

## **Turning Conflict Experiences of Some into Resilience for All: An Impossible Task?**

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### Abstract

Learning, and especially the broader learning process, requires an intellectual and emotional effort. Such emotional effort can come with greater risks for some learner profiles than others, and this is particularly true for refugee/ forcibly displaced learners. To provide adequate support for these students from conflict-affected contexts, reflective educational practices and emotional support are recommended. However, in higher education, educators are often unaware of the circumstances and backgrounds of learners in their classes. This can lead to a lack of dedicated approaches, thus jeopardizing the benefits of educational programs, notably language education, which are essential for integration. The present study sought to address these concerns, questioning whether language courses designed for other foreign learners adequately meet the needs of more vulnerable individuals. More specifically, it analyzed the language learning needs of refugees/ forcibly displaced individuals and well-recognized larger groups, namely first-generation immigrants and incoming learners. The use of a collaborative mixed-method approach allowed for the integration of identified needs from various stakeholders, sources and methods as well as the discussion of actionable teaching practices. The needs analysis shows that refugee/ forcibly displaced learners are more at risk of encountering teaching practices that are less, or perhaps, the least, beneficial for them. However, it also concludes that refugees/ forcibly displaced individuals, first-generation immigrants, and incoming learners have overlapping views of what makes a language course effective and engaging, which are two significant criteria for long-term information retention and skill development. Implications for future research and adult language education practice are discussed.

*Keywords:* collaborative mixed method, effectiveness, language teaching/learning, migration, motivation

“Language learning encompasses sensitive questions related to diversity, identity and culture. In a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual world, this contention becomes all the more important.” (Majhanovich & Deyrich, 2017, p. 440)

A foreign language is not just another communication tool (Peguero, 2024; UNESCO, 2025). Language proficiency, even with the advent of AI and the automation of text translation and generation, is a prerequisite for democratic participation, economic opportunity, access to health care and socio-cultural integration (Aleghfeli et al., 2024; Bradley et al., 2025; Peguero, 2024). From this perspective, providing access to locally relevant language education is an important support for any citizen, but a vital aid for any newcomer to a receiving community (Aleghfeli et al., 2024; Çelik, 2023; UNESCO, 2025).

Nevertheless, there is still little research on the intersection of the migration of formally educated adults and their language learning needs. Building on Luxembourg’s highly international and multilingual context (Hawkey & Horner, 2022; Scuto, 2023), the present study contributes to closing this gap by comparing the attributes of three adult learner groups in migration situations, guided by the research question below.

*What needs are expressed by refugee/ forcibly displaced, immigrant and incoming learners participating in language classes organized by the Language Centre of the University of Luxembourg?*

The inquiry had two underlying objectives. First, it sought to understand the learning needs of a multitude of diverse language earners. Focusing on learners' needs aligns with sociocultural approaches favored in European language education (Council of Europe, 2001). It also highlights the requirement for teachers to embrace the plurilingual and pluricultural diversity present in their courses, by dedicating space for its valorization and recognition (Council of Europe, 2020).

As the scope of language education widens, understanding language learning needs stemming from diversity has become a necessary condition for pedagogical conceptualization (Council of Europe, 2020), thereby leading to the second objective. The study additionally explored how teachers can best meet these learners’ needs without inadvertently putting the most vulnerable ones, such as the refugee and forcibly displaced learners, in harm’s way.

To prevent harm and in turn, promote student well-being, learners' perceptions were chosen to guide the analysis (Broek et al., 2023), which was performed through a mixed collaborative method (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Two criteria were used to reflect language learners’ experience, drawing on interrelated cognitive, behavioral, and motivational dimensions (Phan & Ngu, 2021). Those are the perceived effectiveness, positive self-concept, and enthusiasm towards learning that language learners would experience if the identified needs were actively targeted by teachers in the classroom.

## Literature Review

Migration movements growingly shape modern societies, setting a new defining phenomenon called superdiversity in motion (Vertovec, 2022). Luxembourg closely follows the same societal trend. According to Eurostat (2024), almost half of the population living in Luxembourg in 2023 (47.4%) did not have the Luxembourgish nationality. When compared with the European norm of 9.2%, Luxembourg appears as singular. Through this special position in the European migration landscape, Luxembourg can be conceptualized as a magnifying glass for migration phenomena and the accompanying superdiversity.

The effects of these phenomena are palpable in Luxembourg's education contexts (Luxembourg Centre for Educational Testing [LUCET] & Service de Coordination de la Recherche et de l'Innovation pédagogiques et technologiques [SCRIPT], 2025). As the learners become more diverse, new variables are affecting the teaching and learning processes. Some of these can revive a sensitive and critically important educational debate in a multilingual country like Luxembourg. Such is the case of the linguistic variable.

In addition to being a country of immigration (Scuto, 2023), Luxembourg is known for its “extensive individual and societal multilingualism (...) [in which] the national language of Luxembourgish is used alongside French and German” (Hawkey & Horner, 2022, p. 196). Consequently, Luxembourg has a unique linguistic configuration: unlike other multilingual societies around the world, it operates on the principle of contextual multilingualism. This type of multilingualism is characterized by the fact that geographic region is not a determining factor in the choice of the preferred language of communication (Hawkey & Horner, 2022).

Aligned with the national context, the traditional Luxembourgish education system seeks to develop individual plurilingualism among its population. At a later stage in the education system, the University of Luxembourg (hereafter, University) continues to show consideration for multilingual education. Since its foundation in 2003, the country's only public university has adopted a multilingual policy: Luxembourg's degree programs offer courses taught in French and/or German and/or English and/or – albeit to a lesser extent – Luxembourgish. As a result, in Luxembourg higher education, the ability to master several languages is a prerequisite for orientation and academic success (LUCET & SCRIPT, 2025).

In such a multilingual and international academic context, language learning and teaching has become an inevitable response to migration flows (UNESCO, 2025). In Luxembourg, a wide range of language training offers are available in response to these circumstances. The present study in particular was situated in the context of the language courses organized by the Language Centre of the University (hereafter, Language Centre). These free courses are open only to students and, depending on the study program, are integrated into the students' training. As such, the language courses provide learning opportunities for everyone, especially for more vulnerable students who lack the financial resources to build language competence elsewhere. However, unlike other contexts, where training programs tailored for refugee and forcibly displaced (RFD) learners have demonstrated their worth (Peguero, 2024), RFD students at the

University do not benefit from dedicated language courses that take their migration background into account. Relative to larger groups such as incoming students in international mobility programs and first-generation immigrant students RFD language learners thus account for a small proportion of learners in the classroom, which may explain the lack of dedicated institutional and pedagogical approaches. Furthermore, poor information exchange between the teaching, support and administrative staff is an aggravating factor (Baker et al., 2018), preventing the identification and consideration of the specific needs of the learners concerned.

The superdiversity era brings its own set of challenges. From a pedagogical point of view, the conjunction of social, cultural, economic, educational, gender, or age-based variables, to name but a few (LUCET & SCRIPT, 2025; Vertovec, 2022), results in the coexistence of multidirectional and sometimes contradictory imperatives in the same learning space. Confronted with these complex considerations, teachers face a paradox: they must design their teaching of a cohort (LUCET & SCRIPT, 2021) and at the same time, they have to adapt it to the various objectives, priorities, perceptions, desires and experiences that each learner in such an increasingly heterogeneous group might have (Council of Europe, 2001 and its companion volume, Council of Europe, 2020).

### **Maximizing a Learner's Competence Through Effective Learning**

Regardless of the students' background or experience, one of the poignant questions that occupies teachers is how to “encourage and foster students' educational experiences” (Phan & Ngu, 2021, p. 14). This question, which is not new, shows the intentionality of teachers to choose the most effective teaching practices for their cohort and the various individualities within it (Council of Europe, 2001; Trinidad et al., 2020). However, there are no straightforward answers (Hattie, 2008) to what would secure learning opportunities for a wide range of learners. Superdiversity and migration flows aside, this open-endedness is nurtured by the fact that the objectives of instruction, along with the resources and relationships among the teacher, the learner, the subject matter, and the institution, have been evolving over time, crystallizing into diverse habitus or approaches (Puren, 2022).

