I know Polish and both Polish and Icelandic culture. I conducted this study with participants who are immigrants with the same origin as me. Moreover, I could identify with them, because as a teenager I had a comparable experience, with limited proficiency in Icelandic and problems with adapting to the new environment when I came to Iceland. I experienced problems with learning in Icelandic schools due to lack of proficiency in Icelandic. Those aspects allowed me to access the fieldwork as an insider. When identified as an insider by my participants, I noticed that expressions about their feelings and experiences were more open, expanded and sincere. Perhaps they trusted me because they sensed that I comprehend their social realities. It helped me to collect richer and more appropriate data, because the research can be enriched with inner meanings and insights by the insider (Milligan, 2016).

On the other hand, I do not work in the Polish School in Reykjavík and my participants did not know me. Therefore, some of my participants perceived me as an outsider. Being an outsider helped me to see things differently from the insider perspective and to be more inquisitive. On the other hand, being an outsider can be associated with misunderstandings of participants’ perspectives. I believe that participants who perceived me as an outsider provided less open and less extensive answers, therefore I obtained poorer data from them. Mullings (1999) believes that the position of the researcher is often shifted during data collection, because no individual can consistently be an insider or an outsider. As a result, my multiple identities were constantly renegotiated according to the various situations and interactions with my participants. Hence, my interactions with participants were influenced.
by the role they assigned to me, which required me to be conscious about self-reflexivity during data collection and analysis.

### 3.1 Data collection

The student participants were six adolescents of Polish background, aged between 11 and 15 years old, who attend the Polish School in Reykjavík. Finding participants for this research turned out to be difficult. I sent a request to parents through the School twice in January and February 2018 but did not get any answers. I decided to send a request once more, and also to try and find some participants on my own through my friends and acquaintances as well as through Facebook. In this study the only criteria for interviewees to participate in the study were to be aged between 11 and 15 years old and being a student of the Polish School in Reykjavík. A total of six interviews were conducted with Polish adolescent immigrants in Iceland who attend the Polish School in Reykjavík. One of the interviewees was born in Iceland, whereas the others had lived in Iceland for over 5 years. Four female and two male adolescent immigrants of Polish background participated in the interviews. Students were encouraged to participate in the research; however, no one was obliged to take part. The principal of the Polish School, interviewees and their parents were informed about the purpose of the research, all of the procedures, the benefits and risks involved in the research, and ethical issues. Informed consent forms (Appendix A) in Polish that included all the information about the research were prepared and given to participants’ parents to be signed in order to grant permission for interviewing their children. Similarly, all participants got consent forms. All participants and their parents agreed to participate in the study.

#### 3.1.1 Interviews

Berg and Bruce (2009) define interviewing as a conversation with a purpose. Interviewing in research is a face-to-face social interaction between the researcher and the participant. The features of interviewing are related to the presence of direct verbal contact between the interviewer and the respondent. When the researcher aims to understand the perspectives of participants on certain ideas, the interviewing technique is especially effective (Berg & Bruce, 2009). This method of collecting information is time-consuming and labour-intensive. Often it
is difficult to engage participants in the interviews. However, it provides reliable information, comprehensive understanding of the issues and adequate answers.

I employed a face-to-face, semi-structured, in-depth interviewing method. In semi-structured interviews questions are prepared in advance as a basis for interviewing but can be re-ordered. Semi-structured interviews allow for using different words, as well as to add questions and make clarifications (Berg & Bruce, 2009).

I prepared an interviewing guideline in which I could outline key topics in my research (Appendix B) and to guide my interviews. However, each interview followed an individual’s experience, therefore I shaped follow-up questions when I wanted to clarify the details or when I wanted to obtain more accurate answers. I used a voice recorder with the permission of the participants and their parents. The device was small and inserted into the pencil case so as not to distract the participant. Recording interviews allowed me to capture the whole conversation without needing to write it down or rely on my memory. The recording of the interviews allowed me to capture the data more effectively and to focus on the interview content. I also used it to record my observations and contextual details about each interview right after the interview was finished when all of the details were still vivid in my mind.

I interviewed 4 female and 2 male participants, aged from 11 to 15 years old. I spent 435 minutes on interviewing my participants. The interviews were held on various dates, with consideration taken to the time and availability of interviewees and their parents. Interviews were conducted both in the Polish School in Reykjavik and at the students’ homes, depending on the parents’ and students’ preferences. Allowing participants and their parents to choose a location for interview ensured their comfort. According to Alshenqeeti (2014), for the interview to flow naturally, it should be conducted in a relaxed and calm environment and atmosphere. It is important for the interviewee to be at ease, therefore the researcher should take into consideration the interviewee’s preference about the location in which she/he would be comfortable when being interviewed (Alshenqeeti, 2014). For the same reason, parents were allowed to be present during the interviewing of their children, as this could increase the comfort of both the parents and their children. However, there were only two such cases. In one case, a mother used the opportunity to accompany her child during the interview. In the second case both parents were present during the interview of their child. The interviews were conducted in Polish and recorded. All that was recorded was transcribed in Polish soon after the interview took place. Later interviews were translated into English.
This research involves single interviews rather than a focus group in order to eliminate the influence of third parties on the respondent (Berg & Bruce, 2009). Nevertheless, there is a possibility that the influence of the interviewer, including appearance, age or rash phrases might distort the respondent’s opinion. In this research, interviews were chosen rather than questionnaires in order to provide maximum opportunities for complete and appropriate communication (Berg & Bruce, 2009) between the researcher and the participants. This method of interviewing is relevant for this study, because it is the best source of knowledge about the inner motivations of people. The interview is one of the leading methods of obtaining data of people’s views and their assessments of various social phenomena and processes. Interviews are irreplaceable in situations in which the theme of study is difficult to observe (Berg & Bruce, 2009) such as, challenges and benefits of studying in the Polish School in Reykjavík. In this case, the interviews are the primary method of collecting information.

3.1.2 Observations
Observations increase the validity of the study, because they allow for better understanding of the phenomenon and context of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Observation is essential for studying the activity of the student’s behaviour during informal communication. I employed direct and semi-structured observations. In direct observations, the observer is physically present in the natural setting, which enables me to see the participants in real life situations and understand the context of their behaviours (Berg & Bruce, 2009). On the other hand the presence of the observer can influence some behaviours. Semi-structured observations involve working according to a plan but at the same time enable me to note each observation that the observer feels to be relevant. Semi-structured observation is very useful in qualitative and descriptive research (Berg & Bruce, 2009).

Observations during classes and breaks allowed me to complement some of the information obtained from the interviews. I spent 295 minutes as an observer in the Polish School in Reykjavík during various times of the school day, such as class time, breaks and free time. I observed my participants during lessons. Not all of my participants attended the same classes, therefore not all of them were observed at the same time. I observed students of Polish background aged between 11 and 15 during various classes, such as Polish, History, Geography and Civics. The observations took place on Saturdays, the 3rd, 10th and 17th of
March. On the 10th of March, students of one class had a History test, therefore it was decided with the History teacher that it would be better to postpone the observations for a week. This decision was made both because observing students who write a test was not useful for my research and because it could be distracting for the students. Nevertheless, observations of other classes on the 10th of March were continued. On the 3rd of March, I observed two Polish language classes and civics. On the 10th of March I observed Polish language class and geography. On the 17th of March I observed the history class. Each class lasted for 45 minutes and I spent all that time in the class during my observations. Because my interviewees were in different classes, I observed students from two different classes.

Before the instruction began, I introduced myself and explained the reasons for my presence. I situated myself in a place where I had a good view of students, but was not too conspicuous. During observations in classes and breaks I wrote down information in my journal. During breaks and free time, I usually settled in the hallway, because it was the place most frequently occupied by the students. However, I also moved between places to follow my participants and gain a better overview of the situations.

During my observations in the Polish School in Reykjavík, I tried to grasp as much first-hand data as possible about Polish adolescent immigrants’ views on attending the School. I focused on their behaviour and their interactions with the teachers and other students in order to complement and verify the information they shared with me. I focused in particular on their school life, such as the students with whom they communicated and how, the areas in which they stayed and with whom, the activities in which they participated, and how they behaved both during instruction and breaks. My interest was also in observing student-teacher interactions, both formal during instruction and informal during breaks and free time. I wanted to record the quality of those interactions, along with the topics and the context. Although I prepared a check-list of key points about which I was especially concerned (Appendix C), I tried not to peek at it too often, so as not to distract myself from observations.

During my fieldwork, I wrote down my observations and thoughts, which included information about activities and conversations of students I observed. I used my journal to document all information I observed in the classrooms and other common spaces inside the Polish School in Reykjavík. Information was recorded during observations by writing them down in my journal. General observation checklist (Appendix C) was specified prior to the study but observations were open, allowing for new themes to be explored. Therefore,
observations were semi-structured. These observations provided additional information about my participants and the environment in which they function. They helped me to create a more complete image of my participants and to support the data I obtained from the interviews.

