

# LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR NEWCOMERS IN CANADA (LINC) PROGRAM AT MOHAWK COLLEGE

Exploring Students' Experiences and Transition to Postsecondary  
Education and Employment

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## FOREWORD

Mohawk College is recognized as a provincial leader in the provision of language instruction and work place preparation services for new Canadians settling in the Hamilton region. Spanning over 40 years, the College has played a pivotal role in ensuring newcomers have the necessary language proficiency to support their families, find and secure stable employment, and contribute meaningfully to the rich social and cultural fabric of the community. The English as a Second Language team, comprised of dedicated faculty and staff, pride themselves on the exemplary level of teaching, advocacy and support they offer to their students to ensure English Language Learners can move forward with their hopes and dreams for their new lives in Canada.

Building on this legacy, the English as a Second Language team continually undertakes new innovative approaches to strengthen our response to the ever-changing needs of our students. This is first comprehensive scholarly review of the English as a Second Language programs offered by Mohawk, and demonstrates our overriding commitment to continuous improvement. Moreover, this work reaffirms the tremendous value that Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) and Workplace Preparation (WPP) programs contribute to the success achieved by newcomers attending the College.

The findings of the study highlight the importance placed by students on creating a plan for their future that allows them to leverage the skills and expertise acquired in their homeland. For most if not all students, the pathway forward often involves further education, employment or a combination of the two. The study also underscores the student priority of learning in an environment that is safe, supportive, and welcoming. Further, students appreciate and recognize the program quality dimension, acknowledging that the teaching and service excellence delivered by LINC and WPP differentiates Mohawk from other providers.

I would like to commend the research and faculty team for their efforts in preparing such a thorough and insightful report on these important programs. Mohawk is grateful to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada for their long-standing partnership in the delivery of LINC and WPP in our community, and for their interest in collaborating on this research study.

Finally, I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to all of the students who chose Mohawk as a place to begin their journeys here in Canada, and who have helped to define us as a sanctuary institution where possibilities can be realized.

Jim Vanderveken  
Dean, Centre for Community Partnerships and Experiential Learning

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although there have been multiple studies on the demographics and outcomes of LINC students, a study specifically targeting Mohawk LINC students has not been conducted. Concrete recommendations for improvements can be found on page 46/47, and are based on focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and Mohawk Student Entrance Survey data from LINC students that subsequently attended Mohawk.

This study outlines a socio-demographic profile of recent LINC students at Mohawk (2012 Fall to 2017 Fall inclusive), and also addresses the challenges, successes, and areas of improvement that the Mohawk LINC program faces.

Mohawk LINC students generally have attained some degree of postsecondary education (PSE) but are seeking LINC certification in order to secure a place in PSE and/or the workforce. However, significant secondary benefits including improved language skills, greater ties to the community, and a better understanding of Canadian culture are identified in this report.

Some key demographic qualities are that most participants are under 40 (20.6% under 26), from the middle-east, particularly Iraq (with Syria trending upwards recently), and speak Arabic (45%) at home. There is a slight trend of more females than men in most demographic categories.

LINC students who subsequently pursued a diploma at Mohawk (N=117) were clustered primarily into business (26%) and technology (42%), with more female students in business (86% of all reported students in the program) and males in technology (75% of all reported students in the program). In addition, female LINC students chose a more diverse array of programs than males.

Benefits from the LINC program are clearly recognized. However, there are some significant challenges and areas for improvement. Some benefits are that LINC is a cost-free, easy-to-access method to improve language skills in all language categories (written, spoken, cultural/conversational and grammatical/academic-preparedness). Also, it has a relatively straightforward system of progression with a tangible goal at the end, which is postsecondary eligibility.

Participants noted some areas in need of improvement. Cultural and class sensitivities can be lacking in instructors –some LINC students felt that they were treated as typical students, even though they held advanced degrees or were older than their instructor. Others felt that instructors were not being sensitive to various cultural issues. This last point is balanced by some students who appreciated the immersion in the Canadian style of education, which in many cases was very different from their own and helped them when they were integrated into a Canadian PSE environment.

Skill-sets are often incongruent to level placements, especially when a LINC student does not need to improve in all language areas. In order to progress to the next level, students may need to receive instruction in areas they have previously covered extensively. A fast-track option was suggested by many students as a potential solution. The timing, transitioning, and next-steps in the LINC program was identified by some students as an issue. Greater clarity about the program as a whole would be beneficial. A lack of other 'fluent' English speakers with which to converse (i.e. other students had a diverse array of accents) was also noted.

Lastly, it appears that the student population can rapidly flux, especially with governmental and geo-political changes; ideally the LINC program at Mohawk would be able to nimbly address these issues and adjust course timings and instructional methodologies accordingly in response to these forces.

## INTRODUCTION

Mohawk College has been serving the newcomer population in Hamilton through LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers in Canada) classes for over two decades. The LINC program was launched by the government of Canada in 1992 to facilitate the integration of adult immigrants and refugees through free adult language instruction in English and French (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). Newcomers who use LINC classes come from diverse backgrounds with different goals and ambitions. While a majority of LINC students have stated that their primary goal in taking these classes is to improve English for everyday life, three quarters of these students have voiced their ambition to pursue further education and become employment-ready (ibid, 2010).

Previous studies have explored policy barriers, LINC curriculum and instruction, and learning experiences and performance of LINC students. However, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to understanding the long-term impacts of LINC classes. In this research, we will investigate and research whether and how students use the LINC program as a step to transition to postsecondary education or find employment.

### Research Questions

Our overarching questions in this research are:

- What is the socio-demographic profile of students who attended LINC classes at Mohawk College between 2012 and 2017?
- What is the transfer rate of these students to enrol in a program of study at the college or university level, or to find employment? How do students experience this transition?
- What role does the Mohawk College LINC program play in these students' transition to postsecondary education and employment?
- What are the challenges facing LINC program graduates in their pursuit of higher education or employment, and how does the LINC program at Mohawk College help address those challenges?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has shown that a key barrier facing newcomers in their settlement experience in Canada is language (Cray and Currie, 2004, p. 52). In order to address this barrier, in 1992 the Canadian government launched language training programs. The objective was to ensure newcomers “adapt to their new country and participate fully in social and economic life of their communities” (ibid, p. 52). “By developing linguistic communication skills, immigrants and refugees are better able to function in Canadian society and contribute to the economy” (CIC, 2010, p. v). Therefore, language instruction has been by far the largest component of public spending in the settlement and integration of newcomers in Canada.

Language Instruction for Newcomers in Canada, known as the LINC program, provides language assessment and training for new immigrants (Dempsey, Xue and Kustec, 2009). The purpose of the LINC program is to facilitate the integration of adult immigrants and refugees through free adult language instruction in English and French. LINC classes in Canada are offered by a variety of community-based organizations (64.5%), school boards (15.5%), community colleges (13.5%), churches (0.6%) and private trainers (5.8%) across Canada (CIC, 2010, p. 47). These classes are free of charge, tailored towards the needs of adult newcomers and offered both full-time and part-time. In many sites where classes are offered, child-minding is also available.

### Eligibility

In order to be eligible for LINC classes, “applicants must be at least 18 years old, a permanent resident of Canada, or a Convention Refugee as defined in Section 95 of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, or a person in Canada whose application for Permanent Resident status is being processed in Canada (e.g. someone who has been informed by CIC [now Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada or IRCC<sup>1</sup>] of the initial approval of his/her application” (Jackson, 2013, p. 17, italics in original)). Each applicant’s language abilities are assessed based on a national standard for language learners, known as the Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) system<sup>2</sup>. Assessment centres offer this service at no cost for newcomers.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that IRCC (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) is the new name for Citizenship, Immigration Canada (CIC). Many citations include the former name, CIC, because the publication was released when the ministry held the respective name.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks, “CLB is used in Canada to teach and test language learning for adults ... [who] plan to go to English class, train, look for work or study at a college or university.” For more information, visit: [www.language.ca/home](http://www.language.ca/home).

Currently, levels 1 through 5 are offered across Canada. However, in Ontario, levels 6 and 7 are also available. For the most part, LINC is classroom-based and conducted in a standard school classroom setting. Additionally, classes have been offered online and through correspondence since 2009. The LINC program is part of IRCC's general settlement program (Jackson, 2013, p. 18).

### Demographic Profile

According to an evaluation of the LINC program conducted by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) or currently known as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) in 2010, 86% of permanent residents in Canada spoke a mother tongue other than English or French, and language was identified as one of the most serious barriers to pursuing further education and finding employment (CIC, 2010, p. v). The same evaluation (2010) showed that 36,814 clients were assessed, 55,286 were in training and 19,162 completed training in Canada in 2008. Further, Ontario accounted for the majority of LINC clients (82.4%) in the same year.

CIC's evaluation of the LINC program in 2010 include information about the make-up of the LINC client population as of 2008:

- 72% of LINC clients are female and 28% male.
- 35% of clients belonged to Skilled Workers category and just below 35% in Family Class. Over 20% were refugees and about 5% were other economic immigrants.
- The top two countries where LINC learners came from were China and India (22% and 8% respectively).
- 12.2% of clients were between 18-24 years of age, and the majority (65.6%) were between ages of 25 and 44. Clients between 45 and 64 made up 19.7% of the clients and 2.4% were 65 years of age and over.
- A majority of clients had lived in Canada for less than 2 years (51.8%). 17.2% had been in Canada between 2-3 years, and 31.1% for more than 3 years.
- LINC clients are a highly educated population, with 38.5% having a university degree, 24.5% with a non-university certificate, and just 37% with an education level equivalent to high school or less.

### Hamilton's Newcomer Population and LINC

According to the 2016 census, Hamilton has seen a 3.3% increase in its population since 2011. The percentage of population who are foreign born is 24, slightly above the national average (20%). Since 2011, Hamilton has received about 17,500 immigrants and refugees, who predominantly come from non-English speaking countries, including the Philippines (9%), India

(8.6%), Syria (7.5%), Iraq (7.1%), and China (5.2%) (Hamilton Spectator, 2017). According to the 2016 census data, 12% of Hamilton households speak a non-English language at home (ibid, 2017).

Data from Coordinated Language Assessment and Referral System (CLARS) from YMCA Hamilton shows that 2,613 unique clients were assessed between April 1, 2017 and March 31, 2018. Clients included those assessed for both provincially and federally funded language classes.

Dates	IRCC (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) & MCIIT (Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade) * eligible	MCIIT (Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade) * eligible	Male clients	Female clients	Total number of clients
April 2017 – March 2018	1,826	787	1,086 (41.5%)	1,527 (58.5%)	2,613
April 2016 – March 2017	2,129	635	1,209 (43.8%)	1,555 (56.2%)	2,764

\*Clients eligible for provincially and federally funded English language classes (referred to LINC providers).

\*Clients eligible for only provincially funded English language classes, mainly offered by Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board.

Source: YMCA Employment, Education & Immigrant Services, Hamilton: Coordinated Language Assessment and Referral System (CLARS), 2018.

Further, data on clients assessed for language classes in 2006 shows that LINC students in Hamilton are predominantly young adults and highly educated, as 57% of the learners assessed between 2005 and 2006 had completed postsecondary education (Howard Barton and Associates, 2006, p. 6).

