



School experiences of immigrant adolescents during lower secondary school in Iceland

*“...just because I could speak Icelandic doesn’t mean that all the girls
would be my friends ...”*

Gloria Zarela Castro Conde

February 2021

Thesis for a MA degree

Faculty of Education and Diversity



UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

**School experiences of immigrant adolescents during lower
secondary school in Iceland**

***“...just because I could speak Icelandic doesn't mean that all the girls would
be my friends...”***

Gloria Zarela Castro Conde

Thesis for 40 credit degree in International Studies in Education

Supervisor: Edda Óskarsdóttir

Co-Supervisor: Anna Katarzyna Wozniczka

Faculty of Education and Diversity
School of Education, University of Iceland

February 2021

School experiences of immigrant adolescents during lower secondary school in Iceland (“...just because I could speak Icelandic doesn’t mean that all the girls would be my friends...”)

This thesis satisfies 40 credits towards an MA
in International Studies in Education in the Faculty of Education and
Diversity,
University of Iceland, School of Education

© Gloria Zarela Castro Conde, 2021

This thesis may not be copied in any form without author permission.

Acknowledgements

This research has been an excellent opportunity to discover new skills and interests within myself. And the best lesson I keep close to my heart is that even from small ideas, dreams become realities when there is will, desire, opportunity and discipline.

To my supervisors Edda Óskarsdóttir and Anna Katarzyna Wozniczka: with your expertise and knowledge, you have inspired me and contributed to my hard work from the beginning to the end of this research project, which is finally complete.

Many thanks to the students and the teacher who participated in this research. Through your experiences, you are sharing knowledge and raising awareness in our society. I wish you all success in your future endeavors.

This thesis would never have been possible without the support of my husband Jón Þór: your encouragement and understanding are constants that I can rely upon. The same goes for my children, Luna Lind and Hlynur: your patience and respect for what I have been doing encouraged me every day to continue pursuing my dreams, because you are part of them.

My parents Gonzalo & Rosario, and my siblings, this is also for you.

Iceland, my second home: I will be always grateful for all the opportunities you are giving me.

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 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.

Reykjavík, February 20th, 2021

Gloria Zarela Castro Conde

Abstract

In a more globalized world, students with immigrant backgrounds are a fast-growing group in Icelandic schools. Many factors influence these students' decisions about the future, including whether to continue pursuing academic attainments. Among these factors are the support received from family members and teachers, friendships, social life, and how successful they have been in their education thus far. Although the debate on immigrant students' issues is developing in educational policy, research and practice in Iceland, limited attention has been given to adolescents with immigrant backgrounds.

This research aims to give a voice to immigrant adolescents in lower secondary schools in Iceland by presenting male and female experiences within the Icelandic educational system. Individual, semi-structured interviews with seven immigrant students were conducted in Reykjavík, the capital of Iceland. Additional data from an interview and informal discussions with one teacher were included.

In this research, immigrant students' responses to the reception program implemented by schools were positive regarding learning Icelandic and adjusting to Icelandic society. Research findings suggest that the significance of family support, school experiences, teachers' support, and peer and friendship relationships impact students' academic engagement. They are reflected in their attitude towards learning English rather than Icelandic. At the same time, this research demonstrates the interrelated influence from the factors mentioned before, indicating an impact projected in their attitudes towards schools and society, learning experiences, and future plans.

More emphasis is needed in preparing teachers for working with diverse students and developing support practices for students who learn Icelandic as a second language. These considerations would be to the benefit of both students with immigrant backgrounds and to Icelandic society.

Ágrip

Í alþjóðavæddari heimi, eru nemendur með alþjóðlegan bakgrunn ört vaxandi hópur í íslenskum skólum. Margir þætitir hafa áhrif á áframhaldandi árangur þeirra í námi. Meðal þessara þátta eru stuðningur frá fjölskyldu og kennurum, félagslíf og hve vel þeim hefur gengið fram að þessu. Þó að samtalið sem varðar erlenda nemendur er að þroskast í menntastefnu, rannsóknum og framkvæmd á Íslandi, þá hefur takmarkaðri athyggli verið beint að ungmennum af erlendum uppruna.

Rannsóknin miðar að því að gefa nemendum ef erlendum uppruna í efri stigum grunnskóla á Íslandi rödd með því að útlista upplifanir, bæði karl og kvenn nemenda, af menntakerfinu. Einstaklingsmiðuð viðtöl, að hluta strúkteruð, fóru fram í Reykjavík, höfuðborg Íslands. Viðbótar upplýsingar, viðtal og samtal við einn kennara er innifalið.

Viðbrögð nemenda í þessari rannsókn við móttökuáætlun vegna barna með íslensku sem annað tungumál í þeirra skóla voru jákvæð hvað varðar að læra íslensku, og að aðlagast íslensku samfélagi. Niðurstöður rannsókna benda til mikilvægis stuðnings fjölskyldna, upplifanna í skólanum, stuðnings kennara, ásamt tengsla við jafninga og vinasambönd hafa áhrif á námsárangur. Þau eru endurspegluð í viðmóti þess að læra ensku frekar en íslensku. Á sama tíma sýnir þessi rannsókn fram á samhengið áhrifavalda þeirra þátta sem hafa verið nefndir áður, sem bendir til áhrifa sem þeir hafa á viðhorf þessarar nemenda til skólans, samfélagsins, lærdómsreynslu og framtíðar áætlunum.

Meiri áhersla er þörf á að undirbúa kennara að starfa með fjölbreyttum nemendum og þróa með sér þann stuðning sem þarf til að aðstoða nemendur að læra íslensku sem annað tungumál. Sú nálgun væri til gagns fyrir bæði nemendur af erlendum uppruna og íslenskt samfélag í heild

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
ABSTRACT	4
ÁGRIP	5
TABLE OF CONTENTS	6
TABLE OF TABLES	8
1 INTRODUCTION.....	9
1.1 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH	12
1.2 PERSONAL BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY.....	13
1.3 RESEARCH STRUCTURE.....	14
2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	15
2.1 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ICELAND	15
2.2 ICELANDIC AS A SECOND LANGUAGE	18
2.2.1 <i>Reception program for new students</i>	20
2.2.2 <i>Immigrant students' cultural backgrounds</i>	21
2.3 ADOLESCENCE	22
2.3.1 <i>Gender differences</i>	23
2.3.2 <i>Parent-adolescent connection</i>	24
2.3.3 <i>Friends and peers connection</i>	25
2.3.4 <i>Teachers/mentor connection</i>	26
3 METHODOLOGY AND METHOD	28
3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	28
3.2 PHENOMENOLOGY RESEARCH	28
3.3 RECRUITMENT PROCESS	29
3.4 PARTICIPANTS.....	30
3.5 DATA COLLECTION	33
3.5.1 <i>Interviews with teenagers</i>	33
3.5.2 <i>Interview with a teacher</i>	35
3.6 DATA ANALYSIS.....	36
3.7 ETHICAL ISSUES.....	36
3.7.1 <i>Informed consent and privacy</i>	36
3.7.2 <i>Power relationships</i>	38
3.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH	39
4 FINDINGS.....	40
4.1 FAMILY MATTERS.....	40
4.1.1 <i>Connection with parents</i>	41
4.1.2 <i>Home rules</i>	43
4.1.3 <i>Cultural Background</i>	44
4.2 SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS.....	45
4.2.1 <i>Teachers support</i>	48
4.2.2 <i>A teacher who cares</i>	50
4.2.3 <i>Learning a second language</i>	53
4.3 BUILDING UP FRIENDSHIPS.....	55
4.4 LOOKING TO THE FUTURE.....	57
5 DISCUSSION	59

5.1	THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY SUPPORT	59
5.2	SCHOOL IS AN INCENTIVE.....	61
5.3	PEER AND FRIENDSHIP FACTORS.....	63
5.4	IT TAKES A COMMUNITY TO RAISE A CHILD	64
6	CONCLUSION	66
	REFERENCES	69
	APPENDIX A: ADVERTISEMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT.....	75
	APPENDIX B: PRESENTATION LETTER TO CONTACT IN MUNICIPALITY (IN ICELANDIC).....	76
	APPENDIX C: PRESENTATION LETTER TO TEACHERS (IN ICELANDIC).....	77
	APPENDIX D: PRESENTATION LETTER TO PARENTS	78
	APPENDIX E: APPROVAL FORM PARENT/CHILD	79
	APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS	80
	APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS WITH TEACHER (SPANISH/ ENGLISH).....	82

Table of Tables

Table 1. Information on Participants	31
--	----

1 Introduction

Many societies are facing increasing challenges, particularly when it comes to education, aiming to provide equal learning opportunities to all students regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, economic status, or cultural background (Hallahan, Kauffman & Pullen, 2014). With increased immigration in Iceland, immigrant adolescents are a growing population group, having a relevant impact both on the society and especially on the Icelandic educational system. Statistics Iceland (2009a) defines an immigrant as a person born abroad with both parents and grandparents foreign-born. According to the most current number by Statistics Iceland, this group represents 12.6% of the total Icelandic population (2020b).

During the last decade, the number of students with various immigrant backgrounds has been growing steadily (Statistics Iceland, 2020b). Today these students, mainly located in the capital area of Reykjavík, comprise 10.6% of the total student population (Statistics Iceland, 2020b). The Icelandic school system is based on inclusion, stating that all students should have access to education regardless of their abilities (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). However, a 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report states a gap between immigrant students' achievements in school compared to that of their native-born counterparts (OECD, 2018). For example, the results presented in the report on Iceland's education policy outlook (OECD, 2016), states that immigrant students scored 10 points lower in mathematics than native-born students. At the same, differences in other subjects were also found.

According to studies (Rumberger, 2011; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2009), immigrant adolescents face many challenges in the process of establishing a new life in the host society, exposing their vulnerability in different sensitive situations. Immigrant adolescents' vulnerability may be reflected in many aspects of their lives, such as having a higher risk of dropping out of school, discontinuing higher education, and having lower economic attainment in the future (Rumberger, 2011). Behind this vulnerability, there are different influencing factors that connect to students' relationships. The extent of the support that students receive from family members, friends, peers, teachers and others is one of these influential factors (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009).

In response to the concerns and demands from the education system about the PISA results regarding immigrant students' academic performances, the Municipality of Reykjavík, according to the Compulsory Act 2008/91 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014), implemented a program entitled "Móttökuáætlun vegna barna með íslensku sem annað tungumál" (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020), or in English, "Reception program for children with

Icelandic as a second language". In this reception program, many circumstances are taken into account to support students with a mother tongue other than Icelandic. Among these is the support the parents and family members receive (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020). This reception program provides the connection between the families and the Icelandic society. A designated mentor offers the family all sorts of information, from essential services about schools and their rules to places such as hospitals, the municipality, police station, stores, public transport, etc., to leisure activities and legal advice (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020).

All compulsory schools in each municipality must have a reception program for students who have a mother tongue other than Icelandic (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014), presenting them with an opportunity to develop their individual academic skills and scaffold over other skills which will help improve their knowledge of Icelandic as a second language. This reception program's guidelines describe the support of mother tongues and active plurilingualism in schools and afterschool programs (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2020). The guidelines refer to the diversity of existing mother tongues within Icelandic schools, defining "mother tongue" as the first language a child uses in communication with others, feels comfortable using, and has a fair competence in. Thus, the term active plurilingualism is employed to mean the active use of two or more languages. Children can simultaneously develop two or more languages if they utilize those skills, whether reading, listening, speaking, or writing (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2020). Although being plurilingual brings many benefits to the person, developing a language requires adequate motivation and needs to be encouraged according to individual interest (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2020). Children who are exposed to two or more languages other than Icelandic show different competence levels in those languages (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2020). Therefore, it is essential for the further development of fluency in Icelandic to engage these students while learning, by giving them positive feedback on their progress and achievements. In this way, the subject of Icelandic as a second language should be taught according to Icelandic levels suggested by the curriculum guide of compulsory schools in Iceland (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). In order to meet students' needs, it is essential that schools provide diverse teaching methods, as well as helping students to participate in school activities with their peers.

Moreover, there is little information about how successful the reception program or afterschool activities have been in facilitating the integration of immigrant students with a mother tongue other than Icelandic into a familiar learning environment. The same applies to integration into the mainstream classroom, where immigrant students feel comfortable attending classes and, when given the same opportunities as their classmates, can

accomplish elementary or further studies. Research also shows that involvement and the support that these students receive from their parents, teachers or friends are determinants for their successful academic outcomes (Harðardóttir, Júlíusdóttir & Guðmundsson, 2015).

By the autumn of 2019, according to Statistics Iceland (2020a), the number of immigrant students in compulsory Icelandic schools reached its highest to date. Statistics Iceland also notes that at school start 2020, 770 new students were 2-10th grade students who had a foreign mother tongue and spoke Icelandic as a second language. Statistics (Statistics Iceland, 2020a) show that in 1997 there were 377 students with immigrant backgrounds in Icelandic compulsory schools, and by 2015 this group of students had reached 3,543 in number – a tenfold increase in just under two decades. This number continues to grow every year. In the autumn of 2019, a total of 5,343 students had a foreign mother tongue (11.6%), an increase of 469 students from the previous year. An average of 19 students with a foreign mother tongue are in each grade in compulsory school and usually 9th grade congregates more students with a foreign mother tongue (Statistics Iceland, 2020a). The most common non-Icelandic mother tongue spoken in compulsory schools is Polish. In decreasing order, the next most common are Filipino, English, Lithuanian, Thai, Arabic and Spanish (Statistics Iceland, 2020a).

Research suggests (Statistics Iceland, 2019) that if an educational system does not offer the necessary support for immigrant students with different needs, many of them might not find a way of overcoming adversity or being successful in further education, such as upper and/or higher education. This support is particularly influential during the stage of adolescence when other developmental changes such as physical, emotional and psychological changes, among others, are occurring (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). According to Statistics Iceland (2020d), the graduation rates in the upper secondary level of education are different depending on the students' backgrounds (Statistics Iceland, 2019). If we compare the percentage of completion rate in upper secondary schools, 35.6% of immigrants versus 62.4% of native-born students, the difference is quite significant (Statistics Iceland, 2021). Almost double the amount of native-born graduated compared to immigrants. Moreover, there is a 51.6% dropout rate for immigrants compared to 20.2% for native born (Statistics Iceland, 2021). Among European countries participating in the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, in the Icelandic context dropouts are shown with a high rate of 20% (2017). These numbers underline that special attention has to be paid to the immigrant population in order to understand what is causing these differences in completion and dropout rates, and what can be done to improve those rates.

Therefore, my research will focus on immigrant adolescents in lower secondary school education in Iceland. This group has plenty of challenges to face in school. It is underrepresented in Icelandic society as well as in studies and literature. Despite all the psychological, cognitive, and physical changes happening during adolescence (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009), studies and literature on immigrant adolescents in Iceland are limited. Qualitative research, and more specifically, interviews of immigrant students, is an optimal way of gaining a deeper understanding of the circumstances and challenges they have to face on a daily basis. In turn, this research will increase awareness about the support they need in order to succeed academically and participate fully in society. Such research can also help us to analyze and potentially improve the professional work implemented in schools, thus making the school system better prepared to find solutions, improve the school services, and move forward (Messiou, 2012).

1.1 Purpose of the research

With this research, I intend to give immigrant adolescents a voice and safe space to discuss their experiences during their years in lower secondary education. I will present the insights from immigrant adolescents who have received assistance through the reception program in Icelandic schools. Physical, emotional and psychological changes, along with external factors such as family context, school environment and social life, combine to impact adolescents' decision-making (Rumberger, 2011). For example, relationships with family and friends and teachers' expectations represent a considerable impact on students' academic achievements (Holmström & Knowles, 2013; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). In some instances, experiences from these factors can become a negative influence. When the student lacks academic support, combined with a lack of personal/emotional support from other relationships, the situation might adversely affect their interest in engaging in future studies. As these negative experiences accrete during a student's life, their likelihood of dropping out of school increases (Rumberger, 2011).

Having said that, my interest lies in studying how relationships, such as personal/emotional support from family, friends, peers and teachers, influence the well-being of immigrant students and possibly impact both their success in school and the continuation of their studies. To explore this focus, my main research questions are:

- How do immigrant students experience the relationships /support received at school?
- How do immigrant students experience the relationships with / support received from parents and friends?

1.2 Personal background to the study

As an immigrant myself, this topic is personally relevant to me. Having lived in Iceland for more than a decade, it has taken me years to adjust to the Icelandic society and feel at home. I have experienced first-hand the different behaviors and attitudes from Icelandic society towards my evident physical differences, sometimes finding them positive and other times not so positive. My mother tongue is Spanish, English is my second language, and I am learning Icelandic at the University of Iceland. These three languages are used by my husband and I interchangeably with our children at home. Personally, it is taking me time to learn and communicate fluently in Icelandic because I find the grammatical structure a challenge since it is different from my mother tongue. On the other hand, I have friends and acquaintances who have learnt Icelandic faster than others and know more languages. Thus, my experience and observations highlight how skills and achievements vary from person to person, according to their individual way of learning as well as their exposure, use and practice of the language.

During my five years of study at the University of Iceland in the International Studies in Education Program in English, I found a place where I could meet people who were in the same situation as mine. We all used English as our second language, and some of us had children born in Iceland. Since the start of my studies, I have been interested in special education, multiculturalism and diversity. These interests drew me to take engaging courses in Icelandic as well because they were necessary for my studies. However, when we plan something thoroughly, life takes other turns, as did the subject of my thesis.