3.1.3 Keeping a journal
I decided to keep a journal during my research, therefore I was able to write down all my reflections on observations. The journal also accompanied me during literature reading, which helped me to determine the most important aspects for my study and arrange my thoughts and ideas. In addition, the journal was used to write my own reflections about the time when I came to Iceland and had problems with adaptation and the Icelandic language. By writing those reflections, I became more aware of my perspective on being an adolescent immigrant. This awareness also helped me to avoid a situation in which my experience would influence my thoughts about Polish adolescent immigrants and their perspectives on attending the Polish School in Reykjavík.

3.1.4 Strengths and weaknesses of methods of gathering the data
Choosing interviews and observations as the methods of collecting the data was a strength of the study. First of all, implementing more than one data collection technique allows for obtaining richer data and helps in validating the research findings (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Doing interviews is a very useful technique for gathering data in qualitative research because it gives an opportunity to gather first-hand information. According to Alshenqeeti (2014), interviewing is a natural form of interaction that allows one to gather information that is not accessible when using, for example, questionnaires. Moreover, conducting interviews allows for mutual understanding and therefore the gathering of more appropriate and complete answers and more accurate data (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Semi-structured interviewing allows the interviewer to focus on the issue, while employing additional questions when necessary or rephrasing them so they are better understood by interviewees (Berg & Bruce, 2009). According to Alshenqeeti (2014), one of the disadvantages of interviewing is the fact that it is very time consuming and laborious and therefore often has little scope.
Interviews were spread over time, which could be a weakness when gathering the data, because I could forget some details. However, I tried to record all of my thoughts right after each interview. The interviews were voice-recorded, therefore the conversation was fluent. The voice-recording method allows for greater accuracy of gathering the data than taking notes (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Although the device was hidden, students knew about its presence and could feel a little uncomfortable. However, recording the voice the same as observing is a less invasive method than videotaping, therefore it is believed that the method I chose was appropriate. On the other hand, videotaping would have allowed me to come back to the data as many time as I wished in order to capture some details I did not notice the first time.

Observation allows for better understanding of the context of phenomena and for gathering complementary information about the issue (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). It allows one to experience a participant’s behaviour in the natural setting or in the setting that is relevant for the study. It also increases the validity of the study, because it allows for evaluation of the participant’s answers during the interview (Kawulich, 2005). Observations were twofold: they were taken both during interviews and after-during classes and breaks. Observations during classes and breaks allowed me to complement some of the information obtained from interviews. However, observations were distributed over time and it was impossible to observe all of my participants at the same time, since they attended different classes. Moreover, observations during classes and breaks focused on other students and teachers to see interactions between students and between students (including my participants) and teachers. Observing my interviewees after interviewing them allowed me to complement their statements and support the data.

It was easier for the participants to express themselves in their heritage language therefore, interviews were conducted in Polish and later translated to English. Translation was done by the researcher who is not a translator, therefore a possible meaning loss could occur. Expressions and interpretations vary from culture to culture and are language-specific. When the data is required to be translated, a researcher might experience challenges in representation and interpretation of the meaning. In this regard, messages communicated in Polish could have lost or changed the meaning during the translation process.

Another weakness is that 100 % anonymity of participants could not be ensured. According to Alshenqeeti (2014), conducting interviews is never 100 % anonymous.
Interviews were conducted face to face and involved participants from the Polish School in Reykjavík, which is very easy to identify because there is only one such school in Reykjavik. Nevertheless, there are over 300 students in this School and seven classes with students aged between 11 to 15 years old. Therefore, some effort has to be made to identify my participants. Indeed, the study employed only 6 participants with a Polish background and one heritage language schools, which could undermine the anonymity of research.

3.2 Data analysis

To analyze data obtained from interviews, I employed the thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a method used for identifying, analyzing and interpreting the data which involve people’s understanding or perceptions (Braun Clarke & Terry, 2015). It engages a six-phase process of analyzing the data (Braun et al., 2015). The first phase is called familiarization with the data and involves re-reading the entire set of material to absorb the content of the data and to begin an analytical engagement of the data (Braun et al., 2015). The second phase is called coding the data and entails labeling key analytical ideas in the data (Braun et al., 2015). A code is effectively a succinct label that captures a key analytical idea in the data (Braun et al., 2015). Many different codes are clustered together to create a broader meaning and a potential theme (Braun et al., 2015). This is done in the third phase, called generating themes (Braun et al., 2015). A theme consists of a wide variety of codes to create a broader meaning (Braun et al., 2015). Next step is to review themes. It involves re-reading the themes in order to combine or reject them or to create sub-themes (Braun et al., 2015). Another step is to define and name the themes. This involves writing informative names for each theme and defining them (Braun et al., 2015). The final phase of thematic analysis is producing a report that explains, locates and contextualizes the analysis in relation to the existing theory and research question (Braun et al., 2015).

My data analysis is organized according to the two issues raised by my research question, namely Polish adolescent immigrants’ perspectives on attending the Polish School in Reykjavík and associated challenges. Data was obtained from interviews and observations. Interviews were voice recorded. Transcriptions were done soon after the interview took place in the same language as it was recorded, namely in Polish. Later, the transcriptions were translated to English. This could involve loss or change of meaning. The analysis of the data
was done in the English version. After each interview was translated I coded it and wrote analytical and interpreting notes. I used English for the working process of coding and identifying themes.

I began the analysis of my data by organizing it. I gathered and arranged all data into two sets: the transcripts of the interviews and the notes from observation sessions. Then I began my familiarization with the data. I kept re-reading the complete structure to get to know what is in the data and interrogate it for assumptions and commonalities (Braun et al., 2015). I kept reading the entire data set until I was comfortable with all details about my participant’s perspectives. Then I moved to the second phase of thematic analysis, namely coding the data. Because the data was collected in written words, it had to be grouped into meaningful categories and labelled with names. I read the data from the interviews line by line and labelled each thought and idea from my participants with codes. The codes were written in the margins of the body of the text. During the process of coding, I constantly wrote notes and ideas for myself to elaborate concepts in order to compare and explain how different codes relate to each other. I kept track of my ideas as I proceeded. The codes were then sorted into patterns in order to identify the themes. Themes were generated by the largest and strongest amount of data as well as what participants’ considered to be important. The next step was to review the themes. I used a Mind Map to relate the codes and categories with each other and for development into themes (Appendix D). This facilitated moving to the next phase of thematic analysis, namely defining and naming themes. The data obtained from observations in class and during free time was analyzed according to the thematic analysis approach, similarly as the data obtained from the interviews. The final step was to write a report.

3.3 Ethical issues
Conducting research involves ethical issues to protect the rights of research participants. Participants were not involved in any situation in which they might have been harmed. All participants were treated equally and justly. For this reason, participants were informed about the purpose of the research, together with all procedures, benefits and risks involved (Lichtman, 2013). Informed Consent Forms (Appendix A) in Polish were provided for to my participants and their parents to ensure confidentiality, anonymity and credibility. Moreover,
it is important for the researcher to demonstrate the work, findings and results in an ethical way. According to Tran (2015), sincerity is an important element of being ethical in research. It involves self-reflexivity, honesty and transparency about goals, methods, weaknesses, mistakes and researcher bias. The following subchapters will further discuss the ethical issues involved in my research.

3.3.1 Confidentiality and anonymity
Confidentiality means that no information will be available to anyone who is not involved in the research directly (Lichtman, 2013). Anonymity means that the identities of participants will not be revealed, either in the study itself or in future (Lichtman, 2013). For this purpose, pseudonyms were used throughout the study. I experienced the task of maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of my participants to be very difficult, because there is only one Polish School in Reykjavík and it can be easily identified. Furthermore, the number of students between 11 and 15 years old who attend this School is rather inconsiderable. To avoid revealing identities of my participants, I had to reconsider the necessity of using some information about them in this research. For this reason, some of the data was not used in this research even though it was relevant to my study. To protect the anonymity of participants and their parents, I decided not to include some detailed information they shared with me, such as the participants’ exact ages and the year they arrived in Iceland. For this reason, the information included in this paper demonstrates mainly issues associated with participants’ views on benefits and challenges of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík.

3.3.2 Honesty and credibility
Honesty refers to clear, detailed and honest explanations of data collection and analysis. I detailed and explained every step in my data collection and analysis. My interviews and observational notes, as well as my journal, were methods of keeping track of various stages of the research and unexpected incidents. Using these methods for gathering and saving the data served as a source of data storage. Therefore, my data and findings could be examined as many times as needed, which provided richer and more accurate results. My work is equipped with additional materials in the appendices, such as the Informed Consent Form, a
mind map of themes and interview questions to supply the reader with details about my work. This provides the reader with honest and credible information to follow my explanations of the results.