### Barriers and Program Efficiency

Considering the importance of language proficiency in newcomer integration, “reducing barriers to client participation has long been a key objective of LINC” (Singh & Blakely, 2012, p. 8). In a survey conducted by CIC in 2010, a majority of participants suggested that LINC was easily accessible and that it was a well-known program among newcomers (p. 23). However, Dieleman (2012) highlights access to LINC classes depend on immigration status as newcomers without an immigration status, refugee claimants and citizens are not eligible for this program (p. 13). Further, supports such as child-minding, home-based tutoring, and online classes are not offered across all LINC programs (Singh & Blakely, 2012).

While LINC clients surveyed in several studies reported high satisfaction with their learning experience (Gormley & Gill, 2007; CIC, 2012), some of the learner needs identified in these studies include: better assessment of language skills, more targeted curriculum for specific skills and employment needs, access to a LINC text book to take home, a coherent course outline with weekly lesson plans, and accommodation for students who have specific interests, such as academic skills, practical daily life skills and employment-related language skills.

Important information on impacts and effectiveness of the LINC program include (CIC, 2010):

- 60% of LINC students had completed at least one LINC level (p. 33).
- LINC has directly contributed to students' improvement in reading and writing. However, it has not improved students' abilities in listening and speaking in significant ways and beyond what they have learned in daily life (p. 32).
- 94% of students felt they were placed at the correct level. 86% felt comfortable with the pace of the classes (p. 21).
- 91% of students reported LINC has helped them make new friends in Canada, and over 60% reported being comfortable using public transit or health services (p. 38).

### This Study

There is a gap in the literature about the long-term impacts of the LINC program on clients' employment and education. Evaluations and studies with data on LINC students have included only those who were currently taking LINC classes. An attempt by CIC in 2010 to reach former LINC clients to find out their perception of the program failed due to outdated contact information and low response rate. This study examines the extent to which the LINC program offered at Mohawk College has helped clients (both former and current) pursue higher education or find employment.

We explore this through accessing data on Mohawk College LINC program attendees and graduates, a series of interviews with a select group of graduates, and a focus group with a group of recent LINC graduates. This study will examine the role of LINC classes in preparing students for higher education or employment.

## Centre for Community Partnerships and Experiential Learning at Mohawk College

Mohawk College is committed to providing and improving access to postsecondary education for groups underrepresented in higher education institutions in Hamilton. Through its Centre for Community Partnerships and Experiential Learning, the College connects community members and external partners to the resources they need to access education and employment. Services offered by the centre include academic upgrading, English language instruction and employment preparation.

Through its LINC program, funded by IRCC, the centre helps newcomers improve their language skills to “be ready for ... academic development, community involvement and career development” (Mohawk College, n.d.). Under the LINC program, the department offers both language instruction for newcomers and workplace preparation programs.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a mixed-method design. The approach combines quantitative and qualitative research (Tedlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 7). The quantitative data was drawn from Mohawk College's Institutional Research Department's student registration database and the Student Entrance Survey. Qualitative data was collected through 11 semi-structured interviews with current and former LINC students and a focus group discussion with 10 students who had recently graduated with 7 and 8 Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) levels. Further, prior to the data collection process, a literature review on the LINC program was conducted. A research ethics application was submitted to and approved by Mohawk College's Research Ethics Board in October 2017 prior to the data collection process. Due to unforeseen labour disruption that lasted for five weeks in October and early November, the recruitment and data collection process started in late November. In compliance with the Tri-Council Code of Ethics research protocol, the research team received informed consent from each participant in this study prior to collecting any information.

### Student Registration Records and Student Entrance Survey Data

The research team requested data on LINC students from the Mohawk College Institutional Research (IR) Department. The Department provided us with data on current and former LINC students within the past five years, between Fall 2012 and Fall 2017. This data included demographic and postsecondary information on 1,307 students. Further, the research team from the Community Access and Engagement Department accessed data on LINC students between 2012 and 2017 through HARTs (History of Assessment, Referrals and Training) system, a database that keeps records of clients who use various services funded by IRCC, including the LINC program. This data was merged with the Student Registration data to complement information on language and country of birth.

Mohawk College conducts a Student Entrance Survey (SES) at the beginning of each academic term. Survey respondents include only students who have registered in a postsecondary program at Mohawk College. Using a controller code assigned for LINC students, the Institutional Research Department provided us with data on former LINC students who had responded to this survey. The sample includes 117 former LINC students who had transitioned to a postsecondary program at Mohawk College.

The student registration data was used to understand the demographic profile of the LINC students at Mohawk College. Further, the SES data helped inform the demographic profile

of students who have transitioned to a postsecondary program at Mohawk College and their perception of their academic preparedness.

The research team conducted a descriptive analysis of the student registration and SES data. Tables and charts were generated on Microsoft Excel to demonstrate a breakdown of the LINC students by age, gender, language, country of birth, LINC class type, current program of study and credentials achieved. The SES data further illustrate the level of academic preparedness and attitudes towards postsecondary education for former LINC students who are registered in a postsecondary program at Mohawk College.

### Interviews and Focus Group

Eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted between February 14 and March 10, 2018. Interviews helped provide valuable qualitative data on students' learning experience in LINC classes and their experiences in transitioning to postsecondary education or the labour market.

Names and email address of all students who participated in LINC classes in the past two years were retrieved from the student registration data provided to us by the Institutional Research Department. We sent email invitations to over 600 students to participate in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. These students included both those who have completed LINC and are registered in a postsecondary program of study, and those who have completed LINC and are not registered in a program of study.

Further, a focus group discussion was held with 10 recent LINC graduates on February 14, 2018. The focus group was aimed at understanding the learning experience of students in LINC classes, their reasons for attending these classes, their next steps and future aspirations, as well as their challenges and barriers in achieving their goals. Both the focus group session and semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for the purpose of analysis.

Qualitative data collected in the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion was analyzed through a coding technique, followed by looking for themes, patterns and relationships. A set of themes emerged as a result of reading and re-reading interview and focus group transcripts. These themes were then grouped into various pre-existing categories (based on interview and focus group questionnaires), and emerging categories. These categories were reviewed and revised and, as a result, several themes with broader patterns of meaning emerged.

## Limitations

Our initial research design included an online survey, but due to a labour dispute that caused a five-week-long college faculty strike in Ontario, we were unable to launch the survey. However, we were able to retrieve most of the data we were looking for in our initial survey in the student registration database, the Student Entrance Survey, and the HART system. The survey was aimed at understanding key demographic information about current and former LINC students and their postsecondary and labour market participation rates. While the data that substituted the survey includes the demographic information we were looking for, information regarding current postsecondary and labour market participation experience were not included in the above datasets.

The other limitation of the student registration data is the obvious fact it does not include information as to whether students have pursued higher education or further education in another postsecondary institution other than Mohawk College.

Further, the SES data includes only students who have taken a postsecondary program at Mohawk College, and does not include those who have taken a continuing education course or apprenticeship program. The SES does not include students who are in other educational institutions, because the survey is administered only at Mohawk College.

Due to outdated contact information and time constraints, we were unable to recruit the target number of interview participants, 20. Failing to meet recruitment targets is a common challenge in research studies (McDonald et al., 2006, p. 1). Additionally, a majority of interview participants were former LINC students who are currently enrolled in a postsecondary program at Mohawk College, and many mentioned they wanted to talk to us because they were satisfied with the program.

In this research study, we accessed valuable quantitative data drawn from various data sources, including the Student Registration Database, the Student Entrance Survey, and the HART system. However, due to time constraints, we were not able to conduct statistical analyses of the data. We used the data to provide a demographic profile of students. Future research on the LINC program can use this valuable data to find statistical associations and relationships between variables, such as age, gender and type of LINC program, and transition to postsecondary education or academic preparedness.

## PROFILE OF LINC STUDENTS AT MOHAWK COLLEGE

Three sources of data were accessed to develop the following charts and tables, including Student Registration Records, History of Assessment, Referrals and Training (HART) system, and Student Entrance Survey (SES).

### Student Registration Data Findings

Student Registration data shows that there were **1,307** unique students who attended LINC classes at Mohawk College between Fall 2012 and Fall 2017. Students are included in the data regardless of whether they had completed a regular LINC term.

#### Last Year of Activity at Mohawk College

Table 1 shows the distribution of LINC students by last year of activity at Mohawk College. The activity can refer to both LINC and non-LINC classes, including postsecondary programs and continuing education courses.

Table 1. Last Year of Activity at Mohawk (LINC & Non-LINC)	Percentage	Count
*2012	3.4%	45
2013	16.1%	210
2014	14.6%	191
2015	15.3%	200
2016	18.9%	247
*2017	31.7%	414
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,307</b>

\*It is important to note that the number of respondents in the year 2012 is lower because the year 2012 only covers September to December, whereas years 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 include respondents from January to December. Finally, year 2017 refers to the time period between January and September.

#### Type of LINC Activity

The LINC program offers a variety of courses and activities. The basic LINC classes are based on Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs), including levels 1 through 8. The LINC program offers an intensive course called 6-Intensive<sup>3</sup> for students who wish to transition to

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<sup>3</sup> The LINC 6-Intensive is a 13-week course (12 weeks this year due to the strike) for students with benchmarks of at least 6. There is no information as to whether this course or a similar course is offered in other colleges or LINC service providers. This course began to be offered over a decade ago as a free (to LINC eligible clients) version of what was then College Entrance English (CEE). It allowed LINC students to do the same academic preparation and

postsecondary education. Upon successful completion of this course, students achieve CLB-7 and meet the language requirement to enroll in most college programs. It is important to note that many students interviewed in this research had either completed this course or knew about it.

Further, the LINC program offers two other courses geared towards workplace and employment preparation. The Enhanced Language Training (ELT) course is aimed at improving students' communication skills, and transferring skills and work experience into the Canadian job market. The Occupation-Specific Language Training (OSLT) course is offered to qualified immigrants who have prior experience or training in a particular field. OSLT courses have so far been offered for internationally trained professionals in the fields of: business, human services, health and technology. Only students with at least CLB level 6 are eligible for OSLT and ELT classes.

Table 2 shows the number of LINC students by the types of LINC courses they attended. A majority of students enroll in basic LINC courses to complete benchmarks at various levels. However, the table below shows that some students also show interest in improving their English for workplace preparation. In addition, the Enhanced Language Training (ELT), launched in 2003, has been an attractive option for many newcomers. The data from interviews (discussed in section *Findings from Interviews and Focus Group*) shows that because they have prior postsecondary and professional experience from their home countries, many LINC students reported that their goal was finding a job in their desired field of employment.

<b>Table 2. Type of LINC Course</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Count</b>
LINC	67.5%	882
ELT & LINC	15.8%	207
ELT	8.2%	107
LINC & OSLT	2.7%	35
ELT, LINC & OSLT	2.0%	26
ELT & OSLT & OSLT alone	0.8%	11
*Missing data	3.0%	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,307</b>

\*There are 39 respondents missing data on type of program/courses.

