
Multicultural Educational Resources in Thunder Bay Public Libraries:

Availability, Accessibility, and Educational Implications

By

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Abstract

This study examines the availability, accessibility, and perceived usefulness of multicultural educational resources at one branch of the Thunder Bay Public Libraries, with particular attention to how these resources support multicultural families with young children. As Canadian mid-sized cities become increasingly diverse, public libraries play an important role in supporting bilingual literacy development, heritage language maintenance, and opportunities for cultural learning. However, limited research has explored how multicultural educational resources function in mid-sized cities with constrained institutional capacity.

Using a qualitative single-case study design informed by ethnographic principles, this study draws on semi-structured interviews with three parents from diverse linguistic backgrounds and two library staff members, as well as field observations of library spaces and resources displays. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify patterns related to resource availability, visibility, institutional practices, and family experiences.

Findings indicate that while the library provides a welcoming and child-centered environment that supports English literacy and social interaction, multicultural educational resources remain limited in scope, visibility, and depth. Multilingual materials are unevenly distributed and often difficult to locate without staff assistance. Although families value the library as a community space, support for sustained heritage language development and culturally embedded learning is constrained by institutional structures, centralized decision-making, and limited programming opportunities.

The study highlights the importance of visibility, strategic collection development, community-informed programming, and institutional support in

advancing equitable access to multicultural educational resources. By focusing on a mid-sized Canadian city, this research contributes to ongoing discussions about the role of public libraries as inclusive educational spaces in increasingly diverse communities.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	7
1.1 Context.....	7
1.2 Definition of Terms.....	12
1.3 Purpose of the Study	12
1.4 Research Questions	13
1.5 Significance of the Study	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review	14
2.1 Policy Framework of Multiculturalism in Canada.....	14
2.2 Theoretical Framework of Multicultural Education	18
2.3 Public Libraries as Multicultural Education Community Hubs.....	22
2.4 Barriers and Challenges in Multicultural Resource Access.....	26
2.5 Research Gaps and Study Significance.....	29
2.6 Chapter Summary	30
Chapter 3: Methodology	31
3.1 Introduction.....	31
3.2 Research Design.....	31
3.3 Research Sample	33
3.4 Procedure	35
3.5 Data Collection	36
3.6 Data Analysis	37
3.7 Ethical Considerations	39
3.8 Trustworthiness of the Study	39
3.9 Chapter Summary	40
Chapter 4: Findings.....	41

4.1 Introduction to the Findings.....	41
4.2 Availability of Multicultural Educational Resources	42
4.3 Structural and Institutional Mediation of Access and Awareness	44
4.4 Partial Alignment With Multicultural Families’ Needs.....	47
4.5 Structural Gaps Between Institutional Intentions and Community Needs	50
4.6 The Library as a Potential but Underrealized Multicultural Third Space.....	53
4.7 Chapter Summary	55
Chapter 5: Discussion	55
5.1 Introduction.....	55
5.2 Availability and Visibility of Multicultural Resources.....	56
5.3 Promotion, Mediation, and Institutional Power in Public Libraries	57
5.4 Alignment and Misalignment with Multicultural Families’ Needs	60
5.5 The Public Library as a Multicultural Third Space	64
Chapter 6: Conclusion and Implications.....	67
6.1 Overview of the Study	67
6.2 Summary of Key Findings.....	67
6.3 Implications for Public Library Practice.....	68
6.4 Contributions of the Study.....	72
6.5 Limitations of the Study.....	73
6.6 Directions for Future Research	74
6.7 Final Reflections	74
References.....	76
Appendix A.....	87
Appendix B	88
Appendix C.....	90

Appendix D.....	94
Appendix E	98

Chapter 1: Introduction

Public libraries serve as vital institutions that support diverse learning, language development, and cultural engagement in multicultural societies. As Canadian communities experience increasing demographic diversity, the role of public libraries in providing culturally responsive educational resources becomes increasingly important. This study explores how multicultural educational resources in public libraries are made available and how multicultural families perceive these resources as supporting opportunities for their children's heritage language learning and cultural engagement. The study focuses specifically on Thunder Bay, where rapid demographic change presents both opportunities and challenges for community integration.

1.1 Context

Thunder Bay has experienced significant demographic changes in recent years, with increasing numbers of immigrants, migrants, and temporary visitors from diverse ethnic backgrounds. According to Statistics Canada data (2025), the city's population reached approximately 133,000 as of July 1, 2024, reflecting an annual increase of around 2,000 residents over the past two years. Rinne (2025) attributes this growth primarily to international migration. This figure involves individuals holding work or study permits along with their families. Furthermore, Lakehead University (2024), one of the two postsecondary education institutions in Thunder Bay, reports that the city now hosts over 1,500 international students from more than 80 countries, significantly contributing to the community's multicultural character. Although a significant portion of this growth consists of international students and temporary permit holders, many arrive with families and face common challenges in supporting

their children's integration while maintaining heritage cultures, making them a central population for this study.

The newcomers to Thunder Bay - some permanent residents or citizens while others are working towards this status – speak different languages, have different cultural practices, and bring unique perspectives to their new home. They all have a strong need to integrate into the local community while maintaining connections to their heritage cultures (West, 2011). There are significant differences in experiences for newcomers to Canada, particularly along the dimension of status. For example, in the employment market, permanent residents have a very different experience from refugees or study visa holders (Preibisch, 2010). These differences also impact the experiences of their children as they approach integrating into Canadian schools, preschools, and child-care settings (Goldring et al., 2009; Kingsbury & Findlay, 2021). Nonetheless, one thing that unites all newcomers is the tension between integrating into Canadian culture while maintaining connection to their heritage cultures (Berry, 1999). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the term *multicultural families* is used to refer broadly to these families, without directly examining immigration status as a variable in the study.