When I was set to commence the research as part of my master's program completion, my focus was on the experiences of immigrant adolescents with learning disabilities in lower secondary schools in Iceland. However, in the course of finding participants for my previous plan on learning disabilities, I could not find the required number of volunteers for my research, and time was running out. Nevertheless, there were many volunteers without learning disabilities who were possible participants in the immigrant group of students. Therefore, the group did not have learning disabilities but rather were students with different levels of proficiency in the local language, Icelandic. At that time, I felt compelled to switch my topic of interest, as I struggled somehow with the language myself. I can relate to the circumstances of being a newcomer in a society, having experienced the difficulties that arise with it. When one moves to a new country it is like starting a new life. Everything is new: finding a place to fit in a society, making new friends, the environment, neighbours, personal space and language are some of the key areas that we as immigrants need to find or adjust to, to name but a few. These conditions can be overwhelming, and sometimes they

might be experienced as a threat. As adolescence is a unique stage in life, when our bodies and hormones are changing, quite a lot of things might become unstable. Fitting in becomes essential when everything around seems to crumble and is inconsistent. Based on my own experience as an immigrant, having Icelandic as a third language has influenced me and will affect my interpretation of the experiences of immigrant adolescents in lower secondary school in Iceland. The criteria for my participants and interview formats changed slightly, but I ended up with an important topic that is relevant to Icelandic society in the globalized times ahead.

1.3 Research structure

In Chapter 1, I present the introductory part of the fundamental research, which includes the purpose of the study, the personal background to the study and the research structure. Chapter 2 describes the conceptual framework, inclusive education, and Icelandic as a second language. I discuss this in reference to how it has been implemented in the Icelandic educational system through policies and structures. I also discuss the reception program for new immigrant students in Icelandic schools and the impact of adolescence on their educational experiences.

In Chapter 3, the method and methodology, I explain the reasons behind choosing phenomenological qualitative research and describe the participants' characteristics. This section consists of immigrant students in lower secondary school in Iceland. The possible ethical issues that might arise while preparing and carrying out the research and limitations of the research are also presented.

Chapter 4 outlines the findings of the research from my data analysis in four main themes. The first theme is family matters, with sub-themes dealing with students' connections with their parents, home rules and cultural background. The second theme is the school environment and relationships, under sub-themes such as teachers' support, a teacher who cares and learning a second language. The third theme is building relationships. The fourth central theme is looking to the future.

In Chapter 5, discussion and conclusions are discussed in the form of the importance of family support, school as an incentive, and peer and friendship factors.

In Chapter 6, the thesis's conclusions are presented, along with a reflection on the research. Lessons learned and suggestions for further studies are discussed as well.

2 Conceptual framework

In this chapter, I will present the foundational ideas of this research. The literature review is divided into three aspects. The first aspect is regarding inclusive education in Iceland. The second aspect is about Icelandic as a second language and the implementation of the reception program by the Municipality of Reykjavík for students with another mother tongue. As part of the second aspect, the cultural background is also considered. The third aspect is regarding the stage of adolescence. I am considering factors such as gender differences, parent-adolescent connection, friends and peer connection, and teachers/mentor connection within these aspects. The conceptual framework will make me understand and analyze the concepts in order to interpret and present the data for this research.

2.1 Inclusive education in Iceland

The Icelandic education system is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2012). Education is provided mostly by the public sector, but there are also a number of private institutions operating as compulsory schools (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2020).

The levels of education in Iceland are divided into the following groups,

- Preschool education (leikskóli). During this stage children are under the age of 6. Children should be provided with instruction based on tolerance, care and respect for their upbringing. Children will be encouraged to learn through playing and creative activities, promoting their autonomy (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2020).
- Compulsory school education (grunnskóli). In this group, children are aged between 6 and 16 years old. Compulsory school is generally ten years of duration as it comprises primary and lower secondary school (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2020). Typically, students begin their studies in compulsory school in the year they turn six years old and complete their education the year they turn 16 years old, with some exceptions. Students continue studies in each grade progressively, regardless of their academic achievements, based upon the fundamental pillars of education in Iceland: literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality and creativity (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). Students will be competent in Icelandic, which is also the case for students with another mother tongue and for those whose language is sign language.

The main aim of compulsory education is the development and general education of the individual based on knowledge, skill and competence. Compulsory schools choose to implement competence criteria in their activities following the Icelandic National Curriculum guidance, as it states:

In the National Curriculum Guide special chapters stipulate the content and organization of studies in Icelandic or Icelandic as second language or Icelandic sign language, mathematics, English, Danish or other Nordic languages, artistic and practical subjects, natural sciences, physical education, social sciences, equal rights affairs, religious studies, life skills and information and communication technology. The subjects and subject areas of the compulsory school are aids so that pupils can achieve the competence criteria laid out in the National Curriculum Guide. (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012, p.38)

- Upper secondary education (framhaldsskóli). The students in this stage are between 16 and 20 years of age. This level is the continuation of studies after completing compulsory schools. General education at this level is an organized course that may be four years in duration. Thus, the time of studies may also vary from one semester to ten semesters (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2020). The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary School (2012a) stipulates supporting students with a mother tongue other than Icelandic as a continuation from the Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools that is based on the six pillars of education in Iceland: literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality and creativity. Its aim is also to encourage education to all citizens, promoting the relevant support according to the student's needs. This level of studies presents different choices in a variety of programs "regarding general education, artistic studies, academic and vocational studies" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2020a, p.30). Vocational training takes place under teacher supervision, implementing different practices and approaches. However, as the core subjects require a minimum qualification of competence – where competence 1 is the basic qualification – in Icelandic, Mathematics and English, many students who do not meet these basic levels of competence may be at high risk of dropping out of school (Statistics Iceland, 2020d).
- Higher education (háskóli). This level is stipulated by Article 5, Act No. 63/2006 on higher education and degree guidelines based on learning outcomes and is directed at students between 19-20 years of age and older (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011).

Education in Iceland is highly accessible for all students. The system works under the premise of Education for All (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017; UNESCO, 1994), embracing students under different conditions and including most of them in mainstream schools. Learning and teaching in the Icelandic educational system are based on the six fundamental pillars mentioned in the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools: literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality and creativity (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). The National Curriculum Guide (2012) provides information on implementing the role of compulsory schools and policies. It includes suggestions to subjects and timetables, allowing each compulsory school to make their own decisions on how to organize their subjects and the methods to use under this implementation (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2012).

According to The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools, teachers should assist students through individual evaluation, explaining the aims of education and their progress (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). When it comes to students whose mother tongue is other than Icelandic, the guide states that teachers should consider their background, language skills and competence in the subjects under study (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). At the same time, the students who are not native-born Icelandic should be credited for their knowledge in their mother tongue (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). Both students and parents should be provided with advice and access to information about the school's activities (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012).

Regarding inclusive education, all students have the right to education in a place where they feel respected for their values (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2019; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017). Based on the fundamental pillar of Democracy and Human Rights in the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide:

Respect for the human value and health of children and youth involves both respect for their human rights and acceptance of their talents and possibilities for development, attitudes, values and ethics are essential factors in education for democracy and are at the same time an intrinsic part of other fundamental pillars of education. Schools are to cultivate the attitude that society is to be democratic and individuals are to be critical and have a vision of the future. (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012, p.19)

Students' interests and responsibilities regarding their own education are encouraging, corresponding to the guidance of the Equality pillar in the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide, as it states:

Equality education refers to both the content of education, study methods and learning environment. Equality is an umbrella concept that involves a number of factors. The following are some of these factors in an alphabetical order: age, class, culture, descent, gender, disability, language, nationality, outlook on life, race, religion, residence, sexual orientation. At every school level, education for equality should address how these factors can establish discrimination and privileges for people. (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012, p.20).

The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools should provide support to all students who face challenges in academic performance. Including those having emotional or social problems, facilitating the opportunity to develop skills according to everyone's individual capabilities. According to Article 40, Compulsory School Act No. 91/2008 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014), municipalities shall ensure special services in each school and provide assistance to the parents and the students in the classroom.

Inclusive education is an ideal concept to implement in schools as it challenges teachers in their search for practices to implement in a diverse classroom (Guðjónsdóttir & Óskarsdóttir, 2016). Inclusive education refers to all the students' rights to receive the same education in an equitable manner, according to their individual abilities, backgrounds and strengths (Guðjónsdóttir & Óskarsdóttir, 2016). Despite being widely understood as a factor to increasing participation of all students in the classroom, some disagree that it is challenging to educate all children together in the same classroom (Florian, 2015). This debate is ongoing, even when there is an agreement in principle (Florian, 2015). However, it is vital to highlight the benefits that inclusive education brings, not only to those involved with the students and the schools, but also the benefit of making us all more socially conscious (Slee, 2011). Some of the benefits include diminishing exclusion from local culture and community, and an improved curriculum of mainstream schools to suit these students' needs.

2.2 Icelandic as a second language

Language skills are important for communication and for managing human relationships, as well as for academic purposes. Cummins (2012) refers to the correlation of proficiency in the

mother tongue (first language) with proficiency in the second language – the ‘interdependence hypothesis’ – indicating the following:

To the extent that instruction in Lx (first language) is effective in promoting proficiency in Lx (first language), transfer of this proficiency to Ly (second language) will occur provided there is adequate exposure to Ly (second language) (either in school or environment) and adequate motivation to learn Ly (second language). (Cummins, 2012, p. 1980)

This states that if a student develops reading skills in one language, these are correlated with reading skills in the other language. Thus, when it comes to students who do not have Icelandic as a mother tongue, in order to develop further skills and improve their academic skills in Icelandic, it is important for them to gain more knowledge in their mother tongue or the language they use the most (Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory School, 2012). However, many immigrant students’ native languages differ greatly in terms of grammatical structure, which increases their challenge in learning Icelandic (Cole, Hermon & Yanti, 2015).

For students with a mother tongue other than Icelandic, schools should implement a system that works best for each individual. According to the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools (2012), students who show difficulties in understanding or expressing themselves during the process of integration into an Icelandic school are under the guidance of a school reception program. In this reception program they should receive information with the guidance of specialized personnel, as well as personalized classes in Icelandic (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020).

The results of the latest PISA test of 2018 indicate that the performance of students with Icelandic as a second language in skills like reading comprehension in Icelandic is low and is deteriorating (OECD, 2018). These results are a crucial indicator of what is lacking, since reading comprehension improves the use of language for other subjects. The study points out that students in this group do not receive appropriate support for learning Icelandic (OECD, 2018). At the same time, there is a high dropout rate in upper secondary schools as a result of lack of proficiency in reading comprehension in the Icelandic language (OECD, 2018). However, it is also stated that greater effort is present in meeting the needs of struggling students during their learning process (OECD, 2018). Nonetheless, since 2018, implementation of reception programs has started on multicultural issues for students in some schools, orchestrated by the Icelandic Language committee (Daníelsdóttir & Skogland, 2018). The increasing number of students in these reception groups presents a challenge for the staff in charge (Daníelsdóttir & Skogland, 2018).

2.2.1 Reception program for new students

The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools (2012) mentions that each municipality is responsible for implementing a reception program for new students.

According to Article 16 in the Compulsory Schools Act, no. 91/2008, regarding reception of new students who do not have Icelandic as a mother tongue:

Compulsory schools receive students who are starting school, changing schools or starting their studies in Iceland, according to the school or municipality's reception program. At that juncture, parents shall be provided with information about the child's schooling and schoolwork in general, and parents with a mother tongue other than Icelandic and deaf parents shall be informed of their right to interpretation services. (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014)

The reception program for new students with a mother tongue other than Icelandic is designed to address the rights of the students, including their right to attend school in the district of their residency as is stated in Article 17 of the Compulsory Schools Act, no. 91/2008 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014). The reception program should be adapted to the students' individual situations, considering their background, language skills and command in other subjects (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020). Students and parents receive coordinated appointments to provide them with relevant information about compulsory school (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020). The information exchange provides knowledge of all the necessary material for the student and his/her family needs in order to help them become familiar with the Icelandic system through an intermediary individual, who will then become the contact assigned by the Municipality of Reykjavík (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020). This intermediary will manage issues for the children in question.

Parents should be provided with information such as the student's registration, leisure activities, information and rules of the school, in the presence of the supervising mentor who will be working with the assigned student (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020). Personal interviews with the students are also part of the academic and psychological evaluation, in order to position the student in the most convenient division and with the mentor with whom the students will work in the school of their residency (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020). Parents and students will be provided with a translator, if required (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020).

As these groups of students have diverse backgrounds, each school should adapt the reception program to each student's needs. Bilingualism will be encouraged under any situation, as academic skills are built upon the student's mother

tongue. In this way, the reception program becomes the principal connection between the family and Icelandic society, which in many cases is the only contact. (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020)

The purpose of the reception program interview, where students' academic and personal background are presented, is the exchange and update of information about the students and the school's rules and routines, e.g., what students should bring to the school, like sport clothing and swimming wear, as well as lunchtime and information about leisure activities or participation of parents in school, their responsibilities with their children's academic development, and more (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020).

Cultural support is also presented in the reception program (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020), as students need the support to be active participants in Iceland, their new society. Parents are encouraged to nurture their own culture and mother tongue and might find support in immigrant associations that promote multilingualism as part of the Icelandic society (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020).

2.2.2 Immigrant students' cultural backgrounds

Cultural background factors and limited proficiency in local language may result in students being diagnosed with disabilities (Hallahan et al., 2014; IDEA, 2004). For example, students who are not fluent in the local language may manifest difficulties while learning the language. In addition to the difficulties of learning a new language, they have to negotiate the new environment using a different language than their mother tongue (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). As all cultures have, among other characteristics, their own values and social behaviors, differences in ethnicity may play a role in identifying skills of a different level compared to those raised in the local setting (Hallahan et al., 2014).

Culture is described by Edward T. Hall as resembling an iceberg, where the tip of the iceberg shows only what is visible to everyone, with the larger part of the iceberg hidden under water and therefore not visible (Devarakonda, 2013, p. 55). Examples of hidden values are religion, beliefs or ways of thinking, which are the basis of behavior, attitudes or practices between people of a particular culture (Devarakonda, 2013). Thus, as immigrant adolescents are influenced by their parents' values and their cultural backgrounds, all encounters in the schools should be carried out by tactful measurements that take into account different cultural views and moral values.

Aronson & Laughter (2016) point out that *cultural relevant education* in teaching practices stands by the teacher's response and disposition to teach effectively students with various backgrounds. The authors (Aronson & Laughter, 2016) suggest that consideration

should be taken in terms of the perspectives of students and communities, to understand what opposite or agreeable ideas are present on the issue of diversity in order to analyze their own methods and material, in this way gaining knowledge and finding better ways of how to improve their own practices.

It is usually common to find families involved in their children's education; however, under the educational path, families can also find discrepancies with their own cultural values or beliefs, feel ignored or marginalized and misinterpreted by the families' own ruling, or else be difficult or not want to be involved (Holmström & Knowles, 2013).

In other cases, parents work long hours in order to make a living, disengaging from their children and allowing their children to live their lives more independently without their emotional support, creating a whole new role for the adolescent (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). For example, in some households, parents expect their children to work right after compulsory school in order to help them financially, or to take charge of younger siblings. Under other circumstances, some students prefer to be independent financially from their parents and move on, limiting their studies and aspirations (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009).

2.3 Adolescence

Adolescence is a unique stage of life that entails many simultaneous psychological, cognitive, and physical changes. Studies show that being prosperous in physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional and social development will lead to positive youth development (Bowers, Forman, Lerner & Phelps, 2009). Moreover, as the brain transitions from concrete to more abstract thinking, adolescents' spirit of independence and autonomy increase, along with the need to detach themselves from their parents' authority (Lorain, 2016). External factors such as home, school, and neighborhood environments have a determining influence on an adolescent's decision and future attainments during her/his lifespan (Rumberger, 2011).

Adolescence is the time to explore independence and autonomy while discovering oneself and becoming a young adult. Despite the feeling of detachment from their parents, adolescents still want their parents to be involved and be connected to their lives, even though they rely more on friends (Riera, 2017). Adolescents need the support of family in factors such as building self-esteem or receiving advice in making decisions (Riera, 2017). Gender differences are noteworthy during adolescence, because social stereotypes are constructed as impositions upon us (Riera, 2017). We also need to consider the basic differences in gender roles within families (Riera, 2017). Studies show that in some immigrant households specific home duties or responsibilities are divided by gender, as in

some families, girls tend to be required to contribute to household duties (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009).

In many cases, cultural background and personal values will often predetermine and influence adolescents' decisions over different aspects of their lives (Riera, 2017). Because cultural values are transmitted by parents to children, parents' moral values become the backbone of their children's moral values (Holmström & Knowles, 2013). As immigrant adolescents start acquiring more independence and detach themselves from their parents, they rely increasingly on relationships outside the home environment. As a result, friendships become a priority during this stage of life, creating the person's social network (Riera, 2017; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). Under other situations, adolescents' responses towards their environment turn into a more autonomous development with the capacity to interpret their own points of view, and stressful situations may occur in the parent-adolescent relationship (Holmström & Knowles, 2013). Furthermore, conflicts between parents and adolescents may appear when differences with the local culture gain influence over the adolescent (Li & Warner, 2015).