### 3.3.3 Informed Consent and avoiding deception

The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical code of the University of Iceland. First of all, the research was reported to The Icelandic Data Protection Authority to ensure the appropriate data collection, research conduction and procedures in accordance with law. To get access to the Polish School in Reykjavík, I met with the principal of the School and discussed the purpose, goals and procedures of my research. Next, I wrote a formal letter in which I asked for permission for access to this School. My letter explained the purpose and goals of my research, as well as discussing my research methods and identifying the participants. When asking for interviews with students, I wrote a similar letter that explained the purpose and aims of my study, but this time it was a request to the parents for allowing their children to participate in the interview. The principal then sent my letter to parents of students who fulfilled the requirements of my study. Because I got no answers, I sent my letter again. Unfortunately, again there were no answers. Resigned, I sent my letter again, but also began to seek participants on my own. All in all, 2 participants were enrolled in the study through the Polish School in Reykjavík and 4 through my own search. The next step was to meet with the parents who allowed their children to participate in the study. I provided them with Informed Consent Forms (Appendix A) and explained the issues and concepts they did not understand. The Informed Consent Forms were in Polish for the convenience of my participants and their parents. When I had their signed Informed Consent Forms, I met with my participants. As required by the Data Protection Authority, I informed them that their participation was voluntary, and they had the full right to terminate it at any time. Finally, I provided them with Informed Consent Form, and as with the parents, I explained to them the issues and concepts they did not understand. This procedure protected personal freedom and the autonomy of participants (Lichtman, 2013) as well as participants’ privacy.
3.3.4 Self-reflexivity

The study I conducted arises from my personal and social experience, therefore self-reflexivity is an important aspect of my study. My theoretical framework, research design and methodology were based on my research question, which developed when my research interest blossomed through my personal and social experiences. Researchers’ values, research questions and the knowledge they construct are influenced by their biographical lives (Banks, 1998). This requires the researchers to be critical about the knowledge they create and construct, as well as the way it was generated. My values from various identities affected my fieldwork. The same origin and identification with my participants allowed me to access the fieldwork both as an insider and an outsider. The research can be enriched with inner meanings and insights by the insider (Milligan, 2016). On the other hand, the position of an insider can be tricky because the researcher’s bias may not allow one to be critical (Milligan, 2016). Moreover, there could be an issue of over-interpretation of the data by an insider, because of identification with participants (Milligan, 2016). To avoid those problems, I needed to be conscious about self-reflexivity during data collection and analysis.
4 Interview findings

The interview questions were structured to explore Polish adolescent immigrant’s perspectives on attending the Polish School in Reykjavík and embraced questions about subjects taught, teachers, Polish friends, benefits associated with attending the School, learning Polish and challenges associated with attending this School and whether they enjoy attending it.

This chapter recounts Polish adolescent immigrants’ narratives of their perspectives on attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. The chapter is divided into three subchapters that are related to the issues encompassed by my research question. The first subchapter refers to Polish immigrant adolescents’ perspectives on the benefits of attending the Polish School, i.e. what they gain from attending the Polish School. The second subchapter relates on Polish adolescent immigrants’ perspectives on challenges associated with attending this School. Each perspective will be introduced below. The last subchapter demonstrates other issues associated with attending the Polish School raised by Polish adolescent immigrants.

4.1 Benefits of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík

The vast majority of participants stated that the reason for attending the Polish School in Reykjavík was their parents’ suggestion. They explained that parents, predominantly mothers, wanted them to attend the School in order to know Polish in case they went back to Poland. Nevertheless, some parents had different plans associated with the future of their children and their suggestions to attend the Polish School and learning Polish were influenced by those plans. Peter explained it in this way: “My mum thinks that it is important for me to learn Polish because she thinks that I can get a job as a translator here in Iceland.” According to participants, other parents had similar reasoning in terms of sending their children to the Polish School in Reykjavík. Participants explained that better job opportunities were one of the arguments most often stated by their parents for learning heritage language in the Polish School. Another argument used by Polish adolescent immigrants parents for studying at this School, stated by participants, was a belief that learning Polish is an important factor of their heritage, and as they are Poles they should know how to use it appropriately.

Although interviewees admitted that the idea of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík was conceived by their parents, most of them declared that they like to attend it and they
believed it is advantageous for them in terms of learning Polish. Karen explained that her mother’s motives encouraged her to attend the Polish School. She states that her mother’s suggestion was the right decision, because attending the School is both enjoyable and beneficial.

Some of the Polish adolescent immigrants who were interviewed stated that they would not attend the Polish School in Reykjavík if their parents did not urge them to do so. What’s more, one participant admitted that attending the Polish School is the only way of avoiding quarrels at home. Ben said: ‘I need to go there (to the Polish School in Reykjavík) every Saturday if I want to avoid quarrels at home and live in peace with my family’ This participant was rather reluctant to attend this School and he confessed that there is no point in attending it apart from exemption from Danish classes (this will be explained in a subsequent subchapter).

Parents suggestions for the reason they attend the Polish School in Reykjavík is compatible with the results of Zielińska et al. (2014) that focused on students’ perspectives, along with the reasons and experiences of attending the Polish heritage language schools in Iceland and England. Their study demonstrated that the main reason for attending heritage language schools is parents’ suggestions, especially by mothers and that in Iceland, mothers’ suggestions were based on the possibility of returning to Poland. Similarly, participants in the present study mentioned the possibility of returning to Poland as one of the reasons for parents to send their children to the Polish School in Reykjavík. Similar results were found in the study of Mosty et al. (2013), which explored immigrant parents perspectives towards heritage language. Some of the parents stated that heritage language learning was important for their children because of future plans about returning to their home country.

It is worth noting that besides possible plans about returning to the home country, other participants’ beliefs about their parents’ motives for sending their children to the Polish School in Reykjavík were different from parents’ opinions in previous studies. In my study, Polish adolescent immigrants suggest that their parents’ motives were better work opportunities for their children and maintaining their heritage. On the contrary, in the study by Mosty et al. (2013), parents believed that knowledge of heritage language by their children increases their educational opportunities and enables communication with the family. The opinions stated by Polish adolescent immigrants about the motives of their parents to
encourage their children to attend the Polish School in Reykjavík are different from previous studies, except for possible plans about returning to the home country.

Another important reason for attending the Polish School mentioned by interviewees was a desire to learn about Poland. There were four participants who suggested that it is important to learn about Polish culture and traditions. However, they gave different explanations for that. Ben showed interest in Polish history and claimed that one of the reasons for attending the Polish School in Reykjavík is learning Polish history. He demonstrated great knowledge of Polish history, when he talked about partitions, battles, kings, monuments and interesting stories related to those monuments. He claimed to have many books about Polish history and added that it is possible to borrow such books from the library located in the School. He declared that he borrowed one recently and he still reads it. Emma, on the other hand, indicated that it is important to learn the Polish language and culture to be able to follow traditions. She affirmed that Poles should know Polish traditions regardless of where they live, and added that Polish traditions are interesting and funny. She mentioned that she had an opportunity to experience the tradition of pouring water on Easter Monday when her family went to Poland for Easter once and she loved it. She regretted that this tradition is not practised in Iceland. When asked whether she learned about Polish traditions in the Polish School in Reykjavík, she told about the winter farewell. She was very excited when she explained:

Polish people prepare big dolls called Marzanna, which symbolize the winter. They are made of hay and old clothes. On the first day of spring, Polish people go to the rivers and they burn those big dolls and throw them in the rivers. That is how they say goodbye to the winter (Emma).

Nevertheless, Emma admitted that she has not seen a winter farewell, though she looked forward to seeing it. Other participants also named several traditions, but they were similar to Icelandic traditions, like for example Christmas traditions. For some of the participants it was rather difficult to explain why they wanted to learn Polish history and traditions. One participant stated that his parents believe that it is important to know Polish traditions and that he agrees with them. The desire to learn about Poland as a reason for attending heritage language schools cannot be supported by results of previous research, therefore this information contributes to new knowledge. Participants were also encouraged to tell about
learning Polish. All of the interviewees admitted that Polish is a “cool” subject. There were various reasons for this. Participants claimed that the Polish language teacher is “cool” and forgiving, that Polish language classes are interesting and that they learn advantageous things during Polish language classes. As for other subjects and teachers, interviewees were not so indulgent. One participant even confessed that some of the teachers in the Polish School in Reykjavík are not professional. Participants claimed that during the Polish language classes they do not only learn Polish grammar and vocabulary, but also other intriguing things, such as traditions and interesting facts about Poland (and Polish). Mary explained that it is always funny to talk about words ambiguity. Ben on the other hand, claimed that conjunction and inflection for a person are very funny and cause a lot of laughs during Polish language classes. Interviewees had a rather positive attitude and experiences when learning Polish. This is both because the subject seemed to be interesting for them and because they liked their Polish language teacher. The vast majority of participants claimed that they like to attend the Polish School in Reykjavík. Interviewees stated four benefits of attending it. They are: exemption from Danish classes, improving Polish skills, meeting Polish friends, better communication within the family and receiving support.