Benefits and Challenges of Multiculturalism

The growing multicultural population brings numerous benefits to Thunder Bay. These newcomers bring diverse cultures, traditions, and worldviews that can foster multiculturalism and strengthen community bonds (West, 2011). The increased population can also lead to a more dynamic and creative city, as people coming from diverse backgrounds are working together and generating new ideas (Parisi & Eger, 2020). As a result, newcomers will want to actively engage in community activities

for successful social integration to mainstream society (Marzana et al., 2019), which will contribute to social cohesion and local development.

However, newcomers and their children face significant challenges during integration. These families often struggle to balance maintaining their heritage culture while adapting to mainstream Canadian society. For example, language barriers frequently impede academic performance for the children and limit social skill development (The Social Planning Council of Ottawa, 2010). The cultural adaptation process can trigger identity crises, negatively affecting mental health and compromising social interactions (Tyyska et al., 2012). Additionally, unequal access to educational and community learning resources across different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds can contribute to disparities in children's learning opportunities (Rossiter, 2009). These children may encounter discrimination or social exclusion, which can severely impact their integration process and undermine their self-esteem (Madibbo, 2005; Schleifer., & Ngo, H., 2005). Realizing the benefits of multiculturalism therefore depends on whether multicultural families can successfully integrate while maintaining their heritage identities. Community institutions such as public libraries play an important role in supporting this process.

Canada's Multicultural Framework

Canada's official multiculturalism policy provides a framework for addressing these challenges. According to the Canadian Heritage (2023), "multiculturalism supports the belief in Canada that all citizens are equal. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can maintain their identities, take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging. It supports our shared values of human rights, inclusion and mutual respect" (para. 1). The statement emphasizes that everyone's languages, traditions and

beliefs should be respected. Apart from respect for diversity, Canada also values inclusion, because “inclusive societies are more innovative, creative, dynamic, resilient and prosperous” (Global Affairs Canada, n.d.). An inclusive society can facilitate newcomers’ integration because it values and celebrates cultural diversity rather than demanding assimilation (Wright & Bloemraad, 2012).

Research also supports the benefits of maintaining heritage languages and cultures. Gutierrez et al. (2010) found that the preservation of heritage languages facilitates the acquisition of English, particularly in the cultivation of early biliteracy proficiencies, further improving academic development. Yohani et al. (2019) underscore that having bicultural identities and skills is beneficial for immigrant and refugee children who are navigating between different cultures and languages.

Multicultural education aims to create an equitable learning environment for students of diverse backgrounds by fostering inclusive learning spaces that incorporate different cultural perspectives, histories, and experiences. It helps students develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to navigate cultural diversity and actively participate in an inclusive society (Banks, 2004).

Multicultural educational resources in community institution typically include multilingual collections, culturally responsive programming, language learning materials, and spaces that support cultural expression and celebrations (Westby, 2022).

Role of Public Libraries

Public libraries play a crucial role in supporting multicultural integration (Picco, 2008). They serve as accessible community spaces where multicultural families can

access educational resources for their children, participate in cultural programming, and build connections between their heritage culture and their new community.

Libraries have the capacity to provide comprehensive multicultural resources including multilingual collections, culturally responsive programming, and language learning materials (Garcia-Cabrera & Garcia-Soto, 2010).

However, simply having multicultural educational resources is not sufficient. Libraries must ensure these resources are visible and accessible so that community members are aware of them. The extent to which libraries fulfill this potential varies considerably depending on institutional capacity, resource allocation, and community outreach practices.

Research Gap

While existing research highlights the importance of multicultural services in public libraries, most of this work has focused on large urban centers where immigrant populations are concentrated and libraries have greater institutional resources, established multicultural programming.

Smaller cities like Thunder Bay operate under different conditions because they often have fewer institutional resources and less established multicultural infrastructure, while simultaneously experiencing rapid demographic diversity. Findings from large urban contexts may therefore not be directly transferable.

Understanding how public libraries in these smaller contexts respond to evolving community needs can contribute to more effective and culturally responsive library services.

1.2 Definition of Terms

For clarity, the following key terms are defined as used in this study.

- (1) Multicultural families: families with at least one member who has immigrated to or recently arrived in Canada within the past 10 years, including permanent residents, temporary residents (study or work permit holders), and refugees, regardless of their official status. These families navigate between heritage cultures and mainstream Canadian cultures while supporting their children's integration and development.
- (2) Multicultural educational resources: collections, materials, and programming in public libraries that support cultural and language learning, including multilingual books and materials, culturally responsive programming, language learning tools, and dedicated community spaces for cultural celebrations and learning.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

As an international student and parent in Thunder Bay, I have personally experienced the challenges of locating accessible educational resources that support my child's heritage language and cultural learning needs. This experience motivated me to investigate how multicultural educational resources in public libraries support multicultural children and families in the city I live.

This study focused on one branch of Thunder Bay Public Library to examine the relevance and accessibility of available multicultural educational resources, how these resources are utilized by multicultural families, and what challenges exist between library services and community needs. This site was selected because it has the most

extensive children's collections among the public library branches in Thunder Bay and regularly hosts early childhood and family-oriented programs. These characteristics make it an important community hub for families and a relevant site for examining how multicultural educational resources are provided and experienced.

The research explores both institutional and community members' perspectives, examining how the library designs and implements its multicultural educational programs while also understanding how multicultural families experience and utilize these resources.