2.3.1 Gender differences

During adolescence, gender plays a big role, especially in an adolescent's social life. Gender defines social circles and relationships, influencing the adolescents' choices, activities and behavior in their environment (Riera, 2017). However, consideration should be taken between the complexity and ambiguity that fluctuates in gender experiences in immigrant adolescents. It has been shown (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009) that boys and girls have different responses under situations that affect them daily. For instance, there is a tendency for the first-born child or daughters to have the responsibility to help parents with home chores, whereas boys are allowed to have more freedom. Consequently, it is suggested that having more responsibilities at home may trigger girls to engage more with their studies, whereas boys may find it more appealing to invest time in social life (Rumberger, 2011). These differences are present not only in academic achievements, but also in how adolescents perceive external factors that influence their environment (Riera, 2017).

It is shown (Lopez-Agudo, Marcenaro-Gutierrez & Roper-García, 2017) that boys tend to misbehave more than girls in school. Girls tend to aspire to be recognized by teachers, thus gaining more self-esteem, while boys have the tendency of showing more defiant behavior towards the authority (Lopez-Agudo, Marcenaro-Gutierrez & Roper-García, 2017). On the one hand, in some cases it is suggested that boys' academic achievements are susceptible to external factors such as socio-economic changes (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). For example, some students have to balance their time and energy between their studies and jobs, and in

other cases, students stopped studying because they have to contribute to the home income, which can be beneficial in keeping them away from engaging in unfavorable behavior such as consumption of drugs or alcohol, or from participating in vandalism under peer pressure (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). On the other hand, some students will exchange their studies for a job because they felt unsatisfied with their academic results and by working, they feel more accomplished than in school (Lopez-Agudo, Marcenaro-Gutierrez & Ropero-García, 2017). Girls tend to have more supportive people around them and be more serious about their schoolwork, whereas boys tend to be less understood by teachers (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017). Boys tend to engage in deviant behaviors because of peer pressure and be stigmatized by the biases and misconceptions of others (Marcenaro-Gutierrez, et al., 2017; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). The differences between genders in adolescents are also pointed out, by their ways of communication and social relationships among them (Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al., 2017; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009).

Research (Green et al., 2008) originating in countries that have an extended history of multiculturalism in their societies suggests that request of support in the school varies by gender. Boys tend to be overlooked by school staff when there is a tendency to be stereotyped by prejudgement and with the use of unnecessary discipline, whereas girls tend to request support from the staff member when they have conflicts or academic challenges (Green et al., 2008). Searching for such help could be a sign of vulnerability in boys if gender-role behaviors are driven as differentiators for some cultures; for example, crying will be a sign of weakness (Green et al., 2008). Likewise, interventions and support by mentors are crucial for immigrant students, highlighting productive practices that encourage students to get accustomed with the time (Green et al., 2008).

2.3.2 Parent-adolescent connection

As children step into adolescence, supervising becomes an ever-active duty for parents (Abdullah, Eliasa, Gaika, & Ullia, 2010). In addition, depending on how the parents stand in their role in communication and connection, this will have an impact on the adolescent's behavior and personal decision making (Steinberg, 2001). According to (Calafat, García, Montse, Becoña & Fernández-Hermida, 2013) parenting styles are so influential that they transcend ethnicity, socioeconomic status and home composition. For these reasons, Calafat et al. (2013) established four parental styles within the European context: authoritative (parents who are warm and strict), authoritarian (parents who are strict but not warm), indulgent (parents who are warm but not strict) and neglectful (parents who are neither warm nor strict). Others (Baezconde-Garbanati, Carlo, Davis, Schwartz, Streit, Unger, &

Szapocznik, 2018) point out that parents' cultural background and values are predictors for adolescents' own cultural values, even though they are living in a different environment to the parents' birthplace. Thus, it is important to consider the immigrant students' households, as they bring their own cultural backgrounds to a new place (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009), such as school.

Children's developmental progress shows the significant influence of parenting styles. The effects of positive and negative parenting styles may show repercussions according to cultural backgrounds (Davis et al., 2018). For example, physical punishment and discipline may play an important positive role in one culture, but for another it might be seen a negative method for a parent to use (Adams, Reissland & Sangawi, 2018). However, it is not clear how significant the effects of parenting styles in different cultures are (Adams, Reissland & Sangawi, 2018). It is valuable to consider other interference factors that may affect immigrant students, such as socio-economic status, language, level of education and family functioning (Crosnoe & Fuligni, 2012; Lareau, 2011).

2.3.3 Friends and peers connection

As a child grows up and gains more personal independence during adolescence, the detachment from parents emerges naturally and has an impact on the parent-child relationship (Riera, 2017). On the one hand, when adolescents develop a more rational view of the world the idealization of parents decreases and they rely more on themselves and on friendships and relationships outside their family circle (Bornstein, Hendricks, Jager, Putnick & Yuen, 2015; Riera, 2017). On the other hand, when proper detachment from parents fails, this can inhibit the proper development of relationships with peers (Jager et al., 2015). Steinberg (2001) presents friendship as an important external factor that influences adolescents' decisions. Friendship provides an exclusive motivation for social life (Jager et al., 2015). Adolescents tend to choose those with whom they have similar interests and inclinations; thus, it is during this stage of life that adolescents adopt styles, values and interests they have shared with peers (Jager et al., 2015).

At the same time, adolescents feel the pressure from others of trying to fit in, taking seriously what others think of them, because it is a defense mechanism to avoid rejection (Monahan & Steinberg, 2007). Peer pressure can be beneficial for some groups of adolescents. Peer pressure to participate in activities and develop personal interests such as sports can help adolescents avoid risky behavior (Monahan & Steinberg, 2007). Risk behavior in adolescents consists of activities that put their well-being in danger, such as delinquency and abuse of alcohol or drugs (Steinberg, 2001). It is also demonstrated (Monahan & Steinberg, 2007) that gender has a significant influence on adolescents, i.e., girls tend to be

more autonomous in self beliefs, standing up more for themselves than boys, which helps them avoid risk behavior (Monahan & Steinberg, 2007).

Research in the Icelandic context regarding immigrant adolescents in schools is limited. Recent research (Rafik Hama, 2020; Rúnarsdóttir & Tran, 2020) about students with immigrant backgrounds has pointed out issues related to the conceptual framework for this research. Rafik Hama (2020) and Rúnarsdóttir & Tran (2020) indicate that young people of foreign origin prefer to continue friendship with people of similar background as they find it difficult to build friendship with Icelandic peers.

2.3.4 Teachers/mentor connection

Article 28 of the Compulsory School Act 91/2008 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014) states that the instruction term in compulsory schools should be nine months per year. It should include 180 days of school attendance, and the schedule's organization should be decided by the head teacher (OECD, 2014). So, the minimum time spent per week per student in lower secondary school should be 1,480 minutes. On average, most students in lower secondary school spend a minimum of five hours a day inside a classroom, a considerable portion of their daily activities (OECD, 2014). Thus, school is the environment where students not only learn academic subjects, but also where they learn social skills, including through their relationships with teachers. For example, teachers spend time regularly with their students during weekdays in different settings and have a different kind of relationship with them than parent-student (Gurdal & Sorbring, 2018). Therefore, the emotional support that teachers provide is as important to their social well-being and academic attainments as students' perceptions of their teachers (Hogekamp, Blomster, Bursalioglu, Calin, Cetincelik, Haastrup & Van den Berg, 2016; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). Students whose perception of their teachers was supportive and positive had better academic attainments, as teachers' attitudes towards their students tend to determine whether inclusion or exclusion is practiced within the classroom environment (Hogekamp et al, 2016). Thus, a positive and caring relationship between teacher and student promotes connection, a sense of belonging and community within school settings, which can result in successful academic achievements and engagement (Newcomer, 2018).

As the number of immigrants from different societies has increased in Icelandic society, the student population in schools has become more diverse. However, little attention has been given in educational research to this group of immigrant adolescents and their relationship with teachers, or to other forms of support, in lower secondary school. Thus, the following chapter will introduce the method and methodology for this research study, to

better understand the situation of this group of students in Icelandic lower secondary schools.

3 Methodology and method

As the literature suggests (Rumberger, 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009), immigrant adolescents face various challenges that might influence their academic achievements. By addressing the issues of immigrant adolescents in lower secondary schools, it will contribute to improving the Icelandic educational system in a more sustainable manner.

In this chapter, I explain the research design, the research questions and the research methodology, as well as the recruitment process, interviews with participants, data collection, data analysis, and ethical issues.

3.1 Research questions

With the aim of giving immigrant adolescents a voice and safe space to discuss their experiences during their years of study in lower secondary education, the following questions were formulated to guide this research:

- How do immigrant students experience the relationships / support received at school?
- How do immigrant students experience the relationships with / support received from parents and friends?

3.2 Phenomenology research

The methodology used for this research is phenomenological qualitative research, which is considered to be a reliable method for any study seeking understanding of individual experiences, including the factors that influence specific outcomes (Creswell, 2018). Phenomenological research focuses on a concept, idea, or phenomenon through the experiences of the participants in a specific situation (Creswell, 2018; Stan, 1999). Phenomenological qualitative research intends to explore the relationship or comparison between ideas, which cannot always be foreseen. It is therefore important to consider the flexibility of the research, especially in cases where statements and questions lead to something different to what was expected at the outset (Creswell, 2018). The intention is to establish detailed information and the meaning behind what each participant is trying to communicate, with the emphasis on the participants' personal perspectives and meanings, rather than generalizing all the answers by different participants (Creswell, 2012; Stan, 1999).

The phenomenological aspect is beneficial for providing more comprehensive information in respect to culture-sharing, giving the participants space to explain their personal experiences while living in an unfamiliar or new context, with different behavior

modes, attitudes of people, and other issues that vulnerable groups in society experience (Creswell, 2018). In this way, phenomenological research enables information from the research findings to be part of a practical theory, providing support to improve policies and practices (Ghirotto, 2016; Stan, 1999).

3.3 Recruitment process

In this section, I introduce how the participants were recruited for the interviews. As previously stated, the focus of this research study is on immigrant adolescents in lower secondary schools in Iceland whose mother tongue is other than Icelandic. Two methods were used to recruit participants. The first was snowball sampling, which consisted of gathering contacts who then become the connection to the sought-after participants (Creswell, 2012), through personal social networking. Online activity is part of the real live connection among people, and Facebook was a relevant tool to find my participants through the snowball sampling method (Baltar & Brunet, 2011). For the purpose of recruitment, I created an online advertisement (see Appendix A) aimed at immigrant students with learning disabilities (my original research focus, as explained in Chapter 1.2). This advertisement (see Appendix A) was translated into two languages (Spanish and English) and was published in different groups on Facebook, linked to groups within the vicinity of Reykjavík. Besides online social networking, the second method was the traditional way of connecting with the participants' parents through the school authorities in the greater Reykjavik area. I wrote presentation letters, one of them in Icelandic language to the person in charge of connecting me with the teachers in the municipality (see Appendix B). Another presentation letter was sent to the teachers (see Appendix C) in the schools, again in Icelandic language; and still another presentation letter was sent to the parents (see Appendix D), which was translated into ten different languages in order to reach as many participants as possible.

I also presented my research in one formal meeting of immigrants and foreigners' associations such as *Hola – félag spænskumælandi á Íslandi*, and I went to a meeting of an afterschool event for immigrant adolescents named *FUS – Fjölmenningarleg ungmennasmiðja* – to try to recruit more participants. Despite the formal effort to contact people through authorities and the immigrant associations in Iceland, the most successful way of gathering participants was through personal connections and the use of social media, using the snowball sampling method.

Before and after gathering my data with the participants, I had a conversation with a teacher who has been working with this group of immigrant students for some years in a

compulsory school in Reykjavík. Few of the participants of this research were her students. She was a crucial link to inside information, not only about how the Icelandic system is implemented and integrates immigrant students into Icelandic schools, but also about the role she carries out as teacher, adviser, friend, and provider of emotional support.

The year of 2020 was full of surprises, especially when it comes to international affairs. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the world under threatening circumstances, a predicament affecting the entire world. Even in Iceland, I was not isolated from it. The research has been influenced by COVID-19 in my methodology, where I have had to make more use of technology, abandoning in-person interactions with some interviews, in order to be able to conduct the interviews in time. One of the interviews with the students was conducted over the Internet, using video conferencing software, and the conversations and interview with the teacher were on the phone, in order to respect the rules of social distancing set in the country at that time.

3.4 Participants

When the interview dates were arranged with the participants, I introduced myself to each of them and to their parents, when they were present. I read them my presentation letter and then explained the purpose of the research, as well as the informed consent (see Appendix E) that both the parent and adolescent had to sign.

All seven participants in this research were students in lower secondary schools in eighth, ninth or tenth grade. The participants were students in different schools in the Reykjavík area. Students' countries of origin were in Latin America, Western Europe, and Asia. The students had been living in Iceland for one to four years. Four of the participants were girls and three were boys. The youngest was 14 years old and the oldest 16 years old. All the recruited participants met the criteria for this research. All the participants came to Iceland with at least one member of their family: mother, father, or both. As the participants were not yet adults, they are under their parents' guardianship. Due to the sensitivity of whether refugee status was involved, this was not discussed.

An additional participant I considered for this research was Julia. She is a teacher who works with a group of students in the reception program for immigrant students, in a school in the Reykjavík area. Julia and I met through acquaintances in common some years ago, as we share the same mother tongue. When we had our informal conversations, before I took the interview for data collection with her, I decided to ask for more information about her work and her students' backgrounds, as well as what kind of circumstances the students are in. She gladly shared with me a general view of her students. She gave me examples as she

shared information with me. I decided to consider her as a participant because she could share her involvement with the reception program and its implementation with me. Likewise, her perspective as a direct source of contact with a few of the participants who are part of this research was useful. She was an immediate, reliable source of information about the situation of students in this group. At the same time, when we shared information, we respected the confidentiality terms we needed to follow even though the students were not aware of our informal conversations or formal interview. She did not disclose names linked to the examples. Once the students agreed to participate in the interviews, she informed me about students' general backgrounds, e.g., where they came from or their language. No personal data of any individual had been disclosed that could be used for identification purposes.

I designated pseudonyms that are used throughout the research to preserve participants' privacy. All the participants could speak in their mother tongue or the language they felt more comfortable with. The main languages that the participants spoke were Spanish and English and we communicated in these languages. All the students were in lower secondary grades at the time of the interviews. Table 1 presents information about the pseudonyms that I gave the participants, their age and the continent they originate from, their grade level, how long they have been in the Icelandic school and the languages they speak. To preserve some of their identities, their mother tongue is not presented.

Table 1. Information on Participants

Name	Age	Zone of origin	Grade	Time in Icelandic School	Languages
Gonzalo	15	Western Europe	9 th	3 years	Mother tongue /English / Icelandic
Jesús	16	South America	10 th	2 years	Mother tongue /English / Icelandic
Fernando	15	South America	9 th	9 months	Mother tongue /English / Icelandic
Teresa	16	South America	10 th	3 years	Mother tongue / English / Icelandic
Daniela	16	Western Europe	10 th	2 ½ years	Mother tongue / Icelandic
Mercedes	14	South America	8 th	3 years	Mother tongue / English / Icelandic
Aamira	15	Asia	8 th	3 years	Mother tongue /English / Icelandic

A general description of the participants and their backgrounds is the following:

- Gonzalo is a 15 year old boy from Western Europe, living with his father. He came to Iceland after his father was established here, while his mother remained in his homeland. He speaks his mother tongue and some English and understands Icelandic. He loves music and would like to pursue a career related to music.
- Jesús is 16 years old, an only child who lives with his mother and his mother's partner. He speaks his mother tongue, some English, and Icelandic. He would like to go abroad to continue to pursue a bigger goal towards his future.
- Fernando is a 15 year old boy. He lives with his mother and brother, while their father remains in his homeland. They came to Iceland searching for a secure place to live. He speaks his mother tongue, some English and Icelandic, and would like to become an engineer because he has a good understanding of mathematics.
- Daniela is a 16 year old girl. She lives with both parents after finding their homeland impossible to continue to live in and build a future. After living in two places characterized by war and economic instability, she plans to settle here in Iceland. Her mother tongue is Spanish. She also speaks English and wants to learn Icelandic for a better future in music.
- Teresa, a 16 year old girl from Western Europe, lives with both parents. She came to Iceland with her parents to pursue a better future. She found her homeland a continuing challenge since she was bullied in school and her parents had difficulties at their place of work. She would like to own her own hair salon in the future.
- Mercedes is a 14 year old girl and lives with her father and stepmother's family. She is from South America. She came to Iceland with her father and had already been living in Iceland for more than 3 years at the time of the study. Her mother tongue is Spanish; she also speaks some English and Icelandic. She loves handcrafts and frequently draws and paints.
- Aamira is 15 year old and lives with her father, who is physically disabled. She was born in Asia and came to Iceland with her father to find a better life. She has a very good command of English and speaks Icelandic, although she does not fully understand it. She wants to learn more English because she dreams of studying in an English-speaking country.
- Julia is in her thirties and has been living in Iceland for 13 years. When she arrived in the country, she did not know any Icelandic. She stayed with an Icelandic family who hosted her and from whom she learnt Icelandic. It was challenging for her learning the language at the beginning but once she learnt it, it helped her to pursue higher education. At the time of the interview, she had been working as an Icelandic teacher for immigrant students in the reception program for four years.

