

REACH

March 2024

THE READY ENGLISH ACCESSIBLE FOR CAREGIVERS AT HOME (REACH) PILOT

FLEXIBLE LANGUAGE TRAINING FOR WOMEN CARING FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

PREPARED BY :

MOSAIC



MOSAIC

Engaging Newcomers, Enriching Communities

The Social Research and
Demonstration Corporation
(SRDC)



SRDC **SRSA**
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“There are no words to describe how convenient and flexible the program is. Even if you have a sick child, you can join the class on other days. It’s not something you have to attend on specific days or times. And if your child is crying or something, you can do your homework at any time. I had days when I did my homework at midnight. The option is here and it’s possible. Even if I miss one class, I can join another. They made it convenient and flexible for the mothers. I didn’t miss anything because of my children.”

REACH participant

The Ready English Accessible for Caregivers at Home (REACH) program is a flexible online language training model targeted for newcomer women caring for children at home. REACH was designed to meet the needs of mothers who could not access other language training services, particularly Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes, due to childcare responsibilities. These barriers include lacking access to childcare and the inflexibility of traditional language training services when children are ill or during other absences related to family demands.

REACH and its curriculum were designed to improve participating women's English language skills and for them to use the information gained in the program to access community services, make informed decisions about their life in Canada, and participate in social networks. These gains should lead to improvements in participants' abilities to advocate for their children's needs, supporting children's development, and result in benefits beyond the participant herself, to her family and her community.

THE STUDY

REACH was managed by MOSAIC who partnered with two experienced service providers: Achēv in Ontario and Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) in Nova Scotia to ensure that REACH had a national yet locally customizable scope. The partners collaborated on the development of the curriculum and in administering the 9-month pilot training. The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) was the research and evaluation partner responsible for designing and implementing the evaluation of the REACH pilot project.





The evaluation of REACH was designed to 1) understand who joined the pilot, 2) assess the successes and challenges of implementing the pilot, during both the development phase as well as the pilot implementation phase, and 3) estimate the outcomes of REACH for participants in terms of improved language skills, increased knowledge of life in Canada, and participation in social networks and Canadian society more broadly.



THE DESIGN OF REACH



English:

Online learning activities
Review sessions

Parenting support:

Play activities
Family learning sessions

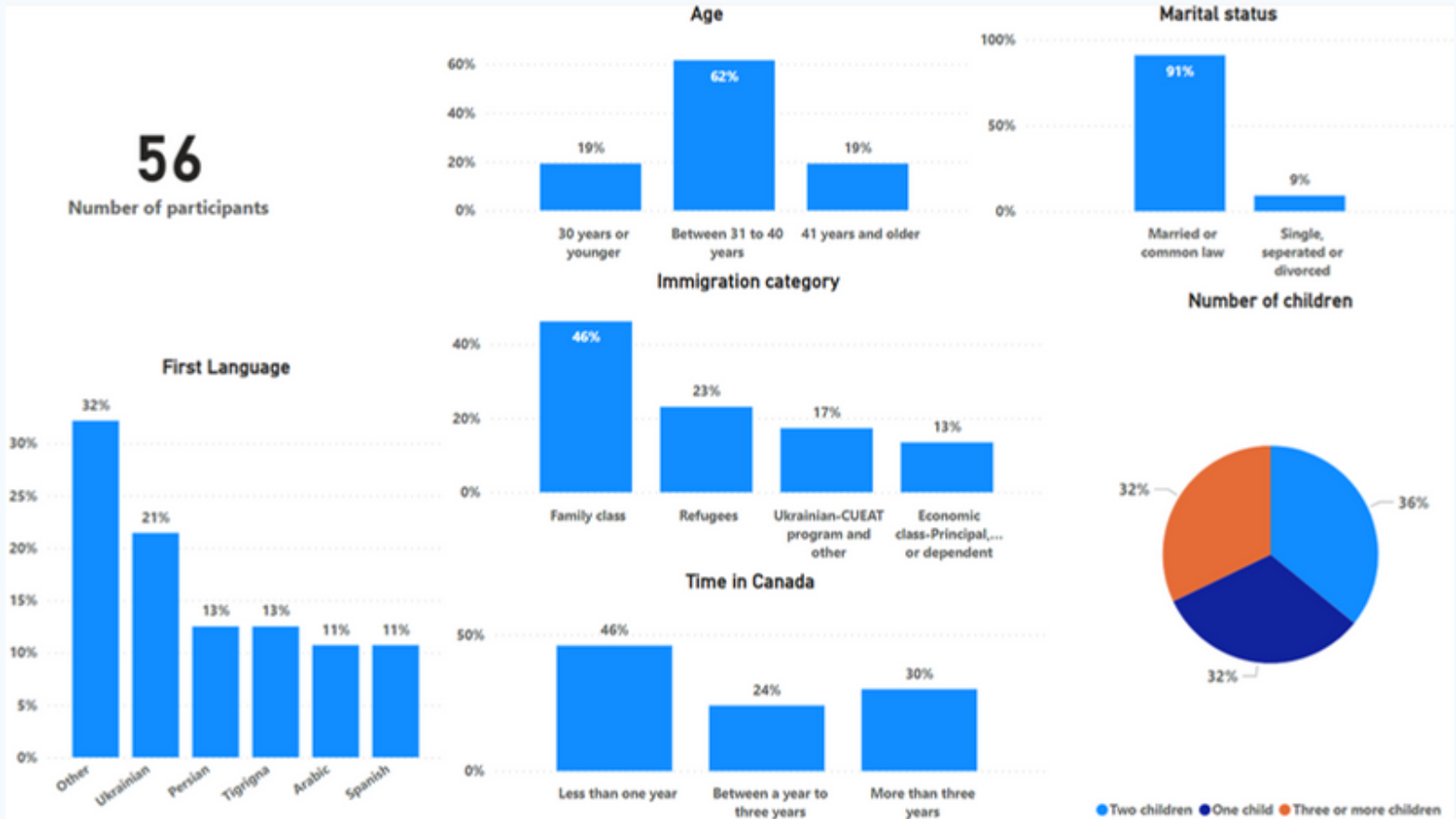
Community Connections:

Guest speakers
Field trips
Referrals

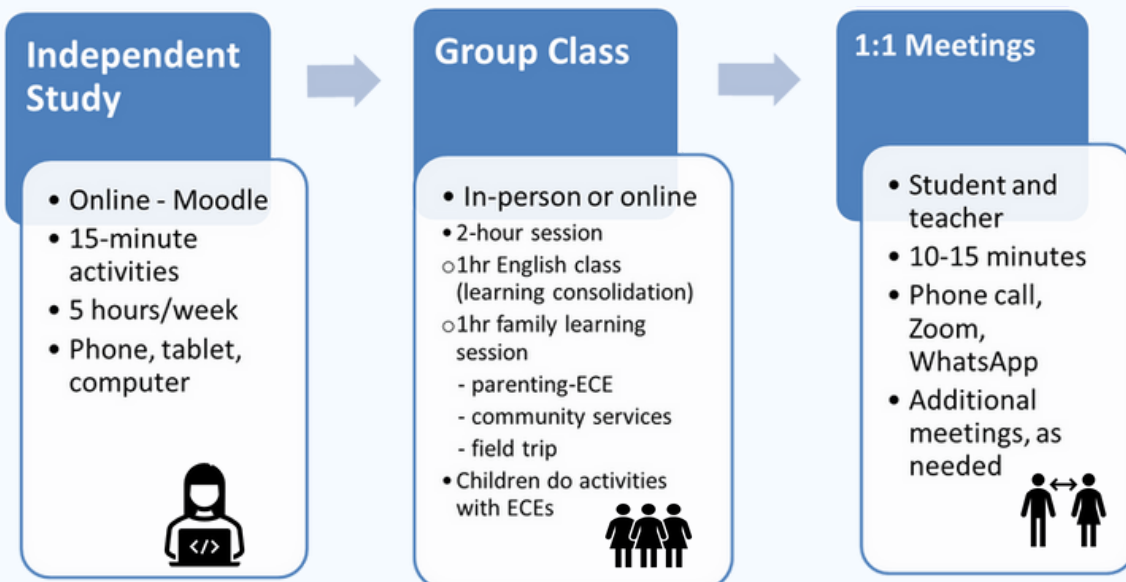


REACH PARTICIPANTS

Fifty-six women joined REACH through Achēv, ISANS, and MOSAIC. All of these women are newcomers to Canada and either mothers or stepmothers caring for young (12 years old and younger) children.