1.4 Research Questions

This research addresses the following questions:

- (1) What types of multicultural educational resources are available in the selected Thunder Bay Public Library branch?
- (2) How does the library promote community awareness and accessibility of these resources?
- (3) How do multicultural families perceive the usefulness of these resources for cultural and heritage language learning?
- (4) What challenges exist between library services and the needs of multicultural families?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Findings of this research may inform library staff, educators, and policymakers about how to better design, promote, and implement multicultural library services that

are educationally relevant and culturally inclusive. The study aimed to fill an existing gap in the literature focusing on small and mid-sized cities like Thunder Bay, where rapid demographic change requires responsive community institutions. In addition, this study offered a multi-layered view by comparing the views of both library staff and multicultural parents, enabling a nuanced analysis of strengths, gaps, and improvements in public services for multicultural families.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Policy Framework of Multiculturalism in Canada

Canada's multicultural policy framework provides an important context for understanding how public institutions respond to cultural and linguistic diversity. Over the past several decades, federal and provincial governments have introduced policies that recognize multiculturalism as a defining feature of Canadian society and emphasize inclusion, equality, and cultural participation (Berry, 2013). These policies not only acknowledge cultural diversity but also shape the responsibilities of public institutions such as schools, community organizations, and public libraries.

2.1.1 Federal Level

Canada's commitment to multiculturalism began with the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1967, which recognized the growing cultural diversity of the country and the need to acknowledge multicultural identities within Canadian society (Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 1967). Although the Commission primarily focused on English-French relations, Book IV of the Royal Commission acknowledged concerns raised by other ethnic communities who felt excluded from the bicultural framework (Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 1970). This pressure from non-charter groups helped shift the

policy discourse toward a broader multicultural framework (Brosseau & Dewing, 2009), eventually is widely understood to have contributed to the adoption of the federal multiculturalism policy in 1971, which formally acknowledged that Canadians come from diverse cultural backgrounds and that cultural diversity should be respected and preserved (House of Commons Debates, 1971).

Canada further strengthened this commitment through the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* in 1985. The act established multiculturalism as an official component of Canadian public policy and emphasized that all citizens should have equal opportunities to participate in social, cultural, and economic life regardless of their cultural or ethnic background (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1985). This act also affirmed that individuals could maintain their cultural identities while also participating fully in Canadian society. Importantly, the act also placed obligations on federal institutions to make their programs and services accessible and responsive to the multicultural reality of Canadian society (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1985), establishing a direct link between national policy and institutional practice. (Kymlicka, 2012).

Today, Canada's multicultural policy framework continues to emphasize principles of equality, inclusion, and cultural recognition. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1985) affirms that multiculturalism ensures that individuals can maintain their cultural identities, take pride in their ancestry, and develop a sense of belonging while supporting shared values of human rights, inclusion, and mutual respect (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1985). This policy framework has shown remarkable adaptability, expanding to include specialized programs for race relations, heritage languages, and community support (Brosseau & Dewing, 2009). Earlier iterations of the policy focused largely on cultural preservation and symbolic

recognition. Over time, the framework incorporated enforcement mechanisms and targeted programs addressing structural inequalities, reflecting a shift from passive acknowledgement to active intervention. The evolution demonstrates how Canada has moved from simply recognizing diversity to actively promoting equality social inclusion. For public institutions such as libraries, this evolution means that multicultural commitment carries expectations of active implementation, particularly in the provision of inclusive and culturally responsive services (IFLA, 2011)

2.1.2 Provincial Level in Ontario

Ontario's multicultural policies have developed alongside federal initiatives, creating a complementary framework that addresses provincial responsibilities in education and community services.

In 1982, Ontario formalized its multicultural approach through *the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture Act*, which established the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture and defined its responsibilities. The act requires the Ministry to recognize “the pluralistic nature of Ontario society, to stress the full participation of all Ontarians as equal members of the community, encouraging the sharing of cultural heritage while affirming those elements held in common by all residents” (Ministry of Citizen Culture Act, 1990, s. 4(b)).

By 2016, Ontario recognized that promoting multiculturalism wasn't enough and needed to tackle racial discrimination directly. The government created an Anti-Racism Directorate to identify and address racist practices in government policies and programs (Government of Ontario, 2016). In March 2017, the Government of Ontario released *A Better Way Forward*, a three-year plan to eliminate systemic racism, followed by the Multicultural Community Capacity Grants program to help newcomers and ethnic communities participate fully in Ontario's civic, cultural,

social, and economic life (Ontario Public Service, 2017). Ontario's Education Act further reflects these priorities by requiring schools to create policies that build positive environments and prevent discrimination (Government of Ontario, 1990). All in all, these provincial measures reinforce the expectation that public institutions actively support cultural inclusion rather than simply acknowledge diversity (Ontario Public Service, 2017; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

2.1.3 Challenges in Multicultural Education Implementation

Despite these well-developed policies, implementation may face significant challenges (Adkins & Hussey, 2006). Research indicates a gap between policy commitments and actual practice (Howard, 2019).

Public institutions like libraries, community centers, and cultural organizations play crucial roles in supporting newcomer integration (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1985). However, their effectiveness depends on having adequate multicultural resources, meaningful community engagement, and culturally relevant programming.

Simply having diverse populations does not automatically create successful multicultural communities; institutions must actively create opportunities for people from different cultures to interact and engage with each other (Jackson & Herranz, 2006). Vertovec's (2007) research on super-diversity demonstrated that even large, well-resourced cities in Britain struggled to adapt their institutions to rapid demographic change. Building on this, it is reasonable to suggest that smaller and mid-sized cities, which often have fewer specialized staff and less established multicultural infrastructure may face additional challenges in implementing multicultural policies at the institutional level. Thunder Bay's recent and rapid demographic growth, as outlined in chapter 1, reflects precisely this situation, making

the gap between policy intention and local institutional practice a central concern of this study.

Successful multiculturalism requires a delicate balance between supporting newcomers in preserving their identities and fostering meaningful interaction between different groups (Nye, 2007). This balance becomes harder to maintain when communities experience rapid demographic changes, as institutions and residents may struggle to adapt quickly enough to support both cultural preservation and cross-cultural understanding.

This policy framework establishes expectations that public institutions respond to cultural and linguistic diversity through inclusive services and programming. However, how these expectations are interpreted and implemented at the local level, particularly in mid-sized cities like Thunder Bay, remain underexplored. This study therefore examines how public libraries operationalize multicultural policy principles in practice.