3.5 Data collection

For this research study I am making use of semi-structured questions for the interviews. Semi-structured interviews are intended to gain a better insight of the participant's views in life over a social phenomenon and their interactions (Grindsted, 2005). I made use of semi-structured interviews for the flexibility they gave me during the interview. I used open-ended questions, opening more possibilities of exchanging ideas and questions with the participant, in order to gain richer data throughout the conversation (Creswell, 2012).

3.5.1 Interviews with teenagers

The interviews were conducted during the period from June to September 2020. The interviews were conducted in Spanish or English, and with the help of a translator for the mother tongue I did not know. Six out of seven interviews were taken in person, in the comfort of the participants' homes. Only one interview was conducted virtually, while the participant was in school, in order to respect the social distance rules in place in Iceland at the time of the interview due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this did not turn out to be an impediment to conducting an interesting interview.

The questions (Appendix F) were based on the topics of personal and cultural background, school experience as an immigrant, and the participant's social life. I also asked about how these interrelated and influenced an adolescent's decisions in life, as open-ended questions. All the participants answered the questions voluntarily. The interviews lasted from 30 to 55 minutes. The interviews followed the flexibility of answers and directions during the dialogue with each participant. The interviews were audio recorded with the adolescent's consent and after the signing of the consent form.

Many people find it uncomfortable to answer personal questions asked by an unfamiliar person. So, as the interviews were conducted in a single meeting, I decided ahead of time to implement a card game with three of the interviewees. Using the card game helped these students to feel more comfortable as they were more introverted than the others at the beginning of the interviews. The idea of using the card game came from reading about how to best communicate or connect in a positive way with adolescents and children (Ehmke, 2020; Jensen & Nutt, 2015 & Nelsen, Foster & Raphael, 2011). Additionally, there is a research approach where psychologists use different methods in order to gain the patient's trust, interest and focus (Hanna, Jones, Rowley & Vassiliou; 2012). When the adolescents were presented with the card game, they reacted positively. The card game requests that they apply their own thoughts and personal opinions. The adolescents engaged naturally, appreciating they were being listened to. The card game consisted of more than 100 cards with open-ended questions. It was a fusion of two card games I found online (Holmes,

2020a; Holmes, 2020b), with easy and reflexive questions, according to psychological age, and could be used for a bigger range of ages. As one example, a card asks: What would you do if you were invited to a dinner and you did not like the food? (Holmes, 2020a).

As the research points out, a card game encourages the participants to use their logical and mental abilities to give their own answers (Hanna, Jones, Rowley & Vassiliou; 2012). Each card has a random question. I explained to them that the card game will be on the table and they could pick a card at any time they wanted to during the interview. The students picked one card before the interview started and answered according to their own thoughts and feelings. After they gave their answers to the card question, I started with the first interview question and continued with the following ones. As the interviews developed in depth, both the participants and I forgot about the card game until we remembered the card game at the end of the interviews, when the students took another card from the deck on the table and answered as the interview ended. The questions in the card game were random and not related to the interview, therefore the answers from the card game are not part of my data. I found that these cards helped the adolescents to feel more comfortable as the interview progressed. They could express themselves more freely and were more aware that their own words and thoughts were the most important outcome of the interviews. While this card game facilitated a better connection between the adolescent and me, this does not mean that the interviews without the card game were less interactive; rather, each interview had a different flair of progression and encounter.

I mentioned to the participants that it was more important to me that their answers and personal opinion were true than whether they were “right” or “wrong.” As the interviews progressed, the adolescents would voluntarily answer most of the questions about their reasons for coming to Iceland. I perceived that this question was often somehow sensitive and difficult for them to answer, so a few of them asked their parents to answer for them. From the total of seven interviews to the students, in only three of them were the students alone. In two of the interviews, the students’ mothers were also present from the beginning to the end of the interview. In one of the interviews, only the mother was present until a curious father came along in the middle of the interview and stayed on to listen. I perceived that the mothers were curious about the questions I was going to ask their children and wanted to make sure what the interview was about and what the questions were based on.

The questions for the interviews (see Appendix F), had a focus according to the conceptual framework for this thesis, in order to analyze and interpret the data from the interviews. The design of themes enabled me to classify questions and be able to map out how the adolescents’ views on their environment were developing.

When talking to all the participants, I found that the younger participants tended to provide shorter and more reticent answers, whereas the older participants were more reflective and extended in their answers. At the same time, I want to point out that parental presence had some influence on my participant's answers. There were moments I realized students made some gestures, like rolling eyes, stayed quiet or took their time to answer my questions under a parent's presence. It is worth mentioning that when there was a significant language barrier and a translator was used for the communication, the flow of the interview suffered discontinuity.

3.5.2 Interview with a teacher

Julia is a friend I have known for some years. When we coincided at the university several times, we chatted about our studies. Part of those conversations was the job she had been doing with students with a different mother tongue to Icelandic, including immigrants. While we talked, we shared what we were doing in our work-studies routines. Julia shared what she did at her work, and I shared what I was doing for my thesis. I realized that there were many similarities between her job and the topic I had chosen for my thesis, as she mentioned the situation of the students with whom she worked. Julia provided some insights about matters of which I was not aware. So, I decided to ask her if she could facilitate, help me contact some of her students, and work with them as part of my data collection. She was positive in her answer and I proceeded with the formal process I had to follow in order to contact participants at her work. I sent a presentation letter to the principal of the school she worked at, and only then was I able to be in contact with a few of her students regarding participation. As time passed, potential participants declined for different reasons. Situations arose and impeded the meeting between the participants and me for our meetings. For example, the difference in language between the participant and I was a barrier to the interviews as I did not have proficiency in their mother tongue or access to a translator who could help me out. COVID-19 had already arrived in Iceland at that time, which was also one of the reasons why I could not meet with other potential participants. In other instances, the students did not want to be contacted, and it was not possible to reach out to them.

During our informal conversations, I decided to ask Julia if she wanted to participate as one of my interviewees and she accepted. Julia and I set the date and time most convenient for her, in order to proceed with the interview. The interview was done through social media, on a Facebook Messenger phone call. I elaborated a set of questions (see APPENDIX G) especially for her, according to the conversations we had had and guided by what could have been relevant for my data. The interview developed according to our conversation

about how immigrant students' experiences were mirrored in the reception program's progress.

3.6 Data Analysis

To analyze the data from the interviews, verbatim transcriptions were made from the audio recordings. The use of the button “dictate” in the Word software helped me to transcribe verbatim in the language I chose: even though it was not an accurate transcription, it was a relevant tool for transcribing and saved time during the transcription process. Listening to the audio recordings repetitively enabled me to generate extra notes, as I was remembering the atmosphere when the interviews were conducted. All the transcriptions were printed out in order to make notes on paper and to identify the themes for coding analysis.

The data was analyzed with the theoretical background of inclusive education, school, social and family relationships, and the adolescence phase. I highlighted individual words or phrases that stood out or were of significant value for the research from each participant. In order to help organize the themes, and considering that people differ in backgrounds, experiences and different world views (Creswell, 2018), the use of spreadsheets and the Word program, together with the use I made from my notes, enabled me to sort and classify the data and compare them with the notes I made on the interview printouts.

Themes were analyzed according to Creswell (2018), and will be presented as follows: Expected themes, which are themes that are expected to be found related to the theoretical background and common sense; surprising themes, which are themes that were not anticipated before the study; and codes of unusual or of conceptual interest.

In the previous chapter on data collection, I mentioned Julia, the teacher who worked with a group of students with a different mother tongue and immigrants, as one of my participants. In order to gain richer data, I compared Julia’s narrative, examples and personal experiences with the information I had gathered from the students, and also compared it with the conceptual framework used for this thesis.

3.7 Ethical Issues

3.7.1 Informed consent and privacy

In a research study it is crucial to observe privacy and anonymity issues in order to protect the participants (Creswell, 2018). In a small society such as Iceland, it is very common to encounter people who are interconnected to each other and, as the immigrant population in Iceland is even smaller, that could happen more frequently. Once the contact was made with

the adolescents for the interviews, through the connection, I informed them of these issues by reading from a document that specified the content of the interviews and asked them for their personal consent in two formats: the consent format (see Appendix E) that they and their parents had signed and the presentation letter for my research (see Appendix D).

When the interviews with the immigrant adolescents were completed, I made sure that the procedures for the interviews were suitable for each person, taking into consideration their different cultural backgrounds, expectations according to age and how gender roles may influence their personal lives (Schenk & Williamson, 2005). Even though adolescents are independent in their thinking from parents or caregivers, they are under the legal age and thus under their parents' surveillance.

So, I gladly let them skim through the questions. To my perception, in a few instances there might have been the issue that answering some questions could affect their immigrant status in Iceland. Through family histories, I could assume that a few of them had refugee status because of threats to their lives in the past or some other indication, but that was not discussed during the interviews. I indicated explicitly that all data would be treated with confidentiality and under the privacy code laws according to Act 90/2008 on Data Protection and the Processing of Personal Data (Ministry of Justice, 2018), with the freedom to continue or discontinue participation at any time during the time of research.

In some instances, questions from the list were not asked. Personal statements that could reveal their identities were omitted to respect their privacy, but relevant statements were used as part of the data for this research. Schenk & Williamson (2005) point out that the most important principle is always to place the best interests of the child first by promoting and protecting their well-being. I tried to follow this principle by wording the following statements:

- Adolescents should be treated as autonomous individuals, capable of making their own decisions.
- When a person has certain limitations, they must be allowed the opportunity to express themselves according to their own understanding.
- To protect the adolescents if they are under threat of harm or facing negative consequences.
- Justice: the participants should be treated with fairness and equity without bias and coercion.

Additionally, Schenk & Williamson (2005) mention that it is unethical to prevent adolescents from participating in decision-making about things that affect their lives. There

should be a balance between protecting their best interests and securing them from self-harm by minimizing intervention.

3.7.2 Power relationships

It is important to mention that relationships can have a significant power influence over people for a long or short period of time (Gurdal & Sorbring, 2018), and for this reason I want to point out the power relationships that stood out during the development of analysis in this research. These were parent-student, teacher-student, and researcher-student relationships.

Parents are the responsible guardians and holders of their children's rights but also permit choices appropriate to their cognitive and emotional developmental level (Gheaus, 2016). Then, as children grow older, they will gain more liberties to make choices as adults do (Gheaus, 2016). For the interviews, the presence of parents at the start of the interviews was unavoidable, which also gave me an insight about the parent-adolescent relationship. For example, during one interview where a mother was present all the time throughout the interview, I perceived her dominance over the daughter. I felt the participant's answers were influenced in a way by her mother, and there were times when the mother questioned the answer that the student gave me. Yet she could provide me with her own perspective out of respect for the mother. My participants could not avoid their parents' presence, yet the participants all showed respect for their parents and in front of me.

Another power relationship I noticed was the teacher-student relationship. For this research I interviewed Julia, the teacher who worked for the reception program. Alderman & Green (2011) identify four types of power that teachers could make of use over students in order to influence student performance and behavior. *Coercion*: power over students' behavior for improvement. *Manipulation*, in the form of giving choices so that students can make decisions attributed to themselves. *Expertness*: helping students to solve academic issues they could not solve themselves. *Likability*: when teachers show their positive side and understanding, students will respond positively and with responsibility to their teachers. In the case of Julia, she had mentioned examples of each of these types of power that she had exerted over her students, as she mentioned that she had to play different roles, not only as teacher but also as a confidante, advisor and provider of emotional support.

The last power relationship was researcher-student. As the interviewer is the one who builds up the idea of the topic for this research, this research will be conducted and developed according to the background, world views, insights, methodology, etc. of the researcher (Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009). For instance, as the researcher has all the power and responsibility over personal information gathered on the participants, the

researcher reflected on what kind of information could be disclosed in order to develop the questions for the research study (Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009). Under these circumstances, the researcher should build up a relationship of trust and respect with the participants, considering and recognizing participants' experiences and feelings concerning the valuable information that the participants could share for the importance of the research (Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009).

3.8 Limitations of the research

Despite the fact that the number of participants in this research is limited and cannot reflect the experiences of the entire immigrant adolescent population in Iceland and of all the teachers who work for this reception program in Iceland, their experiences are important and unique. My aim is not to generalize based on the information I received from them but to shed light on and learn from their diverse experiences.

4 Findings

In the seven interviews I conducted with adolescents, the questions were constructed in relation to the factors that formed the basis of the theoretical framework. In the data analysis, the influence adolescents received in their daily experiences were related to their background, parents and parental relationships, friendship or social life, teachers, mentors in school and their personal perspectives for the future. The aim of the research was to give voice to Gonzalo, Jesús, Fernando, Teresa, Daniela, Mercedes, and Aamira, and to recognize their experiences as immigrant adolescents in lower secondary schools in Iceland; at the same time, I sought to understand what each of them, individually, could share with others, in order to establish and build their own lives as newcomers to Iceland. I also wanted to help improve policies and practices regarding the lot of young people arriving in Iceland, who have Icelandic as a second language. In the following section, I will explore my main research questions: How do immigrant students experience their relationships/support received at school? And how do immigrant students experience their relationships with/ support received from parents and friends?

The results of the data analysis are divided into four main themes. The first one is family matters, which relates to connection with parents, home rules, and the participants' cultural backgrounds. The second is the school environment and relationships, particularly how teachers supported participants in learning Icelandic. The third theme is related to friendship, and the fourth theme is about participants' futures.

4.1 Family matters

The participants were asked about their personal and family background. Their parents' backgrounds are diverse, and their marital status varies. The parents have diverse levels of education, with the majority having had at least some secondary education in their home countries. One of the parents has a graduate degree and a career here in Iceland. In some cases, the adolescents did not remember the level of their parents' education or did not want to talk about it. All of the adolescents came to Iceland with their parents. A few of the parents visited Iceland before they emigrated and described it to their children.

Gonzalo moved to Iceland because his father moved to Iceland first. After his father was settled, his father described to him the positive potential of living in Iceland. One summer, Gonzalo came for a visit and decided to stay in Iceland to have a different experience and try something new. The same experience was shared by Jesús and Mercedes. Their parents moved to Iceland first and they came along after their parents had settled. Both of their

parents have new partners. They all shared a common goal of finding a better future and improving the one they had back in their home countries.

Most of the participants were only children when their parents were together as a couple. Few of the parents had new partners. Two of the participants had siblings, and a few had stepsiblings. Their parents' family compositions were as follows: at least two of the participants had a single mother. At least two of the participants had a single father, and at least two of the participants had both parents together. The adolescents seem to be comfortable with their parents' situation as they did not talk or give indication of discomfort when disclosing it.

The situations of Daniela and Fernando were different. In each case, their parents were trying to find a better future for their families. Daniela comes from a land where war and economic issues do not allow families to survive, nor to have a peaceful life – oceans apart from the peaceful life in Iceland. For Fernando's family it had been important to leave their home country, since the life of one of his family members was under threat.

4.1.1 Connection with parents

A fundamental change appears when children move into adolescence. The students showed independence from their parents when they mentioned that even though they still live with their parents they still like to lead their own lives. As they start looking for their own independence and try new experiences themselves, in their most vulnerable moments they reach out to their parents for emotional support when they feel it is necessary. Reading through the data, I noticed that the two boys who lived with their single mothers were more decisive in their goals and showed more sense of responsibility as they had already planned for their future. They both talked with appreciation about their mothers, mentioning what hard workers they were. They already had decided and were certain of what they wanted for their lives and for their future careers. One of the boys wants to be an engineer and the other wants to join the United States military.

When I asked about their relationships with their parents, most of the participants said that they felt good about them. Certainly, relationships are very personal and so are their experiences, but what caught my attention was the relationship that Fernando has with his mother. His mother was present during the whole interview. They seemed to have a close bond, and when I asked him "How is the relationship with your parents?", Fernando shared with me that his relationship with both of his parents is based on friendship, they communicate often and share time together. When I asked Jesús about his relationship with his parents, he said:

...we talk, almost every day, basic things between parent and child, like: what did you do? How was your day? What did you eat? Normal things. I do trust more my mom than my dad. I haven't talked to him much, but when we were in my home country, I used to meet him on weekends. And the rest of the week I spent with my mom.

On the other hand, Gonzalo lived with his single father and when asked about him, he mentioned:

There are always typical arguments in a father-child relationship and it also happens with my mom. And being only my dad and I at home makes it difficult, but in general, is not continuous, normally we have a good relationship, but misunderstandings happen, especially at my age.

During the interview, Gonzalo showed awareness about the changes he was going through as an adolescent and explained to me that "his father was still learning to be a father". However, when I asked him "Do you feel you can tell your parents personal things?", Gonzalo answered:

...almost everything. There are things that I like to keep for myself, because it is better to keep them for myself, and there are other things in which my parents can help, and my mom, she is good to me and that is good.

And a similar answer came from Jesús:

In that matter, I am a private person, I prefer to keep those matters for myself. I do not tell anyone, not to my friends nor to my sisters, not to anyone. I would rather solve things on my own.

Fernando shared with me the well-thought-out project he wants to accomplish for his life. He even mentioned that he is stricter with himself than his mom with personal projects. He likes to keep his routines and accomplish them all. But at the same time, he finds inspiration through his mom's hardworking example. When I asked him where he got all those skills, he answered: "...from my mom, because she has always wanted to do it. Besides, she did not have the opportunity to do it, she has always succeeded and continues."