4.1.1 Choosing a better option

The granting of credits obtained in heritage language schools by compulsory schools of the host country facilitates immigrant students learning their heritage language (Liu et al., 2011). As explained before, the Polish School in Reykjavík and some Icelandic schools cooperate in terms of Polish language development among immigrants. The Icelandic school system does not provide heritage language learning classes for immigrant students but facilitates the process by giving Polish adolescent immigrants the alternative of learning Polish as an equivalent to learning Danish. Students in grades 7 and 8 in some Icelandic primary schools have the opportunity to choose between studying Danish in Icelandic schools or Polish in the Polish School in Reykjavík. If the student decides to attend Polish language classes instead of Danish language classes, his/her presence in the Polish School is compulsory and grades from the Polish language classes are transferred to Icelandic schools and included on the certificate instead of the Danish grade. Providing such an alternative is beneficial for Polish adolescent immigrants and their parents. Polish adolescent immigrants who attend the Polish School in
Reykjavík are not overwhelmed with too many subjects or homework and parents of Polish adolescent immigrants share the responsibility of Polish heritage language nurturing with the Polish School in Reykjavík. The opportunity to study Polish in this School instead of Danish in Icelandic schools allows Polish adolescent immigrants to maintain their heritage language and culture without neglecting the Icelandic language.

All six interviewees agreed that exemption from Danish classes is beneficial for them. Participants tend to prefer to learn Polish over Danish, because they already have some idea about Polish and thus they choose to learn Polish and therefore attend the Polish School. Most of the interviewees suggested that Polish is much easier than Danish and the most difficult part in Polish learning is the grammar. Mary expressed her opinion in this way: “I attend the Polish School in Reykjavík, because I do not want to learn Danish. I had the opportunity to choose between Polish and Danish languages and I chose the better one-to-learn Polish”. Peter thought similarly: “The most important reason is that I do not have to attend Danish classes. I attended it before, it was crazy. I am not going to learn this language”. Moreover, all of the participants believed that Danish is difficult and useless for them. They confessed that there is no point in learning Danish because they will not move to Denmark. On the contrary, the interviewees declared that Icelandic and Polish are important languages for them, because they can use them in every day situations, unlike Danish. Translating for their parents was mentioned as one such situations. In addition, they admitted that the Icelandic language is important for interacting with teachers and friends in Icelandic schools, whereas Polish is important for interactions with family. The exemption from other classes as a benefit of attending heritage language schools cannot be supported by previous research, therefore this information contributes to new knowledge.

4.1.2 Improving Polish skills

All six interviewees stated that improving Polish skills is one of the benefits of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. This theme however, included two different codes, namely enriching vocabulary and improving literacy and grammar in Polish. All four participants affirmed they were improving their literacy and grammar skills due to admission to the Polish School in Reykjavík. Karen explained it in this way:
When I did not attend the Polish School in Reykjavík, I had problems with reading in Polish. Polish has these fancy letters like “ó” with a line (ó), which is read “u” and not “ow” (oo) like in Icelandic. It is very confusing. Therefore, I kept asking my Mum how to read particular letters. But now I do not have to ask her because I know the pronunciation of all the letters in Polish. (Karen).

Anne had a similar experience with Polish and Icelandic grammar and pronunciation as Karen, but she added that learning grammar is useful in the reading process. Unlike Karen and Anne, Emma perceived improving Polish skills in the context of enriching vocabulary. She declared that her vocabulary has been enriched and confirmed that with several examples. According to Peter, learning Polish was not necessary, but he believes that it was useful for jokes. He admitted using Polish in the presence of Icelanders to make fun of them or when he did not want Icelanders to understand. Mary, on the other hand, associated learning grammar and enriching vocabulary with increase of self-esteem. She confessed that her Polish cousins had laughed at her several times, because she had said something ungrammatically and it made her reticent about using Polish. Her Polish vocabulary had been enriched after several months in the Polish School in Reykjavík. Moreover, she admitted to using more Polish after learning it in the School because she feels more self-confident about her proficiency in Polish.

Similarly, Ben stated that increasing proficiency in Polish enables him to use the language without the shame of saying something with no sense. He admits being more confident about using Polish on the Internet (Facebook), with Polish friends and family.

On the occasion of talking about self-esteem, the topic of ethnic identity was discussed with interviewees. Participants questioned the association between heritage language learning and greater ethnic identity. Five interviewees declared that they identified with both ethnic groups (Polish and Icelandic) and claimed that learning Polish is not associated with ethnic identity. Peter affirmed that he feels he is an Icelander rather than a Pole and that learning Polish or attending the Polish School in Reykjavík does not change this. Therefore, participants do not associate heritage language learning with greater ethnic identity. It seems that interviewees accept themselves as both Poles and Icelanders, apart from Peter who perceives himself as an Icelander. It can be assumed that this is due to the fact that they are also accepted by the others as both Poles and Icelanders. Perhaps their Polish ethnic identity
is supported by their families and the Icelandic ethnic identity is supported by their Icelandic friends.

4.1.3 Social contact
Findings have shown that another important benefit of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík is meeting with Polish friends. This can be supported by results of the study performed by Zielińska et al. (2014), in which Polish adolescent immigrants in England and Iceland mentioned the opportunity of meeting other Poles as an important benefit of attending heritage language schools. Generally, in the present study interviewees declared that they like to attend the Polish School in Reykjavík because they can meet their Polish friends. However, two participants had a different view on this issue. Peter seemed to have annoying experiences and unpleasant thoughts about his classmates. He wondered whether Polish immigrants who attend the Polish School were worth his friendship, because they like to please teachers. He claimed that he prefers his Icelandic friends. Anne, on the other hand, believed that some of the students do not like to attend this School because they consider themselves to be more Icelanders than Poles and therefore do not show empathy for other Polish students in the Polish School in Reykjavík. Three interviewees admitted that they like to attend the Polish School because they can meet with Polish friends. For Karen attending it was an opportunity to meet her best friend who lives far away from her. She always waits impatiently for Saturday to go to the School and meet her best friend. There she can share her thoughts, experiences and gossip. She confessed:

I have a best friend here in the Polish School in Reykjavík and we like to talk about various things and gossip a little bit. We can only meet in the Polish School in Reykjavík, because we live far away from each other. Otherwise we write on Facebook, but it is not the same. (Karen)

Similarly, Emma confessed that she has both Polish and Icelandic friends, but admitted that relationships with Polish friends mean much more to her. She revealed that her Polish friends understand her better and that they can talk about things which their Icelandic friends would not understand because of their different mentality. Another participant stated that he speaks Icelandic very well and that he understands his Icelandic peers, but he indicated that understanding is something more than knowing the language. He stated that understanding is about shared values. Ben revealed:
I like my Polish friends. I can speak with them about anything. They understand me very well. You know, I know I have Icelandic friends but I cannot tell them everything. They have different values than I have and they simply do not understand some things. (Ben)

Taking it into consideration, the Polish School in Reykjavík is not only an educational setting, but a place to meet friends and share experiences and thoughts in heritage language with people of the same background and mentality.

4.1.4 Better communication within the family and receiving support

On the occasion of talking about importance of learning Polish, interviewees revealed another benefit of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. They believed that enriching Polish is important for communicating with friends and family.

In the present study, the majority of interviewees stated that they often send text messages or messages on Facebook to family and friends. They explained that it is extremely important to use appropriate words and grammar in order to be understood. Knowing Polish allows them to spend time with cousins and meet new friends when they are on holiday in Poland. Interviewees stated that they feel that their parents and family understand them more and that they feel more confident to speak with family in Poland. For some of interviewees, better communication within the family meant something more than ability to express their feelings. Anne revealed that better communication within the family was about spending more time together. She also stated that her parents’ admiration which she had received when she began attending the Polish School in Reykjavík, improved their relations.

Better communication within the family was also associated with another benefit, namely: receiving support. Three out of four participants who named better communication within the family as a benefit of attending the Polish School, admitted that they get more support from their families. Anne declared that she can count on her parents when she needs support with the homework from the Polish School. Peter declared that he generally gets more attention from his parents since he has been attending the School. When asked about support from teachers at the Polish School in Reykjavík, all of them agreed that they receive support from teachers when needed. However, they were not that keen to share what kind of support they receive from the teachers at the School. One interviewee simply said that
teachers in the Polish School in Reykjavík are always ready to explain something. However, one participant provided a slightly different answer. Emma said that it is supportive when the teachers are lenient when students are absent due to sport competitions. Only two interviewees admitted that they get support from their classmates, but it was more about sharing homework.

4.2 Challenges of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík

Two major themes emerged from the interviews that are associated with challenges of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. They are: extra homework, lack of free time and waking up early on Saturdays; as well as tests and learning useless material.

4.2.1 More homework, less free time

When it came to speaking about the challenges of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík, participants’ answers were much more in agreement. All participants complained about more homework, lack of free time and the necessity of waking up early on Saturdays. Interviewees declared that their weekend only lasts one day because of the necessity to attend the Polish School. Most of the interviewees believed that beginning the School at 9:30 on Saturdays is too early. However, the most disturbing challenge seemed to be lack of free time. They mentioned various things that they cannot do because of lack of free time. Emma complained that because of a lack of free time she cannot meet with friends. She declared that she stays in the Polish School until 15:00 and after the school she needs to do homework and study for the Polish School in Reykjavík. Therefore, Sunday is the only day she can meet with friends.