Given that teaching practices are not uniformly ideal for all learners in every context and at all times, research in this area is critical, and identifying and exploring teaching practices that effectively enhance learning has been a key focus for several decades. Although the definition of effective learning and its constitutive elements may vary among scholars, some principles achieve a broad consensus.

The teacher's efforts in providing pedagogical expertise, fostering human connection, and facilitating a safe learning environment are among these recurring principles (Cummins, 2001; Hattie, 2008; Xu et al., 2023). These efforts provide pedagogical, social and emotional support to the learners, which significantly contributes to addressing their identity (Cummins, 2001) and psychological needs (Phan & Ngu, 2021; Xu et al., 2023). Among such fundamental needs, the student's agency and need for autonomy are consistently considered of great importance for effectiveness (Cummins, 2001; Phan & Ngu, 2021; Xu et al., 2023). Hattie (2008) further

underscores this aspect, asserting that learners ultimately determine what knowledge they retain. Because coercive and transmissive teaching methods lack alignment to learners' interests (Hattie, 2008), it is imperative for the teacher to understand how their learners function. Consequently, the teacher should investigate how learners conceptualize the world and the learning process, thereby adapting their approach to provide content of interest to them (Hattie, 2008).

If possessing interest and more broadly, sustained motivation are essential to learn effectively (Hattie, 2008; Phan & Ngu, 2021; Xu et al., 2023), successful practice necessitates both the learners' motivation to learn and their capacity to engage in the learning process. However, the strong mediation exerted by intrinsic motivation on engagement (Phan & Ngu, 2021; Xu et al., 2023) has led some scholars to treat these constructs jointly. This is the case of Trinidad et al. (2020), who use engaging and decidedly motivating synonymously. Despite this distinction or lack thereof, a predictive or direct causal relationship between motivation/ engagement and effective learning is not self-evident (Phan & Ngu, 2021; Trinidad et al., 2020). Assuming that a learner who engages with enjoyable and motivating teaching will automatically learn could be misleading for educators (Trinidad et al., 2020).

To work towards a better understanding of learners by their teachers (Hattie, 2008), the present study aimed to make learners' "internalised frames of reference" (Broek et al., 2023, p. 627) more visible. Continuing the discussion initiated by Trinidad et al. (2020), two decision-making criteria were selected for their ability to foster an educational environment that "can affect information retention and skill acquisition" (Trinidad et al., 2020, p. 168), including the learners' assessment of how well teaching practices support their functioning and their motivation to engage in learning. Here, effective functioning is defined as the learner's intention and personal desire to facilitate personal achievement in a capable fashion through organized thinking and ordered behavior (Phan & Ngu, 2021, p. 4). Motivation towards learning, on the other hand, adds another layer to the cognitive and behavioral aspects explored with effective functioning. It helps to define the learner's perceived state of motivation, by conveying information about the intrinsic or extrinsic drive to engage in learning (Phan & Ngu, 2021, p. 5).

### **Considering the Learner's Experience of Conflict**

Ineffective and tedious language education may have adverse effects on learning. However, for those in more vulnerable situations, such as RFD learners, the repercussions can be even more severe. For them, language learning intersects a prerequisite for survival, resilience and integration into the community of arrival (Arjona Soberón et al., 2017; Bradley et al., 2025).

These circumstances heighten the educational stakes for RFD learners. They also demonstrate why the conditions for effective learning for these students extend beyond the immediate educational environment (Bradley et al., 2025; Lebreton, 2017), as RFD learners need to allocate time and energy to navigating acculturative stress. Stressors inherent to their resettlement within a new community include, but are not limited to, economic (Aleghfeli et al., 2024; Arjona Soberón et al., 2017; Bradley et al., 2025), political (Aleghfeli et al., 2024;

Bradley et al., 2025; Hawkey & Horner, 2022), professional (Finnigan et al., 2023; Lam, 2019), and digital aspects (Bradley et al., 2025).

These contexts, which imply substantial personal involvement and emotional effort to be in a condition conducive to learning (Larrotta & Ture, 2025), also underline the responsibilities that institutions and teachers have towards populations from conflict-affected settings (Ab Rashid et al., 2025; Kester, 2024) and explain why the needs of even a minority of learners must not be left unattended. However, the work initiated here does not promote an “abyssal deficit-orientation that renders students from conflict-affected contexts as behind or in need of being saved” (Kester, 2024; p. 629; see also Lam, 2019). Rather, exploring these students’ needs aims to recognize their unique experiences (Larrotta & Ture, 2025), which a learner-centered, culturally relevant pedagogy would include. Focusing on RFD learners is also justified, as they often express regret over the lack of training or curricula that address their needs (Larrotta & Ture, 2025; Lebreton, 2017).

For RFD learners, providing an inclusive learning environment is key to success (Aleghfeli et al., 2024). Inclusive practices include, among others, avoiding exclusion based on alternate views (Lam, 2019; Murdoch et al., 2020), or psychological needs arising from a learner’s traumatic past (Arjona Soberón et al., 2017; Lam, 2019).

Considering a traumatic past also requires ensuring safety in both everyday life (Aleghfeli et al., 2024; Larrotta & Ture, 2025) and the educational setting. Outside the educational environment, RFD learners may face the pressures of adverse treatment, including devaluing discourses linked to their new migrant identity, which may lead to a weakening of self-esteem. Establishing a standard of compassionate and respectful exchanges in the classroom would prove beneficial (Arjona Soberón et al., 2017; Kester, 2024; Larrotta & Ture, 2025; Murdoch et al., 2020). Aleghfeli et al. (2024, p. 11) recommend “the cultivation of pedagogical love”, wherein teachers are encouraged to see, listen to, and tailor their approaches to learners, while being mindful that learners may be adults as well (Larrotta & Ture, 2025).

Such an approach highlights the importance for RFD learners of belonging to an open, supportive community (Aleghfeli et al., 2024; Arjona Soberón et al., 2017; Murdoch et al., 2020; Larrotta & Ture, 2025), with peers as the most immediate contacts, followed by the language teacher and, ultimately, the institutional staff (Baker et al., 2018). The openness of this network exceeds facilitating acculturation (Finnigan et al., 2023; Larrotta & Ture, 2025; Majhanovich & Deyrich, 2017) or acknowledging RFD learners’ heritage language, indigenous knowledge, and identity (Aleghfeli et al., 2024; Arjona Soberón et al., 2017; Kester, 2024; Peguero, 2024). It also involves recognizing that learners in migration situations, notably women, often face increased responsibilities outside the classroom, such as family obligations (Aleghfeli et al., 2024; Finnigan et al., 2023; Kester, 2024; Lam, 2019).

Fulfilling requirements for either inclusion, safety or belonging is not enough for RFD learners. As multiple circumstantial urgencies compete (Lebreton, 2017), education for learners with

conflict experiences should ideally be based on a more holistic approach (Ab Rashid et al., 2025; Kester, 2024).

Conflict-sensitive pedagogy aligns with this approach since it emphasizes quality education based on inclusion, social justice and a peacebuilding dynamic (United Nations, 2024: SDG 4, SDG 16). From the teacher's point of view, this definition can be rephrased following three key principles (Ab Rashid et al., 2025, p. 4): (1) the Do-not-harm paradigm, which is designed to alleviate tensions and moderate sensitivities; (2) the Resilience and Empathy Paradigm, which is designed to support learners in managing and adapting to change and its sometimes traumatic consequences; and (3) the Inclusion and Social Cohesion paradigm, which is designed to foster integration and acceptance in a supportive community.

Accordingly, conflict-sensitive pedagogy makes it possible to conceptualize education for language learners arriving from both conflict and post-conflict zones. By doing so, it reveals a potential for education in conflict prevention (The Hague Institute for Global Justice, 2023) and for education in peace zones receiving students from conflict-affected contexts. Considering this study falls into the latter category, the premise of conflict-sensitive pedagogy must be to sensitize teachers not to “[assume] students should naturally assimilate into the dominant local/global culture without regard for the conflicts and histories from which they originate” (Kester, 2024, p. 628). As such, it aimed to include the subjective beliefs and experiences of a diversity of learners, while nurturing a social learning context that mitigates classroom tension (Ab Rashid et al., 2025; Phan & Ngu, 2021).