THE REACH PILOT



Curriculum development

REACH was designed for women with CLB levels 3 and 4 by specialists in LINC curriculum development at Achēv, ISANS, and MOSAIC in a coordinated approach.

The focus was to develop a targeted curriculum with real-world tasks that would be useful to learners.

What worked well?



One theme as a template and exemplar



One staff member to conduct final revisions of every theme



REACH themes well received by participants

Staff at MOSAIC initially created one theme as a template and exemplar which helped curriculum developers across all three other organizations efficiently create a consistent curriculum.

Having one staff member conduct a final revision of every theme developed worked well in keeping the curriculum consistent in terms of language, content, and formatting.

What were some challenges?



Miscommunication and lack of collaboration between organizations



Lack teaching experience, technological skills, knowledge of PBLA and CLB



Dissatisfaction regarding division of themes and differences in time allocation

Recruitment

When REACH was initially proposed in 2020, waitlists for LINC classes and for associated childcare support services were long. The proposed REACH recruitment strategy was to offer REACH to women caring for young children on those waitlists. However, by summer 2021 when REACH recruitment began, those waitlists were either very short or non-existent. Therefore, the REACH service provider organizations developed new recruitment strategies.

Strategies:

Social media
Community organizations
Language assessment centres
Religious organizations
School boards
Other settlement organizations

Challenges

- Potential participants may have been deterred from participating in the program during the registration process.
 - Screening forms that may not have been completely accessible to all potential participants.
 - Paperwork required to verify eligibility and for enrollment.
- The eligibility criteria were limited, (CLB levels, the age requirements of children, and being eligible for IRCC-funded services), to be able to recruit the targeted number of participants.
- Potential participants were required to know and have proof of their CLB levels when joining.
 - Many did not and wait times at CLB testing centres were substantial.

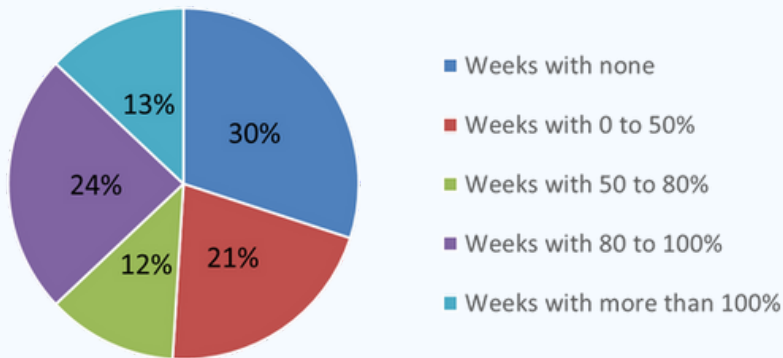
Success

Experienced instructors at MOSAIC developed a placement test, solely for the purpose of determining enrollment in REACH.

Tests were marked by experienced instructors at all three organizations who had received specific training on how to accurately mark the tests. However, clients still needed to take an official CLPBT placement test, when they could access it.

REACH PARTICIPATION

Online Activities



Activity	Percentage attended
One-on-one sessions	60%
Learning consolidation sessions	46%
Family learning sessions	44%