Fernando pointed out that he has had more opportunities than his mother had and will not waste them. Aamira shared something similar regarding her father, though she mentioned that she had not seen or met her mother since she was a little baby; instead, she talked about the good relationship with her father. Her eyes got a particular spark when she

talked about her plans with her father and shared with me that he was pursuing further studies in a school in Reykjavík Centre. She shared with me her big dreams and told me: “I am very close with my dad; we share everything together. We usually study, like now, I am learning algebra with him. I use his help a lot, and he is very good at math”.

Of the four female participants, two live with both their parents. One lives with her father in his new extended family. And another girl, whose mother abandoned her when she was an infant, lives with her father.

The maturity and set of values that these adolescents carried with them and expressed are outstanding. The majority know the differences between right and wrong decisions and consider the consequences that those bring along with them in a possible future. In this instance, I realized that those adolescents who had a religious background had their values very well settled. For example, Fernando is a practicing Christian, and participates in the church along with his family. He has friends from the church where he and his family assist. He neither smokes nor drinks, as those are bad habits according to his beliefs. As he showed values built on his religious beliefs, discipline was a reflection on his plans for the future. Fernando and Jesús, both living with their hard-working mothers, shared with me that their mothers were the role models of hard work they want to continue to be inspired by.

4.1.2 Home rules

For most of the participants, their parents are quite flexible with the rules set at home, e.g., with the time they should be back home after meeting their friends. However, Teresa, an only child, expressed that her parents are strict with the rules at home. As her mother was present during the interview, I noticed her dominant presence over Teresa, and there were times when her mother questioned the answers Teresa gave me. At the same time, Aamira mentioned that her father, at the time of their arrival to Iceland, had a different view of the rules she had to follow, but as time passed, he had become more flexible, though she was also an only child. When I asked her, “do you have many rules that your dad puts on you?”, she shared: “At first..., yeah, ...but when the time passed, he started changing. And also, me.” These girls’ perspectives suggest that girls are more likely to have stricter rules than their male counterparts. The girls shared having more time curfews than the boys, in terms of the time they needed to get back home, being asked where they were going, and who they were going to be with or at. In contrast, the only rule set by the boys’ parents were that they should not get into trouble.

4.1.3 Cultural Background

Similarities in cultural background could be found in participants whose homelands were closer geographically or who shared the same mother tongue. However, differences in culture varied according to e.g., family background or values constitution. Thus, it cannot be assumed that because of cultural similarities, two participants would think or behave in the same way or have identical thoughts or values. The culture varied, not only between country of origin but also among families. Even though some of these students might have shared similar languages, they had different ways of describing their experiences and individual points of view.

When the participants were asked what the most difficult part was in coming to Iceland, some of them connected their experiences with their own culture and others with how different the Icelandic society was for them, in comparison to their own cultures. Gonzalo related his experience of living here in Iceland with how people's behavior had affected him in gaining friends and integrating into the Icelandic society: "...since I came, I have been trying to integrate myself with the people here. I think the culture is not different. People are different. The language, you cannot communicate with many people."

Jesús had a similar answer, explaining:

I think it is the differences in culture, because I am not used to European culture. The way people behave, and the language is quite complicated...The culture? People can be colder here. In my country, people are happier, without material things.

Teresa and Daniel had similar thoughts about the most difficult part of coming to Iceland. For them, the language and people had been part of the difficulties of adapting to the Icelandic culture. For Aamira, the change of culture was even bigger when coming to Iceland.

At first, it was strange for me that we can wear these clothes [she made reference of the clothing we normally use daily in Iceland], outside and inside the school. In my country we have uniforms, and boys and girls are not in the same school. For me it was kind of strange, but I got used it... It is better here...because I don't think there is differences between genders.

She used to wear a hijab and other kind of clothing for women, different from that in Iceland.

Mercedes' perspective was different. She mentioned that the most difficult part for her had been growing up away from her family, who lived in her home country. She also felt

limited in communication as she could not speak her mother tongue as often as in her home country. Experiencing a different culture can have different effects on perspectives and perceptions between individuals. All of the students agreed that Icelandic culture was very different from the culture they were used to back home, as different as Icelandic was from their native languages.

4.2 School environment and relationships

For most of the adolescents involved in the interviews, beginning in a new school was very difficult since everything was new for them: the environment, friends and all surroundings. They shared with me that everything had been very challenging at first, but as time passed, they settled into the new environment and became more comfortable in their new schools, especially when the participants found ways to feel more at ease and made new friends. Daniela shared with me that at the beginning, it was very difficult in the first school she attended:

...at the beginning, it was very difficult, because I just arrived, and I did not have a life here, nor the language. And I did not know any English. Once, I remember, I was in the bus and I didn't know what that person was telling me. I did not understand it...

All of them mentioned that Icelandic schools were very different from those they knew back in their home countries. The participants mentioned that schools here in Iceland were easier and less strict. When I asked Jesús what he liked most from the school, he shared:

The diversity of things we need to do, or what we can do, also the freedom of speech. The teachers always want to know what the students think, or how are they doing, or if someone needs help, teachers are always supporting them very well.

At the same time, Jesús shared with me that the curriculum in Icelandic schools sometimes can be boring for him, compared to the structure in the school curriculum back in his home country. He felt that in the schools of his home country, rules were stricter and had more discipline in their agenda.

Schools in my country are stricter and have a superior academic level. And, when I came into my school, I felt I was going backwards, because I was checking things that I did see before, when I was in fifth grade.

Jesús pointed out to me that the school he goes to here in Iceland, where students were grouped according to academic results, could not be beneficial for students who have a different academic level. He believed that having all students in the same classroom is favorable for everyone, because everyone is in the same class level and it allows for students to learn from each other. He shared with me:

...the school where I go to, have different groups. Those who are in the advance group go to another classroom, for example, in mathematics, social studies or science. They go there and see more advanced themes in the subjects. To their academic level. Whereas those [the others] who are not advanced as them, see themes in the subjects that they can understand and help them to move forward academically. However, in my country, everyone goes to the same level, there are not different groups with different academic levels, so we all learn the same, even though you do not understand, we all go to the same level.

His ideas are very mature, and he has an insight that he is able to compare to his home country, so I asked him: “And what do you think about it?” His answer was:

... I think it is good and bad at the same time. Bad because there are people who do not have the mental capacity or have a learning difficulty to learn so that could situate them in a more advanced academic level, and simply they will have to accommodate their level to others... and good because if everyone is attending the same class, we all learn. It is easier to learn and everything has the same level... the mind expands because you learn much more...

His ideas about education are in the spirit of inclusive education, i.e., that we learn more from each other if the group is diverse than with only those who think alike.

Teresa shared that her experience in the school had not been positive while trying to make friends, not only in her home country but also here in Iceland. According to her personal experience, she perceived that students she shared school with in Iceland were bullies, as she also had perceived being bullied in previous schools. She related that other students did not talk to her because she comes from another country. When I asked why she thinks that she was being bullied, she answered me: “I feel I am being bullied because I am not Icelandic, I am a foreigner here, I think this is the reason the students would not speak to me or answered me back.” Her experiences with school or making friends was not positive and she relates her being bullied to the fact that she is a foreigner.

Gonzalo had another story to tell. He had been bullied and was involved in street fighting with the classmates who bullied him. He mentioned to me that he had to move from one school to another school as he and his father made the decision that that was the best for him. Even though he did not want to change schools, he and his father made the decision to proceed with the transition. A teacher who witnessed a fight tried to help by alerting the principal, but the harassment did not stop. They both, father and son, thought it could have been handled better, as they felt their voices were not heard enough by the authorities of that school. Yet when he was going to a new school, those classmates continued to harass him. His situation escalated with time, even to the point of the involvement of the police. From what he shared:

We were friends with these boys and, there was a time that we argued because I was defending a friend so that is how we got into a fight. They were always teasing me, bothering me, and trying to hit me. Even before I went back for vacations to my country, one of them wanted to hit me. Many students started harassing me on the phone, saying they will go to my place and do something to me. After I came back to Iceland, one of them, one boy who was my friend, called and told me that everything was OK, and he only wanted to meet me. I went to where he told me to go, and suddenly, three of them appeared, and then three more and they were six against myself. Nobody was on the streets.

It was impossible not to pay attention to Gonzalo's story, and what else he had to say. I continued listening and asked him: "Did they hit you?" He answered:

They hit me! My father knew about it and got mad at me and that was the beginning of the story. My dad complained more than two times and those boys were still in class. They continued harassing me and there were more incidents. It did not stop there. [In] The school told me they would help out, but they didn't do much. Those boys were recidivists in that school [that student had bullied other students in the same school]. I felt some racism by some teachers [because he felt they didn't want to help or do something more to make bullying stop], and I had to change schools. I did not want to change schools, because I had made friends there and, I did not want to lose them, but I did, I had to.

The episodes Gonzalo shared before were not the only occasions he had encounters with the same boys. He mentioned to me that because he comes from another country, he felt discrimination by some teachers and by the authorities in the school. Despite having meetings with the other students' parents and the authorities in the school, he and his

father did not see positive results. He also said that he felt these kinds of situations happen very often in Iceland as he was not the only foreigner who had been under similar situations. Thankfully, not everything has a dark horizon for Gonzalo. He had changed schools and he is feeling better there, with more friends who appreciate him. And when I asked, “how do you feel in the new school?”, he added: “...Good, good. It is a school, I don’t go to... have fun, do I? but the best part is that I have more friends, and I feel... more appreciated [by friends and teachers].”

Daniela had another story to share. She had been in at least two schools before the one she was in at the moment of the interview, because her parents had to move. Thus, she had to change schools as her mother was recommended to do. She shared:

At the beginning I was with all foreigners together in the same classroom. The teachers were really good. And it was difficult because of the language. In the other schools it was very hard, sometimes people said to me hello, but sometimes they ignored me, and that didn’t bother me, but made feel alone, but it is like I have gotten used to it.

Gonzalo and Teresa shared with me their feelings and situations about being bullied; however, only Gonzalo shared with me that he complained to his teachers and the authorities in the school, but he felt that his situation was not given the needed attention, so he decided to go to police, and he felt he received the same response as in the school. On the other hand, Teresa did not share further her situation with me, as the communication between her and I was limited because of the language limitation.

All of the participants in this research were first introduced to their schools through a reception program, which introduces them to the Icelandic language and culture. The program helped them to build up their knowledge in Icelandic as they started to practice their Icelandic more, as Daniela shared in her story above. Their teachers in Icelandic in the reception program were also the ones mentioned as favorites, as I will explain the next section.

4.2.1 Teachers support

The participants shared with me that they tended to be ignored by teachers from other subjects than Icelandic when they needed support, and in some cases, they were too shy to ask the teachers for help. The participants also shared with me that at the beginning of their experience in the reception program, some of the teachers from other subjects helped them. But as time went by, teachers forgot to give them feedback through encouragement. For Gonzalo, his adaptation process was fast, and according to him:

I stopped being the new one, because they are used to new people. It is not that they pay attention to me. I am one more, a new one who comes here, without adaptation, and knowing what I have to do, so it was easy. If I did something good, they recognized I did good, so that encourages me to continue doing good. So, if you put a lot of effort in something and they do not recognize that, and they not even tell you about it, so then I don't want to do it anymore.

Many of the teachers at the beginning help me, but the majority of them, when the time has passed, two weeks, a month, they don't pay attention anymore.

They forget that I do not know the language to perfection or that I do not know much yet, but there are those who also help.

Gonzalo expresses that he needs encouragement from his teachers to have the interest and ambition to do well in school. He feels that many of the teachers were quick to forget that he is new in learning the language and stopped giving him the encouragement he needed. All the participants agreed that their experiences with teachers from the reception class were the best. These teachers supported them throughout their studies. Daniela shared:

...sometimes I needed help but as I am very shy, well, I told myself, I better not ask for help, because maybe I will not know how to say it, and I tried to do it myself. Do you understand? I tried to call the teachers but they never heard me. Well, it is not that they didn't listen, is just that they looked busy with other things and I have low pitch voice. For example, I did have a teacher who was all the time with me. She was my favorite, because she helped me very much. I learnt a lot of Icelandic with her. She encourages me, it is very important when you are under a situation like this.

Here, Daniela gives an image of how difficult it is to be new in the language, and the shyness in asking the teachers for help. Her savior was the teacher who supported her in Icelandic. However, Mercedes shared:

The teachers here in Iceland help me more, because I don't understand Icelandic. Well, back in my country I never dared to ask or to say that I did not understand, or else the other kids will tease you, maybe that is what is happening to me. I think if I get back to my country, things will be different, because I can speak my language and express myself better with the teachers.

Her experience is different from Daniela's as she is not shy, and she asks for help because she feels that the teachers are more helpful than in her home country, and also she trusts that the other students in her class will not tease her. Gonzalo and Jesús mentioned their sports teachers as their favorite. They shared that those teachers were open-minded and taught them about the Icelandic culture as well. The outstanding common feeling for all the students was the way they refer to their teachers of Icelandic, who were their favorites. All the students felt good and received enough help and support in this reception program, regardless of what school they went to. This was especially true of the teachers who helped them learn Icelandic. These teachers could be of foreign origin or Icelandic. Participants describe them as very caring, helpful, and patient, with dedication towards their students. In this matter, Jesús said: "What I found something really good is that teachers really care for you to learn."

On the other hand, participants have mentioned that when it comes to communication between a subject teacher and the foreign student, it can be challenging for the students. Many of them mentioned that the subject teachers expected them to speak or understand English. This was not the case for all the participants in the research. Some of them knew little English and others nothing. But among the participants, Teresa – who did not know English when she arrived in Iceland – was the only student who learnt Icelandic faster than English, compared to the other participants. She did not share with me the real reasons for this result, but I can assume that her friends, who are immigrants like she is, spoke Icelandic as well.

Teachers' expectations of students played a big role for students as well. If the teacher overlooked them, they would not be interested and would not attend the other classes. After feeling overlooked by the teachers, the students might be triggered to disengage with their studies.

4.2.2 A teacher who cares

Julia is a teacher who works with immigrant students in the reception program. Julia works with students from eighth to tenth grade in the area of *íslenska sem annað tungumál* – Icelandic as a second language. Her personal history is that she came to Iceland as an au pair and lived with an Icelandic family who helped her achieve knowledge in Icelandic language. As an immigrant herself, she had similar experiences and expectations as the students she works with. She mentioned many situations throughout her personal story that students would have also encountered. She also shared with me her personal perspective as a teacher and what kind of expectations she had for her students.

She pointed out that the students she works with come to this program from diverse cultural backgrounds and with different reasons to move to and live in Iceland. Within this group, one could find students born in other countries whose parents were Icelandic and decided to move back to Iceland. There were students who had one Icelandic parent and one foreign parent. There were also students who had been born in Iceland but had challenges in learning Icelandic, because their households were multilingual. And there were other students who had refugee status.

She mentioned that as a teacher, she had to tailor teaching methods and content to each student in the group, because the students were very diverse. She also mentioned that teachers needed to see individuals progress academically with the correct material teachers presented to them, including their individual ways of learning:

...we cannot give all the students the same classes, because some of them need more support in other fields and we need to teach them individually, person to person, and check on their level ...so we could ask them in what subject or theme they consider the need for support. For example, in grammar, we need to find books that are adequate for them among those books we work with. From where the students can practice reading, writing, vocabulary, in Icelandic...

Teachers need not only to focus on academic content but also be prepared to help with emotional issues. As the students are adolescents, she felt that sometimes students' behavior turned challenging for the teachers. And she mentioned:

... with them, I cannot be only the teacher. I have to be a friend as well. In the sense of daily routines. The students don't want to socialize with other students, and they want to stay in the classroom, so I encourage them to go... we are told of the need for them to share with Icelandic students, but there are times that they do not feel confident to do it, and sometimes we have to understand them and wait for the next time...

Julia, herself an immigrant to Iceland, identified with these students. She told me that she came to Iceland as an au pair for a family. It was also difficult for her to come to Iceland without knowing the language and not knowing much English. However, her host family were very supportive in helping her to speak the language. They talked to her in Icelandic, and she even had private Icelandic lessons with a teacher. She shared that it was not easy at first to communicate in Icelandic, but she was very grateful for the support and help she received from her host family. Furthermore, once she became fluent in Icelandic, she could complete studies in upper secondary school and at the University of Iceland. She also shared

with me that learning Icelandic had changed her life in Iceland immensely. She was surprised when she got her first job, thinking that her Icelandic was not good enough. She appreciated that the language helped her to build a future that she had not planned.

Julia mentioned that because the students brought many emotions and experiences themselves, she felt that when working with these students she had to bring out the best of herself. She felt that they needed not only her academic and professional support but also emotional support. She had to manage different roles, not only that of a teacher, but also as a friend, confidante, adviser and more:

...the students also come with different feelings and it feels like they are trying the boundaries they could cross with the teachers. There was one student, who did not want to learn anything, not even try it, because she thought everything was the same and, the reality is that we cannot present new topics if they do not have the needed level...

From her perspective, as Julia reflected on students' stages of adolescence, she considered that an adolescent's engagement in academic performance depends also on friendship and parental involvement. She felt that the parents lacked involvement with their children's academic responsibilities. Julia believed that there were various reasons behind parent's lack of involvement, and one of the consequences showed up in students' class absences. As she shared with me:

... I feel that there is a lack of communication between parents and children. I feel that parents do not ask them [students] how things go in the school, it seems parents overlook that part. But I also, I think, that one of the first obstacles is the language. Not all the parents are young, and they don't have enough knowledge and cannot follow up their children's studies... on the other hand, there are parents whose only focus is working and do not have time and energy to face all the responsibilities... some of them (students) come to me crying because they don't want to learn and want to give up, preferring to stay home ...