## **Methodology**

The study design relied on a mixed collaborative methodology, called Group Concept Mapping (GCM). Originating from social sciences, GCM aims to materialize through visual representations or maps how a group of heterogeneous stakeholders conceptualize an idea or issue (Kane & Trochim, 2007; McBeath et al., 2021).

### **Group Concept Mapping as a Collaborative/Participatory Paradigm**

To foster conceptualization, GCM includes a collaborative process that is also described as participatory by some scholars (Kane & Trochim, 2007), and interested key stakeholders engage at various stages of the study via group work and interpretation sessions. Such partnership with the communities of interest serves as a decolonizing approach (McBeath et al., 2021), which is valuable to the research process, as it guides the reflection and final interpretation of the data, thereby minimizing researcher bias (Nicoras et al., 2022).

The collaborative/participatory paradigm and its advantages explain why GCM is highly regarded as a means of accessing the experiences of minority, vulnerable, geographically dispersed groups or, more generally, hard-to-reach communities (Finnigan et al., 2023). In this manner, GCM seeks to empower migration-related groups and ensure that their voices are equally heard “regardless of power or relationship dynamics” (McBeath et al., 2021, p. 143).



RFD students who are already a minority in their study environment are the most sensitive group, whereas immigrant and incoming students are respectively less at risk (Peguero, 2024).

Refugee students are considered most vulnerable due to their status and forced migration experience. Based on the definition of the 1951 Refugee Convention (UNHCR, 1951), the term refugee refers to “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (p. 3). In Luxembourg, refugee students are therefore individuals who were granted international protection by the Ministry responsible for asylum, allowing them to enroll at the university. Forcibly displaced students, on the other hand, share a similar migration experience with refugee students, but have not applied for protection status. Given the similarities in their forced migration histories, RFD students are considered jointly in this study.<sup>1</sup>

Neither the amended Law of 29 August 2008<sup>2</sup>, which is Luxembourg's immigration law, nor international law (International Organisation for Migration [IOM], 2019) provide a legal definition of the term immigrant. This study therefore relies on a locally relevant definition which is provided by the European Migration Network. Its glossary (European Migration Network [EMN], 2018) defines an immigrant as “a person [in the EU context] who establishes their usual residence in the territory of an EU Member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months, having previously been usually resident in another EU Member State or a third country” (p. 203). Tailored to the Luxembourgish context, first-generation immigrant students are approached as non-Luxembourgish students who willingly left their country of origin with the explicit intention to establish a long-term residence in Luxembourg and have already resided there for more than 12 months.

However, students participating in an international mobility program, also known as incoming students, are not required to have resided in Luxembourg previously (University of Luxembourg, 2024). In this study, incoming students are those with at least one foreign nationality who are enrolled at universities other than the University of Luxembourg. Additionally, they reside in Luxembourg solely for the purpose of their studies, typically for less than 12 months, and have expressed a clear intention of short-term settlement.

Alongside the three student groups discussed above, identified by criteria like reported student status, migration experience and intention, and place and duration of residence, the present research project brings together other voices with greater institutional power. These are program directors responsible for programs with a larger number of RFD students, members of the administrative staff, language teachers and a student-tutor from the Language Centre.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that students, who were previously under international or temporary protection and have since been naturalized, are included in this group, given the forced migration experience they went through. Only one student was found to be in this configuration.

<sup>2</sup> Referenced in French as “Loi modifiée du 29 août 2008”.

## Group Concept Mapping Steps

While the collaboration with multiple communities, each featuring varying degrees of vulnerability and institutional influence, qualitatively contributes to the study, the methodology's final yields take the shape of statistical maps. Unlike hand-crafted concept maps, GCM processes qualitative data quantitatively, thus a mixed methodology. Six steps typically build GCM methodology. Table 1 below shows the breakdown of participation in the stages where stakeholders' input is usually anticipated by the methodology.

### *Step 1: Preparing GCM*

GCM's preparation step, also known as the "brainstorming" phase, aligns with the initial phases of a non-collaborative research approach. The researchers aim to understand the field, identify the key knowledge-holding participants without whom the research should not progress, and formulate the research question(s) (Kane & Trochim, 2007).

Stage 1 is also the stage during which GCM's focus prompt was designed. While the research question drove the rationale, the focus prompt grounded the research objectives and was used to interact with participants. This study's focus prompt was the following: "to learn a foreign language, the learner in a situation of migration, whether chosen or forced, needs to ...".

In GCM, the preparation phase only collects qualitative data and may take many forms. This study's data collection involved three sources. Initial responses to the focus prompt were developed from a survey entitled Linguistic and Cultural Skills of non-Luxembourgish Students. The survey that was partly funded by a European project (SERAFIN 2022-2025: 2022-1-BE01-KA220-HED-000085227)<sup>3</sup> targeted foreign students at the University during the 2023-2024 winter semester. With its 442 anonymous responses, 156 RFD, immigrant or incoming learners were identified based on the definitions provided earlier for these student groups (see table 1). A second data source took the form of 24 semi-structured interviews. Participants for the semi-structured interviews were selected based on their survey responses, which were compared to the definitions discussed earlier, and their willingness to participate further. The survey therefore also served as a contact database for the identification, selection and recruitment of students interested in continuing their contribution to the study. The decision to conduct semi-structured interviews and the topics to be covered in the process also followed the guidelines of the aforementioned European project. However, the interview guides were slightly adapted to better fit the local context and the profile of each participant. These adaptations were necessary to address the difference in position and expertise between the interviewees (Gerson & Damaske, 2020).

Among the interviewees, there were 12 students, 7 male and 5 female, from 7 different fields of study and 12 countries of origin (see Appendix A). These students were regarded as experts

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<sup>3</sup> The survey underwent internal review and minor revisions prior to distribution, ensuring its clarity for participants. As it was designed for exploratory purposes, extensive validation procedures were not pursued.

in their own learning processes. The other half consisted of 12 domain experts with various expertise, including 5 pedagogical experts who were language teachers with experience working in higher education with RFD, immigrant and/or incoming students; 2 contextual experts, serving as administrative staff in charge of guest or special needs students; and 5 institutional experts, represented by program directors whose programs are regularly attended by refugee learners (see Appendix B). These 24 interviewees shared among others what they consider should be prescribed or favored in learning/teaching with migrant audiences. In addition to interviews, an unrecorded focus group was also part of the data collection. It took place in a French language course organized by the teacher-researcher, in part developed within the European project activities.

**Table 1**  
*Study Participation and Overlap*

GCM steps Participant	Preparing GCM			Generating the state- ments	Sorting & Rating	Inter- preting maps	Total overlap between steps
	Inter- views	Focus Group	Survey				
Administrative staff	2	/	/	/	/	/	/
Incoming student	5	1	21	/	10	1	4
Immigrant student	3	2	115	/	10	2	3
Language teacher	5	/	/	/	/	1	1
Program director	5	/	/	/	/	/	/
Refugee/ forcibly displaced student	4	2	20	/	10	2	6
Student-tutor	/	/	/	1	/	/	/
Total	24	5	156	1	30	6	14

### ***Step 2: Generating the Statements***

Step 2 aimed to develop a list of unique and clear ideas that could be reused with the focus prompt in subsequent steps of the methodology. The development of these ideas, or statements, followed the process detailed by Kane and Trochim (2007), key figures in the development and application of GCM.

In this case, the individual statements were extracted verbatim from the transcribed interviews, the survey responses and the learners' traces in the focus group. In total, 296 statements were identified. These statements were then reviewed and edited in an excel file to ensure a clear completion of the focus prompt and correct grammar and spelling mistakes.

To reduce the statement set from 296 to 100 or fewer, as recommended by Kane and Trochim (2007), a collaboration was established with a Luxembourgish student-tutor who had been working for approximately 1 year in the field of language remediation with foreign students at the Language Centre. Initially, independent assessments were conducted to evaluate the fidelity

of the rewording and edition of each statement in relation to the anonymized quotation(s). Following codes mentioned by other researchers, such as Finnigan et al. (2023), and Stack-Cutler et al. (2017), each statement was autonomously coded to identify “unique”, “unclear”, “repeated” concepts, but also, “compounds” and statements that “do not respond to the focus prompt”.