For Mary, a lack of free time was associated with a different issue. She confessed:

In the Icelandic school I am in nemendaráð (students’ council) and we often have meetings or events on Saturdays. I always have to choose between attending the Polish School in Reykjavík or meetings in nemendaráð. In the Polish School in Reykjavík, participation counts for final grades, so I usually end up going there but I am very frustrated if I miss something in nemendaráð. (Mary)

Mary said that being in nemendaráð was very important because she could represent other students when they need it. Being part of nemendaráð allows her to participate in the
Icelandic community and therefore to socialize with her Icelandic contemporaries. Moreover, she can develop some skills and individual goals. Mary admitted that the Polish School in Reykjavík takes her away from the activities of the day school. Two participants mentioned that attending the School interferes with their sporting activities. Ben complained that he cannot attend sports competitions because of lack of time. Sport is very important among adolescents because it develops social skills and reinforces an individual’s potential. Sport improves health and physical condition. Ben admitted that the Polish School in Reykjavík disrupts his in sport activities. He explained:

I am in a football team and when we have some football competitions we need to train a lot. Trainings and football competitions are usually on Saturdays and I have to choose between attending the Polish School in Reykjavík and competitions. It is very difficult because football is my passion and I like attending the Polish School in Reykjavík, but I always have to choose. If we could attend the Polish School in Reykjavík during weekdays, it would be easier... (Ben)

Similarly, according to Liu et al. (2011), conducting heritage language classes at weekends or after regular school causes that immigrant students to resign from extracurricular activities. In addition, operating on weekends brings another challenge, namely limited instructional time. Teachers are faced with the challenge of transferring a great amount of knowledge in a short time, which results in a great amount of homework (Liu et al., 2011).

Lack of free time was often associated with the quantity of homework. Participants confirmed that there is a lot of homework from the Polish School in Reykjavík and that they often need to spend the rest of Saturdays doing homework. It seemed that the quantity of homework really bothered interviewees. Interviewees complained that they have to do double homework because they attend two schools: the Icelandic school and the Polish School in Reykjavík. Karen admitted that the quantity of homework from the Polish School is large. Emma revealed that some teachers in the Polish School ask them to transcribe whole pages from books to their notebooks, which takes a lot of time. Furthermore, they are usually asked to do that at home to save time in class.

More homework and less free time as challenges of attending heritage language schools are mentioned in a study conducted in 2010 investigated attitudes of Korean students to
heritage language schools which revealed that students complained about a lack of free time and additional homework (Brown, 2011).

4.2.2 Tests and useless material

Four participants complained about the quantity and difficulty of tests in the Polish School in Reykjavik. Participants compared them to tests in Icelandic schools. They confessed that tests in the Polish School are more often than in the Icelandic schools. They also complained that tests are mostly with open-ended questions unlike in Icelandic schools. Emma declared:

Emma: I do not like the fact that the tests have open-ended questions and we have to write long answers. Besides, the tests should only be allowed only in Polish language classes and not in History or Geography.

Researcher: Why do you think so?

Emma: Because I think that History and Geography are not very useful subjects and WOS (Civics), yes WOS is a very useless subject.

Researcher: Why is that?

Emma: Because we learn some stupid things about Poland, Polish society and law and I will never use them, because I will not go back to Poland, I will stay here in Iceland.

This brings up another challenge of attending the Polish School in Reykjavik which according to participants is learning useless things. The majority of interviewees confirmed that they learn useless material. Among them were subjects such as Civics, History and Geography. Mary believed that History is a boring subject and she admitted that she does not care “what happened one hundred or one thousand years ago”. Civics was the most unwanted subject among my participants. Anne raised a serious issue:

I do not like Civics, I think it is a very difficult subject and I do not even know if students in Poland learn it. The knowledge that is acquired in this subject is completely useless, especially for people who do not live in Poland. And learning about populations, natural resources and things like that is simply a waste of time. Maybe it would be a good idea to make such subjects free electives? Only students who really want to would attend. It would be much easier for everyone (Anne).
Learning about population and the natural resources of Poland can be completely useless for a person who lives in Iceland. Perhaps knowledge about population and the natural resources of Iceland would be more useful. Some students in the Polish School in Reykjavík attend it to learn Polish only and are not interested in other subjects. Learning useless things and the difficulty of tests as challenges of attending heritage language schools were not mentioned in previous studies, therefore in this respect the current study contributes to new knowledge.

4.3 Interviews—summary and issues

During interviews, a few unexpected answers were received that contribute to the construction of new knowledge. The significant aspect of obtaining information was the way the questions were structured. For example, interviewees provided different answers to the questions of why they like to attend the Polish School in Reykjavík and (what are) the reasons for attending it. Although those questions may sound similar, participants assigned them various meanings. Reasons for attending the Polish School in Reykjavík meant, for them, something that they gain benefits from; that is why the most common answer was an exemption from Danish classes. However, it turned out that for some participants’ reasons and benefits of attending the Polish School meant the same thing. Those include themes such as: exemption from Danish classes or meeting Polish friends. In this study perceptions of interviewees are of great importance; therefore, the researcher needs to adjust the analysis to answers provided by participants. Themes which emerged twice (both mentioned as reasons and benefits of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík) are considered to be strong and therefore meaningful. Moreover, it can be considered that they were important for interviewees.

Most of the interviewees admitted that they like attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. They associate it with benefits such as learning grammar and enriching vocabulary, improving communication within the family and higher self-esteem. Those advantages of heritage language learning have already been mentioned by scholars. Better communication and improving Polish skills were also perceived by interviewees as benefits of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. Therefore, it can be concluded that, according to participants, the reasons for why they like to attend this School and benefits of attending it are associated with heritage language learning importance. It is good to have in mind though, that interviewees
have a positive attitude to the Polish language teacher and subject, compared to other teachers and subjects, what can have an influence on their perceptions.

On the other hand, interviewees mentioned various challenges that bothered them about attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. The challenges reported by participants were rather trivial, although they seemed to bother interviewees a lot. Perhaps lack of free time and learning useless things are rather difficult to cope with, but on the other hand the learning process is associated with difficulties and challenges. It has to be mentioned that challenges reported by participants were not linked to the importance of heritage language learning itself. There were no complaints about the learning difficulty of Polish. Similar challenges are often reported by students from any school, who do not even attend additional heritage language schools.
5 Observations

This chapter documents observations during my fieldwork in the Polish School in Reykjavík. It recounts activities and behaviours of interviewees, both during lessons and breaks. The data obtained from observations in this chapter are set together with the data obtained from interviews in order to evaluate their relationship. In addition, this chapter demonstrates aspects that can influence students’ behaviour, such as the atmosphere in class or the behaviour and interactions of students and teachers. The chapter is divided into four subchapters that recount observations that are believed to explain, complement and understand the information obtained from interviews with my participants. The first subchapter focuses on interactions between students in the Polish School in Reykjavík. This subchapter encompasses issues associated with the importance of heritage language and confirms the data obtained from interviews, namely that interactions with other Polish immigrants allow for practising Polish. The second subchapter focuses on in-class atmosphere and student-teacher interaction in the Polish School in Reykjavík. It questions the information obtained from interviews about receiving support. The third subchapter demonstrates student behaviour and engagement in class. It complements the information obtained from interviews about the challenge of learning useless material. The last subchapter focuses on organization of classes and learning activities. It raises the question about the reluctance of Polish adolescent immigrants to some subjects and learning useless material. It encompasses the issues associated with heritage language learning importance.

Observations are very advantageous because they allow one to observe what participants do or say in real-life situations. In the interviews, participants say what they do or think, which sometimes can turn out to be false. It happens that interviewees say what they think the researcher wants to hear or they match their answers so as not to embarrass themselves. In this regard, setting together the data from observations and interviews allows one to access the meaning and context of what people say and do.

On the other hand, there are several problems associated with observations. One of them is that the presence of an observer can affect situations or the behaviour of participants and it is often difficult to gauge. In addition, when participants know they are observed, they may conceal their emotions. Also, some emotions, feelings or opinions are difficult to observe or evaluate. The observer has to dig very deeply to link his/her observations with what has been
said. Often observations do not provide the full picture of participants’ opinions. It is also difficult to evaluate whether an observed phenomenon or situation is common, or whether it is influenced by external factors, such as bad mood or family problems. It is important to have those factors in mind.

5.1 Student-student interactions

The student-student interactions were very positive. During observation, there was no situation between students that would indicate negative emotions. They were talking, smiling and laughing a lot, mostly during breaks. During classes, students were sitting mostly in pairs, and were often whispering and laughing quietly. They were willing to lend various aids to each other, such as pencil sharpeners, rulers or pencils. During breaks they were often gathered in groups, eating their lunch and telling stories. Younger students were chasing each other in the hallway, having a great time and a lot of fun.