While Julia felt that the program was working for many of the students, she considered that practices could be improved, especially in regard to raising curiosity and engagement in the students. For example, she suggested that it could be advantageous to group the students by proficiency in Icelandic language, thus everyone could learn from each other and engage in class.

...I think that it would be better if there were better teaching methods and group the students for levels and explain to them, make the classes more interactive, not like we go and sit down with the students and help them to learn, because not all students are willing to learn through this method...

Additionally, she mentioned that there was no specific guide or agenda to follow, or to teach students with more organization. However, Julia thought that it could be more beneficial for the students to work according to what the students want to learn themselves, as they were doing in the school where she worked.

Julia mentioned that the number of students in the reception program had been growing larger every year, and it had become a burden for the small number of teachers of Icelandic as a second language who worked in the school, she worked at to assist all these students accordingly, as only three teachers have to support more than 20 students in the reception program with Icelandic as a second language. She said: "Sadly, not all teachers had enough patience, and tend to overlook those who did not understand Icelandic, for the fact was that all students were in the same classroom, as the teachers presented their classes thinking of the whole group together and not thinking of each student individually." Julia shared with me that some of her students had mentioned that they were not interested in learning Icelandic, because they wanted to move to another country anyway, and Icelandic would not be useful in other places. Others wanted to study abroad in English-speaking countries, which matches the goals of one of the students in my findings.

Julia hoped this area of the reception program would improve, as currently it is under revision for improvement, as she mentioned. Her work really mattered to her, and she was devotedly trying to find ways or new teaching approaches or methods that could help these students to engage better, strive in their studies, and succeed in their futures.

4.2.3 Learning a second language

After trying to find their way into the Icelandic society, the adolescents were working hard to learn Icelandic. However, under the pressure of needing to fit in somewhere and trying to connect with people, they started learning a new language, English. The participants all had different reasons for why English became important for them to learn. Daniela shared with me:

I understand Icelandic, but it is very difficult to speak it. The fact that I had heard Icelandic people laughing about themselves because of their pronunciation in their own language, I tell myself: I better keep myself quiet and speak English.

Gonzalo's experience was different:

It took me time when I arrived at the school. I had friends who spoke my mother tongue, so I did not learn Icelandic, I did not learn English as much either, then I thought, what do I do now if I don't know English? So that is how I learnt English, trying to communicate with people.

Aamira's feeling was:

I have hard time learning Icelandic, and the teachers usually speak Icelandic, so sometimes I don't understand those words... They usually do not have too much time to come and say everything to me, but sometimes they will help me translate.

To the question "Do you feel English is a tool to gain communication with others?", Mercedes answered: "Yes! It helps a lot, because with my friends we talk more in English, we do not speak Icelandic".

The importance of learning English for the students was a big issue of communication with others, teachers, classmates and specially on the path of building up friendships with other students. As the students mentioned above, they all tried hard to learn Icelandic, but on the way they took the decision of learning English faster because it was a necessity for them.

To Fernando and Jesús, besides the challenges in its pronunciation, Icelandic was not the problem but they preferred to speak English instead. Fernando shared:

During the process, I felt very happy because I learnt English very quick, because I had learnt English before, but I did not practice it as much. So, I am practicing it more, remembering words and learning more. I have also learnt Icelandic, besides, I don't use it much, but I understand it. I need more practice. I usually speak more English.

Jesús mentioned something similar:

When I arrived here, I thought it was going to be more complicated, but the fact was it was easier than I thought. Except for the language. I speak primarily English with my friends but when I have to, I speak Icelandic. I do understand everything everyone says, but I do not like to speak it. I feel I have accent or that I don't speak it perfectly. And I don't feel good about it, but it is personal.

Mercedes shared with me:

At the beginning I did not learn anything because I did not know Icelandic nor English, but with my teacher, I started to understand better, and my brain started remembering some things in English. At least I could talk to some girls.

Of all the students I interviewed, only Daniela spoke Icelandic more fluently than English. The rest of the students had learnt English faster than Icelandic. Those who have learnt English faster than Icelandic have stated that as Icelandic has a complex grammar structure, English became a powerful tool of fast communication and for building friendships with other students who are in the same situation as they are – immigrants. Despite all of the participants having knowledge in Icelandic, students said they felt more comfortable speaking English. Students expressed security when they found friends with whom they could communicate more easily in the language of their proficiency, which was English rather than Icelandic.

4.3 Building up friendships

When students were asked if they had friends, most of them took some time to answer. Friendship is part of the growing process in any stage of life, especially during adolescence. It is the bond to society and the path of making personal decisions.

Mercedes said that she does have friends, a few but good ones, which was the most important to her. She even mentioned that one of her friends told her: *“you are a person I can trust.”* Teresa had a different answer. Her experience with friendship had not been the most ideal. She used to be bullied by classmates in the school she attended in her home country, and she had shared with me that she had been bullied in the schools she went to here in Iceland. Even though Teresa speaks Icelandic, she does not have Icelandic friends. All of her friends are of foreign origin.

When I asked Mercedes about the school, she let me know that it is very important for her, because she found friends there: *“Apart from being able to see my friends, I can also interact with other boys and girls and when I do it, I feel very happy, because I am a bit introverted.”*

Like many other relationships that are built up in a social environment, the participants hang out together with friends with whom they go out for ice cream, go to the mall or the movies, but what they all had in common is that they were foreigners learning Icelandic. They all mentioned that they did have Icelandic acquaintances and they could get help from them in the school. However, perceiving that friendship with Icelandic classmates would not

go beyond being classmates, the students shared their reasons why. Jesús shared: “I have another kind of humor, and sometimes Icelanders do not understand it what I am saying, whereas the other guys – immigrants – do”. And Aamira had another opinion about it:

...Sometimes I don't understand the people and students in the school. It is just hard to communicate with them. I understand that they've been friends with their friends since their childhood, so they will prefer to stick with them, that is why they didn't want to be friends. I mean, they don't like to be friends with other people.

So, it can be said, from their testimonies, the reasons why they think that it is difficult to make Icelandic friendships is either that they feel that the Icelandic teenagers already have long-term friends since childhood and do not want new friends or else that there are communication differences.

During this stage of life of adolescence, for many of the students building up friendship is crucial, because as they gain friends their sense of security increases as well as their self-esteem. I have learned that the participants in my study learned English faster than Icelandic. The students felt more secure making friends with whom they could share things in common and not because of their lack of Icelandic language or Icelandic friends. Mercedes shared with me: “...well, they [her friends] are also learning Icelandic, which is why we communicate in English.” When discussing making friendships with students from other subjects outside of the reception program, Mercedes said she was not sure and shared with me:

Friends? I don't know, I can tell that they are my friends but I don't know if they will say I am their friend. There are some guys I talk to, in English, but they are a few and also come from different countries. There were a few Icelandic girls I used to talk to...and because there are always new students, or someone who doesn't speak your language, they [Icelandic students] exclude themselves. But with my friends, we all speak English.

At the beginning, the girls [Icelandic] spoke more to me, because I speak Spanish, but I don't speak with them anymore, and maybe now I feel rejected, or something like that.

I asked Mercedes what she thought the reasons were for being rejected by other students or other students not talking to her. She answered: “Because I don't speak Icelandic.” And then I decided to ask her if it would make a difference to the other students' attitudes if she spoke Icelandic. She replied:

I think yes, but it doesn't mean that is going to change. I mean, ...just because I could speak Icelandic doesn't mean that all the girls would be my friends... but I could talk more to them. And have a normal conversation.

Something I could not overlook was Jesús' awareness about his local peers. He mentioned his peers' lack of humor and something even more serious: he mentioned that great consideration should be taken to the emotional and mental health of local peers. He considered that local adolescents should acquire greater emotional support, as he had witnessed alcoholism, drug use, and depression in predominantly Icelandic peers.

All the students shared with me that even though they had a decent level of Icelandic, they were not yet able to make Icelandic friends. They were willing to speak more English as it gave them more confidence and became the main tool to communicate with friends. Thus, as they all had friends within the reception program group, I perceived from most of what the students shared, that they felt Icelandic students were not talking or communicating to them because they were foreigners.

4.4 Looking to the Future

When the students were asked at the time of the interview about where they see themselves three to five years into the future, most of them knew what kind of jobs they wanted for their future. Jesús stated that he is very eager to go to a bigger country where he could participate in the military forces, and he mentioned: "...I have plans after I finish high school... I want to join the military forces in that country... that has always been my goal..."

Fernando also has plans for his future: he wants to study at the University of Iceland and become an engineer. When I asked him about his future, he started counting the numbers out loud, adding them to his age, and said:

... I am 15 now, in three to five years...well, graduating from high school or from the University [among smiles and laugh] I will know with more certainty by then, what I really want to build for myself... a better future...

On the other hand, Gonzalo mentioned to me that he does not yet know for certain what he would be doing a few years into the future. He mentioned that depending on his opportunities he will take what is more convenient for him. However, when I asked him if he wants to study something, he shared: "... since I was little, I have always liked music... if I had to study something, [it] is going to have to be with music. If it is not with music, I will choose programming."

When I asked Daniela the same question about her future, she shared with me that she did not know yet what she really wanted, if she would be studying or working, because her tendency is to be undecided:

“.. despite not having it very clear – I might change my mind – I want to study Icelandic for foreigners first and thereafter, I want to study cinematography...the principal always told me I need to learn Icelandic to be able to study cinematography or else I will not understand anything.”

When I asked Teresa about what she would like to do for her future she said:

“... in three years, I will be studying in the school I want to, because I want to be a hairdresser... I think I will be working somewhere I can earn money from and in the future open my own hair salon.”

Mercedes sees herself speaking Icelandic with more proficiency and thinking of having more friends; she wants to continue her studies and work at the same time. She sees herself traveling and expanding her skills in photography. She also showed her interest in painting. Although she shows some artistic skills and interests, she has not yet decided any concrete plans for her future.

For Aamina, thinking in the present is more essential. She shared with me that “she has learnt a lot about being a girl” and she sees herself, in the short term, working and doing big things with her father as well as studying in an English-speaking country, as she has not yet learnt Icelandic very well.

They dreamt of being an engineer, a hairdresser, a filmmaker, and a photographer, as Fernando, Teresa, Daniela and Mercedes shared with me respectively. As much as Jesús is enchanted with Iceland, his desires were to be living and building a future in a bigger nation. Some of them express their desire of continuing to live in Iceland, whether studying or working, or doing both. Those who desire to stay in Iceland want to learn better Icelandic, which is part of Daniela’s goal, as well as for Fernando. However, those whose future goals were going abroad to build their future in other countries, shared with me their desire of learning more English, and that is one of the reasons why they were not interested in getting better in Icelandic.

5 Discussion

This research study focuses on the experiences of immigrant adolescents in lower secondary school with the purpose of giving a voice to an underrepresented group in Iceland. In Chapter 2 the conceptual framework of the research is presented. Chapter 3 describes the methods and methodology used in this research study through phenomenological qualitative research, introducing students' backgrounds in lower secondary schools in Iceland, ethical issues and the limitations of the research. Chapter 4 presents the finding analysis represented under the main subjects found from the data collection. In Chapter 5, the discussion of the research study is presented.

The following chapter brings together the conceptual framework and the research findings and themes for a discussion about the experiences of immigrant students regarding school support, friendships and parental relationships. The main themes discussed are the importance of family support, the school as an incentive, peer and friendship factors, and the last one, "it takes a community to raise a child", which represents the results from the findings and also acts as summary. In Chapter 6, the conclusions and suggestions are presented. The most important considerations from this research will be discussed in the following sections.

5.1 The importance of family support

Despite the diversity of participants and their family background, all of them mentioned feeling supported by their parents and discussed positively the good relationships with them, even though in some households the home rules were stricter than in others. This is in accordance with other studies that have reflected on the impact and influence parents and cultural background could have on an adolescent's life (Rumberger, 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). The style of parenting of participants has been impacted by Icelandic society (Calafat et al., 2013; Davis et al., 2018). One of the girls mentioned that her father had changed after time had passed from settling in Iceland and he allowed her to behave differently than in their home country. On the other hand, for one of the participants the religious background practiced by the family was clearly a difference as his guide of good behavior was avoiding risky behavior; it is more likely for boys to present these kind of behaviors (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). Parental involvement was a concern for Julia, the teacher who is part of this research study.

During the interviews, all of the participants manifested different experiences and feelings regarding moving to Iceland. Their experiences and feeling were, for some of them, a constant comparison between Iceland and their country of origin. They said that Iceland

was different because of Icelandic costumes or how Icelanders might express their feelings in ways that are culturally different for them. The students also mentioned that Icelandic is very different grammatically from their mother tongues. Thus, despite all the considerable changes mentioned before for these students, for one of the female students the change was greater in a particular way. Due to her cultural background and gender, as she expressed herself about her particular experience, she found the sort of clothing she wears here in Iceland contrasts with the clothing and accessories she used to wear back home as a differentiation of genders.

Gender differences in academic achievements were not apparent in the interviews with the participants; nonetheless, gender differences were shown by the girls who claimed having stricter rules at home than boys. At the same time, when adolescents shared about their feelings, boys mentioned that they prefer to keep those feelings for themselves, whereas girls have a tendency to share more feelings with those who they feel they can trust (Camic, Green, Heitler Hirsch, Rhodes & Suárez-Orozco, 2008; Marcenaro-Gutierrez, Lopez Agudo & Ropero-García, 2017)

One of the factors Julia mentioned was the lack of parent involvement with their children's studies, even though teachers made their best efforts to keep in contact with both parents and students. She mentioned that in many instances parents keep poor contact with the teachers as a consequence of the lack of parent-student communication, though language is another barrier of communication. Limitations in parents' competence and the capacity to balance time, jobs and energy to support their children's responsibilities in school is another important factor (Adams, Reissland & Sangawi, 2018; Crosnoe & Fuligni, 2012; Lareau, 2011). From the perspective of my participants, the above-mentioned issues were not discussed as problematic: Aamira's father assisted her with her algebra homework and Gonzalo's father supported him by talking to school authorities and the police when he got into trouble.

Even when the cultural background in students is similar or possession of a common language, when it comes to a student's family values, all the participants showed individual family cultures, family compositions and relationships. Furthermore, home rules and cultural background play a big role for immigrant adolescents who participated in this research study. Home rules and cultural background (Crosnoe & Fuligni, 2012; Lareau, 2011; Sangawi et al., 2018) will influence the relationships and involvement of parents in adolescents' academic achievements (Rumberger, 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009).

5.2 School is an incentive

All the students in this research had been in the reception program implemented by the Municipality of Reykjavík. Students stated that they were satisfied with the reception program and their teachers. They talked with respect and care about them. They also mentioned that their teachers in the reception program were helpful, supportive and understanding. All the students, without exception, referred to these teachers as their favorite ones. They were the ones who supported them in connecting with the Icelandic society and learning the local language. Students' perceptions of good teachers seemed to reflect Julia's expectations she had about her students. She supported them from academic to emotional issues. Furthermore, the students said they felt great with other subject teachers if those teachers demonstrated a helpful, supportive and understanding attitude towards them, similar to the attitudes demonstrated by the teachers in the reception program (Reykjavíkurborg, 2020). These experiences made the students feel more included, despite some participants considering they were somehow forgotten or ignored by the subject teachers. The clear examples of bullying by classmates were alarming, especially in the case of Gonzalo. Not only did the school fail to support him (by not addressing bullying in the school he was going to), but also the society, as other authorities refused to take his case further. The importance of the reception program and how it is implemented is clear in my findings. It is obvious that the first months in the Icelandic school system have an immense effect on a student's experience and attitudes. This means that the program needs to be carefully thought out and implemented to ensure the reception takes place everywhere in the school, such as the reception classroom, regular classroom and afterschool program. Furthermore, teachers and others involved in the education of immigrant students need to collaborate and share responsibility of the reception process.

However, there was a tendency among these students to learn English faster than Icelandic. Teachers outside the reception program – teachers of other subjects – usually speak to the students in Icelandic. However, in some instances the students' diverse proficiency in Icelandic makes it more difficult for them to understand the teacher. This prompts the teacher to switch from Icelandic to English, under the assumption of expecting all immigrant students to understand or communicate in English. The issue with this attitude is that many students end up with the need to learn English, or get more interested in learning it over Icelandic, as they are indirectly encouraged by some teachers to know English. Most of the students also showed a preference for learning English because of social status or the ability to gain friends. In addition, some of the students had a desire to study or work abroad and did not see their future in Iceland. However, some students mentioned that when they did not understand instructions or explanations in Icelandic, the teachers

tended to switch to English, making the assumption that everyone could understand the English language which was not the case for the students in this research. As suggested in one research study (Tran & Ragnarsdóttir, 2019) the most common method teachers use is to speak English instead of Icelandic to help students understand. However, teachers cannot assume that all students speak or understand English.

The students in this research did not mention the methods teachers in other subjects used to communicate or to convey their messages to the students. Students only mentioned the great attitude displayed by their teachers in Icelandic in the reception program. One of the students, Jesús, shared that 'freedom of speech' was one of the good practices encouraged by the teachers and he was able to openly express his thoughts.