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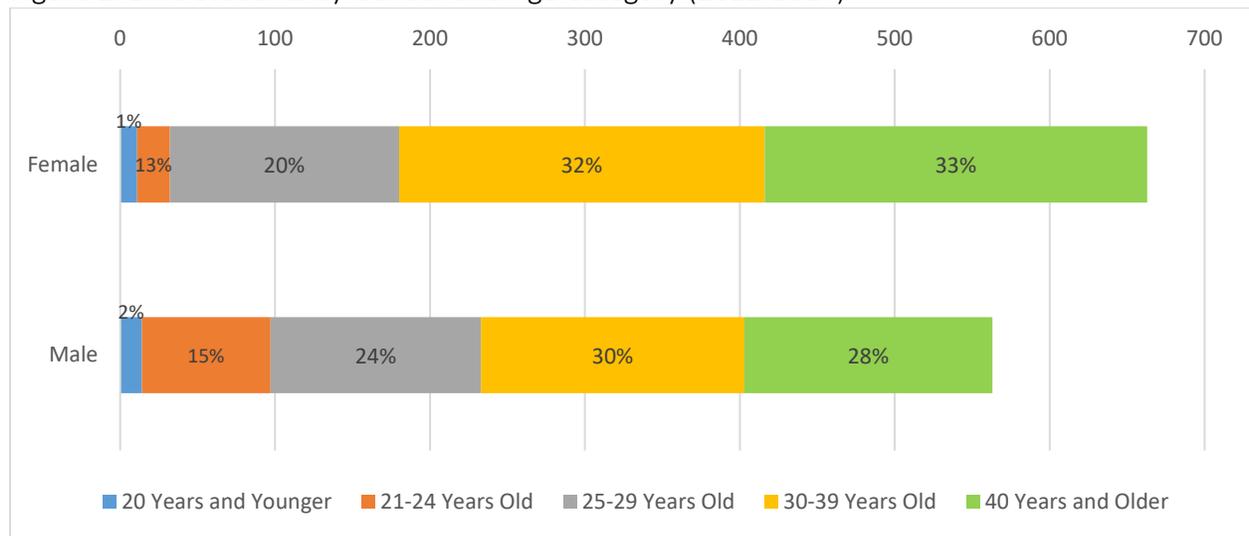
get the English requirement for college admission as students (mostly international students) who paid for CEE. Students who successfully complete 6-Intensive will get benchmarks of 7 and higher.

## Age and Gender

As shown in Figure 1, of 1,307 students, a majority of students were female and in their late 20s and early 30s. The data shows that the LINC program is an attractive option for younger students. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of LINC students by gender and age category.

The age categories reflect the age of the student at the present time (2017) as opposed to the time of registration.

Figure 1. LINC Students by Gender and Age Category (2012-2017)



\*Data with fewer than 5 responses are hidden to reduce risk of identifying individuals.

## Languages

Consistent with the recent census data that revealed Arabic has taken over Italian as the top non-English language spoken at home in Hamilton, Student Registration data at Mohawk College shows that Arabic is by far the most reported first language among LINC students.

Table 3 shows a list of the eight first languages reported by LINC students between 2012 and 2017:

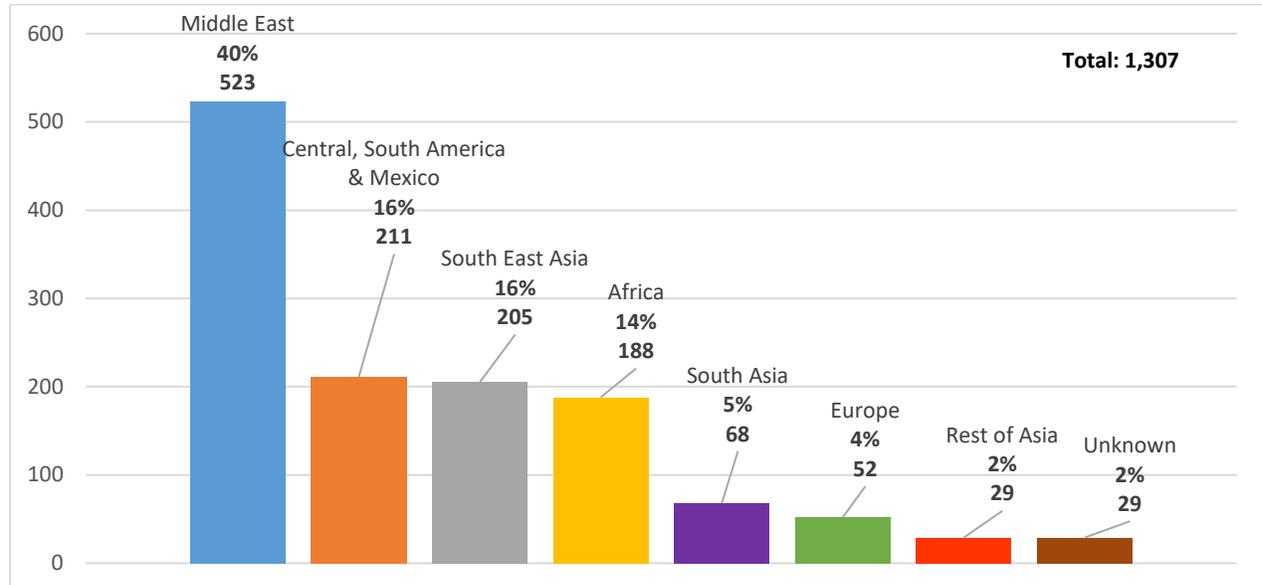
Table 3. Top Languages	Percentage	Count
Arabic	45.0%	401
Spanish	21.3%	190
Mandarin	10.3%	92
Persian/Farsi	8.2%	73
French	4.1%	37
Urdu	4.0%	36
Korean	3.7%	33
Tagalog	3.4%	30

\*Only languages with at least 30 responses are included in the table above.

### Birth Countries and Areas of Origin

A large number of LINC students come from the Middle East, followed by Central and South America, and South East Asia. Figure 2 shows the areas of the world LINC students come from:

Figure 2. LINC Students (2012-2017): Distribution by Birth Region



\*Data with fewer than 5 responses are hidden to reduce the risk of identifying individuals.

The student registration records at Mohawk College shows that Iraq is the top country of birth, followed by Colombia and Syria with more than 100 students reporting to have come from the aforementioned countries.

Figure 3 below shows top birth countries. Please note that only countries with at least 29 responses are included in the chart below.

Figure 3. LINC Students (2012-2017): Top Birth Countries

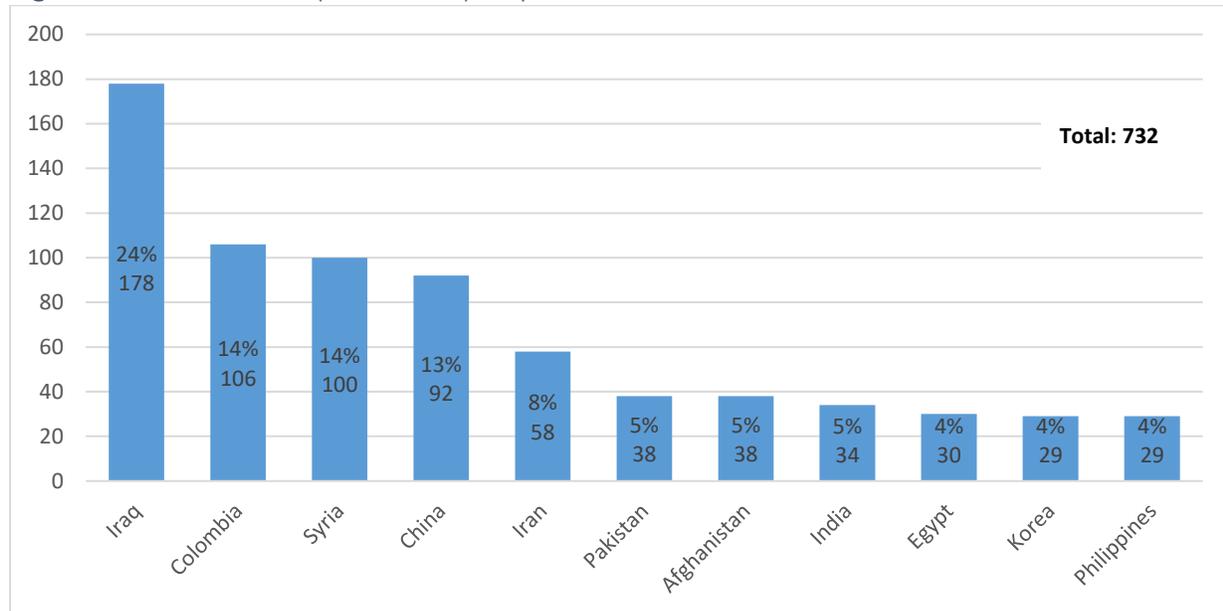


Figure 4 shows area of the world students come from by gender. There are more female students than males taking the LINC program. This is true regardless of which part of the world students come from.

Figure 4. LINC Students (2012-2017): Birth Region by Gender

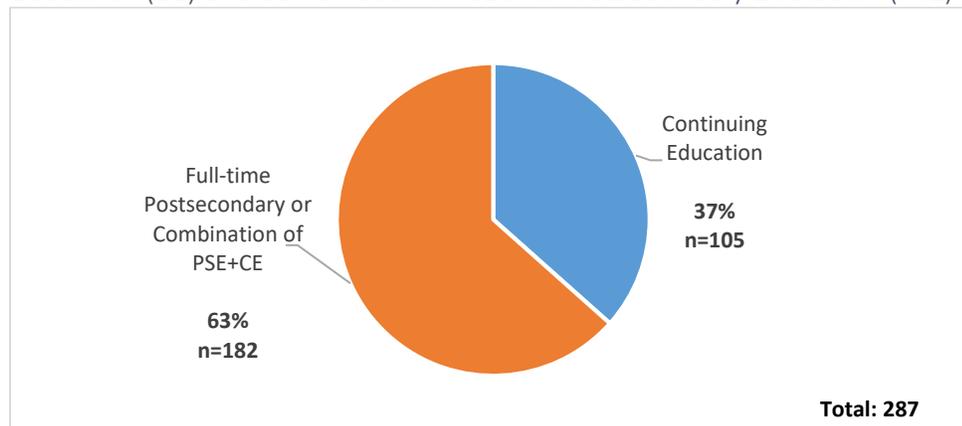


### Enrollment in Postsecondary Programs

Of **1,251** LINC students who finished the LINC program (meaning that they had completed at least one regular term at Mohawk College), **105** have pursued CE<sup>4</sup> courses and **182** have pursued full-time day postsecondary<sup>5</sup> programs or a combination of postsecondary and CE courses/programs at Mohawk College either before, during or after finishing the LINC program.

It is important to stress that the LINC students included in this dataset (1,251) have completed various CLBs. However, only those who have attained at least CLB 7 meet the language requirement for college level studies. In addition, we consulted Mohawk College's internal database and found that between Fall 2006 and Fall 2017, 375 unique LINC students pursued a postsecondary program at Mohawk College. Figure 5 shows only those who completed LINC split by the type of non-LINC program they attended at Mohawk College.