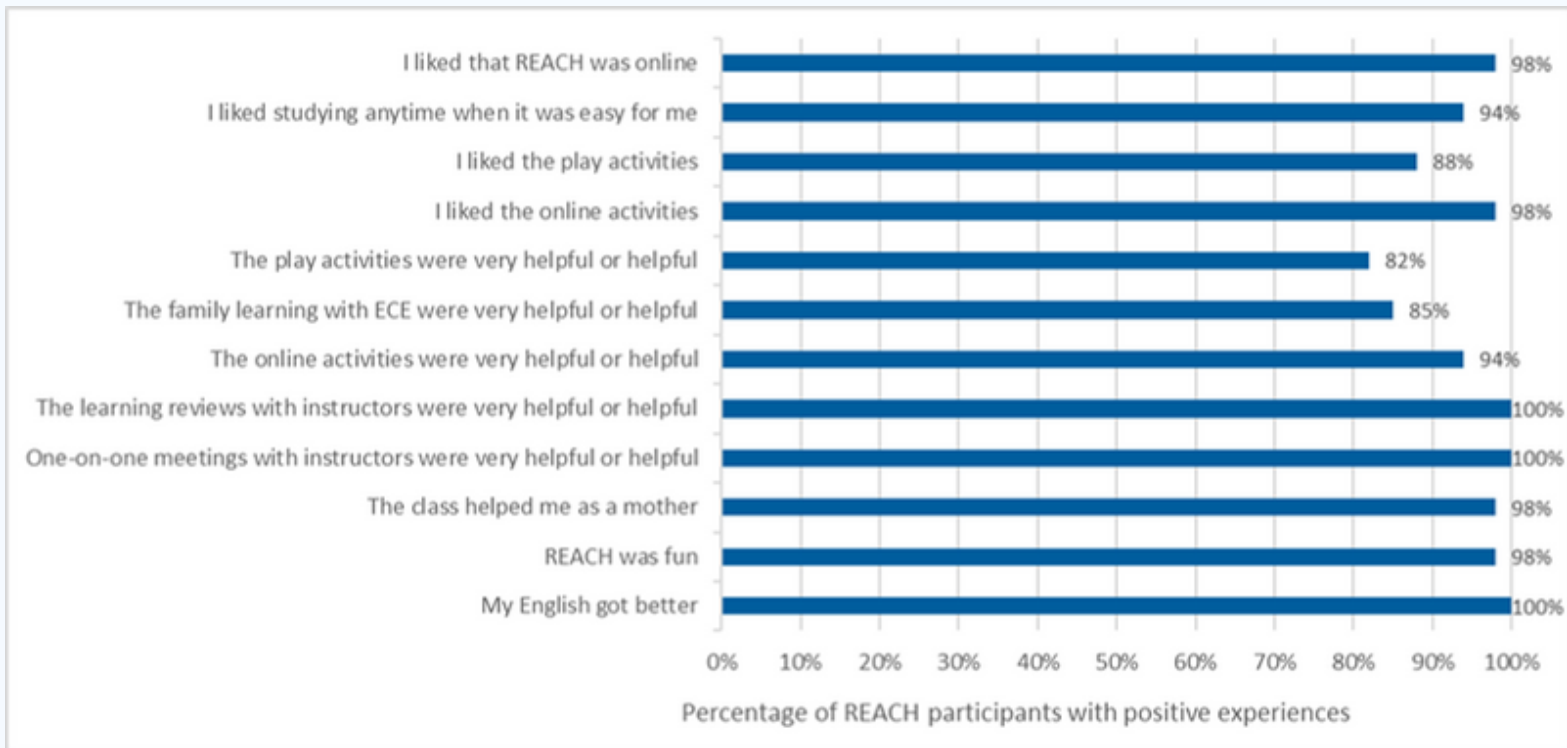


"I wanted to do REACH because I didn't want to send my kids to daycare. I wanted to stay home because my children are too small. I was looking for a flexible program and was looking to have time. Because I pick up and drop off my daughter to and from school, and when she is in school, I am home with my baby. So, it seemed to me more practical to do REACH and be able to do my homework at home."

REACH participant



CLIENT SATISFACTION



"We did [play] activities that taught the children about five senses, and even took videos of my children and shared it with my [instructor]. I enjoyed these activities so much. Even when the children came back from school, they asked me "mom, what type of activity are we doing today?"

REACH participant

"Seeing my [instructor] face-to-face in Zoom was very helpful for me because this is the way that I can practice English by talking to someone, not just reading and listening. I just want to speak with someone. You can improve your listening whenever you're talking with someone. My favourite part of the program was talking with my [instructor], and spending time with her in order to learn new words. That was important for me because I found myself learning better when talking with someone. I'm always looking for chances to talk with someone."

REACH participant



OUTCOMES

English: CLB



	Percentage of Participants who Progressed at least 1 CLB level
Listening	13
Speaking	18
Reading	13
Writing	22
At least one skill	36



A green upward arrow indicates either a statistically significant average increase or a positive average difference between REACH participants and comparison group members.