Regarding learning Icelandic as a second language, the findings showed that participants were eager to improve their English skills, because this language gave them an immediate gain. The students already felt excluded from their Icelandic peers (social life), and they felt the same about Icelandic. They felt that learning Icelandic had little social value for them. One of the students mentioned feeling ashamed of not being able to speak Icelandic without an accent, or even worse, when his own Icelandic peers made fun of his pronunciation. On the other hand, it seemed that teachers indirectly encouraged the students' English skills by automatically assuming that immigrants would have a good command of English to communicate. Julia mentioned that for many local students in the schools it is 'super cool' to speak in English. Without considering the consequences, this could affect immigrant students in their process of learning Icelandic. Moreover, some participants' future plans were to go abroad, hence their interest in English language; in this case, English was more valuable than Icelandic, while other participants and peers might have considered English to be a cooler language (as suggested by Julia).

As the primary role model and promoters of behavior in the classroom, teachers need to be aware of their attitudes toward the students, which could determine inclusion or exclusion among students (Hogekamp, et al., 2016). For example, if students see teachers' attitudes as including everyone, students will also tend to reflect that behavior in themselves without difference.

Julia mentioned that from her perspective, discipline as a strict measurement of teaching methods, is unlikely to be considered in Icelandic compulsory education. Teachers hold back on calling out students on behavior that disagrees with the standards of social values of respect in the school, or in the ability to demand from them improvements in their academic attainments or results. In this regard, in compulsory school students tend to lack commitment to pursue academic studies, which becomes more challenging in upper

secondary schools, the next level of education (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012a), where teachers require more commitment and discipline than in compulsory school (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012), e.g., students' presence in class, or a minimum score to pass a subject, are not mandatory in compulsory school. Julia also mentioned that many students get discouraged in the classroom, even though students and teachers have a proper environment to develop and interact within the school. Literature indicates that academic engagement and success are linked to what students learn, how students learn, and with whom students learn (Green, et al., 2008).

For the most part, academic engagement is related to how good the students feel towards their teachers, along with their expectations, friends and social connections within the school environment. Teachers' expectations play a big role in students' outcomes and this was reflected in Gonzalo's viewpoint. He felt that while he received encouragement by the teachers in the reception program, he felt disconnected to do better when teachers did not encourage him to do his best.

It is important for the teachers to put more emphasis on issues such as development of the environment inside schools and to make improvements for the benefit of the students, as the Curriculum Guide for Compulsory School states that everyone should receive support according to individual needs (Hogekamp, et al., 2016; Suárez Orozco et al., 2009)

5.3 Peer and friendship factors

Building friendships was an important factor for all the participants. The struggle of avoiding exclusion in a completely new place and trying to fit in (Monahan & Steinberg, 2007) with their Icelandic peers, and within Icelandic society, was the biggest challenge for the participants, who feel very vulnerable, especially at the stage of adolescence. Social connection is imperative for students at this stage in life, as it is the link to society (Jager et al., 2015; Riera, 2017). After having felt excluded by peers for the fact of not speaking Icelandic, the participants expressed a preference to build up friendships with other immigrants who had more things in common with them, such as being an immigrant, speaking English and having a mother tongue other than Icelandic, sharing similar humor or experiencing challenges in learning Icelandic. These personal connections made them feel in a way included and they fitted in.

As it seems that immigrant students are well included as part of the school agenda, considering that the core of Icelandic education is based on inclusion, it is surprising to find bullying as a common practice in schools: research shows (Arnarsson & Sigurgeirsdóttir, 2018) that 6.3% of students had disclosed being bullied two or more times a month. In this

regard, it seems that bullying programs are neglected by teachers and authorities in some schools, as the research states that bullying occurs frequently and, as a result, makes not only other bullied peers, but also immigrant students who are bullied, less socially integrated. Despite the experiences the participant shared about bullying, we did not discuss the bullying programs offered in the schools.

Other important considerations should be taken to the concerns that Jesús raised on local peers' mental health, which was not discussed with any of the students in this research.

Lastly, many participants seemed to be motivated and have a positive perspective on their future, despite the challenges they had faced. The participants shared that English was not only the connection to friendship, but also to personal dreams and future plans of studying abroad, with some setting their sights on Iceland and improving Icelandic as their second or third language.

5.4 It takes a community to raise a child

The findings of this research represent a few accountable characteristics in school culture in terms of how authorities organize the schools' functioning and implement practices. It is imperative for the Icelandic community to face these challenges by preparing and supporting teachers – not only those who work in the reception program but also teachers of the other subjects. Teachers need to let go of traditional methods, allowing new and more updated practices. In this way, teachers and people involved in education could face unique challenges that multicultural societies bring, with more knowledge and the capacity to meet immigrant students' needs for everyone's benefit.

The findings of this study are similar to previous research (Rumberger, 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009), suggesting that parents' involvement and collaborative support with the school are essential factors that certainly will impact participants' academic achievements. The sense of community in schools is an important matter (Rumberger, 2011). Its beneficial side is reflected in the positive feedback students shared about the teachers on the reception program. This positive response from students will give Julia hope in her expectations about increasing their academic attainments and engagement.

The relationships formed in a school environment are the first connection to Icelandic society, which can be projected in students' desires of belonging to part of a community. Research (Rumberger, 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009) suggests that all these factors influence students' achievements. In this research, it is demonstrated that these factors significantly influence immigrant students' future decision-making.

Humans have the innate ability to socialize, as raising a child needs help from other people like our relatives, people around us we can trust, or the support from an acquaintance or neighbor to give us a hand (Harari, 2015). This research demonstrates that factors such as family support and involvement, peers, friendship connections, teachers and school support are interrelated. Each of them has a different level of impact on an immigrant student. For instance, we should consider that it takes more than one person to raise a child, or as Yuval Harari (2015) wrote: "It takes a tribe to raise a human."

6 Conclusion

The main purpose of this research is to provide a platform for immigrant adolescents in lower secondary schools in Iceland to share their experiences and make their voices heard in a safe space. With phenomenological research methodology used throughout the interviews, the results confirmed and matched international research. Research done in places with a larger population with a multicultural background definitely matters: parents' support, teachers' expectations, and the impact of the adolescent life stage greatly influences immigrant adolescents.

The number of immigrant students has been rising over the years in compulsory schools in Iceland. Hence, helping these students to learn Icelandic for academic purposes is imperative. As research shows, there are less graduations of immigrant students in lower secondary schools compared to their Icelandic counterparts. Improvement in the collective knowledge of multiculturalism by teachers and people involved in education is essential by implementing more innovative and engaging methods or practices that will arouse immigrant students' participation in class.

All the students who participated in the reception program for students with another mother tongue than Icelandic felt satisfied. All of them had fond memories of their teachers of the Icelandic language in the reception program, due to the fact that those teachers were the ones who helped them the most, compared to the teachers from other subjects, whom they felt ignored by on many occasions.

In this research, only one out of seven participants learnt Icelandic as a second language. The rest of the students learnt English as a second language, thus making Icelandic their third language. These findings highlight the fact that immigrant students are learning English faster than Icelandic, which becomes quite worrisome if these students want to become part of the Icelandic society. Teachers should be aware of this crucial issue in order to ensure the continuous practice of learning Icelandic. Careful attention needs to be given. It is paramount that teachers upskill themselves and expand their capabilities by working in multicultural classrooms. Providing a more explicit framework to support teachers and other people involved in this area would be beneficial.

I also recommend implementing workshops and/or other innovative approaches to meet these students' needs. Such interventions should not only be socially focused but also should facilitate interaction with locals, in the form of leisure activities or extracurricular programs offered by the Municipality of Reykjavík.

One of the factors that came into play in the results of this research is the participants' eagerness to reach out for friendship and to communicate with others. The teacher who participated in the research declared that even though the reception program is working for many of the students, there are still many improvements to be made, for instance in enhancing practices and educational structures to better engage the students in school. She also mentioned that parental involvement plays a significant role in students' engagement in school. The lack of parent engagement could be explained in part by parents' limited knowledge of Icelandic to help with students' homework. Also, some of the parents lack time and energy, as their primary focus is on working hard rather than supporting their children's academic development. Gender differences in academic achievements were not discussed with the participants. Nevertheless, gender differences were noticeable in students' internal feelings and external behaviors through home rules being stricter for girls than boys.

Overall, when I think of these students' futures, it becomes unavoidable for me to think about the futures of my own children. I always wonder whether their classmates and society will respond to their learning processes and needs. I wonder if they will have enough tools and means to achieve what they want in life. Similarly, I wish the best for these students – my participants' – future and those who are or will be in similar circumstances. I hope that they find enough motivation within themselves to reach their personal goals – wherever they come from and wherever they may go – with the support of Icelandic Education Authorities.

The findings in this research are limited, as they comprise the experiences of seven immigrant students and one teacher involved in the reception program for students with another mother tongue than Icelandic. The results do not, therefore, reflect the experiences of all immigrant students in Iceland.

Further studies are recommended, as there is a gap of information and literature is limited about this group of students in Iceland. There is a need for further research of the influence of the reception program and its elements on students' wellbeing and academic achievement, including gaining proficiency in Icelandic. In this way, we could better understand their reality and the circumstances these young people face in order to contribute to improve practices and even policies for the benefit of the education system and society. My interest lies in continuing research in this field, implementing new methods or practices, and getting involved more deeply with the Icelandic community and Icelandic as a second language.

References

- Adams, J. Reissland, N. & Sangawi, H. (2018). The impact of parenting styles on children developmental outcome: The role of academic self-concept as a mediator. *International Journal of Psychology*. Vol. 53 (5), pp.379-387.
- Arnarsson, Á. M. & Sigurgeirsdóttir, V. (2018). Viðhorf íslenskra grunnskólanema til eineltis og inngripa í eineltismál út frá reynslu þeirra af einelti. Netla – Veftímarit um uppeldi og menntun. Menntavísindasvið Háskóla Íslands. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24270/netla.2018.14>
- Aronson, B. & Laughter, J. (2016). The theory and practice of culturally relevant education: A synthesis of research across content areas. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315582066>
- Baltar, F. & Brunet I. (2012). Social research 2.0: virtual snowball sampling method using Facebook. *Internet Research*, 22(1), 57-74.
- Bornstein, M. H., Hendricks, C., Jager, J., Putnick, D. L. & Yuen, C. X. (2014). Adolescent-Peer relationships, Separations and Detachment from Parents, and Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors: Linkages and Interactions. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*. Vol 35(4), 511-537. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431614537116>
- Calafat, A., García, F., Montse, J., Becoña, E. & Fernández-Hermida J. R. (2013). Which parenting style is more protective against adolescent substance use? Evidence within the European context. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 138 (2014) 185-192.
- Cole, P., Hermon, G. & Yanti (2015). Grammar of Binding in the languages of the world: Innate or learned? *Science Direct*. Vol.141, 138-160.
- Creswell, J. W. & Creswell J. D. (2018). *Research design. Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. (5th ed.). Los Angeles: Sage edge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research. Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Crosnoe, R. & Fuligni, A. J. (2012). Children from Immigrant Families: Introduction to the Special Section. *Child Development*. Vol. 83(1471-1476)
- Cummins, J. (2012). The intersection of cognitive and sociocultural factors in the development of reading comprehension among immigrant students. *Reading and Writing*. Vol.25(8), 1973-1990.
- Daníelsdóttir, H. & Skogland H. (2018, February 1st). Staða grunnskólanemenda með íslensku sem annað tungumál. Greining Menntamálastofnunar. Retrieved from https://mms.is/sites/mms.is/files/isat-nemendur-greining_feb_2018_1.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3mPRp4WoNqqcADRvv9qu_UWfxYIS63hjCwcOF2NCpMis0gnBfg9n91IPw

- Davis, A. N., Carlo, G., Streit, C., Scchwartz, S. J., Unger, J. B., Baezconde-Garbanati L. & Szapocznik, J. (2018). Longitudinal Associations between Maternal Involvement, Cultural Orientations, and Prosocial Behaviours Among Recent Immigrant Latino Adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 47(2), 460-472.
- Devarakonda, C. (2013). *Diversity & inclusion in early childhood* [Kindle version]. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Ehmke, R. (2020, December 19th). Tips for Communicating with Your Teen. Child Mind Institute. Retrieved from <https://childmind.org/article/tips-communicating-with-teen/>
- European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2017). Education for All in Iceland. Final report. Retrieved from https://www.stjornarradid.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media/media/frettatengt2016/Final-report_External-Audit-of-the-Icelandic-System-for-Inclusive-Education.pdf
- European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities - EASPD (2020, February 5th) Inclusive Education in Iceland. Retrieved from https://www.easpd.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/News/inclusive_education_iceland.pdf
- Florian, Lani (2015). Inclusive Pedagogy: A transformative approach to individual differences but can it help reduce educational inequalities? *Scottish Educational Review* 47(1), 5-14.
- Gaik, L., Abdullah, M. C., Elias, H. & Uli, J (2010). Development of Antisocial Behaviour. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 7, 383-388.
- Gheaus, A. (2016). Parental enhancement and symmetry of power in the parent-child relationship. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, Vol. 42(6) 397. Retrieved from DOI:10.1136/medethics-2016-103624
- Ghirotto, Luca (2016). Research Method and Phenomenological Pedagogy. Reflections from Piero Bertolini. *Encyclopadeia* (45), 82-95. Retrieved from <https://encp.unibo.it/article/view/6326/6099>
- Green G., Rhodes, J., Heitler Hirsch, A., Suárez-Orozco, C. & Camic, P. M. (2008). Supportive adult relationships and the academic engagement of Latin American immigrant youth. *Journal of School Psychology*, Vol. 46 (4), 393-412. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2007.07.001>
- Grindsted, A. (2005). Interactive resources used in semi-structured research interviewing. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 37, 1015-1035.
- Gurdal, S. & Sorbring, E. (2018). Children's agency in parent-child, teacher-pupil and peer relationship contexts. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, Vol. 13, 1-9.
- Guðjónsdóttir, H. & Óskarsdóttir, E. (2016). Inclusive Education, pedagogy and practice. *Science education towards inclusion*, 7-22.

- Hallahan, D. P., Kauffman, J. M. & Pullen, P. C. (2014). *Exceptional Learners: Pearson New International Edition: An Introduction to Special Education*. England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Hanna, S., Jones, R., Rowley, J. & Vassiliou, M. (2012). Using card-based games to enhance the value of semi-structured interviews. *International Journal of Market Research*. Vol. 54(1), pp.93-110
- Harari, Yuval N. (2015). *Sapiens: a brief history of humankind* [Kindle version]. Vintage Books: London.
- Harðardóttir, S., Júlíusdóttir, S. & Guðmundsson, H. S. (2015). Understanding resilience in Learning Difficulties: Unheard Voices of Secondary School Students. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 32(4), 351-358.
- Hogekamp, Z., Blomster, J. K., Bursalioglu, A., Calin, M. C., Cetincelik, M., Hastrup, L. & Van den Berg, Y. H. M. (2016). Examining the Importance of the Teachers' Emotional Support for Students' Social Inclusion Using the One-with-Many Design. *Quantitative Psychology and Measurement*. *Front. Psychol.* 7:1014. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01014>
- Holmes, K. (2020a, December 19th). 150 conversation starters for kids that will make you closer than ever. *Happy you, Happy family*. Retrieved from <https://happyyouhappyfamily.com/conversation-starters-for-kids/>
- Holmes, K. (2020b, December 19th). The secret to raising your kids to be kind. *Happy you, Happy family*. Retrieved from <https://happyyouhappyfamily.com/raise-kind-kids/>
- Holmström, R. & Knowles, G. (2013). *Understanding Family Diversity and Home School Relations* [Kindle version]. *Taylor and Francis Group*. London and New York.
- IDEA. (2004). Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-446, 118 Stat. 2647 (2004). Retrieved from https://fl-pda.org/independent/courses/foundations/pilot/_docs/FOEC-V391B.pdf
- Jensen, F. & Nutt, A. E. (2015). *The Teenage Brain. A neuroscientist's survival guide to raising adolescents and young adults*. [Audiobook]. Harper Audio.
- Karnieli-Miller, O., Strier, R. & Pessach, L. (2009). Power relations in qualitative research. *Qualitative health Research*, Vol. 19(2), 279-289. Sage Publication. DOI: 10.1177/1049732308329306
- Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal Childhoods: class, race and family life*. University of California Press. Second Edition with an update a decade later. Berkeley, United States.
- Lerner, J. V., Phelps, E., Forman, Y., & Bowers, E. P. (2009). *Positive youth development*. In R. M. Lerner & L. Steinberg (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology: Individual bases of adolescent development* (p. 524–558). John Wiley & Sons Inc. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470479193.adlpsy001016>

- Li, Y. & Warner, L. A (2015). Parent-Adolescent Conflict, Family Cohesion, and Self-Esteem Among Hispanic Adolescents in Immigrant Families: A Comparative Analysis. *Family Relations. Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies, Vol. 64 (5)*, 579-591. Retrieved from DOI:10.1111/fare.12158
- Lorain, P. (2016, April 19). Brain Development in young adolescents. Retrieved from <http://www.nea.org/tools/16653.htm#.WG9LCpYIYcU.email>
- Lopez-Agudo, L. A., Marcenaro-Gutierrez, O. & Ropero-García, M. A. (2017). Gender Differences in Adolescents' Academic Achievement. *Young 26(3)*, 250-270. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308817715163>
- Messiou, K. (2012). Collaborating with children in exploring marginalisation: an approach to inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 16 (12)*, 1311-1322. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2011.572188>
- Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2012). The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools. Retrieved from https://www.government.is/library/01-Ministries/Ministry-of-Education/Curriculum/adskr_grsk_ens_2012.pdf
- Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2012a). The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary School. Retrieved from https://www.government.is/library/01-Ministries/Ministry-of-Education/Curriculum/adskr_frsk_ens_2012.pdf
- Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2014). The Compulsory School Act No. 91/2008 Retrieved from <https://www.government.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media/media/law-and-regulations/Compulsory-School-Act-No.-91-2008.pdf>
- Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2020). Guidelines for the support of mother tongues and active plurilingualism in schools and afterschool programs. Retrieved from https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/01--Frettatengt---myndir-og-skrar/MRN/Leidarvisir%20um%20studning%20vid%20modurmal_enska.pdf
- Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2011). The Higher Education Act 63/2006 Retrieved from <https://www.stjornartidindi.is/Advert.aspx?ID=7fa0729e-dacc-47e3-b626-96efb036ef68>
- Ministry of Justice (2018). Data Protection and the Processing of Personal Data Act No. 90/2018. Retrieved from https://www.personuvernd.is/media/uncategorized/Act_No_90_2018_on_Data_Protection_and_the_Processing_of_Personal_Data.pdf
- Monahan, K. & Steinberg, L. (2007). Age Differences in Resistance to Peer Influence. *Developmental Psychology, 43(6)*. 1531-1543.
- Nelsen, J., Foster, S. & Raphael, A. (2011). Positive discipline for children with special needs. *Three Rivers Press*. New York.
- Newcomer, S. N. (2018). Investigating the power of authentically caring student-teacher relationships for Latinx students. *Journal of Latinos and Education Vol. 17(2)*, 179-193.