Figure 5. LINC Students (2012-2017) in Non-LINC Program/Course: Distribution by Continuing Education (CE) and Combination of CE and Postsecondary Education (PSE)



<sup>4</sup> According to Settlement.Org (2015): Continuing education refers to courses/programs that are offered to adults in the community to help them develop their knowledge and skills in a specific area. These courses/programs are offered by local school boards, colleges and universities, and may include diploma and certificate programs, but also non-credit courses. Those with prior postsecondary education may take continuing education courses to upgrade their skills. Continuing education courses/programs are often offered at flexible hours in the evenings or on the weekends. Mohawk College offers over 150 programs through continuing education as well as stand-alone courses in specific areas of study. These programs and courses can be completed in-class, online or both and are available in the evenings and weekends to accommodate students who face challenges to complete full-time studies.

<sup>5</sup> According to Statistics Canada (2010), postsecondary education refers to a variety of apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma programs offered by colleges and universities as well as degree programs offered by universities. Mohawk College offers over 160 full-time diploma and certificate programs in areas of study, including business, communications, community services, health, skilled trades, and technology. For the purpose of this research, postsecondary refers to full-time diploma or certificate programs offered during the day.

### Area of Study

Technology and business are by far the most attractive postsecondary programs for LINC students. Over two thirds of LINC students who have pursued postsecondary education at Mohawk College have enrolled in technology and business programs.

190 students who had attended some type of postsecondary and CE course at Mohawk College have reported an area of postsecondary program of study. Figure 6 illustrates a breakdown of LINC students at Mohawk College by area of postsecondary study.

Figure 6. LINC Students (2012-2017) in Postsecondary Education and Continuing Education by Area of Study

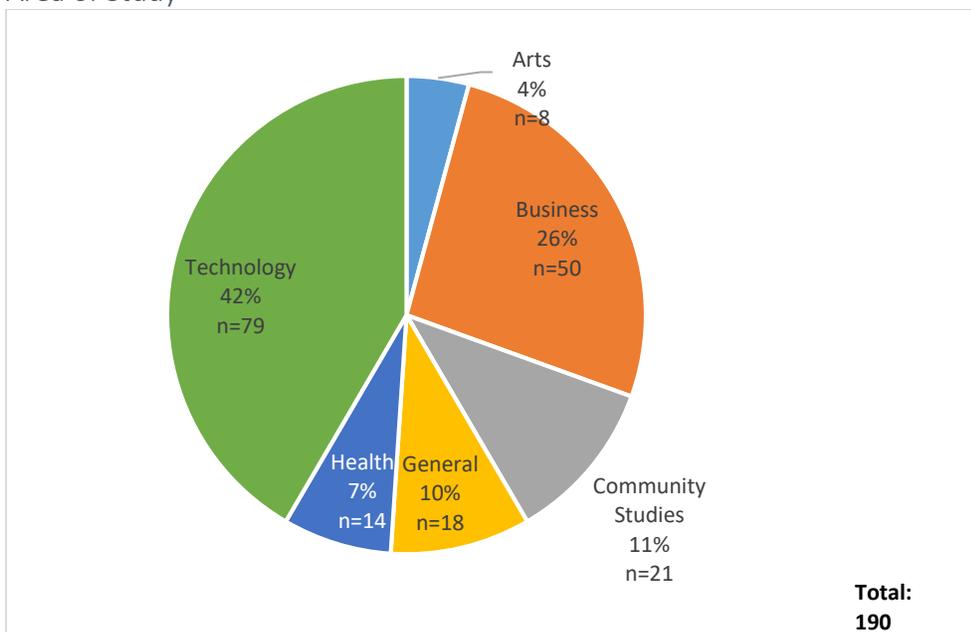
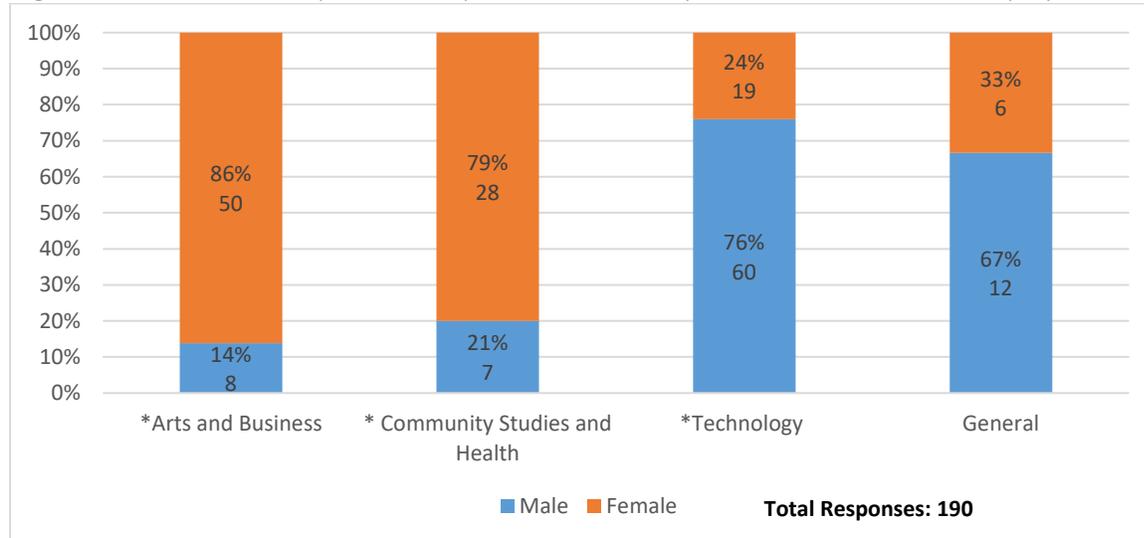


Figure 7 shows the breakdown of program of study by gender. There are more male students enrolled in technology and more women in business and community studies.

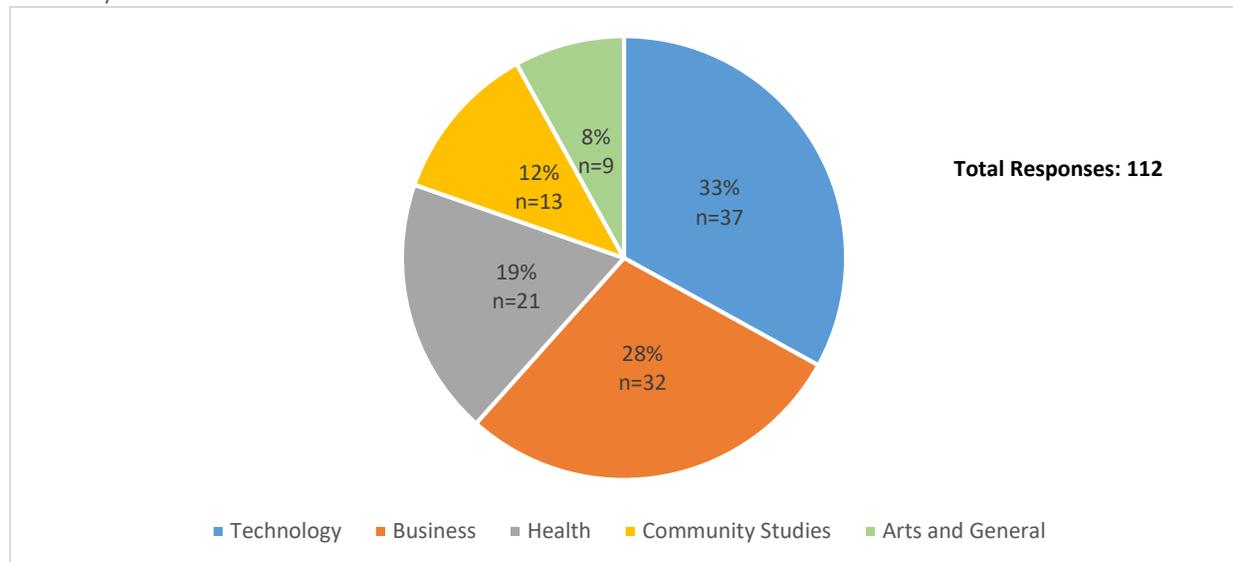
Figure 7. LINC Students (2012-2017) in Postsecondary Education: Area of Study by Gender



\*Statistically significant differences found between male and female students in business:  $p < 0.01$ ; community studies:  $p < 0.01$ ; and technology:  $p < 0.01$ .

Figure 8 shows a breakdown of LINC student graduation rates by postsecondary and CE areas of study. Technology, business, and health are areas of study from which a majority of students have graduated.

Figure 8. LINC Students (2012-2017) in Postsecondary Education and Continuing Education: Area of Study Graduated



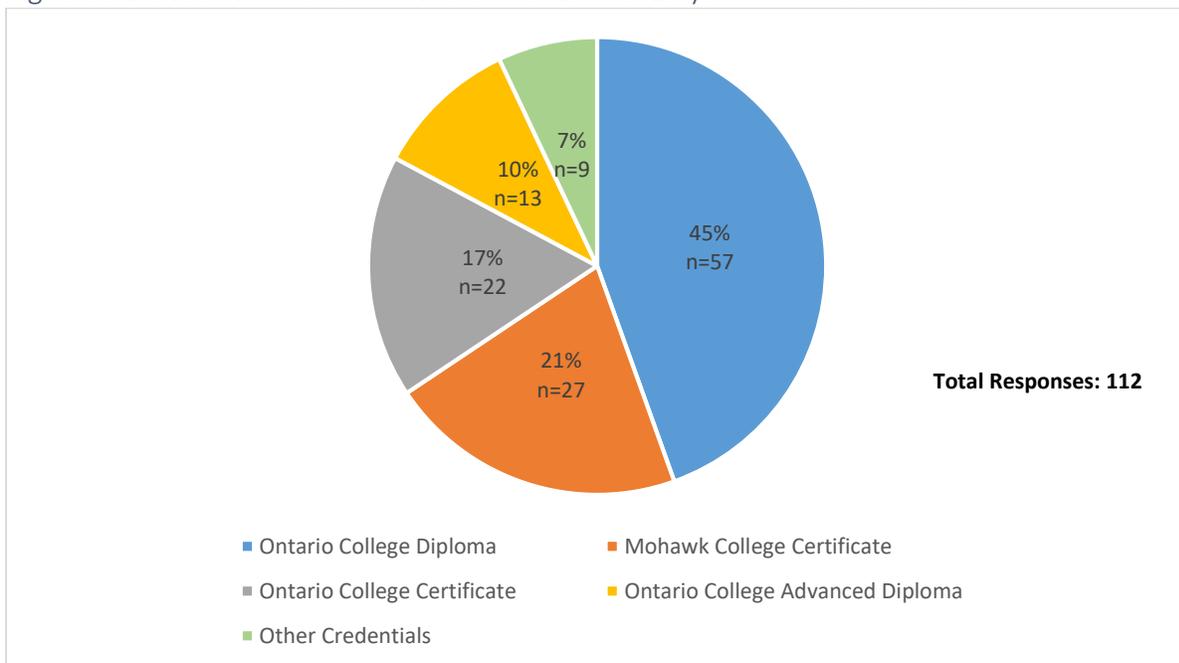
\*Data with less than 5 responses are hidden to reduce the risk of identifying individuals.

It is important to note that the percentages in Figure 8 (above) do not reflect the number of unique students. This is because some students may have graduated from more than one program in different areas. What is significant about Figure 8, however, is that LINC students who have transitioned to postsecondary education at Mohawk College have predominantly graduated from a program in technology, business or health.