Subsequently, the assessments were reconciled and discussed in a face-to-face session. Due to time constraints and more specifically, the fact that the student's contract with the Language Centre was coming to an end, the consolidation stage and the final list of 100 language learning needs were independently finalized by the researcher, although the student-tutor remained available to answer questions.

### ***Step 3: Sorting and Rating the Statements***

It was during the sorting and rating stage that the qualitative data was transformed into quantitative data. Through the sorting activity, participants were asked to sort a paper deck of statement cards into groups in a style that was comprehensible to them (Trochim & McLinden, 2017, p. 168). The rating activity required participants to give a grade to each statement on one or more criteria using a 5-point Likert scale (Trochim & McLinden, 2017).

In this study, two assessment criteria were chosen to assess the qualitative data, formatted as a list of 100 statements. To support participants, the assessment of a statement's perceived effectiveness was guided by the question “Personally, will I make progress if I can + statement?”, while the question “Personally, would I want to learn if I could + statement?” was designed to guide engagement assessment (see also Phan & Ngu, 2021; Phan et al., 2018). These criteria provided access to one's learning perceptions, which explains why only language learners were invited to take part in step 3 (see table 1 above). Moreover, stage 3 participants systematically carried out the sorting activity followed by the rating activity, which corresponded on average to 1.5 to 2 hours of individual work. In order to mitigate the cognitive effort, participants were informed that they were at all times free to rest for a few moments or to take a break by physically leaving the room. Each sorting and rating session concluded with an unrecorded exchange on the research process between the participant and researcher.

Out of a total of 30 students, 10 incoming, 10 immigrant and 10 RFD students engaged in the sorting and rating activities. Although this sample size per learner group may seem limited, it followed the standard validity and reliability requirements for GCM. More participants can be included, but the decision depends on the research specificities and factors such as management capacity and the gain/ participant effort dimension. Furthermore, GCM is not typically concerned with issues of random or proportional selection as in other social science research. The importance in this type of research exists in assuring that minority perspectives (...) in any context will be included (Trochim & McLinden, 2017, p. 168). Similarly, it is not necessary for the same stakeholders to be involved at every stage of the research. In this study, and more specifically for stage 3, the sample size took into account the representation of RFD learners in the institution, with only 20 identified during the 2023-2024 university-wide survey, and

ensured balanced sample sizes given the objective of testing rating consensus between the three groups.

#### ***Step 4: Computing Maps***

During step 4, the quantitative data developed through the sorting and rating activities was entered into software for analysis. The current study used the open-source software R-Cmap, supplemented by excel. R-Cmap is a software that was specially developed to facilitate GCM work for researchers with no R-related coding skills (Bar, 2022; Bar & Mentch, 2017). It builds an interface that allows the user to make technical, conceptual and statistical choices, and also provides a sorter/rater analysis.

Unlike digital sorting/rating which could be programmed to require one answer per statement, students worked on paper handouts. Unexpectedly, some participants either circled several values per statement or did not select any values on several occasions. Consequently, a total of 57 ratings were excluded, with 32 for perceived effectiveness and 25 for engagement, representing an acceptable error margin of 0.95% (< 5%).

#### ***Step 5: Interpreting Maps***

Step 5 was the most collaborative phase of the study. Two interpretation sessions of approximately 1h45 took place with 4 and 2 participants. The first session included one language teacher, one incoming and two immigrant students, while the second was attended by two RFD students. During these sessions, the researcher moderated and guided work groups' analysis of selected GCM map(s). In this case, the results of the sorting phase were discussed by analyzing a foundational map called cluster map. The analysis of the cluster map was an important starting point, as it guided final data interpretation and informed more advanced GCM visualizations. Results of the rating phase allowed through greater analysis a more advanced visualization known as the Go-zone plot.

#### ***Step 6: Utilizing Maps***

Step 6 involved testing the external reliability of the maps and interpretations developed as part of GCM. The final step of the research lead to putting the results into perspective through existing literature.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

Due to the vulnerability of the communities of interest, the research was conducted after obtaining approval from the University's Ethics Review Panel. Measures have also been taken with the University's Data Protection Office. These exchanges with the Ethics Review Panel and Data Protection Office aimed to ensure the physical and emotional safety of participants, enhance the transparency of the research process to strengthen trustworthiness, and collaborate

with participants by enabling them to exercise their right of choice and autonomy (Reicherter et al., 2022).

Special arrangements for semi-structured interviews with RFD students reinforced the commitment to participants' emotional safety (Reicherter et al., 2022). The planned semi-structured interviews revolved around the participants' background and experiences, which had the potential to lead to psychological harm and retraumatization (Reicherter et al., 2022). In collaboration with the University's psychological support team, meetings with RFD students were scheduled within the institution at appropriate times to ensure immediate psychological support could be provided in case of emergencies. As university staff, the researcher could also freely call on the psychological support team in the event of secondary traumatization (Reicherter et al., 2022).

Moreover, information and consent sheets corresponding to the various data collections were developed and explained to the participants to ensure they understood the use of their data and could provide informed consent. Each participant had the right of withdrawal: they could choose not to answer a question, cease their participation at any time, or request the deletion of their data during or after the data collection. Voluntary participation was the sole method of recruitment for this research.

Finally, to preserve the privacy of the participants, particularly given their belonging to sensitive or even vulnerable communities, reported data were anonymized. The prevailing method of de-identification involved replacing data identifiers with anonymous values, using a combination of letters and/or numbers.

## Findings

### Operating a Go-zone Plot

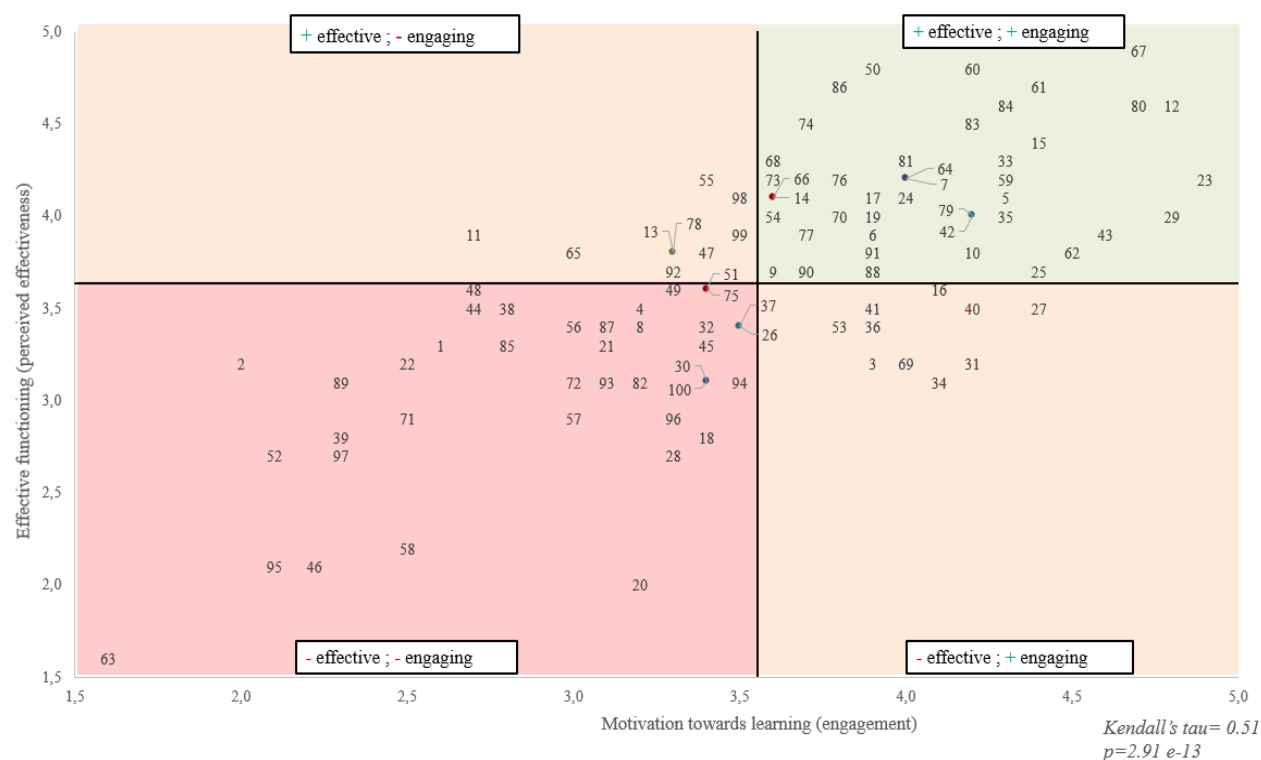
Developing specific goals and actions can be informed in GCM through bivariate plots called Go-zone plots (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Here, these plots visually displayed the 100 language learning needs identified in steps 1 and 2, through a relative scale of perceived effectiveness and engagement, developed in steps 3 and 4 (see Figure 1 below). In practice, the position of a statement corresponded to the x-coordinate and the y-coordinate, which were obtained by averaging the engagement and the perceived effectiveness scores for that statement, respectively. The x and y axes, calculated by taking the average of all statement scores for each criterion, then classified the statements into meaning-making quadrants.