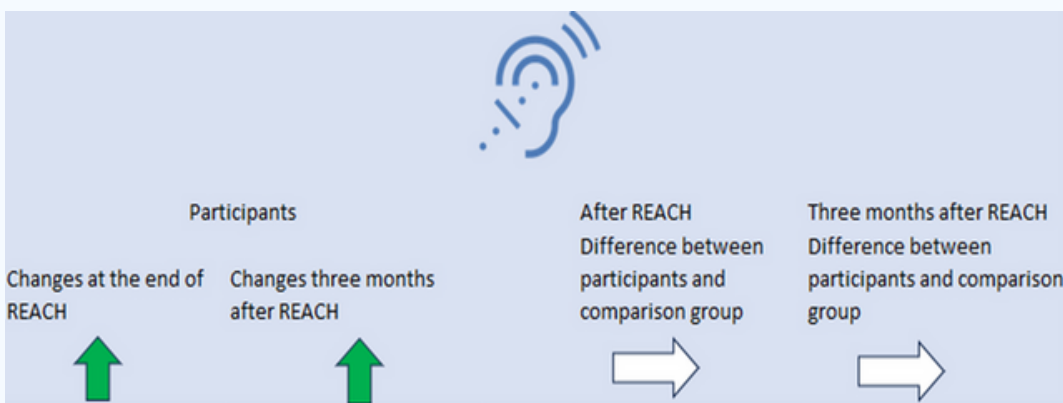


A white forward arrow indicates no statistically significant average change or difference.

REACH participants are progressing at relatively similar rates to CLB 3 and 4 LINC students who are women aged 25-50, even though they are likely to have more barriers.



English: Listening



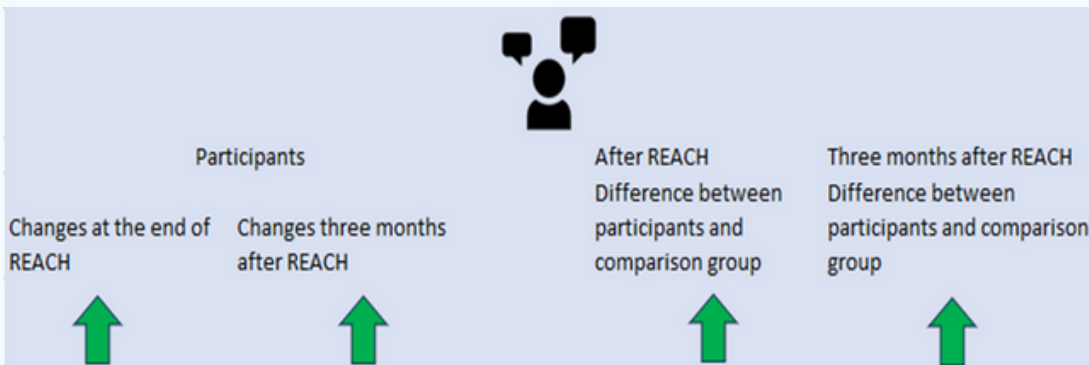
“Even my doctor noticed that my English was getting better. Even when I have an interpreter with me, I can answer questions without waiting for the interpreter to translate.”

REACH participant

When joining REACH, participants were asked how easily they could understand four different scenarios in English. For example, understanding the weather news on radio or television. On average, only 29% of participants found understanding the four scenarios easy or very easy. This percentage increased to 66% at the end of REACH and remained about the same, 64%, three months later.

However, when we compare the percentage of REACH participants who found the listening scenarios very easy or easy with the same percentage of comparison group members, we do not find a statistically significant difference at either the end of REACH or three months after.

English: Speaking



"My [instructor] helped me in the beginning when I had to bring my son to the dentist. I didn't know how to say and what to say to the dentist. My [instructor] gave me a lot of information, a lot of vocabulary, and we even practiced speaking dental situations at the dentist office, which was very supportive and helpful."

REACH participant

When joining REACH, participants were asked how easily they could speak English during four different scenarios. For example, saying hello to a neighbour in English. On average, 34% of participants initially found all four speaking scenarios easy or very easy. After participating in REACH, this percentage increased to 74% but reduced slightly to 68% three months after REACH ended.

We find that more REACH participants found the speaking scenarios easy or very easy after completing REACH and three months later compared to comparison group members. This difference is quite large at, approximately, 18 percentage points immediately after REACH and, approximately, 16 percentage points three months later.

Read this text message. Answer the questions.

Hi Annie! Thank you for inviting Benita to your house. Benita likes cheese strings or hummus and carrots, but she doesn't like potato chips or crackers. For drinks, she likes juice or pop, but she doesn't like milk. Also, she's gluten intolerant, so she can't eat wheat. We're excited to see you tomorrow! Bye for now!