2.2 Theoretical Framework of Multicultural Education

This study draws on several theoretical perspectives that explain why multicultural educational resources are important for children growing up in culturally diverse communities. In particular, the framework combines theories of multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, acculturation, and identity development. These perspectives help explain how educational institutions can support both cultural inclusion and children's sense of belonging in multicultural societies. In the context of this study, these theories provide a lens for examining how public libraries support multicultural families through resources and programming.

2.2.1 Multicultural Education Theory

Multicultural education theory provides the foundational framework for understanding how institutions can support cultural diversity and equity in educational environments. Banks (1993) proposed five key dimensions of multicultural education, which are “content integration”, “the knowledge construction process”, “prejudice reduction”, “an equity pedagogy”, and “an empowering school culture and social structure” (p. 24). These dimensions emphasized that multicultural education involves not only incorporating diverse cultural content but also transforming institutional practices to support inclusion and equity.

Banks (1993) argued that simply adding multicultural materials to existing structures is insufficient if institutional cultures remain dominated by a single perspective. Instead, meaningful multicultural education requires systemic changes that promote equitable participation and representation of diverse groups. This perspective highlights the importance of institutional commitment to diversity rather than symbolic inclusion.

Although Banks (1993)’ framework was developed primarily in school contexts, its principles can also be applied to other educational institutions. Public libraries can contribute to multicultural education by providing resources that represent diverse cultural experiences and creating inclusive learning environments for families from different backgrounds. From this perspective, multicultural collections and programs in libraries can be understood as part of a broader effort to support cultural inclusion within community learning spaces.

2.2.2 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The concept of culturally responsive pedagogy is closely related to multicultural education. Gay (2000) argued that educational practices become more effective when they recognize and incorporate students’ cultural knowledge, experiences, and

identities into the learning process. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasized that culturally relevant pedagogy should support students' academic success while affirming their cultural identities and experiences.

These perspectives highlight the importance of recognizing students' cultural backgrounds as valuable resources for learning rather than viewing cultural differences as barriers. Educational environments that acknowledge and respect cultural diversity can help students feel valued and included, which in turn supports engagement and learning.

In the context of public libraries, culturally responsive approaches may be reflected in the selection of multicultural materials and the design of inclusive programs. Libraries that provide culturally diverse books and create opportunities for families to share their cultural experiences can contribute to more inclusive community learning environments. Such practices align with the broader goals of culturally responsive education by recognizing and valuing the cultural identities of children and families.

2.2.3 Acculturation Theory

Acculturation theory provides another important perspective for understanding how multicultural educational resources may support immigrant and multicultural families. Berry (2005) proposed acculturation theory, which describes four strategies individuals may adopt when encountering a new environment, which include *assimilation* (adopting the dominant culture while minimizing one's original culture), *integration* (maintaining one's original culture while also participating in the broader society), *separation* (maintaining one's original culture while limiting interaction with the dominant culture), and *marginalization* (losing connection with both the original

and dominant cultures) (p.707). These strategies describe different ways individuals balance their heritage culture with participation in the dominant society.

Research based on this framework has suggested that the integration strategy is associated with more positive social and psychological outcomes (Berry, 2005). Individuals who are able to maintain connections to their cultural background while also participating in the dominant culture often experience stronger well-being and social adjustment.

This perspective is particularly relevant for institutions that serve multicultural communities. Public libraries can support integration by providing both mainstream educational resources and materials that reflect diverse cultural backgrounds. By offering spaces where families can access multicultural materials and participate in inclusive community activities, libraries may help support both cultural maintenance and social participation.

2.2.4 Identity Development

Identity development theory further explains the importance of cultural representation in educational environments. Phinney and Ong (2007) described ethnic identity development as a dynamic process shaped by social and cultural experiences. This perspective is useful for understanding how children interact with multicultural educational resources, as such resources can support both cultural recognition and engagement in diverse learning environments. For children growing up in multicultural contexts, opportunities to explore and affirm their cultural identities can play an important role in this developmental process. Educational environments that provide culturally relevant resources may help children better understand and appreciate their cultural backgrounds while also developing connections with the wider community.

As for this study, multicultural educational resources in public libraries may contribute to this process by offering books, programs, and learning opportunities that reflect diverse cultural experiences. Access to culturally relevant materials may help children see their identities represented and valued within community institutions.

2.3 Public Libraries as Multicultural Education Community Hubs

Having established the theoretical foundations of multicultural education, this section turns to be the library science literature to examine how public libraries have been conceptualized as sites of multicultural learning and integration. In particular, the section reviews research on the evolving role of public libraries as community institutions, multicultural collection development practices, and educational programming and community engagement initiatives. These may help explain how public libraries may support multicultural families through collections, literacy programming, and inclusive community services.

2.3.1 Evolving Role of Public Libraries

The role of public libraries has evolved significantly over the past several decades. Lawson (2016) described the traditional library as primarily a custodial institution, a repository of books and information oriented toward the preservation and lending of materials. This custodial model is increasingly recognised as insufficient to describe the broader social role of contemporary public libraries. Lankes (2011) reconceptualized the mission of libraries as facilitating knowledge creation and supporting community engagement rather than focusing solely on collection management, while Lee (2024) further described libraries as active institutions supporting community learning and social inclusion.

Oldenburg's (1989) concept of the "third place", which refers to social environments outside the home and workplace where community life develops, has been widely applied in library science to explain the social significance of public libraries. Unlike commercial spaces, public libraries offer neutral and free environments where individuals from diverse backgrounds can gather without expectations of purchase or productivity. Elmborg (2011) and Audunson (2005) argued that this neutrality makes libraries particularly important for immigrant and minority communities, for whom other public spaces may carry implicit barriers or expectations of cultural conformity. Akbar and Asmiyanto (2021) further emphasised that libraries can function as inclusive institutions because their use does not depend on citizenship status, language proficiency, or cultural assimilation.