The upper-right quadrant stands for the needs that are most likely to ensure the most effective and engaging language learning experiences. It is referred to as the Go-zone. On the opposite side, the lower-left quadrant groups the lowest-ranking statements, which are perceived as least effective and engaging. Needs located in the remaining two quadrants have a certain effect on language learning, but it varies. The upper-left quadrant indicates highly effective but less

engaging statements, whereas the lower-right quadrant includes highly engaging but less effective ones.

**Figure 1**

*Go-zone Plot: Incoming Learners*



The validity and reliability of the sample size made it possible to conceptualize a Go-zone plot for each adult language learner group (see Figure 1 and Appendices C and D). The positions of the needs on the quadrants of the three Go-zones were then compared. Out of the 100 needs discussed through this study, 12 could not be reconciled. A partial alignment was found for 45 needs between two student groups, while the remaining 43 received an identical assessment across the three learner profiles.

## Implications for Teachers

### *Embracing Diversity in Experience: Towards a More Effective Language Education for All*

Findings from the research project revealed that the RFD, immigrant and incoming student participants had a shared understanding of 43 needs. The Go-zone included 22 needs, whereas 21 others were identified as least effective and engaging. There was no consensus on the assessment of needs in terms of effective but not engaging and engaging but not effective properties. Tables 2 and 3 summarize the 43 needs for which RFD, immigrant and incoming students reached a consensus.

These 43 needs can be grouped thematically into actionable teaching practices. Statements 10, 23, 25, 29, 64, 79, 83 located in the Go-zone and statements 49, 58 in the opposite quadrant point towards the student-teacher relationship. Such hints can be identified through the concepts of trust, attentiveness, appreciation, student boundaries, closeness and room for freedom of expression. Particularly for migrant learners, these statements show a yearning for a relationship of trust with a teacher that is emotionally available.

In addition to a close interpersonal relationship with the teacher, targeted disciplinary support is key to learning. More precisely, language learning is believed to be enhanced by detailed feedback, in which the teacher, as opposed to a fellow classmate (38), seeks to elicit the learner's understanding (73). Teacher feedback and language teaching, in general, should not anticipate mastery of technical jargon specific to language education (93).

**Table 2**

*Needs Jointly Assessed as Most Effective and Engaging*

<b>Statement number</b>	<b>Statement completing the focus prompt “to learn a foreign language, the learner in a situation of migration, whether chosen or forced, needs to...”</b>
5	Have access to free or low-cost language classes (and the tools/resources needed for them)
6	Have access to themed summary sheets containing key local and linguistic information and recap exercises
7	Have access to an appropriate study space
10	Trust their teacher
12	Have personal reasons for learning that go beyond professional or academic obligations (e.g. a desire to discover new subjects, etc.)
15	Have useful contact people (friends, mentor, tandem partner, peer tutor, classmate, etc.) to help them learn the language outside class (a learning community)
23	Have a teacher who is approachable and easy to talk to
25	Have an attentive teacher who observes and takes into account the learner's behaviour, reactions and feelings
29	Have a teacher who is driven and enthusiastic about teaching
33	Have a teacher who prepares each lesson carefully
43	Be kind to themselves, because learning a language is a process that requires time and mistakes
54	Have their level tested before or at the beginning of a course
60	Participate in class to develop their speaking skills
62	Be able to choose from a wide range of language courses depending on their profile and needs (academic vs general language, focus on oral vs written skills, specialised language skills, intensive courses, etc.)
64	Be able to express their opinion in class in a respectful, open way (management of freedom of expression)
67	Practise the language in real-life situations outside class, for example by going on language trips or having telephone conversations in the target language (linguistic risk-taking)



73	Receive detailed explanations about their mistakes in all feedback from the teacher so they understand where they went wrong
<b>Statement number</b>	<b>Statement completing the focus prompt “to learn a foreign language, the learner in a situation of migration, whether chosen or forced, needs to...”</b>
79	Feel that the teacher values their efforts to learn
81	Immerse themselves in the new language outside class by using multimedia content
83	Take a course with a small number of participants
84	Take a language course in person
88	Take a course in which the content is presented clearly and gradually so that the learner can take things on board progressively

**Table 3**  
*Needs Jointly Assessed as Least Effective and Engaging*

<b>Statement number</b>	<b>Statement completing the focus prompt “to learn a foreign language, the learner in a situation of migration, whether chosen or forced, needs to...”</b>
4	Have access to multilingual teaching materials
18	Be free to choose whether or not to register for a language course
20	Have the opportunity to talk about difficult topics like death or violence so as to gain a better understanding of cultural differences and integrate more easily
30	Have a multilingual teacher who speaks the learners’ languages, or failing that English, as well as the target language
38	Be given the opportunity to assess the work of other learners
39	Compare the target language with a language the learner speaks (vocabulary, writing system, etc.)
46	Be assessed without the usual formal mechanisms (e.g. no marks, no formal framework, no prior warning of tests, etc.)
49	Be encouraged by the teacher to overcome hesitations and preferences for certain teaching methods (e.g. working alone vs in a group, optional vs compulsory homework, action-oriented vs audiovisual approach, etc.)
51	Be selected when activities are distributed or learners are chosen to participate in class
52	Avoid using tools based on artificial intelligence (e.g. DeepL or ChatGPT) when reading and writing in the target language
58	Maintain a professional distance with the teacher (a teacher is not a friend)
63	Be able to read exam questions in different languages (for example in English for a French course)
71	Engage in online practice exercises
82	Take a course with learners from a similar environment with similar expectations
85	Take a language course that combines in-person sessions and independent online activities
89	Take a pre-university programme explaining methodological strategies and local academic expectations
93	Work on content without having to master the technical jargon associated with language teaching

95	Use fictional scenarios to avoid negative emotions associated with sharing their own story and personal challenges
<b>Statement number</b>	<b>Statement completing the focus prompt “to learn a foreign language, the learner in a situation of migration, whether chosen or forced, needs to...”</b>
96	Use artificial intelligence (e.g. ChatGPT or Duolingo) to practise the language outside class
97	Mainly use paper-based teaching materials
100	Visit the infrastructures and campus(es) where they will be learning

At the same time, language education should not overprioritize multilingual approaches. Effective and engaging teaching practices do not require the teacher to have a strong multilingual repertoire (30), to adopt a contrastive teaching approach (39) or to provide multilingual materials for in-class or exam use (4; 63). Predictability is the quality that is most sought after by migrant learners. Course content (88) and assessment modalities (46) should be clearly communicated to the learners throughout the course. Learners also appreciate being selected to participate in class on a voluntary basis (51) and attending courses following a gradual approach, rather than a patchwork of unrelated recycled activities (33; 88).

While course content, progress and assessment need to be structured, the format of teaching activities should vary to maximize learning (97). In the digital era, multimedia resources (81) and AI tools (52) are appreciated, provided that two conditions are met. Digital activities should neither translate into online practice exercises (71) nor into out-of-class activities that favor autonomous work over immersion (81; 85; 96).