Student-student interaction in school is important for practicing a language (Jacobs & Ward, 2000). This is especially important in the case of immigrant students who should practise their heritage language. My observation revealed that Polish immigrant students of the Polish School in Reykjavík only used Polish when interacting with each other, both during instruction and free time. It was a way of practicing their language. This was confirmed by what interviewees claimed during interviews. Most of them believed that attending the Polish School and interactions with other Polish immigrants allowed them to practise Polish. Furthermore, student-student interactions are part of socialization. According to Jacobs & Ward (2000), interactions between students promote development of language, social skills and a sense of belonging and thus ethnic identity.

The inferences made from these observations complement some of the information obtained from the interviews. Participants practise their heritage language by interacting with other Polish immigrants and therefore improve their Polish skills. This factor was perceived by interviewees as a benefit of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. In addition, positive interactions between students indicate that meeting with friends is a benefit of attending the Polish School.
In-class atmosphere and student-teacher interactions

The atmosphere in all observed classes was rather positive and supportive. Creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom is not an easy task but is a very important aspect of effective teaching. A positive atmosphere promotes better learning opportunities, a sense of belonging, trust for others, taking risks and overcoming challenges (Young, 2014). Creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom requires a positive attitude and mood from the teacher (Wilson-Fleming & Wilson-Younger, 2012). According to Ulug, Ozden & Eryilmaz (2011), teachers’ positive attitudes to their students reflect student performance and personal development. Therefore, a teacher’s attitude to students is very important.

During my fieldwork I observed that teachers’ attitudes to students were very positive. All of the observed teachers were very peaceful. It seemed that teachers in the Polish School in Reykjavík try to understand their students. When some question was raised, teachers always tried to answer it. There was a situation in which the student came late to the class and when he explained himself, the teacher said: “That is OK, I understand”. Therefore, the teacher demonstrated comprehension for the student’s situation and did not make the student feel guilty. In another subject, one of the students forgot to do his homework. When he explained himself, the teacher said: “I understand, but you have to do this homework this week and show it to me next Saturday”. This teacher also demonstrated understanding for the student’s situation, but indicated that the task was important and he had to complete it.

Observations in the Polish School in Reykjavík revealed that all the teachers were in positive moods and they seemed to have positive attitudes to their work, students and co-workers. The same applied to the students: everyone was smiling and seemed to be happy. During breaks, students were talking with each other, laughing and walking around with smiling faces. Younger students played chasing games in the hallway or threw the ball. Students shared their thoughts at every opportunity and felt comfortable in each other’s presence, both during classes and breaks.

During classes, some of the teachers used humour to create a positive atmosphere. They tended to joke at the beginning of the lesson to discharge the tension. Other teachers tended to say what had happened to them during the week. Humour and sharing aspects of their lives with students help to create a comfortable atmosphere, because it helps students to get to know the teacher (Young, 2014). Generally, teachers provided students with help and advice. Student-teacher interactions were rather positive and appropriate, and it seemed that
both students and teachers experienced enjoyment and excitement about learning and teaching. During observations, students felt comfortable among each other and in the presence of teachers. Most of them felt confident and did not hesitate to ask questions. Some were not afraid to joke with teachers or ask inconvenient or embarrassing questions.

It can be assumed that students in the Polish School in Reykjavík receive support from their teachers, but as mentioned above, only two students confirmed that. Moreover, they claimed that they received support from their teachers only if they asked for it. It should be noted that it is difficult to observe various forms of teachers’ support during limited time. It is obvious that students will not share their personal problems in front of the whole class or when a stranger observer is present. Such situations should instead rather be intimate and usually unattainable for the observer.

The interactions between students and teachers are measured bidirectionally, which means that the way the teacher interacts with a student impacts the way the student will respond and vice versa; this is associated with teachers’ and students’ behaviours (Reinke, Herman & Newcomer, 2016). The most common types of data that give an idea about student-teacher interactions are teacher’s use of reprimands and praises and students’ disruptive behaviour (Reinke et al. 2016). Teachers in the Polish School in Reykjavík praised their students for good answers as well as for good behaviour. Using positive reinforcement increases the motivation to learn, along with developing self-esteem and confidence (Sigler & Aamidor, 2005), students feel good about their choices and learn to be active (Young, 2014). Observations revealed that teachers in the Polish School used reprimands for disruptive behaviour. During some classes, students who sat in pairs often talked to each other and the teacher had to reprimand these students several times. They always dutifully abstained for a while but came back to these important discussions again. Therefore, the teachers have problems with students talking, which disrupts how the lesson is conducted and reduces the time for learning. It has to be mentioned that the teachers’ reprimands were calm and not malicious. Sometimes teachers simply asked questions about the topic to these students who were talking. Surprisingly, students always knew the answer, which meant that they were able to concentrate on many things at a time. Although students sometimes disturbed the teacher in conducting lessons, they tended to be focused on the subject and reacted to the teacher’s comments. In one class, students did not talk to each other, but rather accosted the teacher by asking various questions. This might have been influenced by the researcher’s
presence, because every time the question was asked, the student glanced at the researcher. Such situations are inevitable, because a stranger in class is always interesting in some way. On the other hand, such situations cause disturbance during instruction and produce invalid data. Therefore, it is important to keep such aspects in mind.

5.3 Student behaviour and engagement in class

Student engagement is considered to be a meaningful student commitment to learning and participation in learning activities (Martin & Torres, n. d.). Student engagement can be divided into observable and internal engagement (Pohl, 2013). Internal engagement refers to students’ beliefs, goals, identification and sense of belonging (Pohl, 2013), and is therefore difficult to observe. Observable engagement refers to students’ involvement in instruction and participation in classroom activities (Pohl, 2013). Research demonstrates that students who are engaged in class achieve more in tests and in school, as well as having better work opportunities (Martin & Torres, n. d.).

During observations in the Polish School in Reykjavik, various kinds of behaviour and engagement of students were noticed, therefore observable engagement of the students will be reported. Students’ engagement in class also varied among classes and subjects. In some classes, students were calm and were listening to the teacher, while in others they were loud, talkative and walking around. Such behaviour can be influenced by students’ attitudes to the subject or teacher. During classes which were evaluated by students as boring, they were much more distracted and occupied with various things, such as: talking, browsing the Internet on their phones or writing messages. Conversely, during subjects evaluated as useful and interesting, students were calmer: they listened to the teacher and were much more active. During the teaching of one subject, students were not active at all. They were mostly talking to each other, disrupting the lesson. When the teacher asked a question, there was no one who wanted to speak. However, it can be considered that they knew the answers, because when the teacher asked a particular student, he answered appropriately and without any hesitation. It is difficult to say whether the reason for this was shame or animosity to the subject or teacher. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that this situation can be associated with animosity to the subject, because in the interviews this particular subject was often assessed by participants as useless and uninteresting. In contrast, during instruction of a
subject which was assessed by my participants as interesting and useful, the engagement and participation was superior. When the teacher asked questions, many hands went up, unlike in the previous example. In addition, students were more likely to ask questions when they did not understand or when they wanted to satisfy their curiosity. The challenge of learning useless things mentioned during interviews can be displayed by students’ engagement during subjects evaluated as boring. Learning useful and interesting things is associated with more engagement, whereas learning useless and boring things is displayed by disengagement.

There was one more class that proceeded in a different way than in the two other examples. In this case there was only one student who was very active whereas other students were passive. When the teacher asked questions, the active student answered immediately without raising his hand and not giving a chance for the teacher to ask someone else. Other students also had no chance to think about the question or to reconsider whether to raise their hands or not. On the other hand, it seemed that both teacher and students accepted such proceedings in class. This phenomenon can be influenced by several factors. It should be mentioned that the situation was happening in the mixed-age class and the active student was the older student. Therefore, the student might feel very confident because perhaps he knew the material already and wanted to demonstrate his knowledge. On the other hand, one of the reasons for his engagement could be drawing the teacher’s attention or willingness to get a high grade for involvement during instruction. Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out that his behaviour could be influenced by the researcher’s presence.

It is difficult to say why students’ engagement differs so much between classes. It can be considered that it can be associated with students’ attitude to a particular subject and their interest in the discipline, and thus with the challenge of learning useless things. On the other hand, students’ engagement in class can be influenced by many different factors, for example family problems, alienation or shame (Martin & Torres, n. d.). Furthermore, the interactions between student and teacher, as well as in-class atmosphere, can be factors that influence student engagement in class. In this regard, it is difficult to identify the reasons for disengagement. What is more, Martin & Torres (n. d.) state that the growing-up period influences students’ disengagement and that adolescence is a critical period in engagement decline. Research demonstrates that 40 to 60 percent of adolescents are not engaged in class (Martin & Torres, n. d.). Taking these points into consideration, the observed students could have been disengaged due to the difficulties associated with adolescence. It can be
considered that the critical period of adolescence, students’ interest in the discipline, in-class atmosphere and student-teacher interactions influence students’ engagement. Therefore, it is difficult to say which factor influenced the various forms of engagement among classes and subjects being observed.