The concept of the "third place" (Oldenburg, 1989), as discussed in sociolinguistic and multicultural education research, adds another dimension to this discussion. Drawing on Bhabha's (1994) concept of cultural hybridity, the notion of "third space", this perspective describes environments where different cultural and linguistic worlds intersect, allowing hybrid identities and practices to emerge. Roessingh (2011) highlighted the importance of supporting multilingual learners' linguistic resources and family literacy development. Building on this perspective, library-based literacy activities, such as dual-language book programs, can create spaces where children's languages are supported across linguistic contexts.

However, the idea that libraries function as inclusive community hubs should not be assumed automatically. Whether a library operates as a welcoming multicultural space depends on institutional decisions about staffing, programming, outreach, and community partnerships. The following sections therefore examine

research on two key components of multicultural public library services: multicultural collection development and educational programming.

2.3.2 Multicultural Collection Development

Multicultural collection development is a central component of public library multicultural services. Research in library science emphasises that collections should reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the community libraries serve. In this regard, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2011) recommends that libraries provide materials both in community languages and materials that represent diverse cultural perspectives within the dominant language.

Hill (2018) further argued that effective multicultural collection development requires more than simply acquiring foreign-language materials. Libraries must understand the specific language needs of local communities, build relationships with cultural organisations, and evaluate the cultural authenticity of available resources.

Authenticity is a particularly important issue in multicultural children's literature. The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC, 2020) reports the underrepresentation of books written by and about minority communities in North American publishing markets. Jackson (2023) conceptualized children's literature as as "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" illustrating the importance of representation: children from minority backgrounds benefit from seeing their own experiences reflected in library materials, while also gaining opportunities to understand other cultures. This suggests that the quality of multicultural collections is as important as their linguistic diversity (Jackson, 2023).

Despite these recommendations, research indicates libraries often face structural barriers when developing multicultural collections. Adkins and Hussey (2006) identified limited vendor networks for multilingual materials, lack of staff

expertise in evaluating non-English resources, and restricted budgets as common challenges. Johnson (2018) further noted that such challenges are particularly significant in smaller library systems that lack the purchasing power and professional specialization found in larger metropolitan libraries. These issues are particularly relevant for the Thunder Bay context, where demographic diversity is increasing but institutional resources remain relatively limited.

2.3.3 Educational Programming and Community Engagement

Collections alone cannot fully support multicultural learning. Library scholarship increasingly emphasises that educational programming and community engagement are essential components of multicultural public library services, particularly in supporting immigrant and multilingual families.

Mallinckrodt et al. (2014) identified several key components of successful multicultural programming, including clearly defined learning objectives, structured program design, active participation opportunities, and spaces where individuals can share personal cultural experiences. Higbee and Barajas (2007) further emphasised that successful multicultural programming often involves collaboration with community members rather than programs designed solely by institutions.

Such programs have been shown to play an important role in supporting immigrant families' participation in community learning environments and strengthening connections between libraries and diverse communities (Roessingh, 2011). Finally, research consistently highlights the importance of outreach and partnership in reaching immigrant families who many not initially view the library as a relevant community resource. Hosley et al. (2003) found that libraries achieved stronger engagement when working with settlement agencies, community

organisations, and ethnocultural groups rather than relying solely on in-library promotion.

2.4 Barriers and Challenges in Multicultural Resource Access

Although the previous sections highlight the theoretical and empirical importance of multicultural library resources, this does not necessarily mean that such resources are always effectively provided or accessed in practice. Existing research has identified a number of barriers that limit libraries' ability to deliver multicultural services, as well as barriers that prevent multicultural families from using available resources. These challenges may occur at different levels, including institutional, structural, and community factors, and they often interact with one another. Examining these barriers is therefore important for understanding why multicultural services may not always function as intended and why access to library resources may remain uneven.

2.4.1 Institutional and Structural Barriers

Institutional barriers to multicultural library provision are widely discussed in the library science literature. These barriers generally fall into three areas: resource constraints, staff capacity, and limitations in needs assessment processes.

Financial constraints are among the most frequently identified barriers. Multilingual materials are often more expensive and harder to obtain than English-language materials due to smaller markets and limited distribution networks (Adkins & Hussey, 2006). As a result, libraries may rely on commercially available materials rather than resources that directly reflect community needs.

Staff expertise represents another significant challenge. Grandpierre et al. (2018) identified language barriers and limited cultural competence as key challenges in

service provision for diverse populations. In the context of public libraries, these challenges may translate into difficulties for staff in evaluating multilingual materials, designing culturally responsive programming, and communicating effectively with diverse communities. Without this expertise, libraries may struggle to develop collections and services that accurately reflect the linguistic and cultural characteristics of their communities.

A third barrier concerns the adequacy of needs assessment processes. Naz et al. (2023) highlighted the limitations of relying primarily on demographic data when identifying service needs, emphasising the importance of direct community engagement. Demographic information can indicate general population trends; however, it cannot capture specific community preferences, literacy levels, or cultural expectations. In the context of public libraries, this may result in the development of multicultural collections or programs that symbolically represent diversity but do not fully respond to community needs.

These institutional barriers often reinforce one another. Limited budgets restrict the hiring of multilingual staff, while insufficient staffing reduces opportunities for community consultation. In such situations, collection and program decisions may be driven by practical constraints rather than community demand. These challenges may be particularly relevant for mid-sized library systems such as Thunder Bay Public Library, where demographic diversity is increasing but institutional resources remain limited.

2.4.2 Community Awareness and Accessibility Barriers

Even when multicultural resources are available, multicultural families may still face barriers to accessing or using them. Library science research identifies several

access-related challenges, including language barriers, unfamiliarity with library systems, and limitations in outreach and communication.