Time spent out of the classroom is regarded as better invested if it is used to connect with the wider target language community (67) or to build an out-of-class learning community (15; 96). The latter is however also true in the classroom, as learners value human interaction (84), that would support their language learning journey.

Although exchanges with these communities increase learning opportunities, learners feel that they must be the driving force behind their learning. The most relevant reasons for learning a language must go beyond fleeting extrinsic motivations such as professional or academic obligations (12). This need for personal involvement can be seen as an indication that learners associate successful cognitive learning with their commitment as fully-fledged individuals. In this context, the use of fictional scenarios to avoid exposing oneself, potentially the migrant self, is not seen as effective or engaging (95).

Moreover, the brief but repeated exposure to sometimes complex emotions contributes to trauma healing (Montanez, 2023). Although the threat of re-traumatization raises great fears amongst teachers who are not trained to address such questions (Ab Rashid et al., 2025), language education could contribute to this process by advocating a laissez-faire approach. In practice, teachers should allow even negative emotions to emerge in the classroom (95) and yet not deliberately target difficult topics like death or violence (20). The discussion topics covered in the course should enable students to participate actively in class, using oral activities to

accelerate the development of the learners' language skills (60). Suitable topics would require a contemporary local thematic anchoring (6).

Finally, two more consequences can be drawn from the learner's commitment. On the one hand, courses with learners from a similar environment and with similar expectations tend to be perceived negatively (82). Consequently, courses bringing together a diversity of profiles, rather than a more homogeneous and normative majority, may help learners feel secure enough to further portray their authentic personalities and thoughts and therefore get more involved personally. On the other hand, personal involvement in the context of language for survival and resilience could possibly lead to excessive self-imposed pressure to succeed, leaving little room for mistakes. However, time and mistakes are considered essential components of the learning process, necessitating self-compassion (43). Although statement 43 does not explicitly specify whether the teacher should internalize this reminder of self-compassion, educators may wish to implement it to ensure that all learners establish a common ground.

In their practice, teachers also need to keep in mind that all three learner groups conceptualize the feeling of effectiveness and engagement as an interrelated concept (Kendall's tau  $\tau$  for all raters = 0.6;  $p = 2.61e-18$ ) (Phan et al., 2018; Trinidad et al., 2020). Consequently, the more effective migrant learners picture the teaching practice, the more they are likely to feel motivation towards learning; and vice versa. However, this moderately strong, positive correlation between perceived effectiveness and engagement varies slightly from one group to another. RFD learners are more sensitive to this association ( $\tau = 0.63$ ;  $p = 1.39e-12$ ), while immigrants ( $\tau = 0.5$ ;  $p = 3.3e-19$ ) and incoming learners ( $\tau = 0.51$ ;  $p = 2.91e-13$ ) may be considering other influencing variables.

The remaining statements 5, 7, 54 and 62 (Table 2) as well as 18, 89 and 100 (Table 3) provide some indication of institutional choices that learners consider impacting language learning. Although motivation towards learning should go beyond academic obligations (12), participants agree that language courses should be integrated directly into their curriculum (18). This shift from a personal to an institutional choice to take part in language courses might entail responsibilities from the institution's perspective. These include providing a variety (62) of free or low-cost (5) course options to students. Additionally, institutional support would be appreciated in determining the learners' actual language proficiency before or at the beginning of the course (54) and in ensuring access to appropriate study facilities outside it (7). However, pre-university support relating to local practical or academic aspects is deemed ineffective and unengaging for language learning (89, 100).

### ***Navigating Pedagogical Tensions***

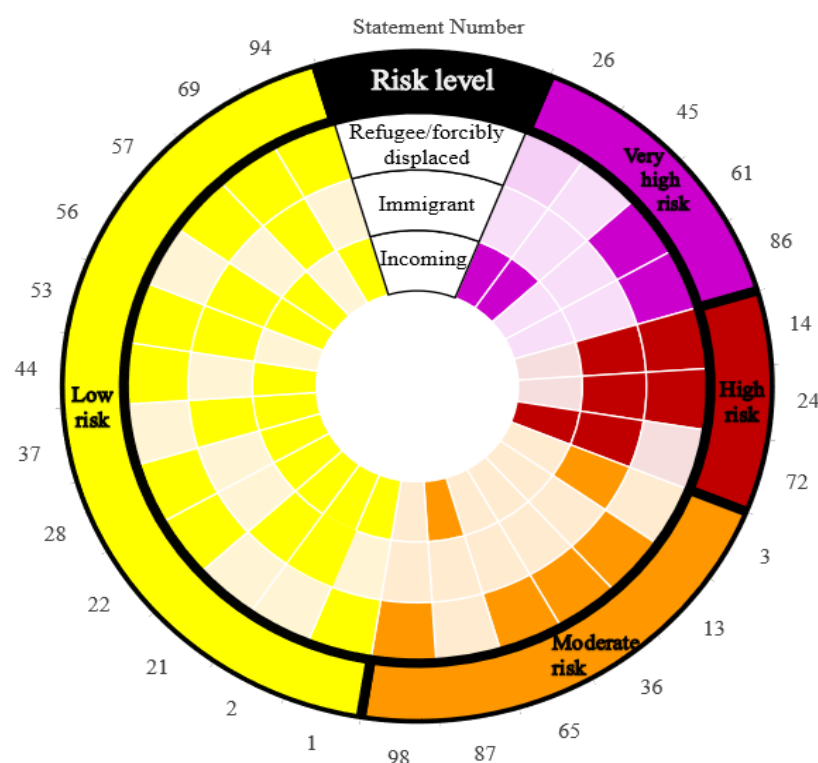
Besides the consensus discussed above, diverging needs assessments exist between these three learner groups. Due to partial agreement among two of the three tested learner groups, 45 identified language learning needs might raise perceptual concerns. Upon closer examination, 25 out of 45 needs can lead to the implementation of teaching practices that might negatively affect specific learner groups and thus deprive at least one group from learning opportunities.

These possible deprivations of learning opportunities are highlighted in Figure 2 below. The different learning experiences among the groups also allow for categorizing the likelihood of a negative learning experience into four levels: very high, high, moderate, and low risk.

Statements 26, 45, 61 and 86 are labelled as very high. Very high risk refers to the possibility that teachers' insufficient knowledge about a learner group might lead them to prioritize a need they assume is typical for groups with a migration background. Although such a strategy would maximize 2 learner groups' chances to have an effective and engaging learning, the third group would persistently face unfavorable experiences.

Analyzing these discrepancies also helps to further inform and nuance the trends identified in the findings. Incoming students, for example, find evaluations aligned with the contents seen in class to be ineffective and unengaging for their learning (45). However, the need for predictability of immigrant and RFD students goes beyond clear communication standards and extends to the content of tests. Unlike immigrant and incoming learners, RFD learners also show an additional in-class need. Although multilingual approaches are not expected from the teacher, RFD learners would feel disadvantaged if they could not use languages other than the target language (86). Outside the classroom, these students also feel that local events do not meet their need for a learning community, nor do they offer practice opportunities in real-life settings or the multimedia format sought in immersion activities (61).

**Figure 2**  
*Needs At Risk of Creating Barriers to Learning*



- 26 Have a competent teacher (who has completed teacher training)  
 45 Be assessed in a consistent and predictable way based on the content seen in class  
 61 Participate outside class in events organised by the university or the local community (social integration)  
 86 Take a course that is taught directly in the target language, avoiding use of other languages
- 14 Be given regular breaks during class (a 10-minute break for every 55 minutes of teaching)  
 24 Have a teacher from a country where the language is spoken  
 72 Receive clear explanations on practical subjects to familiarise themselves with the local academic system (e.g. criteria on plagiarism, how the online learning platform works, precise instructions about homework, etc.)
- 3 Learn using physical objects in the classroom (kinaesthetic learning)  
 13 Be able to take part in targeted catch-up lessons (for example if there is no written tradition in the learner's mother tongue or if the learner encounters difficulties during the learning process)  
 36 Have a teacher who uses humour as a medium for learning  
 65 Have solely pragmatic reasons for learning (work, study, integration, etc.)  
 87 Take a course based on the principle of continuous assessment (regular assessments)  
 98 Use a digital educational platform to receive support during the learning process, especially outside class
- 1 Acquire mainly vocabulary in class  
 2 Acquire mainly grammar in class  
 21 Read around the subject before starting a written assignment  
 22 Engage in activities in class that promote the learner's culture (e.g. language, cuisine, geography, public holidays, etc.)  
 28 Have a teacher who knows how to use digital technologies  
 37 Have mainly homework consisting of mainly short exercises, regardless of the subject (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, written tasks, etc.)  
 44 Have a structured learning framework in which the teacher monitors absences and gives additional homework so that the learner can work on the content covered in class at home  
 53 Be part of a community related to their origins, language or culture  
 56 Have the opportunity to jointly evaluate their progress with their teacher by developing a shared assessment portfolio  
 57 Be systematically corrected by the teacher  
 69 Maintain contact with the teacher outside class (WhatsApp, Teams, email)  
 94 Learn with games (e.g. online activities, fun quizzes, card games, dominoes, sketches/role plays, etc.)