- OECD. (2014). Education at a Glance. OECD Indicator D1. How much time do students spend in the classroom? Retrieved from [http://www.oecd.org/education/EAG2014-Indicator%20D1%20\(eng\).pdf](http://www.oecd.org/education/EAG2014-Indicator%20D1%20(eng).pdf)
- OECD. (2016). Education Policy Outlook - Iceland. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/iceland/Education-Policy-Outlook-Country-Profile-Iceland.pdf>
- OECD. (2018). PISA 2018: Inside and interpretations. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/PISA%202018%20Insights%20and%20Interpretations%20FINAL%20PDF.pdf>
- OECD. (December 27th, 2020). Better policies for better lives. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/>
- Rafik Hama, S. (2020, December). Experiences and expectations of successful immigrant and refugee students while in upper secondary schools in Iceland. [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Department of Education and Diversity. University of Iceland.
- Reykjavíkurborg (October 10th, 2020). Móttökuáætlun vegna barna með íslensku sem annað tungumál. Retrieved from https://reykjavik.is/mottokuaetlun-vegna-barna-med-islensku-sem-annad-tungumal?fbclid=IwAR3C7YdL8-tW5EjxsoUcoMlvFoIX5BE8iE29vgfHfxBp_qa2qTunrzjAnWI
- Riera, M. (2017). *Staying Connected to your Teenager. How to Keep them talking to you and How to hear what they are really saying*. Boston, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Rumberger, R. (2011). *Dropping out. Why students drop high schools and what can be done about it*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Rúnarsdóttir E. M. & Tran A. D. (2020, September 27th). „Ég á ekki enn Íslendinga að vinum.“ Reynsla ungmenna af erlendum uppruna af vinatengslum. [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <https://menntakvika.hi.is/malstofa/samskipti-lifsleikni/>
- Shenk, K. & Williamson, J. (2005). *Ethical Approaches to Gathering Information from Children and Adolescents in International Settings: Guidelines and Resources*.
- Statistics Iceland (2019a, April 4th). Fewer immigrants among graduates from the upper secondary level of education. Retrieved from <https://www.statice.is/publications/news-archive/education/graduates-at-the-upper-secondary-and-tertiary-levels-2016-2017/>
- Statistics Iceland (2019b, April 23rd). Immigrants and persons with foreign background 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.statice.is/publications/news-archive/inhabitants/population-by-origin-2018/>
- Statistics Iceland (2020a, Apríl 22) Grunnskólanemendur aldrei verið fleiri. <https://hagstofa.is/utgafur/frettasafn/menntun/nemendur-i-grunnskolum-haustid-2019/>
- Statistics Iceland (2020b, February 7th). Immigrants and persons with foreign background 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.statice.is/publications/news-archive/inhabitants/population-by-origin-2018/>

- Statistics Iceland (2020c, March 27th). Pupils receiving special Education or Support 2004-2018. Retrieved from https://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Samfelag/Samfelag__skolamal__2_grunnskolestig__0_gsNemendur/SKO02107.px/table/tableViewLayout1/?rxid=9865b794-764c-4b26-8a89-9e113827c054
- Statistics Iceland (2020d, December 27th). Fewer immigrants among graduates from upper secondary level of education. Retrieved from <https://www.statice.is/publications/news-archive/education/graduates-at-the-upper-secondary-and-tertiary-levels-2016-2017/>
- Statistics Iceland (2021, January 4th). Completion rate and dropout from upper secondary education by background 1995-2019. Retrieved from https://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Samfelag/Samfelag__skolamal__3_framhaldsskolastig__0_fsNemendur/SKO03124.px/table/tableViewLayout1/?rxid=d1a9bc97-be6b-4854-b52e-f20dc23677e8
- Steinberg, L. (2001). We know Some Things: Parent-Adolescent Relationships in Retrospect and Prospect. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 11(1), 1-9.
- Slee, R. (2011). *The irregular school. Exclusion, schooling and inclusive education*. London: Routledge.
- Suárez-Orozco, C., Suárez-Orozco, M. M. & Todorova, I. (2009). Learning a New Land: Immigrants Students in American Society. *Harvard University Press. 1st edition*.
- Tran, Anh-Dao & Ragnarsdóttir, Hanna (2019). Students of Vietnamese Heritage: What are their academic experiences in Icelandic Upper Secondary Schools? *Immigration and refugee policy*; 187-204.
- UNESCO (1994). *The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427>

Appendix A: Advertisement on Social media content

Do you know an adolescent who is in sérkennsla in an Icelandic Schools?

I am in the search for adolescents for personal interviews.

Boys or girls who should be in any of the last 3 years of secondary school (8th, 9th and 10th grades) From 14 to 16 of age, approximately.

The adolescent must be immigrant from any part of the world.

The student should be in the department of sérkennsla or receive support for studies.

Have at least 1 semester studying in the school (from 6 months up to years).

Adolescents must have permission from their parents /guardians to participate in the interviews.

Personal information and collected information will be managed under strictly codes of confidentiality.

If you are interested or know of someone who might be or want more information about the topic.

Contact: Zarela Castro mouzarela@gmail.com / gzc1@hi.is

Supervisors: Dr. Edda Óskarsdóttir & Anna Wozniczka

Appendix B: Presentation Letter to Contact in Municipality (in Icelandic)

Ágæti ABC,

Ég er Gloria Zarela Castro Conde. Ég er meistaranemi við Menntavísindasvið Háskóla Íslands að ljúka námi í International Studies in Education. Ég er að gera rannsókn fyrir meistaranemi mína um persónulega reynslu unglunga innflytjenda í íslenskum skólum með námsörðugleika eða greiningu sem getur valdið þeim erfiðleikum í námi. Ég mun taka viðtöl við unglunga sem hafa verið formlega greindir með námsörðugleika eða/og hafa fengið aðstoð vegna sérkennslu í hvaða skóla sem er á Íslandi. Það eru takmarkaðar rannsóknir á þessu viðfangsefni á Íslandi, sem varpa ljósi á upplifun unglunga sem sjálfir hafa gefið sínar skoðanir á málum sem þeim tengjast. Viðtölin verða framkvæmd með spurningarlista um viðfangsefni eins og bakgrunn, sambönd við foreldra, vini kennara / leiðbeinenda, greiningu og framtíð. Meðfylgjandi eru bréf til foreldra, leyfissnið fyrir samþykki og spurningalistinn fyrir viðtölin, sem verður þýdd á mismunandi tungumál.

Ástæðan fyrir því að ég skrifa þér er sú að ég vil biðja um leyfi til að setja mig í samband við foreldra nemenda í gegnum yfirstjórn / forráðamenn / kennara skólans til að geta tekið persónuleg viðtöl við nemendurna. Nemendurnir geta verið innflytjendur frá öllum heimshlutum. Aldur þeirra þarf að vera á milli 14 til 16 ára og þeir að vera á síðustu þremur árum grunnskóla. Ennfremur, farið verður með viðtölin sem rannsóknarefni. Farið verður með allar upplýsingar um þátttakendur í rannsókninni samkvæmt lögum um persónuverndarlög nr. 90/2018, um persónuvernd og vinnslu persónuupplýsinga. Rannsóknarupplýsingar verða geymdar á öruggum stað og eftir gagnavinnslu verður öllum gögnum eytt nema heimild sé fengin til að varðveita þau lengur. Leiðbeinandi minn í rannsókninni er Dr. Edda Óskarsdóttir, aðjúnkt prófessor við Háskóla Íslands, Menntavísindasvið.

Með allri virðingu,

Gloria Zarela Castro Conde

Meistaranemi í alþjóðlegu námi í menntun við Háskóla Íslands

Appendix C: Presentation Letter to Teachers (in Icelandic)

Ágæti kennari,

Ég er Gloria Zarela Castro Conde. Ég er meistaranemi við Menntavísindasvið Háskóla Íslands að ljúka námi í International Studies in Education. Ég er að gera rannsókn fyrir meistararitgerðina mína um persónulega reynslu unglunga innflytjenda í íslenskum skólum með námsörðugleika eða greiningu sem getur valdið þeim erfiðleikum í námi. Ég mun taka viðtöl við unglunga sem hafa verið formlega greindir með námsörðugleika eða/og hafa fengið aðstoð vegna sérkennslu í hvaða skóla sem er á Íslandi. Það eru takmarkaðar rannsóknir á þessu viðfangsefni á Íslandi, sem varpa ljósi á upplifun unglunga sem sjálfir hafa gefið sínar skoðanir á málum sem þeim tengjast. Viðtölin verða framkvæmd með spurningarlista um viðfangsefni eins og bakgrunn, sambönd við foreldra, vini kennara / leiðbeinenda, greiningu og framtíð. Ég mun setja í viðhengi bréfin til að biðja foreldranna um leyfi sem og verða þýdd á mismunandi tungumál.

Ástæðan fyrir því að ég skrifa þér er af því í gegnum þig get ég haft samband við foreldra nemandans til að fá leifi að taka persónulegt viðtal við hann. Nemendurnir geta verið innflytjendur frá öllum heimshlutum. Aldur þeirra þarf að vera á milli 14 til 16 ára og þeir að vera á síðustu þremur árum grunnskóla. Ennfremur, farið verður með viðtölin sem rannsóknarefni. Farið verður með allar upplýsingar um þátttakendur í rannsókninni samkvæmt lögum um persónuverndarlög nr. 90/2018, um persónuvernd og vinnslu persónuupplýsinga. Rannsóknarupplýsingar verða geymdar á öruggum stað og eftir gagnavinnslu verður öllum gögnum eytt nema heimild sé fengin til að varðveita þau lengur. Leiðbeinandi minn í rannsókninni er Dr. Edda Óskarsdóttir, aðjúnkt prófessor við Háskóla Íslands, Menntavísindasvið.

Með allri virðingu,

Gloria Zarela Castro Conde

Meistaraneemi í alþjóðlegu námi í menntun við Háskóla Íslands

Appendix D: Presentation Letter to Parents

Dear parent / guardian,

I am Gloria Zarela Castro Conde and I am a master student at the University of Iceland's School of Education. I am doing a research for my master thesis on personal experiences of immigrant adolescents in Icelandic Schools who are diagnosed or experiencing difficulties in their learning process.

The reason I write to you is that I want to ask for permission to have a personal interview with your child. These interviews will be treated as research material. All information provided by the participants in the study will be handled according to the confidentiality and anonymity rules of the privacy legislation Act no. 90/2018, on privacy and processing of personal information. The names, localities and names of institutions/organizations will be changed to ensure that the data cannot be traced to specific individuals. After data processing, all data will be deleted.

Participants in the study have the full right to cancel the study at any time during the process if requested and, at the same time refuse to participate.

My supervisor in the study is Dr. Edda Óskarsdóttir, Adjunct Professor at the University of Iceland, School of Education.

With all respect,

Gloria Zarela Castro Conde
Student of program International Studies of Education
(gzc1@hi.is/ mouzarela@gmail.com)

Appendix E: Approval Form Parent/Child

Dear parent/guardian.

I am Gloria Zarela Castro Conde. I am a master students at the Unviersity of Iceland's School of Education and, completing my studies in the program International Studies in Education. The research supervisor is Dr. Edda Óskarsdóttir, Adjunct Professor at the School of Education at the University of Iceland. The master study is about personal experiences of immigrant adolescents in Icelandic Schools with learning disabilities or a diagnosis that may bring difficulties in their learning process.

The purpose of this letter is to request permission of your participation in the study that is being conducted in this way. Permission is requested to record the interview and student's interview will be treated as research material and kept confidential. All names, from institutions or people will be changed and carefully taken care that the data cannot be traced to the participants. All information provided by the participant in the study will be handled according to privacy legislation Act no. 90/2018, on privacy and processing of personal information.

Investigative data will be stored in a safe place with the guarantor during the course of the investigation and, all data will be deleted when it finishes, unless authorization is obtained to preserve them for longer.

Participants in the study have the full right to cancel participation at any time in the process upon request and at the same time to refuse participation.

If any of the questions arise regarding this research study, please contact the investigator

Gloria Zarela Castro Conde by phone 6955678 or by email mouzarela@gmail.com / gzc1@hi.is

I hereby give my consent for the interview

_____ date: _____
Parent's signature

I hereby consent to the interview:

_____ date: _____
Signature of the child

Appendix F: Interview Guide Questions

1 Background

Would you like to tell me about yourself?

- How old are you? Where and with whom do you live with here in Iceland (mom / dad / step parent / grandmother / grandpa, siblings?)
- Where do you come from or where were you born?
- What year did you come? How long have you been here in Iceland? Did you come with your family?
- Can you tell me, why did you come to Iceland?
- Are you staying for an extended period of time, or just a short period of time?
- What was the most difficult part of coming to Iceland?
- Did you leave friends behind in your country?
- How was your life during weekdays, back in your country?
- And what about a weekend?

2 Parents

- Can you tell me something about your parents?
- How is the relationship with them?
- How will you describe your parents?
- How do you communicate together?
- How are the rules at home?
- Can you tell me your parents' education? Do they have compulsory school, technical education, higher education, further education?
- Do your parents work too much?
- How do you spend time with your parents during the week?

3 School

- How long have you been in the Icelandic school?
- How do you like the school do you go to?
- What is your favorite subject in the school?
- What do you like the most about school?
- How was your process of adaptation to the school?
- How did you perceive your teachers? Were they helpful with you?
- how involved your parents are with your schoolwork/ duties?
- How is the communication between school and your parents?

- How helpful have been your teachers in the school?
- How helpful have been other authorities in the school?

4 Social life

- Do you have friends? / have you made friends?
- Where do your friends live? Close by home, school or far away?
- How would you describe your spare time with your friends?
- Do you have more girl or boy friends? How do you think you get along with them? Do you have similarities with them?
- How helpful have been your classmates during your process of adaptation into the school?

5 Future

- While living here in Iceland, how do you see yourself in 5 years from now?
- Would you like to study some specific career or do something else?

Would you like to add something else, or tell me something else you have in mind or share?

Appendix G: Interview Guide Questions with teacher (Spanish/ English)

Español

- De dónde eres y cómo aprendiste islandés?
- Cómo cambió tu vida desde que aprendiste el Islandés?
- Cómo comenzó este programa?- historia del programa.
- Me puedes explicar cuál es que trabajo que haces, desde hace cuántos años? Y qué es lo que haces? Cómo es la organización de lo que haces?
- Puedes describirme lo que haces en tu trabajo y cómo es?
- Cuántos estudiantes están en este grupo?
- Cuántos años tienen y sus antecedentes?
- Podrías contarme sobre sus antecedentes? Cómo son ellos?
- Cómo ves que tu trabajo se refleja en tus alumnos?
- Qué es lo que haces por ellos?
- Cuál es mayor problema que ves dentro de tu trabajo entre ellos?
- Cuál es el mayo problema que ves como profesora y qué es lo que te hace falta para mejorar este campo?
- Cómo ves que los otros profesores toman este programa o el aumento de estudiantes en la escuela?
- Cómo ves que está funcionando el programa?
- Qué te gustaría que cambie o hacer diferente?
- Cómo te gustaría que el programa esté de aquí en unos 3 o 5 años?

English

- Where are you from and how did you learn Icelandic?
- How has your life changed since you learned Icelandic?
- How did this program start? - program history.
- Can you explain to me what kind of job you have been doing, for how many years? And what do you do? How is the reception plan organized of what you do?
- Can you describe what you do in your job and how is it?
- How many students are in this group?
- How old are they and their background? - Could you tell me about their background?
- How do you see that your work is reflected in your students? What do you do for them?
- What is the biggest problem that you see within your students at work?
- What is the biggest problem that you see as a teacher and how/what would you like to improve this field?
- How do you see that other teachers see this program or the increase of students in the school?
- How do you see that the program is working?
- What would you like to change or do differently?
- How would you like the program to be in 3 or 5 years into the future?