Figure 9 shows the distribution of graduates by the type of credentials achieved. As shown, 46% of students have graduated with an Ontario College Diploma, 22% with a Mohawk College Certificate, 18% with an Ontario College Certificate, 10% with an Advanced Ontario College Diploma and only 4% with an Ontario College Graduate Certificate.

It is worth noting that Mohawk College does not offer any degree programs, and this data does not include students who have pursued a degree program at a university after graduation. These numbers do not represent the unique graduates as some students have graduated from more than one program and achieved more than one credential.

Figure 9. LINC Students Graduated from PSE and CE by Credential Achieved



## Student Entrance Survey (SES) Results

To further understand the educational characteristics and academic attitudes and preparedness of the LINC students who have enrolled in a program of study at Mohawk College, we accessed the Student Entrance Survey data from the Institutional Research Department. The Student Entrance Survey is conducted by Mohawk College at the beginning of each term. Respondents include students who have registered in a program of study at the college between 2012 and 2017. 117 students registered in a postsecondary program responded to the Student Entrance Surveys. The following data is based on this survey.

### Age and Gender

60% of respondents were female and a majority between 20 and 29 years of age. Please note that the age category reflects the age of student at the time of the survey. Tables 4 and 5 show breakdown of survey respondents by gender (Table 4) and age category (Table 5):

<b>Table 4. SES Respondents by Gender</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Count</b>
Female	59.8%	70
Male	40.2%	47
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>117</b>

\*Data with less than 5 respondents are hidden to reduce the risk of identifying individuals.

<b>Table 5. SES Respondents by Age Category</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Count</b>
20-24 Years Old	34.8%	40
25-29 Years Old	22.6%	26
30 Years and Older	42.6%	49
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>115</b>

\*Data with less than 5 respondents are hidden to reduce the risk of identifying individuals.

### Languages

A majority of respondents reported that they were fluent in English and another language(s), including reading, speaking, and writing. 21 students reported they were fluent in only another language other than English and French, and just 10 students reported that they were fluent only in English.

The following table shows the languages survey respondents reported being fluent in:

<b>Table 6. Languages Fluent in</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Count</b>
English & other language (bilingual home)	67.7%	65
Other language (neither English nor French)	21.9%	21
English only*	10.4%	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>96</b>

\*Data with less than 5 responses are hidden to reduce the risk of identifying individuals.

\*Note: English only should not be confused with English as first language.

### Highest Level of Education

Of 117 survey respondents, 94 said the Mohawk College program they had enrolled in was their first postsecondary experience in Canada, and 18 reported otherwise.

Table 7 highlights that Mohawk College programs are attractive options for many LINC students who pursue their first postsecondary experience in Canada.

Note: Table 7 reflects postsecondary experience in Canada, and not abroad. Previous research (CIC, 2010) suggests that LINC students in Canada are a highly educated group.

<b>Table 7. First Postsecondary Experience in Canada</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Count</b>
Yes	80.3%	94
No	15.4%	18
No Response	4.3%	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>117</b>

Table 8 shows that over half of survey respondents had postsecondary experience prior to attending Mohawk College. This would include education achieved before and after arrival in Canada.

The following is a breakdown of respondents by highest level of education prior to attending Mohawk College.

<b>Table 8. Highest Level of Education</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Count</b>
Some High School	11.1%	13
High School / GED Graduate	29.9%	35
College Credential	8.5%	10
Some University	8.5%	10
Undergraduate Degree	12.8%	15
Post-Graduate Studies	12.0%	14
Graduate degree	6.8%	8
Other/Unknown	10.3%	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>117</b>

#### Fields of Study and Credentials Pursued

Consistent with the data from Student Registration records, the Student Entrance Survey (SES) data shows that business and technology are top two fields of study, followed by community studies, for LINC students. Business overtakes technology as the field of study enrolled, and there is a larger proportion of students in the community, justice and liberal studies field. Table 10 below shows a breakdown of survey respondents by field of study:

<b>Table 9. Field of Study</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Count</b>
Business, Media and Entertainment, and CE	32.8%	38
Engineering Technology	29.3%	34
Community, Justice and Liberal Studies	19.8%	23
Health	9.5%	11
Marshall School of Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship	8.6%	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>116</b>

\*Data with less than 5 responses are hidden to reduce the risk of identifying individuals.

In addition, a majority of survey respondents have reported that they were pursuing Ontario College Diplomas compared to Advanced Diplomas and Certificates, partly because there are fewer Advanced Diploma and Certificate programs that are offered in the technology and business fields.

Table 10 shows a breakdown of survey respondents by the credential pursued:

<b>Table 10. Credentials Pursued</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Count</b>
Ontario College Diploma	64.7%	75
Ontario College Advanced Diploma	25.9%	30
Ontario College Certificate	10.3%	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>117</b>

#### Activity Prior to Attending Mohawk

The newcomer population generally are more likely to be unemployed in the first few years of arrival in Canada. According to Statistics Canada's labour force survey (2017), the unemployment rate for immigrants aged 25-54 who landed less than 5 years ago was 9.6%, compared to 6.2% for immigrants who landed between 5-10 years ago.

Due to the lack of recognition of foreign credentials and Canadian work experience, many immigrants pursue a second career or upgrade their education upon arrival in Canada. Table 11 shows that a majority of survey respondents reported to be attending high school, being unemployed, a WSIB recipient, injured, or engaged in homemaking and caregiving prior to enrolling in a program of study at Mohawk College. While 25 respondents reported they were only working before enrolling in the program, 38 reported that they were attending college.

It is important to note that those who reported that they were attending college may have been taking continuing education courses, including the LINC program or other language and academic upgrading classes. Moreover, the total number of responses do not represent the total number of survey respondents as some may have responded with multiple choices. Table 11 shows what activity survey respondents were engaged in prior to attending Mohawk:

<b>Table 11. Activity Prior to Attending Mohawk College</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Count</b>
Only Worked	16.7%	26
Attended High School	13.5%	21
Attended College	24.4%	38
Homemaker or Caregiver	17.9%	28
Unemployed, WSIB Recipient, Injured, Other	27.6%	43
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>156</b>

\*Note: the total is greater than actual number of survey respondents because a respondent may have circled more than one choice (e.g. homemaker & unemployed).

### Academic Preparedness

LINC classes offered at Mohawk College teach four basic skills which are writing, reading, speaking and listening to newcomer students. Students in the LINC 6-Intensive course, who are working towards achieving CBL-7, work toward academic preparation. In order to measure the level of academic preparedness, the Student Entrance Survey includes questions on levels of confidence in reading, writing and grammar as well as attitudinal questions on students' perceived abilities to be successful in their respective programs of study.

Figure 10 below shows that overall, survey respondents reported a high level of confidence in each of the English skills required for successful postsecondary experience, including reading, writing, and grammar.

Figure 10. Student Entrance Survey Respondents (2012-17): Reported Confidence in English Skills

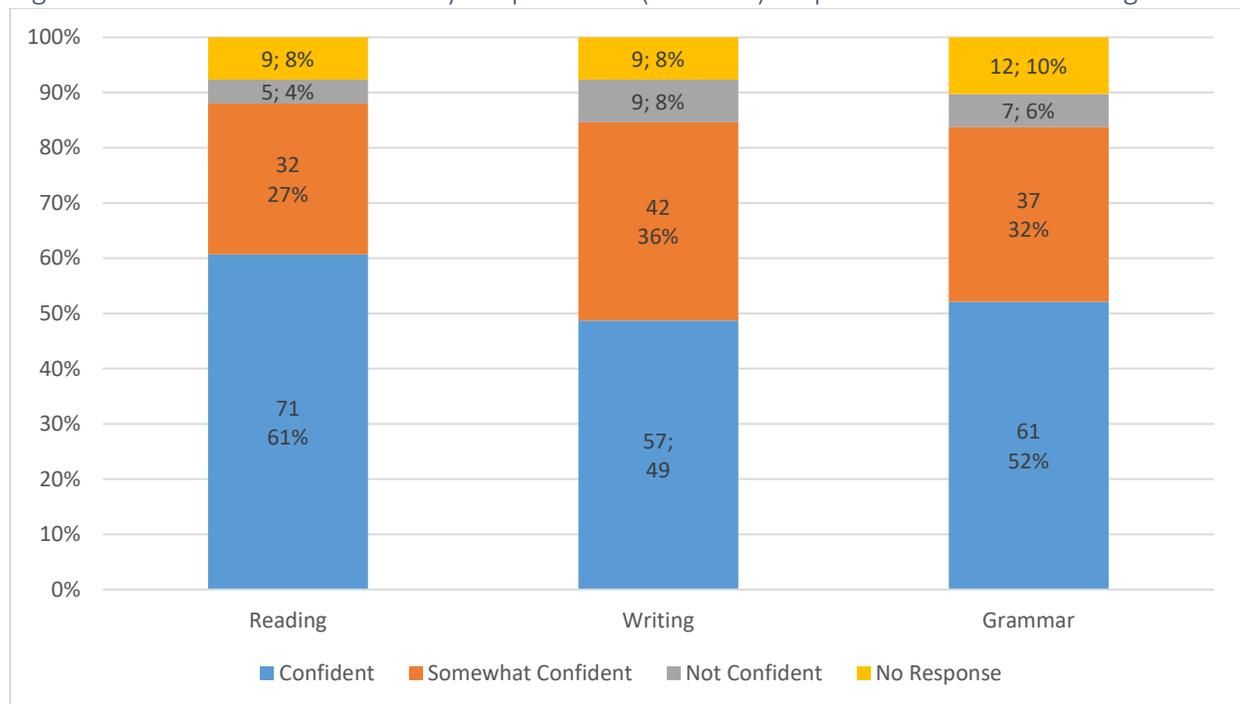


Figure 11 shows that over 90% of survey respondents reported that they were capable of getting at least 75% average in courses, had the ability to succeed at college-level studies, had the academic ability and skills necessary to be successful, and were determined to finish their education. In addition, over 80% of respondents reported that they already had a specific career in mind.

While a majority of former LINC students enrolled in a postsecondary program at Mohawk College reported that they were well-prepared, have confidence in their success, and possess a positive attitude towards their education, the data does not reveal as to whether these variables are statistically associated with the LINC experience or skills acquired in the LINC program. (Please see Section *Findings from Interviews and Focus Group* for more on this discussion).

Figure 11 shows a breakdown of survey respondents by six indicators of academic preparedness:

<b>Table 12. Student Entrance Survey Respondents: Academic Preparedness</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Counts</b>
Well prepared to be successful	86%	101
Determined to finish education	87%	102
Have specific career in mind	78%	91
Have academic ability/skills to be successful	79%	92
Have the ability to succeed at college-level studies	87%	102
Capable of getting a 75% average or better	85%	100

\*Numbers include those who chose options for "strongly agree" and "agree" on indicators of academic preparedness above.

## FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEWS

We conducted 11 semi-structured interviews between February and March 2018, involving eight females and 3 males (most of them between ages of 20 and just over 40). The purpose of these interviews was to understand the experiences of former students with the LINC program and the transition to postsecondary education or employment. Further, we tried to understand the barriers and challenges LINC students face in their next steps after finishing the LINC program.