Like very high-risk practices, high-risk teaching practices include statements with a minority-majority tension. However, it is the opposite here with two of the three learner groups could be affected by an unengaging and ineffective learning experience, while the third group enjoys what it perceives as most engaging and effective. A risk arises when the teachers focus on the needs of the learner group with whom they are most familiar, such as incoming students, and extrapolate a potential benefit to the other groups.

These high-risk practices highlight diverging priorities in terms of what is expected from the teacher. Immigrant and RFD learners do not see the teacher's nativeness as conditioning their learning success as much as incoming learners (24). However, RFD learners expect more from teachers than immigrants. They perceive teachers as resource people outside their community of origin that can help them overcome their lack of locally relevant knowledge and thus, support their adaptation to a new environment (72).

Among the practices that are deemed moderately risky, the tested statements are perceived as somewhat beneficial for 2 groups – either as effective but not engaging or engaging but not effective, but unhelpful for a minority. In this context, the risk of these practices being implemented is mitigated, as teachers would be expected to deprioritize practices perceived by the majority of the cohort as lacking pronounced positive impact.

Earlier findings from the study showed that multimedia resources were well received. Digital platforms received more mixed reviews, further isolating RFD learners (98). Similarly, despite the efforts of the teacher/institution, the introduction of catch-up sessions does not align with the learning needs of all groups (13). Rather than the result of a lack of motivation, students with these backgrounds find the energy to learn at other levels than others (65).

Lastly, practices with the lowest risks connote that if the opinion of one group is upheld for somewhat satisfactory results, the other two would go through an unengaging and ineffective experience. The risk here is at its lowest, given that a significant disadvantage for the cohort should lead to a markedly decreased likelihood of dedicated teaching practices.

Despite the need for a structured learning experience, teacher monitoring is considered effective but unengaging by immigrant students, while RFD and incoming students find it counterproductive (44). This statement's assessment points towards the context of adult education, highlighting the greater freedom that adult learners usually value (Broek et al., 2023) and the desire to limit out-of-class constraints, such as homework, for which learners do not necessarily have time.

Overall, a significant majority of the 25 needs mentioned result in missed learning opportunities for RFD learners (16), as opposed to slightly more than half for incoming learners (14) and a lesser share for immigrant learners (10). The number of potentially risky practices for incoming learners may be surprising. However, the likelihood of experiencing less relevant practices is minimal, given that the practices that are potentially harmful to them coincide almost exclusively with practices presenting low risks. RFD students, on the other hand, find

themselves in the opposite situation. They are more likely to have their needs unaddressed because, in the event of divergence, these needs are inconsistent with the Go-zone assessment of the other two groups.

## **Discussion**

The findings section shows that RFD, immigrant and incoming learners share similar perceptions regarding needs that must be met to guarantee an engaging and effective language learning experience. Capitalizing on shared assessments can maximize learning for all. However, some divergences exist, highlighting the risk of misunderstandings and tensions between teachers and learners. In that case, the views of RFD learners on what is optimal for their learning often diverge significantly from those of other learner groups. From a teacher perspective, focusing on the needs of the classroom's numerically dominant groups, namely the immigrant or incoming learners, is likely to sustain serious learning barriers for RFD learners, meanwhile the reverse is not true.

### **Feeling**

The nature of learning as well as the effects of traumatic experiences on the brain could be one explanation as to why this study found the highest number of suboptimal practices among RFD learners. Literature indicates that quality learning is a risk-taking process which mobilizes the cognitive, affective, psychomotor and identity self (Broek et al., 2023). In such a transformative effort where affect is embodied, the learner's world is challenged and shaken with difficulty in order to reassess previous experiences and replace them with new ones (Murdoch et al., 2020; Trinidad et al., 2020). The extent of such a complex enquiry makes any learning process difficult for learners who are “not prepared for or accustomed to feelings of uncertainty and resistance” (Murdoch et al., 2020, p. 663). However, vulnerable individuals such as RFD learners are already in a heightened world-shattered state (Finnigan et al., 2023; Kester, 2024), as they were forced to give up who they were in their country of origin (Çelik, 2023) and are now required to navigate many spheres of their receiving societies without adequate preparation (Baker et al., 2018, Finnigan et al., 2023).

Their migration circumstances may prevent them from engaging in this reshuffling as efficiently as other learner groups (Aleghfeli et al., 2024; Arjona Soberón et al., 2017; Bradley et al., 2025). These circumstances also explain why these learners in particular value structured, step-by-step courses (Larrotta & Ture, 2025). Spiral curricula, with its ability to review and refresh knowledge, allows for an increased number of repetitions that these learners need to embark on the language learning journey (Larrotta & Ture, 2025).

### **Feeling Seen**

While RFD learners are hindered in their learning progress by a state of acute awareness of oneself and one's surroundings, they also yearn for their worth to be recognized and welcomed (Çelik, 2023; Larrotta & Ture, 2025; Murdoch et al., 2020). However, far from being exclusive

to RFD learners, the desire for respect is a long-held aspiration among migration groups (Lam, 2019).

These desires and the shape they take in the learning environment were also identified and examined in this study. However, further sustainable practices may be identified through existing literature. A selection is explored here and connected to the findings.

From a pedagogical perspective, Larrotta & Ture (2025) point out that teachers should, in addition to being attentive, empathetic, patient and encouraging, use their authority to avoid power dominance among learners. To support peacebuilding in a superdiverse classroom with multiple beliefs and agendas, Kester (2024) also advises teachers to actively promote mixed-group work. Such an approach provides the opportunity to challenge cultural, ethnic and gender-related beliefs (Larrotta & Ture, 2025), thus promoting diversity awareness and support, including within the local in-class learning community. With the specific needs of RFD learners in mind, teachers should additionally carefully select their teaching resources, paying particular attention to potentially unsettling visuals that could trigger emotional responses. Materials displaying or voicing the diversity present in the classroom are also well received (Ab Rashid et al., 2025; Larrotta & Ture, 2025).

### **Feeling Heard**

Even if they build a divergent minority, ignoring RFD voices would convey the message that their “defective” alignment with the majority present in class makes them an undesirable problem (Kester, 2024; Lam, 2019). This path could further dehumanize RFD learners in a system that they may perceive has already taken away some of their humanity (Arjona Soberón et al., 2017; Sasia, 2018). In these circumstances, advocating for more language courses designed with RFD learners in mind, regardless of whether they are explicitly identified in the classroom, could bring more inclusion and social justice in language education.

Working in the direction of successful learning for all starts by building a respectful and humane learner-centered environment (Baker et al., 2018; Gravani et al., 2024; Kester, 2024; Larrotta & Ture, 2025) in which these students feel safe enough to bond with their peers and teacher. Social cohesion and empathy-building however require good communication between the teacher and the learners, and “good communication takes time” (Larrotta & Ture, 2025, p. 46). This observation serves as a call to institutions to prioritize language education programs that are delivered over time with frequent sessions. Course-wise, institutions should allow for flexibility notably in terms of attendance, scope and classroom language usage, as curricula should be fitted to the specificities of an adult population (Gravani et al., 2024; Lam, 2019; Larrotta & Ture, 2025).