5.4 Organization of classes and learning activities

Teachers in the Polish School in Reykjavík organize their classes very precisely and they try to follow the plan and curriculum. However, in practice they often do not manage to finish the plan of the day. This is because it takes plenty of time for students to perform tasks the teacher gives them. During instruction in one subject, students were supposed to make greeting cards for their mothers for Mother’s Day. The time provided for this task was 45 minutes and students were informed about that. However, it turned out that the task was continued into the next class and lasted for almost 90 minutes. When the teacher finally decided that the cards needed to be finished at home and proceeded with the topic of the lesson, some of the students were still working with their cards and ignoring the teacher’s instruction. Other subjects were similar: students used much more time then needed for the completion of their tasks. This can be explained by students’ desire to protract an easy task or by reluctance to the subject. However, it can also be associated with the belief that Polish adolescent immigrants learn useless things in the Polish School in Reykjavík. Waking up early on Saturday morning just to make greeting cards might seem unsuitable for Polish adolescent immigrants and can be evidence for their answers about the challenge of learning useless material. Therefore, their reluctance is understandable.

Another issue with managing the time during lessons was the problem with writing something down. First of all, students were objecting a lot when they were supposed to write some notes. Furthermore, writing notes was taking them a lot of time and the teacher often proceeded with the topic while students were still distracted by writing their notes. It can be assumed that students felt that writing notes was unnecessary and useless, therefore they objected a lot and complained about the necessity of writing everything down. Therefore, the observation confirms the information obtained from interviews about learning useless things. On the other hand, writing contributes to learning grammar and improving Polish skills. In the interviews, all of the participants claimed that it is important to learn heritage language in
order to learn grammar and improve Polish skills. Moreover, improving Polish skills was recognized as a benefit of attending the Polish School by five of my participants but they did not mention writing notes as a way of practising the grammar. This observation confirms that writing down notes was not perceived by my participants as an advantageous method of improving grammar and Polish skills.

It has to be mentioned that the teachers tried to make their lessons interesting and therefore were employing various activities during their lessons. During observations, activities such as reading, writing, working in pairs or alone, student presentations and creative activities were employed. Employing various activities during the instruction is very important for effective learning. Every student is different and learns by different activities or methods. Students were often very keen to read aloud, because it seemed that they are aware of its contribution to the improvement of their Polish skills. In the interviews, the vast majority stated that they benefit from improving their Polish skills by attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. Improving Polish skills was also mentioned as a significant aspect of heritage language learning importance. The willingness to read aloud in class confirms interviewees’ perspectives on the benefits of attending the Polish School and the importance of heritage language learning. Students were also very keen to work in pairs, which proceeded very well. By communicating with each other, they were also improving their Polish skills. Perhaps they could also increase their self-esteem by working in pairs. Working in pairs offers more opportunities to speak and share opinions than group work, which in turn allows for becoming more confident in the topic. It is easier to develop self-esteem in smaller groups, because there are more opportunities to speak, share opinions and being accepted (Tess India, n. d.). Observations revealed that during some classes students were often asked to work on some tasks alone. It seemed that they were not happy about that, which was indicated by the time students were spending on those tasks. Usually they were grumbling and doing something else instead. They only began to work on it if the teacher claimed that the task was going to be graded.

5.5 Observations-summary and issues
Conducting observations is a difficult, time-consuming and labour intensive activity. It requires appropriate preparation and focusing on many different aspects and issues that can
contribute to enriching the data. As mentioned above, observations can be influenced by some external factors, such as observer presence. It can be considered that during observations in the Polish School in Reykjavík, some situations and behaviours could have been influenced by the presence of the researcher. These could include continuous whispering, walking around during classes, students’ uncommon engagement in class or asking the teacher funny or personal questions. Also, it is difficult to obtain information about one’s opinions or to evaluate one’s perspectives on a particular issue just by observations. However, observations in the Polish School in Reykjavík complemented some of the information obtained from interviews.
6 Discussion

The aim of the study is to explore what benefits Polish adolescent immigrants gain from attending the Polish School in Reykjavík, and what challenges they encounter in the Polish School in Reykjavík. The thesis addresses the issue of heritage language learning, studying the benefits and challenges of attending heritage language classes from the perspectives of Polish immigrant adolescents. The following chapter demonstrates the association between the existing literature, theoretical background and the data obtained from this study.

6.1 Fundamental advantages of heritage language learning

Interviewees suggested several benefits of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. They are: exemption from Danish classes, improving Polish skills, meeting with Polish friends, better communication within the family and receiving support. Although, interviewees suggested that exemption from Danish classes was the most beneficial, the second important benefit of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík was improving Polish skills. The findings are in tandem with other studies, like that of Aberdeen (2016), which demonstrated that attending heritage language schools contributes to heritage language improvement and literacy development. Writing and reading skills can also be improved due to heritage language learning in heritage language schools (Zielińska et al., 2014).

Generally, Polish adolescent immigrants associate attending the Polish School in Reykjavík with heritage language learning importance and are aware of it. Similar findings are demonstrated in the study made in 2011 by Berman, Lefever and Woźnicka, which have shown that Polish adolescent immigrants are aware of the importance of Icelandic language in their social interactions with Icelandic friends and in school. Interviewees confessed that they enjoy attending the Polish School just to meet Polish friends, but at the same time they realized that it is a way of practising Polish. Therefore, it can be assumed that Polish adolescent immigrants are aware of heritage language learning importance.

Furthermore, they realized the importance of their heritage language learning in communication with family and Polish friends. The research demonstrated that it was easier for the participants to talk about their experiences and emotions in their heritage language. These benefits were mentioned in the literature review as benefits of heritage language learning and are supported with empirical research. Research has shown that heritage
language plays an important role in family interactions (Carreira & Kagan, 2011; Oh & Fuligni, 2010; Portes & Hao, 2002; Tseng & Fuligni, 2000; Woźnicka & Berman, 2011).

The findings of this study demonstrate that immigrant students are keen to develop knowledge about their heritage. Although, it seems that the idea of attending the Polish School in Reykjavík was initiated by Polish adolescent immigrants’ mothers, they attend it willingly because they meet their Polish friends and develop their heritage language, which increases their confidence.

Polish adolescent immigrants declared to be more confident about using Polish since they attended the Polish School in Reykjavík. Similarly, the results of previous studies confirmed that there was a relationship between heritage language proficiency and self-esteem (Mosty et al., 2013; Yu 2015).

Previous studies (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Oh & Fuligni, 2010; Phinney, Romero, Nava & Huang, 2001; Yu, 2015) prove the association between heritage language learning and developing ethnic identity. However, interviewees in the present study questioned the association between learning Polish and greater ethnic identity. Three of the interviewees declared they identify with both ethnic groups (Polish and Icelandic) and claimed that learning Polish is not associated with ethnic identity.

6.2 Reduced opportunities

Although attending heritage language schools helps to retain heritage language, it can be challenging for immigrant students, especially at particular times of life, such as adolescence. The most common and disturbing challenges that bothered Polish adolescent immigrants were lack of free time, additional homework and waking up early on Saturdays. Also, other research (Brown, 2011; Kim, 2011) has shown that attending heritage language schools requires an additional effort from immigrant students, both because of the additional time they need to spend on learning and the amount of additional material to learn. Similarly, according to Liu et al. (2011) conducting heritage language classes on weekends or after regular school entails immigrant students to giving up extracurricular activities. The present study reveals that interviewees felt upset and worried because they had to give up after-school activities. They mentioned various things that they cannot do because of lack of free
time, such as meeting friends, attending student council meetings or engaging in sport activities.

Moreover, more than half of the participants in the present study reported that tests and learning useless material were also challenging factors. Those findings cannot be supported by previous research; therefore, they contribute to new knowledge. The challenges reported by participants were rather trivial, although they seemed to bother interviewees a lot. Perhaps lack of free time and learning useless things are rather difficult to cope with, but on the other hand the learning process is associated with difficulties and challenges. It has to be mentioned that challenges reported by participants were not linked to heritage language learning importance itself. There were no complaints about the difficulty of learning Polish. Similar challenges are often announced by students from regular schools, even without attending additional heritage language schools.

### 6.3 Mothers insist, and their children benefit

Polish adolescent immigrants attend the Polish School in Reykjavík because of their parents’ suggestion. The findings are in tandem with different studies, like that of Zielińska et al. (2014), which demonstrated that the main reason for attending heritage language schools is parents’ suggestion. In this study, as in Zielińska et al. (2014), mothers were the parent who insisted most on attending heritage language schools and learning heritage language. Mothers’ suggestions were based on the possibility of returning to Poland. Similarly, participants in the present study mentioned the possibility of returning to Poland as one of the reasons for parents sending their children to the Polish School in Reykjavík. Likewise, in the study of Mosty et al. (2013), which explored immigrant parents’ perspectives towards heritage language, some of the parents stated that heritage language learning was important for their children because of future plans about returning to their home country.