Benita likes cheese strings and potato chips.

True False

Check

Benita can't eat bread or crackers.

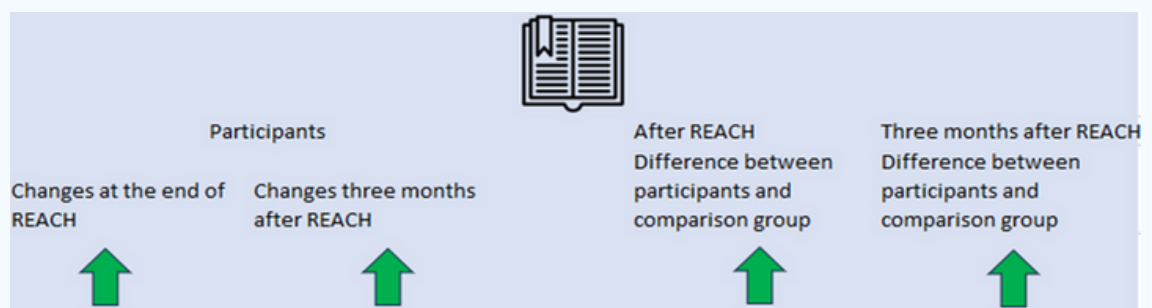
True False

Check

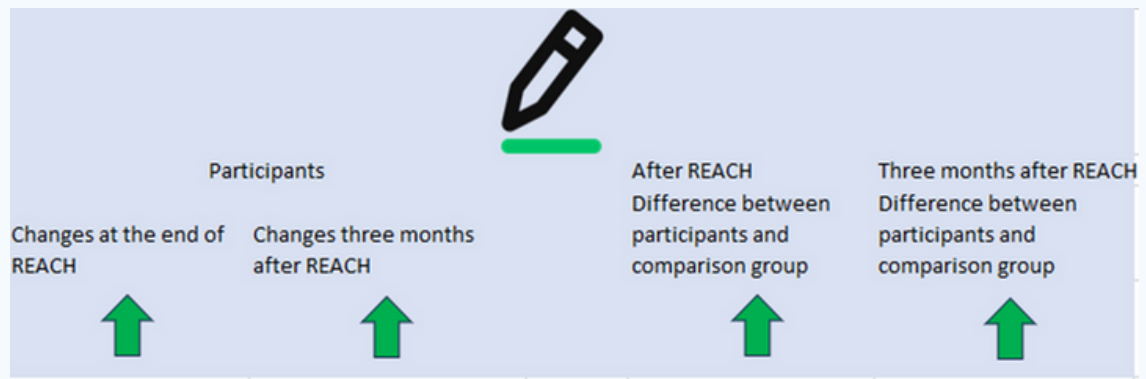
English: Reading

"[...] one client mentioned how she had always read her children's report cards in her first country because she was very concerned about their education and in the two years she had been in Canada, she had not been able to read a report card for her children. And after this she was able to read a report card for her children. She had the language to talk to the teacher, she understood, like [program manager] said, the cultural context around that, because they looked very different than they were in her house."

REACH staff member



English: Writing

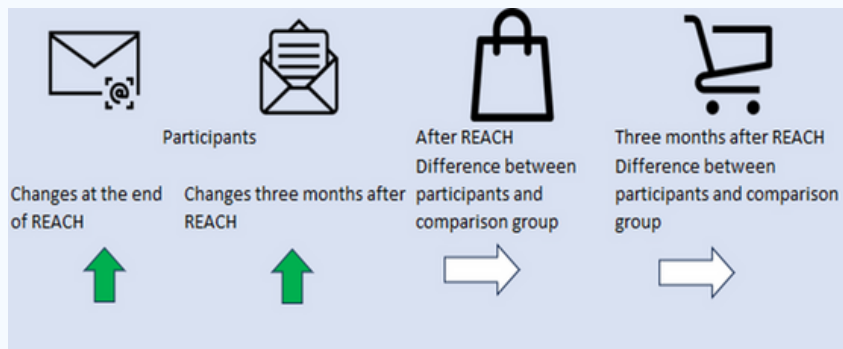


When joining REACH, only 31% of the participants found the four writing scenarios to be very easy or easy. After REACH, this percentage increased to 74% and remained about the same, 70%, three months later.