### **Research Limitations**

The findings presented here were assessed solely on the basis of the learners’ self-reporting (Phan & Ngu, 2021). Although debated, learners are not always considered valid needs-related



informants despite their insider view (Choi & Park, 2024). The diversity, and more specifically, the dissimilarity, in the learners' backgrounds might also lead researchers to interpret the results with prudence (Phan & Ngu, 2021, p. 18).

Subsequent studies might therefore require both objective and subjective measures (Trinidad et al., 2020). Effectiveness might for instance be “empirically measured through students' grades, acquired skills, transfer of knowledge, or retention of ideas” (Trinidad et al., 2020, p. 162), while being correlated with the opinions and perceptions of other stakeholders, such as teachers. The repetition and comparison of needs analyses in other international and multilingual contexts will also support the context-dependency, which characterizes needs analyses.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

No universal recipe exists to excel at language learning and teaching in all settings. But it is possible to build a more inclusive framework to language education. To succeed, such a framework needs to be informed of the attributes of diverse adult language learners, which will support teachers in making stimulating pedagogical choices for different groups of learners (Trinidad et al., 2020). Contextualized responses are required to address classroom realities, which is why this study suggests a vision of inclusion rooted in the local learning context.

Currently, language education at the University does not adopt programs tailored for specific learner groups. While such an approach comes with the disadvantage of isolating the learners concerned (Arjona Soberón et al., 2017), it has also been proven largely successful in other multilingual contexts like Switzerland. However, the main current approach to inclusion in Luxembourg relies on the “physical placement of students with additional or special needs in mainstream classrooms” (Murdoch et al., 2020, p. 679), supported on a case-by-case basis by a Committee for Reasonable Adjustments. This second definition of inclusion would require a still under-recognized equity group like RFD learners (Baker et al., 2018), to devote a substantial portion of their time and energy to adapting and integrating rather than to learning (Majhanovich & Deyrich, 2017).

In this context, a more holistic vision of inclusion could be put forward (UNESCO, 2025), emphasizing the focus on teachers and their ability to create links between different outcomes of the learning experience, beyond just grades. It could mean developing an educational community that gives learners opportunities to deal with their emotions, know that their presence and efforts are valued, and feel that their needs are heard, thereby underpinning the role that perceived social experiences play in fostering psychological processes, motivational beliefs and learning outcomes (Phan & Ngu, 2021, p. 15).

Striving for the learning's optimal outcome is a complex task, even for experienced teachers. Flexibly taking advantage of opportunities related to space, time, and resources in an international and multilingual context is a skill that must be learned (Gravani et al., 2024; Larrotta & Ture, 2025). Supporting teachers in this task would enable them to fulfill the

pedagogical responsibility brought about by superdiversity wherein educators acknowledge and encourage learners as they are (Kester, 2024), by recognizing their resourcefulness and vulnerabilities, and “challenging (...) any system which oppresses them” (Lam, 2019, p. 84). However, the language classroom is not isolated from wider society, highlighting the responsibility institutions also bear in this task. Teachers also have needs that deserve attention (Murdoch et al., 2020) and “more investment in service provisions and facilities from authorities” (Majhanovich & Deyrich, 2017: p. 438) are necessary (see also Ab Rashid et al., 2025). Future research should explore in greater detail how institutional responsibilities are coordinated with the role of teachers from a peacebuilding perspective.

In conclusion, the present study explored the needs of three different groups of newcomer language learners in higher education in Luxembourg. The results highlighted the importance of making teachers aware of how their teaching choices and responses to needs can affect learners’ perceptions and in turn, resilience and competence development. Such awareness is particularly crucial for the most vulnerable learners, who often remain unnoticed due to institutional or individual silence.

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### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies, such as DeepL and Microsoft Copilot, were used in the writing process to improve the language as well as the readability of the paper. The author reviewed the content accordingly.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### *Students' Demographics in the Semi-Structured Interviews*

Participant number	Field of study	Gender	Time spent in Luxembourg	Country of origin	Migration status	Current occupation
94	Psychology	female	<3 months	France	incoming	student
115	Law	female	3-6 months	Japan	incoming	student
166	IT	male	<3 months	Swiss	incoming	student
170	IT	male	> 5 years	Afghanistan	Naturalized refugee	student
176	Law	male	/	Russia	Forcibly displaced	student
203	Medicine	male	<3 months	Colombia	incoming	student
210	Educational sciences	female	1-3 years	Brazil	Immigrant	student
212	Finance	male	1-3 years	Italy	Immigrant	student
213	Humanities	female	>1 year	Ukraine	Refugee	student
249	IT	female	> 5 years	Iran	Refugee	student
386	IT	male	3-5 years	Moldova	Immigrant	student
402	Law	male	<3 months	Laos	incoming	student

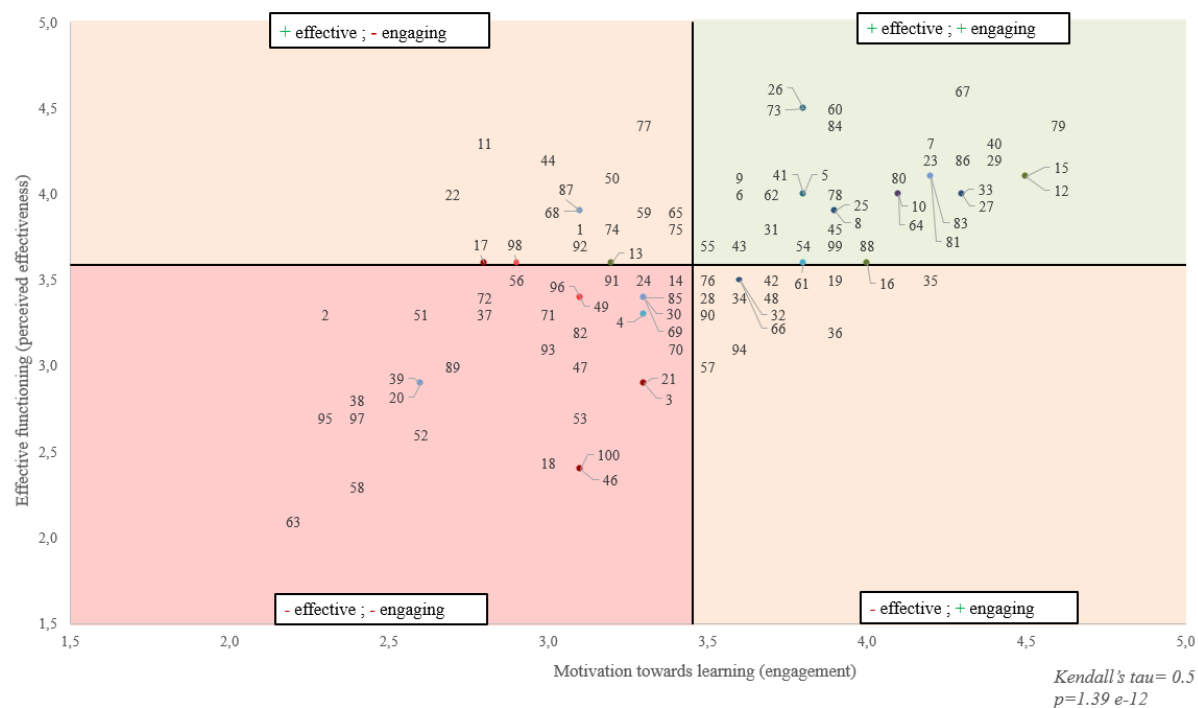
### Appendix B

#### *Other Participants' Demographics in the Semi-Structured Interviews*

Participant number	Affiliation	Gender	Current occupation
2	English studies	female	Program director
10	Guest student services	female	Admin. staff
41	Language Centre	female	French/ German language teacher
61	IT	male	Program director
74	Language Centre	female	French language teacher
85	IT	male	Program director
89	Student services	female	Admin. staff
90	Language Centre	female	French language teacher
179	Formerly: Language Centre	male	French language teacher
198	Entrepreneurship/ innovation	male	Program director
235	Language Centre	female	French language teacher
274	Finance	male	Program director

## Appendix C

### Go-zone Plot: Immigrant Learners



## Appendix D

### Go-zone Plot: Refugee/Forcibly Displaced Learners