Language barriers can affect multiple stages of access. Newcomers with limited proficiency in the dominant language may find library websites, promotional materials, and staff communication difficult to navigate. Caidi et al. (2010) found that language proficiency shapes not only immigrants' ability to use library resources but also their awareness of available services and their confidence in approaching library staff. The researchers also suggest that access challenges are not solely individual language issues; institutional communication practices, such as multilingual signage and outreach materials, can either reduce or reinforce these barriers.

Unfamiliarity with library systems represents another important challenge for multicultural families. In many countries, public libraries do not operate as open-access community institutions in the same way they do in Canada. As a result, newly arrived immigrants may not fully understand what libraries offer or how to use their services (Caidi et al., 2010). This situation highlights the importance of proactive outreach. Hosley et al. (2003) found that libraries achieved stronger engagement with multicultural communities when they collaborated with settlement agencies, community organisations, and ethnocultural groups rather than relying solely on in-library promotion.

Cultural expectations about library services may also influence access. Different communities may hold different assumptions about the role of libraries and appropriate ways of using library space. Honma (2005) argued that libraries in North America have historically reflected dominant cultural norms, which may unintentionally make minority users feel less comfortable in library environments.

These access barriers often interact with the institutional challenges discussed in Section 2.4.1. Limited multilingual staffing, insufficient outreach, and weak community consultation may reduce community engagement, while low community participation further limits libraries' understanding of user needs (Adkins & Hussey, 2006). Such dynamics may be particularly relevant in mid-sized systems such as Thunder Bay Public Library, where demographic diversity is increasing but institutional resources remain limited.

2.5 Research Gaps and Study Significance

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides strong theoretical and empirical support for multicultural educational resources in community settings and identifies important institutional practices and barriers affecting library provision. However, several gaps remain in the existing scholarship.

First, there is limited empirical research on multicultural library services in mid-sized Canadian cities. Much of the existing literature focuses on large metropolitan contexts, particularly in cities (Caidi et al., 2010). Studies of smaller library systems suggest that they often face different conditions, including more limited resources and less developed multicultural service infrastructures (Adkins & Hussey, 2006). However, little research examines how these challenges operate in northern Canadian cities such as Thunder Bay.

Second, existing research often examines institutional provision and community experience separately. Studies of library collections and programming typically rely on institutional perspectives (Adkins & Hussey, 2006), while research on multicultural families' library use focuses on community users (Caidi et al., 2010). Comparatively few studies examine the relationship between these perspectives or

explore how gaps between institutional intentions and community experiences emerge in practice.

Third, although multicultural education theory provides important conceptual frameworks, its application to public library contexts remains limited. Some studies have drawn on concepts such as culturally responsive practice; however, few have applied an integrated theoretical framework, including multicultural education, acculturation theory, and bilingual development and cultural learning in community-based settings to the analysis of library services.

This study addresses these gaps through a case study of Thunder Bay Public Library, examining multicultural resources provision from both librarian and parent perspectives and applying an integrated theoretical framework to analyze library practices in a mid-sized Canadian context.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed three bodies of literature relevant to this study. Multicultural education theory highlights the importance of inclusive institutional practices and culturally responsive approaches to learning. Acculturation and identity development research further emphasise the role of cultural identity and belonging in supporting immigrant and minority children's well-being.

The library science literature extends these ideas to community institutions by examining multicultural collection development, educational programming, and outreach strategies in public libraries. At the same time, research identifies significant institutional and access barriers that may limit the effectiveness of multicultural library services, particularly in smaller systems with limited resources.

The review also identified some gaps, which are limited research on multicultural library services in mid-sized Canadian cities, insufficient integration of institutional and community perspectives, and limited application of multicultural education frameworks to public library contexts.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework used to investigate the role of multicultural educational resources in supporting bilingual literacy development, heritage language maintenance, and cultural learning among multicultural families using Thunder Bay Public Libraries. A qualitative single case study design was adopted to explore how multicultural educational resources are made available, promoted, and experienced within a specific library context.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with library staff and multicultural parents, as well as field observations conducted at one branch of Thunder Bay Public Libraries. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns across participant perspectives and observational evidence.

This chapter first presents the research design and sampling strategy, followed by the procedures for participant recruitment and data collection. The chapter then describes the approach to data analysis, ethical considerations, and the limitations of the study.

3.2 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative single case study design to explore how multicultural educational resources function within a specific institutional context.

A case study was appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of a bounded system within its real-life setting, allowing for a detailed understanding of institutional practices and participant experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, the bounded case was one branch of Thunder Bay Public Libraries.

While the primary methodological framework was a case study, observational methods were informed by selected principles of ethnographic research. Ethnographic traditions emphasize attention to everyday practices and cultural contexts in naturalistic settings (Heath, 1995). Drawing on these principles, field observations were used to document how multicultural educational resources were displayed, organized, and encountered within the library environment.

The study examined multicultural educational resources in Thunder Bay Public Libraries, focusing on their availability, visibility, accessibility, and perceived relevance for multicultural families' heritage language learning and cultural learning. It addressed three areas: (1) the availability of multicultural educational resources; (2) how the library promoted awareness and access to these resources, and (3) the extent to which resources aligned with multicultural families' educational and cultural learning needs.

To strengthen credibility through triangulation, the research design integrated three forms of data: (1) field observations of library spaces and resources displays; (2) semi-structured interviews with library staff; and (3) semi-structured interviews with multicultural parents.

This design supported comparison between institutional practices, staff perspectives, and family experiences within the same library context.

3.3 Research Sample

This study used purposeful sampling to recruit participants who could provide rich and relevant information related to multicultural educational resources in public libraries. Purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to identify participants who are knowledgeable about the research topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Practical considerations such as participant availability and accessibility were taken into account during recruitment.

Given the exploratory nature of this qualitative case study, a small sample size was appropriate in order to allow for in-depth examination of participant perspectives within a specific institutional context.