### Respondents' Overview

Interview respondents in this research came from diverse cultural, educational, and professional backgrounds. Most respondents reported they had prior postsecondary experience from their country of origin. A majority of respondents were attending a postsecondary program at Mohawk College at the time of the interview or had attended one before. Some respondents were employed in their desired career field after graduating from a postsecondary program at Mohawk College. Almost all the participants who were enrolled in a postsecondary program reported they were working part-time. Finally, all interviewees had completed at least CLB-7, which is the English level required for most postsecondary college programs.

We also conducted a focus group discussion with a group of 10 students who had just graduated from the LINC 6-Intensive course, completing their CLB-7. The focus group was aimed at engaging students in a dialogue about their experience in the LINC program, exploring both positive and negative aspects of the program, as well as students' readiness and barriers in their transition to postsecondary education. Focus group participants came from diverse cultural, educational and professional backgrounds. 60% of the participants were female and 40% male. A majority of them were in their late 20s and early 30s. All participants reported they had arrived in Canada within the last two years.

The following sections include themes and categories that the research team has identified after reading and re-reading interview and focus group transcripts. These themes are organized in various categories under sections and subsections. However, it is important to note that many of the following themes are highly interconnected. For instance, while *Increased Confidence* is discussed under the *Impacts of LINC Program* section, this theme is connected to reasons for taking the LINC program, academic preparedness and more.

## Reasons for Taking the LINC Program

Because a majority of interviewees were former LINC students enrolled in a postsecondary program at Mohawk College and those who had taken the LINC 6-Intensive course – a course designed for academic preparation, the top reason for taking the LINC program was identified as preparing for postsecondary education, followed by improving English for daily life and preparing for employment.

An important consideration is that for many participants, the end goal for pursuing postsecondary education or improving English for daily life was finding a good job<sup>6</sup>. For instance, one focus group participant commented on the reason for taking the LINC program: “[the reason is] pursuing ... [postsecondary] education and then finding a job and a career.” Further, for a small number of participants, the reason for taking the LINC program was finding a job as they considered their previous postsecondary education sufficient and did not see the need to upgrade their education in Canada.

### Preparing for Postsecondary Education

A majority of the interview and focus group participants mentioned that the primary reason they took LINC classes was to improve their English language skills in order to be prepared for college or university level education. The fact that the LINC program is hosted at the college attracts those newcomers whose next steps in their settlement journey is to pursue postsecondary education or upgrade their education. One participant said: “I wanted to start a [postsecondary] program, so I didn’t want to waste more time.” Another participant observed: “Looking at my status here in Canada when I came, my degree was ... not valid ... and so I said I want to go back to school.”

Many students we interviewed took the Mohawk College LINC program because they perceived it to be a shortcut to meet the language requirements for admission to college or university. One participant said: “I wanted to go to college. I want to get the benchmark seven and I can apply to college. My goal is really clear.”

Some students were aware of English tests designed for admission into college or university, such as TOEFL and IELTS. However, they were not certain that they would pass these tests or could not afford to pay the fees for the tests. A student mentioned that because these tests are offered only once every 4 months, it was a faster option for him to take the LINC 6-

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<sup>6</sup> Interview participants in this study defined a “good job” as one that is well-paid and permanent, and allows them to use their academic knowledge and skills and/or prior expertise before arrival in Canada.

Intensive course and complete CLB 7 in three months, which would then make him eligible to apply for a college program. He said:

“IELTS, you know, you have to pay for the exam, 250 bucks for it. I tried ... to book the seats and there were no seats at that time. So they told me ... go for LINC and within three months you will just increase it or make it an eight or a seven [CLB].”

Therefore, according to these students, the LINC program was a “faster” and “easier” option to meet the language requirement for postsecondary admission.

For some students, the Mohawk College LINC program offered an opportunity to work on their academic writing and communication skills. Taking the LINC program was an intentional step to become ready for college or university level studies. One participant said:

“Because I wanted to start university and I knew that I need a high level of English, and I thought that I’m not that strong and I need to improve my English”.

Another participant had already completed a high school diploma, which was sufficient to meet the language requirement for her college program; instead, she took the LINC program in order to improve her academic writing and reading skills.

### Improving English for Daily Life

The second recurring reason for taking the LINC classes was improving English for daily life needs. LINC was an attractive option for several participants to improve their English language skills in a bid to engage in basic communication and interactions with other people. One participant, for instance, said:

“So, first when I came in Canada, I had so much difficulty to talking, to doing anything, even chores, even something like looking for a job [...] everything was difficult for me so I [decided] to enter the Mohawk College LINC program to ... [learn] how to write, how to speak, how to listen to people.”

Several participants suggested that they wanted to improve their English in order to be able to learn more about Canada and integrate into the Canadian society. One participant said: “I’m a new immigrant. I need to improve my English to get into the society.” Another participant talked about the fact that the LINC program provided her with the opportunity to interact with people from different cultures.

### Prepare for Employment

While finding employment was an important objective for the majority of the interview and focus group participants, a few participants mentioned that they took the LINC program in order to find employment immediately after. Since they had extensive prior professional experience and higher education in their home countries, these participants did not see the need to upgrade their education in Canada. Mohawk College offers courses under the LINC program that are geared towards workplace and job market preparation. One participant said:

“I [was] just looking for a job on my computer, so you get a little frustrated when you don’t get any interviews [...] I knew that I was going to learn a lot of things in my job search, and I was going to improve a lot of skills [...] and that’s why I came here.”

### Impact of the LINC Program

All our interview and focus group participants had completed at least one LINC level before they spoke to us. The LINC program has had positive impacts on these students not only in terms of learning and improving language skills, but also boosting their confidence and helping them make sense of their next steps in life post-migration. Three important themes in our interviews and focus group discussion included improved language skills, increased confidence, and sense of direction as a consequence of taking LINC classes.

### Improved Language Skills

Participants in this study unanimously agreed that the LINC program has helped them improve their language skills, but the aspect or skill that has improved most varied for each individual. A majority of participants indicated that their writing skills, especially academic and professional writing, has been an area with which they struggled the most before taking the LINC program. After the program, they were most satisfied with their improvement in their writing skills. One participant said:

“I can tell this [LINC program] was very, very helpful . So I was pretty sure and very confident on how to write a good essay now without even getting mistakes or anything.”

Another participant emphasized she was struggling in writing and said:

“I struggle[d] a lot when writing, and then it [LINC program] helped ... To me the [biggest] advantage of taking LINC was writing. It improved my writing right away.”

While academic writing was by far the most mentioned improved skill, participants recognized that their vocabulary, speaking, listening, and reading skills have also improved as a result of taking the LINC program. On speaking, several participants mentioned they are more fluent in speaking now both in one-on-one situations, such as job interviews and meetings with professors, as well as in the public, such as delivering a presentation in front of class.

On listening skills, several participants mentioned that when they first arrived in Canada, they had a hard time understanding native English speakers, but after the LINC program, they were equipped with the skills to understand not only native English speakers, but a variety of English accents. Finally, reading was mentioned as an improved skill by several participants, but because many students we interviewed had prior postsecondary experience, they were quite well-read.

### Increased Confidence

For many participants, LINC classes were not only a site of learning the language, but also an environment where they found their first friends and made their first decisions after arrival in Canada. An increase in confidence and motivation came up frequently in interviewees' responses. A participant said:

“First of all it's like the environment which they [teachers and staff of the LINC program] make for the students – they feel so comfortable and they are so supportive for their students [who] are coming as newcomer and they [students] have no idea of anything.”

A focus group participant highlighted the importance of motivation, and said:

“I think it [LINC program] is better as a motivation, especially for newcomers who have lots of stress when they are in a new environment.”

Another participant said: “In the LINC program I was more social. I wanted to be more – like I became more social and then less embarrassed of my English [...] [it] help you build your self-confidence”. In the words of another participant, “If I didn't take any LINC program here, I believe I couldn't encourage myself to start as a fulltime student here.”

Therefore, increased confidence and motivation were not only associated with and resulting from improved language skills and the ability to communicate in English, but also from interactions and relationships with classmates, LINC instructors, and staff.

Some students talked about lack of motivation after arrival in Canada, especially due to the challenges they face as newcomers. For instance, several participants mentioned that they had to “start from scratch” in Canada in their academic and professional lives. The frustrations that newcomers go through in the early stages of settlement in Canada can often lead to a lack of motivation to pursue goals and dreams. However, participants in this research agreed that the LINC program provided them with the necessary motivation to start a new life in Canada and pursue their goals. For example, one interview respondent said:

“[LINC is] a good experience. You can believe in yourself, you believe that in the future you can do a really good job ... I think it's about the confidence.”

### Sense of Direction

The LINC program has been helpful for many students to make informed decisions about their choice of postsecondary program and desired career in Canada. With the exception of two respondents who were still not sure about their next steps in their education or career, all respondents felt they had a sense of direction as to what their next steps were in life after graduating from the LINC program.

It is important to note that while the LINC program has helped many participants make sense of their next steps, for some participants, previous postsecondary and professional experience was key in their certainty about future steps.

For many students, the fact that the LINC program is hosted at the college allowed them to have access to resources and supports, helping them formulate their future direction in their studies. Even for those with strong prior academic and professional backgrounds in a particular field, the LINC program, especially the courses geared towards workplace preparation as well as extra-curricular workshops, helped them figure out how to transfer their skills to a new on-demand field of study or career. For instance, one participant said:

“In ELT class [...] they taught us that how can we explore the different direction that we can go [...] I could work in research, in clinic, as a, in teaching in college or university or something like this and I explored all of the options. And I decided that this is my first

option [...] I found this program [postsecondary program enrolled in] based on the informational interview that [...] ELT class taught me.”

### LINC Program Experience

Satisfaction with the LINC program experience was high among research participants. In the words of one participant: “I cherish the experience”. Important aspects of students’ experience with the LINC program, apart from learning the language, include a sense of security and comfort, extra-curricular activities, access to resources and supports, geographic proximity, and other incentives, such as free bus pass.

#### Sense of Security

The LINC program was identified as an environment where newcomer students felt a sense of security and comfort. The fact that there is cultural and linguistic diversity in the program developed a sense of security among LINC students resulting from the fact that everyone in the program is in “the same boat.”

One participant said that everyone in the program was a newcomer and is facing the same challenges as he does. He felt that there was no competition in the program and a level playing field for everyone. He further considered the environment conducive to regaining one’s motivation after going through the frustration of starting from scratch in a new country where newcomers need to learn the language. He said:

“I am an immigrant [...] all the people you see in the program are, like from different countries [...] which makes you feel like comfortable being there [...] It’s not about competition in this program [...] we’re all there to learn and [...] English is not our first language.”

He added:

“It’s kind of cool being in the program and then at the same time making friends from different countries and then learning their cultures which is socializing, it’s really good because immigrant and immigrant, they have the same, you know, feelings. They suffer from [...] how to start from a new country”

For another participant, taking the LINC program gave her a sense of “being back to school”, thus helping her become motivated about life in Canada. She said:

“The good thing was the LINC program is in the Mohawk College, so that gives me a sort of view what is happening in the college and what are the best programs [...] it’s, like a good feeling, going back to school again.”