When we compare the percentage of REACH participants who found the writing scenarios very easy or easy with the same percentage of comparison group members, we find that more REACH participants, approximately 20 percentage points, found the writing scenarios very easy or easy after completing REACH and three months later.



Use of English

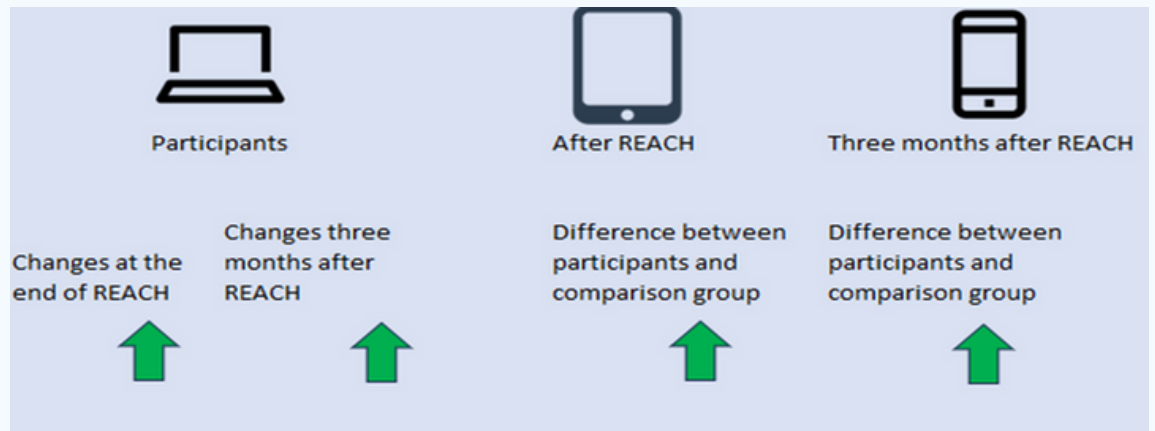


When joining REACH, participants were asked how often they use English in four different scenarios. For example, writing notes, letters, or emails in English.

Fifty-nine percent of participants reported that in all four scenarios, on average, they used English every day, a few times a week, or once a week (compared to less than once a week). After REACH, this percentage increased to 87% and remained about the same, 86%, three months later.

However, when we compare the percentage of REACH participants who reported that their frequency of English use was every day, a few times a week, or once a week, with the same percentage of comparison group members, we do not find a statistically significant difference at either the end of REACH or three months after.

Digital Skills



"And then the typing, there was just a lot of words on a page with weird enters and spaces and sometimes punctuation, but sometimes none and it'll be like word, 7 spaces, period, three spaces, another word. And now when I look at their writing, it looks like English."

REACH staff member

Life in Canada



"It was nice to encounter with different cultures, meeting people from different countries. It helped me to meet other people. And my daughter as well because she also met other kids."

REACH participant

Knowledge of Life in Canada

When joining REACH, participants were asked if they were able to complete six different tasks in Canada.



However, there are no statistically significant changes in participants' sense of belonging or social networks after REACH and no differences between REACH participants and the comparison group.

"Another one that I thought was an achievement is that BC passed a law during the program for free birth control and so the instructors were able to communicate that and quite a few clients were able... this was something that they had really wanted, but they didn't know anything about, didn't know really anything about women's health in general, had no language to communicate about that. So, [...] after knowing more about women's health, knowing that this was available, they were able to avail themselves of that service and those free contraception that they would not have been able to do otherwise."

REACH staff member



Services and Community Participation

Finding settlement services



Participants

Changes at the end of REACH

Changes three months after REACH

After REACH
Difference between participants and comparison group

Three months after REACH
Difference between participants and comparison group



Use of settlement services

Participants

Changes at the end of REACH

Changes three months after REACH

After REACH
Difference between participants and comparison group

Three months after REACH
Difference between participants and comparison group



Community participation



Participants



Changes at the end of REACH

Changes three months after REACH

After REACH
Difference between participants and comparison group

Three months after REACH
Difference between participants and comparison group



CONCLUSIONS

Overall, REACH provided flexible virtual English language instruction to women caring for young children with CLB levels 3 or 4 and achieved its goal of improving the English language skills of participants. After REACH, participants used their new skills to interact with their communities including with neighbours, other mothers, teachers, and doctors. They increased their use of services and their participation in community groups and events, thus supporting their integration into Canada.