The final sample included three sources of data: one library branch as the observation site (hereafter referred to as the researched library), two library staff members (referred to as Staff 1 & Staff 2), and three parents from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (referred to as Parent 1, Parent 2 & Parent 3).

Observation Site

Observations were conducted at one branch of Thunder Bay Public Libraries. This branch was selected because it offered multilingual materials, children's educational programming, and a dedicated children's learning area, making it a relevant site for examining how multicultural educational resources are organized, promoted, and accessed within a public library environment.

The site offered a bounded institutional context in which the visibility, spatial organization, and accessibility of multicultural educational resources could be examined.

Library Staff Participants

Two library staff participants were recruited to reflect different institutional roles and responsibilities, allowing for comparison across perspectives within the same organization.

Staff 1 worked in a public-facing role, primarily responsible for circulation services and front-desk support. This position involved frequent interaction with families and facilitating access to library resources.

Staff 2 held responsibilities related to collection development and children's educational programming, including decisions about the selection, organization, and delivery of educational resources.

Including staff members with different institutional responsibilities provided insight into how multicultural educational resources are selected, managed, promoted, and interpreted within everyday library practice.

Parent Participants

Three parents from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds were recruited for this study. Each participant had at least one child between the ages of 3 and 6 who engaged with Thunder Bay Public Library services. All parent participants were regular users of Thunder Bay Public Libraries. Interviews were conducted in English or Mandarin Chinese, depending on participants' language preference, to ensure that participants could express themselves fully and comfortably.

The three parent participants represented diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. For example, participants reported using Mandarin Chinese or a combination of Chinese and English at home, and African languages at home. To protect participant anonymity, specific demographic details beyond general language background will not be stated here. In one case, a participant requested that her country of origin and detailed linguistic background remain confidential.

Parents of children aged 3-6 were intentionally selected because early childhood is widely recognized as an important period for language exposure and early literacy development (Lenneberg, 1967). Children in this stage benefit from shared reading, which support emergent literacy skills (Chall, 1983). In addition, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecological systems theory highlights the importance of connections between children's microsystems (e.g., home and community institutions) during the preschool period, when parents play a particular significant role in shaping children's cultural and educational experiences. Parents' perspectives therefore offered important insight into how the library supported heritage language maintenance and cultural learning within everyday family practices.

3.4 Procedure

Ethics approval was obtained prior to recruitment and data collection to ensure that participant recruitment, consent, and data handling complied with institutional ethical standards.

Participants were recruited primarily through poster advertisements displayed at appropriate locations, consistent with the ethics-approved recruitment plan.

For library staff recruitment, posters were posted in staff-only areas such as staff bulletin boards and break rooms. Staff members who were interested in participating contacted the researcher directly, reducing the possibility of workplace pressure or perceived obligation.

For parent recruitment, posters were placed in public areas of all library branches and at a local multicultural association center. Parents who met the eligibility criteria and were interested in participating contacted the researcher directly using the information provided on the poster.

Recruitment materials remained available for up to three weeks or until the target sample size was reached. No incentives were offered to participants.

After initial email contact, potential participants were provided with additional study information and interview scheduling options. Written informed consent was obtained before interviews began, and verbal consent was reconfirmed before audio-recording.

Each participant completed one semi-structured interview lasting around 45-60 minutes, conducted in person.

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection included three components:

Staff Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two library staff. One participant worked in a general public service role, and the other had responsibilities related to multicultural collections and children's educational programming. The interviews explored how the library curates, promotes, and delivers multicultural educational resources, and their perceived educational value for multicultural families' learning.

Parent Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with three multicultural parents whose children were between the ages of 3-6. These interviews explored how families discover and use multicultural educational resources in the library, their perceptions of support for heritage language development and cultural learning, and any unmet educational needs or suggestions for improvement.

Field Observations

Field observations were conducted at the selected library branch to document the organization and visibility of multicultural educational resources. Observations focused on the placement of multicultural books, language learning materials, and cultural displays, and related programs.

Three observation visits were conducted over a two-week period. Each observation session lasted approximately 60 minutes. During these sessions, the researcher recorded descriptive field notes on the spatial arrangement of resources, signage, and displays related to multicultural materials.

Following Merriam & Tisdell's (2016) recommendations for observational data collection, an observation code sheet was developed to guide systematic documentation (see Appendix C). This code sheet outlined the key categories used to record the presence, visibility, and organization of multicultural educational resources within the library setting.

All data were collected following ethical protocols and securely stored for later analysis. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized. One parent participant declined audio-recording; in this case, detailed handwritten notes were taken by the researcher during the interview and subsequently transcribed into a written record for analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis

The interview transcripts and observation notes were analyzed following qualitative analysis procedures described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). In addition, a thematic analysis approach was applied to identify patterns across the data, drawing on the framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interviews conducted in

Mandarin Chinese were transcribed in Chinese and subsequently translated into English by the researcher prior to analysis.

The analysis involved several stages. First, all interview transcripts and field observation notes were read multiple times to gain familiarity with the data. During this stage, initial codes were generated to identify recurring ideas related to educational resource use, learning experiences, and library practices. All coding was conducted manually by the researcher without the use of qualitative data analysis software.

Second, both deductive and inductive coding strategies were applied. Deductive codes were informed by theoretical perspectives discussed in the literature review, including culturally responsive pedagogy and multicultural learning principles. At the same time, inductive codes were developed to capture themes that emerged directly from participant accounts and observational data.

Third, related codes were grouped into broader themes that reflected patterns across participants and data sources. These themes focused on how multicultural educational resources were made available, how families accessed and used them, and how they contributed to bilingual literacy, heritage language maintenance, and cultural learning.

A comparative analysis was conducted across participant groups to examine how different perspectives shaped understandings of multicultural educational support. Among library staff, differences between the general front-line staff and the specialized staff responsible for children's programming were examined, particularly in terms of perceived educational responsibilities and understanding of multicultural learning goals. Similarly, the experiences of the three parents were analyzed to highlight how cultural background, language needs, and library engagement patterns

shaped educational resource use and educational learning outcomes. This comparative approach revealed both convergent and divergent perspectives on the library's educational function within the multicultural community.