### Extra-curricular Activities

Because the LINC program is aimed at the integration of adult newcomers into the Canadian society through language instruction, classes provide information about Canada, and instructors engage students in extra-curricular activities. Many participants found this aspect of the program useful. One participant stressed the importance of keeping the extra-curricular activities:

“LINC has a lot of those extra volunteer and extra-curricular activities, so just keep those. Those are very good, I think, [to help us] do something with [our] lives.”

For some participants, their experience in the LINC program is enriched by volunteer opportunities, such as contributing to a magazine run by Mohawk College’s LINC program and volunteering to tutor other LINC students.

In addition, learning about Canadian culture, values, and political system was attractive for several participants. One participant said:

“We were [learning] about Canada itself [...] We went to the City Hall. This was helpful because I [had] never [been] there and I didn’t know what they do in there.”

Several participants appreciated tours of the campus and information shared by staff and previous students about resources available at the college. Students who take the 6-Intensive class are given tours of Mohawk College, including facilities on campus. They are also provided with an opportunity to audit a postsecondary program lecture to become familiar with the higher education system in Canada. One participant was especially appreciative of this experience:

“They made a tour for us when we were at the LINC, so we had a tour. We went to the writing center, we went to all of the facilities, the Student Association, the library, everything [...] that was an amazing experience, really.”

### Mohawk College Reputation, Proximity, and Incentives

According to many participants, newcomers in Hamilton are familiar with Mohawk College due to its reputation in the community. Several participants said that a previous family member or relative had attended Mohawk College's LINC program and highly recommended it. Some participants had taken LINC classes in other institutions and organizations, and spoke highly of the quality of education and professionalism at Mohawk College. One participant highlighted the professionalism of teachers and staff in the Mohawk College's LINC program:

“[Teacher's] planning for the course is very professional, and everything is on time. The materials and resources [...] is very good, and they are always there to answer your questions [...] and support you.”

Many participants suggested that an important aspect of their experience in the LINC program was the availability of supports and resources. Several participants said that their experience was enhanced by having access to the library, writing centre, and career counselling. They appreciated supportive teachers and staff, and suggested that LINC instructors were not only their English language teachers, but also supports that they relied on when in need.

Finally, other recurring themes about students' experience with the LINC program included the fact that Mohawk College was geographically close to their homes and frequent transit services were available to the college. Some participants also mentioned that incentives, such as free programming and bus tickets, were extremely helpful in having a barrier-free learning experience.

### Postsecondary Experience

Participants in this study identified three important factors behind helping them be prepared in their transition to postsecondary education, including previous postsecondary experience, language skills, and self-motivation.

#### Previous Postsecondary Experience

A majority of interview and focus group participants had previous postsecondary experience before arrival in Canada. For several participants, their preparedness in pursuing postsecondary education was influenced by their prior academic experience. Although many of

these students admitted their previous education was not sufficient to be successful in their postsecondary education in Canada, they felt that it has prepared them in this endeavour. Prior postsecondary experience influenced these students' interest and willingness to pursue a postsecondary program. Nevertheless, they felt if they did not take the LINC program, they would not be fully equipped with the skills to navigate the higher education system in Canada.

One participant observed that he fared better than his international student classmates because he had taken the LINC program. Another participant regretted not taking the LINC 6-Intensive course. She said that because she had not taken this course, she was struggling with her assignments, submission of assignments, and use of the online learning system used by Mohawk College, called E-Learn.

#### Useful Language Skills Acquired in the LINC Program

Academic writing, speaking, listening and reading skills acquired in the LINC program were essential for postsecondary education for many participants. Some participants said that they did not feel that their English language level was good enough to pursue postsecondary education upon arrival. For instance, one participant, who already had a CLB that qualified her for postsecondary enrollment, said:

“I wanted to start university and I knew that I need a high level of English and I thought that I’m not that strong and I need to improve my English.”

Some did not know English at all when they arrived in Canada, and the LINC program helped them learn the language over time and achieve the benchmark necessary to do well in college. A focus group participant talked about starting from the first LINC level all the way to completing CLB-7 and enrolling in a postsecondary program at Mohawk:

“I was in Youth-Photo class, so first class here, and it was very helpful to me because I learned all steps in English, from zero till eight and it was – like each class has different advantages and taught me different things [... and] I entered the program in Mohawk College.”

#### Self-Motivation

Personal drive played an important role for many participants in pursuing postsecondary education in Canada. For some of these students, prior postsecondary experience was a factor behind their self-motivation. However, for others, especially female participants, it was more a

matter of “proving others wrong”, commitment “to finish my studies”, and the attitude of “never [giving] up”. Their self-motivation was partly because they had high career ambitions and “not want[ing] to be a newcomer forever”.

### Initial Fear

The start of a new chapter in life often brings anxiety and fear. We spoke to several participants who experienced initial fear and anxiety when starting their postsecondary program. For some students, this anxiety came in the form of being in a hurry to start their postsecondary program, while others were anxious as to whether they have made the right choice of program. One participant said, “I was concerned like is this the right program or not. I was very concerned about that.”

Another participant commented on the fear of a new system of education. She said:

“When I started, to be honest, I was scared. I was scared because it's different. Everything is going to be difficult, different. I was scared even from not getting what the instructors are saying for the communication part, if I'm going to miss some words or anything.”

### Navigating Cultural Differences

There was an agreement among interview participants that language has a cultural aspect. They agreed that learning a new language is about learning a new culture. Some participants recalled their anxieties and fears of making mistakes in the first term of their postsecondary education. They said they were afraid of sounding impolite in their interactions with fellow classmates and professors. One participant observed:

“You know, there's a lot of, like, thoughts there. Like oh my goodness, am I approaching them [native English speakers] right or am I insulting them or what? Especially the culture too. Because when I came to Canada, I had no idea what the culture was like.”

### Developing Postsecondary Habits

For many participants, particularly those with no prior postsecondary experience, meeting deadlines, keeping up with the pace of course work, and use of technology proved challenging. They said being a postsecondary student was a lifestyle to which they had to adapt.

They also observed differences between the postsecondary workload in Canada and their countries of origin. One participant said:

“Because I’ve found here the study in Canada is too much for students. It is opposite in our country. A lot of lectures and assignments [...] a lot of quizzes [...]. The system there is a different, totally, from here.”

Another participant said:

“There was some challenges with the Mohawk College system, like, the e-Learn and how we buy the books, how we access, go there, and like, doing the assignments and the due dates to do assignments. Everything was challenging in the first semester, and now it’s all good.”

### Employment Challenges

Like many newcomers in Canada who face challenges in the labour market, participants in this study talked about their frustrations in their search for a job. The theme that came up most was the lack of recognition of foreign credentials, including prior education and professional experience. One participant, who had extensive professional background prior to immigration to Canada, was frustrated by this barrier, and said:

“It is frustrating because I try to apply for jobs using the credentials that I got from CAS [International Credentials Assessment Services Canada] but it’s just, like Tim Hortons would accept me but not, you know, this or another type of organization.”

Another participant suggested that his failure in job search was due to both under-qualification and over-qualification. He said he had applied for junior level positions, but failed to get the job because he was overqualified. However, when he applied for mid- or senior-level positions, he was turned down because he did not have Canadian education or work experience. Another participant talked about her inability to pursue her desired career in Canada because no matter how hard she tried, she would not be able to be successful in that career because she was not born in Canada and English was not her first language.

Some participants in this research had been successful in finding employment after finishing the LINC and a postsecondary program at Mohawk College. They suggested that doing tasks related to a job was not a concern, but their challenge in the workplace was more so about making everyday conversations with colleagues. They said that because English was not their first language and that they were not aware of all aspects of the Canadian culture, such as

music, cinema, sports, and foods, they were not able to start or keep up with a conversation with an English-speaking colleague about such topics. They considered this aspect of communication very important in building rapport with colleagues and blending in.

### Areas of Improvement for the LINC Program

Some of the areas that participants in this study identified as needing improvement included curriculum, course delivery and teaching styles. It is important to note that these areas did not come up in the one-on-one interviews very frequently, but more so in the focus group. This is because the dialogue among students allowed them to brainstorm and come up with areas of improvement. It is also worth mentioning that due to cultural differences, many students were reluctant to talk about the negative aspects of the program, and many of the areas for improvement below are implied in their remarks. However, some of the probing questions posed in the focus group allowed for more explicit remarks about areas of improvement for the LINC program.

#### Curriculum

Many participants appreciated the focus on grammar and writing in the upper-level LINC courses, but suggested there should be more focus on speaking and communication skills. They said that grammar and writing should be more incorporated in the lower-level LINC classes, but that courses, such as 6-Intensive, should further focus on improving students' communication skills so that they are able to start and keep up with conversations with English-speaking people.

Participants also suggested that there was less focus on learning to speak and understanding the Canadian accent. They said that course materials for speaking and listening were not uniform in terms of accent. Some participants, who had taken LINC classes in other institutions, observed that there is not consistent curriculum across LINC programs. One focus group participant said:

“Teaching material [...] is not [consistent] and it's based on the teacher's, on personal experience. So when you just compare, for example, a school to another for the same LINC program, you will find different teaching materials.”

### Course Delivery

Several participants had difficult experiences with transitioning to different levels. Students who had completed a certain benchmark in two or three skills had to wait as long as one semester because they had not completed the benchmark for the remaining skills. They talked about their frustration over waiting to enroll in classes that offered the benchmarks they were hoping to complete, and suggested that it would be easier if partial levels were offered if a student was already proficient in one or two more skills.

Several students suggested that there is a long waiting list between levels, which often demotivates a newcomer student who is already dealing with challenges of life in a new country. They suggested that attempts should be made to offer courses more frequently.

One participant talked about the lack of online classes or blended courses, and said that due to a long commute, she had to miss classes and would appreciate if some classes were offered online. She also suggested that the use of smart-classes and stable location for classes would enhance students' learning experience.

Although class times and the full-time nature of the LINC program was not an issue for most participants, one interview respondent suggested that attending classes five days a week was a challenge for her because she had other family responsibilities and took other academic upgrading courses. Currently, some courses at levels 5 and 6 are offered part-time and in the evening.

### Instructors

Interview and focus group participants agreed that they had "nice", "caring", and "supportive" teachers. For some, however, the change of teachers mid-way through a class was a major disruption in their learning experience. It is important to note that some of this disruption is caused by the nature of employment instructors are in.

Focus group participants commented on the teaching styles of the instructors, and suggested that, because some students have prior educational experience and are parents or grand-parents, they would appreciate more respect from teachers. One participant said:

“My teacher was very strict and some of the students didn’t like her behaviour because she was so strict and [...] She did not like at all that someone is late for five minutes, for example [...] I always come on time but once [...] I came to the class with five minutes late [...] And she said that it’s no excuse or something like this [...] I understand [the teacher’s] character and I said it’s okay but some didn’t like it. And I know that one of our classmate left the class because she was doctor back home and she couldn’t tolerate this behaviour.”

Focus group participants raised the issue of cultural sensitivity, and suggested that although they want to learn Canadian culture, they observed incidents where they considered the teacher unaware of cultural sensitivities and differences. One participant said:

“Teachers actually should be aware of the cross-culture [...] which means that they should be aware of the different cultures. For example, my wife she is doing LINC. Sometimes she’s feeling herself being discriminated by the teacher [...] because the teacher is not aware of a newcomer’s culture.”