LESSONS LEARNED



Recruitment and retention

Due to the targeted nature of REACH, recruitment was challenging. Reaching newcomer women caring for young children, with CLB levels of 3 or 4, who have not already inquired about language classes is essential but time consuming. REACH was designed for women who could not easily participate in LINC classes. Therefore, it is important that recruitment reaches beyond LINC waitlists and women who have already reached out to language instruction providers. Social media and reaching out to community groups, ethno-cultural groups, and religious institutions and groups are all useful recruitment methods but require time and effort. Moreover, wait times and lack of childcare availability for taking CLB assessments to determine if potential participants matched the recruitment criteria both delayed recruitment and deterred some potential participants from joining. REACH adopted a more flexible approach to initial language assessments which was important in increasing recruitment.

During the 9-month pilot, approximately 30% of participants withdrew from REACH early. They did so to take LINC classes or for a variety of personal reasons. This percentage is slightly higher than the 20.6% LINC withdrawal rate of women aged 25-50 in LINC level 3 and 4 classes over a similar time period. Given, that REACH targeted women who could not access LINC classes due to their multiple barriers, the flexibility of REACH was successful in creating an environment that supported their learning and limited withdrawals.



Flexible programming

Providing flexibility to newcomer mothers through asynchronous learning opportunities is crucial for their continued participation in REACH and their successful learning and in improving their English language skills. As many newcomer mothers are responsible for the majority of household tasks and childcare, many participants would often study English early in the morning, after putting their children to bed, or late at night when there were fewer distractions.



English skills

The primary objective of REACH is to improve the English skills of participants. Approximately, 36% of REACH participants progressed at least 1 CLB level in at least 1 skill after joining REACH, similar to the progression rates of similar LINC students. We also find improvements in REACH participants' ease of completing reading, writing, listening, and speaking tasks in English and increases in their use of English in daily activities. Measures of these participant outcomes are similar or higher than those of comparison group members. Overall, REACH achieved its primary goal of improving participants' English.



Using English to improve integration into Canadian society

REACH's curriculum was designed specifically for women caring for young children; to be applicable to their lives. This differs from traditional LINC classes. REACH program staff identified that newcomer mothers benefited from learning the English required for everyday activities such as making doctors appointments, speaking with children's teachers, and conversing with other mothers and neighbours. This helped them make friends, gave them the abilities to complete important tasks, including the ability to use public transportation, and in turn, integrate into Canadian society. After joining REACH, we also see participants increasing their participation in local community events and groups and accessing services.



Benefits and disadvantages of virtual instruction

The vast majority of REACH activities were virtual. This allowed participants to learn when they were available and to vary the time they spent on REACH depending on their particular circumstances on a given day or in a given week. It also made it easier for those for whom transportation may have been challenging had activities been in person.

In addition to gaining English skills through REACH, participants also learned digital literacy skills. Participants learned to Google information and draft and send emails and texts. We see increases in participants' digital skills after REACH and when we compare REACH participants with comparison group members.

However, virtual English language instruction does have some limitations. Firstly, it requires participants to have access to a device and reliable internet. They also need some initial digital skills and/or support in the use of digital tools. This should be an important consideration in the design, recruitment for, and delivery of similar programming.

Moreover, both REACH participants and program staff described the importance of face-to-face language learning in addition to independent asynchronous learning. Learning one-on-one with language instructors and in group settings with other mothers provided critical opportunities for participants to practice their speaking and listening skills with someone who could provide feedback, as well as clarify concerns about the learning materials or with whom they could share personal concerns and receive support. This could be achieved either virtually, in-person, or hybrid.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research is needed to understand how effective programs similar to REACH would be if adapted for higher CLB levels or for different populations with similarly high barriers to traditional language instruction, such as migrant workers or seniors.

For the full report:



<https://srdc.org/project/ready-english-accessible-for-caregivers-at-home-reach/>

List of Acronyms

CLB	Canadian Language Benchmark
CLBPT	Canadian Language Benchmark Placement Test
LINC	Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada
PBLA	Portfolio-Based Language Assessment