The results demonstrate that exemption from Danish classes was assessed as being very beneficial by Polish adolescent immigrants. Previous research mentioned in the literature review, which is mostly based on parents’ perspectives, does not reveal this as a reason for attending the heritage language schools. Only the study of Zielińska et al. (2014) demonstrates findings of similar significance. The results of her study indicate that in England students have the possibility of taking external exams in Polish and therefore to collect points
in the regular school system. Similarly, Polish adolescent immigrants’ grades from Polish language classes in the Polish School in Reykjavík count in the regular school system. Although interviewees suggested that exemption from Danish classes and parents’ suggestions were the most benefits influencing their decision to attend the school, they also mentioned other benefits, including meeting up with Polish friends. This can be supported by results of the study conducted by Zielińska, et al. (2014), in which Polish adolescent immigrants in England and Iceland mentioned the opportunity of meeting other Poles as an important benefit of attending heritage language schools.

One more important factor in deciding to attend the Polish School in Reykjavík was the desire to learn about Poland, its history and traditions. This suggests that although Polish adolescent immigrants attend the Polish School because they benefit from this, they also want to learn about their heritage. After all, participants indicated that Polish history and traditions are interesting. The desire to learn about Poland as a reason for attending heritage language schools cannot be supported by results of previous research, therefore this information contributes to new knowledge.
7 Conclusion

This thesis is an examination of perspectives of Polish adolescent immigrants on the Polish School in Reykjavik. The literature review gathered for this study discusses the issues of adolescence, heritage language learning importance and the benefits and challenges of attending heritage language schools. The findings of this study offer insight into the importance of attending heritage language classes and the benefits and challenges associated with it. The findings of this research sought to answer the question: What are Polish immigrant adolescents’ perspectives on benefits and challenges associated with attending the Polish School in Reykjavik?

Literature suggests that often parents are the ones who motivate their children to learn. This is also the case for Polish adolescent immigrants who were participants in this study and were attending the Polish School in Reykjavik and learning their heritage language. However, parents’ suggestion is not the only benefit of attending the Polish School. The most important benefit of attending the School for Polish adolescent immigrants is the opportunity to learn Polish instead of Danish. Moreover, Polish adolescent immigrants’ motivations for attending it are: meeting with Polish friends and desire to learn about Poland. The last benefit is associated with heritage language learning importance. The findings of this study demonstrate that Polish adolescent immigrants link the benefits of attending the Polish School in Reykjavik with benefits of heritage language learning, such as improving communication within the family, receiving support and improving heritage language skills.

On the other hand, the results of this study indicate that attending the Polish School is associated with challenges, such as lack of free time, additional homework, more tests and learning useless material. However, those obstacles are not associated with heritage language learning and are rather trivial because they can be encountered in any school. The results demonstrate that Polish adolescent immigrants generally like to attend the Polish School in Reykjavik.

The research has provided insights into the motivations and perspectives of Polish adolescent immigrants in attending the Polish School in Reykjavik. Furthermore, the research sheds light on positive and negative aspects of attending heritage language schools for adolescent immigrant students. My study can be considered a tool to give immigrant parents insight into their children’s perspectives on attending heritage language schools. In addition,
a better understanding of why Polish adolescent immigrants attend the Polish School in Reykjavík contributes to allowing them to spend their free time in a different way. While attending heritage language schools has many positive aspects, immigrant students’ perspectives can differ from their parents’ opinions. Therefore, it is important to reveal Polish adolescent immigrants’ opinions on that aspect. The findings from the collected data could contribute to curriculum changes or pedagogy practice in the Polish School in Reykjavík.
References


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Sienkiewicz, M. personal communication, November 10, 2017


Appendix A:

Informed Consent Form

The Informed Consent Form was originally prepared in Polish but was translated into English for the reader’s convenience.

Informed Consent Form for parents of Polish adolescent immigrants participating in the research entitled: Perspectives of Polish adolescent immigrants on the Polish School in Reykjavik: benefits and challenges.

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This Informed Consent Form consists of:

- Information Sheet (includes information about the study for your knowledge)
- Informed Consent Authorization (for parents to sign if they agree that their child may participate in the study)

A full copy of the Informed Consent Form will be provided for parents.

Part I: Information Sheet
**Introduction**

My name is Malwina Barbara Wejher and I am a student at the University of Iceland, writing my Master Thesis. I am conducting this research in order to help explore Polish adolescent immigrants’ perspectives on attending the Polish School in Reykjavík. My research include interviewing Polish immigrant adolescents.

**My research question:**

What are Polish immigrant adolescents’ perspectives on benefits and challenges associated with attending the Polish School in Reykjavík?

This Informed Consent Form may include some words that you do not understand. Please take your time to read through the information and ask me when you need some clarification. If any questions come to your mind later, do not hesitate to ask me about them at any time.

**Purpose**

The purpose of my study is to explore what benefits Polish adolescent immigrants gain from attending the Polish School in Reykjavík, and what challenges they encounter in the Polish School in Reykjavík. I believe my study is important because it will help teachers and educationalists to understand Polish adolescent immigrants’ educational commitments and expectations, and whether the Polish School in Reykjavík manages to fulfill them.

**Procedure and confidentiality**

Your child will participate in an interview with me. The interview will be voice recorded and it will take about 1 hour. Your child has the right to decide not to answer some of the questions during the interview. In such it is enough to say so and the interviewer will move on to the next question. The interview will take place in the Polish School in Reykjavík, or at place
where it is convenient for you and your child. Only the interviewer will be present during the interview, unless your child asks for someone else to be there.

The information recorded during the interview is confidential, and only the researcher, Malwina Barbara Wejher, will have access to the information documented during your interview. The tapes will be destroyed after 6 months.

The researcher will not be sharing information about your child. The information collected from this research project will be kept confidential. The researcher will use some of the information obtained from the interviews in her study but will make sure to include only information that will not reveal your child’s identity. Your and your child’s names will be unknown as pseudonyms will be used.

Voluntary Participation

You have the right to agree or refuse that your child participate in the study. You have the right to think about your decision. You do not have to decide today. You have the right to ask as many questions as you like, and I will take the time to answer them.

Who to Contact

Any questions that come into your mind can be asked now or later, even after the study has started. If you wish to ask any questions later, you may contact me by any of the following:

Malwina Barbara Wejher,
Address: Skógarvegur 18/203, 103 Reykjavik,
e-mail: mbw1@hi.is,
telephone: 866-9107

PART II: Informed Consent Authorization
I have been asked to give consent for my child to participate in this research study. The study involves completing an interview. I have read the above information and understand it. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and all of them have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily for my child to participate as a participant in this study.

Signature of Parent..........................................................................................................................

Date..........................................

Day/month/year
Appendix B:

Questions: Guideline for interviews

1. Will you tell me about yourself? (How old are you? How long have you been in Iceland? How long have you attended the Polish School? Your interests, hobbies?)

2. Why do you attend the Polish School? (What is the main reason for attending the Polish School?)

3. Tell me about the Polish School.
   - Do you like attending the Polish School? (Why?)
   - Tell me about teachers here in the Polish School.
   - Tell me about your classmates.
   - What do you like about the Polish School?
   - What do you not like about the Polish School?
   - What do you learn in the Polish School?
   - Tell me about learning Polish.

4. In what way does attending the Polish School help you in your daily life? (Any benefits associated with attending the Polish School?)

5. Do you think it is important to learn heritage (Polish) language? Why?

6. What are the disadvantages of attending the Polish School (Any problems, difficulties associated with attending the Polish School?)
Appendix C:

Observations-checklist

1. Students
   a. Total number of students in class
   b. Ages
   c. Student-student interactions
   d. Students’ engagement
   e. Students’ behaviour
2. Teacher
   a. In-class atmosphere
   b. Attitudes to students
   c. Learning support
   d. Organization of classes
   e. Teaching methods/activities
3. Free time
   a. Areas of occupancy
   b. Activities
   c. Atmosphere
   d. Interactions with others/integration
Appendix D:

Emerging Themes from interviews
Ethnic identity is a sense of belonging to an ethnic group. It refers to identification with thinking, feelings, opinions and behaviour that belong to a particular ethnic group.

Heritage language is a language that one identifies with personally (Aberdeen, 2016). Heritage language is most often learned at home and is sometimes not fully developed because of the second language that is official abroad (Brown, 2009). In the case of Polish adolescent immigrants, Heritage language means Polish.

Heritage Language Schools are schools that are established to teach heritage language and culture to the learners who do not live in their heritage country but identify with their heritage language or culture. Heritage language schools are often founded and supported by heritage language communities (Aberdeen, 2016). In the case of Polish adolescent immigrants, their Heritage Language School is Polish School in Reykjavík.

Host country is a country in which an immigrant actually lives, works or studies, other than their country of birth. For Polish Adolescent Immigrants, the host country is Iceland.

Immigrant is a person who moves from one country to another country in order to live, work or study.

Second language is used in the host country where the immigrant actually lives. In the case of Polish adolescent immigrants, the second language means Icelandic.

Self-esteem is a concept of positive regard one has for oneself. It is based on self-judgement, worth and importance and can be influenced by interactions with others. It refers to self-confidence. People with high self-esteem are effective, productive, confident and ambitious. Low self-esteem leads to isolation, lack of autonomy and responsible behaviour (On My Own Two Feet, 1997).