Findings from interviews and the focus group show that students are interested in seeing further improvements in the LINC program with respect to curriculum and course delivery. Research participants also voiced their concern about the issue of cultural sensitivity and suggested that instructors reflect this sensitivity in their interaction with students.

## DISCUSSION

This research study is the first attempt to understand the demographic profile of the LINC student population at Mohawk College, the transfer rate of LINC students to enroll in a postsecondary program at Mohawk College, their personal experiences of the LINC program, and the challenges and barriers in their postsecondary and labour market experiences.

### LINC Students' Demographic Profile and Trends

The quantitative data we accessed from the Institutional Research Department and the HARTs (History of Assessment, Referrals and Training system) helped us understand the gender, age and country of birth breakdown of the LINC students at Mohawk College.

A study by IRCC (2010) showed that as of 2008, 72% of LINC clients were female and 28% male. The top two countries where LINC learners came from were China and India (22% and 8% respectively). In addition, 12.2% of clients were between the ages of 18 and 24, a majority (65.6%) were between 25 and 44 years of age, and clients between 45 and 64 years of age made up 19.7% of the clients (ibid). Data used in this research also showed that there are more female students than male students taking the LINC program at Mohawk College (58% vs 42%), and that a majority are in their late 20s and early 30s. However, contrary to the overall LINC client population in Canada, the top area of the world Mohawk LINC students came from included Middle East (40%), and the top first language reported was Arabic.

The evaluation of the LINC program by IRCC (2010) also shows that LINC clients are a highly educated population, with 38.5% having a university degree, 24.5% with a non-university certificate, and just 37% with an education level equivalent to secondary or less. Data from Registration Records at Mohawk College similarly shows that the LINC program attracts younger adults, as it is considered a pathway to postsecondary education. Similar to the overall LINC student population in Canada, students at Mohawk College are highly educated with over 35% having a university degree.

Due to an increase in the number of immigrants from the Middle East, we see a trend in areas of the world that the LINC student population at Mohawk College come from, with a growing number of students who have immigrated from Arabic-speaking countries in the Middle East. Similarly, census 2016 data shows "Arabic has overtaken Italian as the language most spoken at home ... in the Hamilton Area" (Hamilton Spectator, 2017).

Since 2011, Hamilton has received about 17,500 immigrants and refugees, who predominantly come from non-English speaking countries (Hamilton Spectator, 2017), and this number could be even higher now as nearly 1,500 Syrian refugees have arrived in Hamilton between 2015 (when the Census was launched) and 2017. It is important to consider this demographic change in the LINC student population in future programming.

### Transitioning to Postsecondary Education

Prior research shows that the primary reason for a majority of newcomer LINC students for taking the program is to learn the language for daily life needs (CIC, 2010). In a survey conducted by IRCC in 2010, participants ranked improving English for daily life, getting a job and preparing for studying as the top three reasons for taking LINC classes. Findings from interviews and focus group in this study, however, showed that for a majority of participants, preparing for postsecondary education was the top reason for enrolling in the LINC program at Mohawk College.

Data from the Student Registration Records at Mohawk College showed that technology and business were the most attractive fields of study for newcomer LINC students who had transitioned into a postsecondary program at Mohawk College. Further, there were clear differences between male and female students in choice of postsecondary program. Men were more likely than women to pursue a program of study in technology, and women were more likely than men to enroll in business programs.

Data from Student Entrance Survey (SES) and findings from interviews with LINC students showed that many feel confident about their academic preparedness and English language skills after finishing the LINC program. Data from the Student Entrance Survey at Mohawk College highlights the importance of the LINC program in preparing students for postsecondary education and boosting their confidence. In fact, interview and focus group participants emphasized the role of skills learned in the LINC program, and the supports and resources available to them as being crucial in boosting their confidence and motivation to pursue postsecondary education.

### LINC Program Satisfaction

Research shows that LINC program clients are satisfied with their learning experience. An evaluation by CIC (2010) revealed that students had positive views about the various aspects of the LINC program: over 90% rated LINC as excellent and good for how well it teaches English, what it teaches about Canada, how helpful it is for reaching their learning goals, and speaking

with Canadians in daily life. This is also evident in the fact that about 70% of LINC students never quit a course and 10% dropped out because they found a job. A study by Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) also confirmed that 70% of clients in language training programs rated them as at least satisfactory (2012, p. 8).

Findings from interviews and the focus group discussion in this research show similar rate of satisfaction with the LINC program. However, for many participants, this satisfaction not only came from the skills and knowledge they acquired in the program, but also from the connections and networks they developed and the resources and supports they had access to. The LINC program was viewed as a friendly environment where participants felt secure and comfortable, as the lack of language skills and unfamiliarity with aspects of life in a new country is overwhelming for many newcomers.

Because of its diversity, supportive staff and instructors, and resources, research participants considered the LINC program a “site of security and comfort”, where they felt welcomed and motivated. In addition, the LINC program was particularly helpful for students whose intentions were to pursue postsecondary education. Not only did the LINC experience provide them with the skills and tools to be prepared for postsecondary education, it also provided them with information and resources to make informed decisions about their choice of academic program and future careers.

Participants observed that the LINC curriculum and course delivery could be further improved to meet the changing needs of students. Previous research (Howard Barton & Associates, 2012; Gormely & Gill, 2007) has also documented areas of improvement in the LINC program, including better assessment of language skills, more targeted curriculum for specific skills, the need for coherent curriculum, and catering for specific students’ interests.

### Challenges and Barriers

Consistent with findings from previous research on settlement trajectories of newcomers in Canada (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 2012; Gormely & Gill 2007; Jackson 2013), learning the language was identified as crucial and “the first step” for participants in this research. Many newcomers identify their top settlement challenge as limited language skills (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 2012).

While the LINC program at Mohawk College has helped to improve the language skills of participants, the program is not sufficient to help newcomers overcome certain challenges in their postsecondary and labour market experiences. For many participants, the lack of

recognition of foreign credentials, a lack of Canadian work experience, and being over-qualified were challenges they faced in finding employment. Further, becoming accustomed to the Canadian culture and way of life was considered a “life long journey” for many participants.

### Targeted Courses

Finally, findings in this research showed that courses geared towards academic preparation, particularly LINC 6-Intensive, are attractive options for a majority of the LINC students we interviewed. Many participants hoped to enroll in a postsecondary program and find employment in a desired career. To this end, they found the LINC 6-Intensive course particularly helpful as it equipped them with language skills designed for academic preparation and provided them with resources and extra-curricular activities that familiarized them with the postsecondary education system in Canada. In addition, the Workplace Preparation Program (WPP formerly known as Enhanced Language Training program) was identified by several participants as a useful course in making informed decisions about choice of postsecondary program and career. Findings from this research shows that targeted courses for postsecondary and employment needs are important and attractive aspects of the LINC program.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is a need for more courses and seats to be offered as the number of newcomers from non-English speaking countries has increased over the past two years. According to recent census data, Hamilton has seen an increase in the number of immigrants and refugees from non-English speaking countries (Hamilton Spectator, 2017).
- Many participants in this study suggested that they took the LINC program in order to meet the language requirements for enrollment in a postsecondary program, stating that “they just want to get it done”. Therefore, more fast-track and intensive courses tailored towards the needs of this group of students should be provided.
- Several students we interviewed expressed frustration over the difficulty in transitioning to different levels. Program details should be provided to students ahead of time, and partial levels can be offered to students who are already proficient in one or more of the four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking).
- It was informally reported that the recent surge in the number of Syrian refugees in Hamilton resulted in a waitlist in 2016-2017, and several research participants expressed concern about its impact on their postsecondary goals. Given the inevitable nature of such surges due to changing immigration policies, there is a need for continued monitoring of the numbers of newcomers entering Canada and where they come from. The LINC program also needs to consider steps to be prepared for such surges in the future.
- Minimize change of instructors mid-way into the courses as students lose interest and motivation when their learning experience is disrupted. It is important to note that this disruption is often inevitable due to some instructors’ nature of employment as contract faculty.
- Offer options for students with challenges of a long-distance commute to take classes online or have online access to course materials. Currently, two LINC level 7/8 courses are delivered in a blended manner (online & in class). Additionally, LINC Home Study is offered by the Centre for Education, but only certain levels are available.
- The cultural sensitivity of instructors and respect for different cultures is important when teaching students from diverse backgrounds. Data used in this research shows that 40% of LINC students came from the Middle East with Arabic as the top first language. Therefore, there is an opportunity to increase student satisfaction through culturally sensitive instruction.
- Because students spend much of their time in class speaking to classmates from various parts of the world with different accents, there is a need for native English speakers, such as student volunteers in the class, to speak with LINC students on one-on-one basis.
- Since many students we spoke to in this study took the LINC program in order to prepare for postsecondary education and find a career, LINC 6-Intensive and Enhanced Language

Training (ELT) courses were of particular interest to them. There is a need to explore the possibilities of offering more frequent LINC 6-Intensive and ELT courses throughout the year.

- Finally, students suggested that the LINC 6-Intensive course should incorporate more lessons on oral communication skills besides grammar, writing, and reading. Students suggested that the current curriculum is predominantly focused on grammar and writing.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The LINC program at Mohawk College is an attractive option for newcomers in Hamilton to pursue postsecondary education and find employment. Findings from this research showed that the LINC program played an important role in improving language skills for newcomer students, and in boosting their confidence and motivation in pursuing postsecondary education as well as participating in the labour market. This study also showed that the LINC program is about more than just learning language, and that it is key in helping newcomers participate in and contribute to Canadian society. Finally, data presented in this research provided important demographic information about the LINC student population at Mohawk College, which helps with future programming

Due to time constraints, we were unable to do complex statistical analysis of valuable quantitative data on LINC students at Mohawk College and to conduct a large number of interviews and focus group discussions. Future research should consider conducting statistical analysis of data from Mohawk College Student Registration Records, the Student Entrance Surveys (SES), and HARTs (History of Assessment, Referrals and Training system). The following are recommendations for future research on the LINC program at Mohawk College:

- Use Student Registration, the SES and HARTs data to explore potential association between gender/age/country of birth/first language/type of LINC course and enrollment in a postsecondary program at Mohawk College.
- Examine the relationship between finishing the LINC 6-Intensive course and enrollment in postsecondary program. This can be done through a survey of both students who have taken the course and those who have not.
- Track former LINC students who have completed at least CLB-7, and have enrolled in a postsecondary program at an institution other than Mohawk College. This will help understand reasons that students choose a different postsecondary institution, and whether prior postsecondary experience is associated with their decision.
- To understand the dropout rates of the LINC program, explore the possibility of accessing data on Mohawk LINC students' time spent in the program, number of levels completed and occupational status while attending LINC classes. Conduct parallel in-depth interviews to examine challenges and ways to improve the program.
- Many participants in this research were satisfied with their experience in the LINC program and had successfully completed the program. There is a need for research on students with a diversity of experiences.

- Include the voices of LINC instructors in this research, future studies should explore the experiences of instructors and understand their concerns, barriers and challenges in teaching English language to newcomer students at Mohawk College.

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