Triangulation across staff interviews, parent interviews, and field observations was used to strengthen the credibility of the findings by providing multiple perspectives on the same educational phenomena. Member-checking was used to confirm the accuracy of interview summaries and to allow participants to clarify or correct their responses where necessary.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical approval from the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board (REB). The study involved minimal risk to participants, and potential discomfort was limited to discussing personal experiences related to library services or cultural identity. Participants were informed of their right to skip any questions or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned, and identifying details were removed from transcripts and research reports. Audio recordings and research data were stored securely on password-protected devices, accessible only to the researcher and supervisor.

3.8 Trustworthiness of the Study

This study ensured the trustworthiness of the findings by applying several qualitative research strategies, including credibility, triangulation, and member-checking, following established qualitative research guidelines (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

First, credibility was enhanced through careful data collection using semi-structured interviews and ongoing engagement with participants, including probing and clarification during the interview process, allowing for accurate representation of their perspectives.

Second, data triangulation was employed by integrating three components of the sample: staff interviews, parent interviews, and field observations. Comparing these sources allowed the researcher to examine institutional practices and participant experiences from multiple perspectives.

Third, member checking was used to confirm the accuracy of interview data. Participants received a summary of their interview transcript and relevant preliminary interpretation. They were given two weeks to review and provide corrections or clarifications. If no response was received within that period, the transcript summary was treated as accurate for analysis.

These procedures were implemented to enhance the credibility and transparency of the research process.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological framework used to investigate multicultural educational resources in Thunder Bay Public Libraries. The study employed a qualitative single case study design to examine how library resources support bilingual development and cultural learning among multicultural families.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with library staff and multicultural parents, along with field observations conducted at one library branch. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, and credibility was strengthened through triangulation and member checking.

The following chapter presents the findings of the study, organized around the major themes that emerged from the analysis of interview and observational data.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction to the Findings

This chapter presents the findings from semi-structured interviews with multicultural parents and library staff, as well as observations conducted at one branch of the Thunder Bay Public Libraries. The purpose of this chapter is to describe patterns and themes that emerged from the data regarding the availability, visibility, organization, and perceived relevance of multicultural educational resources and services within the library.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts and field notes were coded iteratively to identify recurring patterns related to the availability, organization, and perceived relevance of multicultural educational resources. Initial codes were grouped into broader categories, which were refined through comparison across interviews and observations to form the thematic sections presented in this chapter.

The findings are organized thematically to reflect recurring issues identified across participant accounts and observations. Rather than focusing on individual experiences, this chapter highlights shared patterns that illustrate how multicultural educational resources are currently provided, how awareness and access to these resources are mediated, and how families and staff perceive the extent to which library offerings align with the educational and cultural learning needs of multicultural families.

4.2 Availability of Multicultural Educational Resources

Interviews with parents and library staff, together with field observations, highlighted several recurring patterns in the availability of multicultural educational resources at the researched branch. While participants acknowledged the presence of some multilingual and multicultural materials, these resources were consistently described as insufficient in scope, unevenly distributed across age groups, and fragmented across formats. Both parents and staff emphasized that access to multicultural educational resources was shaped not only by whether such materials existed, but also by their visibility, organization, and suitability for children.

Two interrelated patterns emerged from the data: the limited size and scope of multilingual and multicultural collections, particularly for children, and a reliance on digital or adult-oriented language resources to address gaps in physical collections.

4.2.1 Limited Multilingual and Multicultural Collections

Participants consistently described the multilingual and multicultural collections at the researched branch as small and difficult to locate. All parents reported actively looking for heritage-language materials but being unable to find them. One parent explained, “I didn’t really see an area for Chinese-language books” and added, “I think I looked around. I tried to look for them, but I couldn’t find any” (Parent 1). Based on this experience, the parent assumed that such materials were not available, stating, “so I assumed that there probably aren’t any Chinese books” (Parent 1).

Even when parents were aware that multilingual materials existed, these collections were described as limited in quantity and range. One parent noted, “I know the library has a small section of Chinese books” but emphasized that “the quantity is not large” (Parent 2). Because of the small size of the collection, parents

explained that it was often difficult to find books appropriate for their children's age or interests. As one parent described, "There isn't really a way to find books that suitable for my child's age. We just borrow whatever is available. We just make do" (Parent 2).

Library staff similarly acknowledged these limitations. Staff participants noted that multilingual children's collections were confined to a small number of languages and that overall collection size remained limited. This resulted in uneven support for families seeking to use library resources to sustain heritage language learning. Parents also described turning to alternative sources outside the library. One parent explained, "buying books from our home country and shipping them here increase the cost" (Parent 1), highlighting the additional financial burden families faced when local library collections were insufficient.

Field observations reinforced these accounts, showing that multilingual children's materials occupied a relatively small physical footprint within the library and were not integrated throughout the broader children's collection. This limited presence corresponded with parents' perceptions that heritage-language resources were scarce or absent.

4.2.2 Reliance on Digital and Adult-Oriented Language Resources

In response to the limited physical multilingual collections, participants described a reliance on digital resources and adult-oriented language-learning tools as alternative pathways for language support. Parents acknowledged that online resources were often easier to access than physical books but emphasized that these tools were not equivalent substitutes. As one parent explained, "online resources aren't the problem; it's the physical books that we can't access" (Parent 1).

Parents also noted that many digital language-learning platforms were not designed with young children in mind. Although such resources could support basic exposure to vocabulary, they were often perceived as limited in age-appropriateness and engagement when compared to physical children's books. One parent emphasized that meaningful language learning for young children depended on access to materials in the heritage language itself, noting challenges when such materials were unavailable (Parent 1).

As a result, families often developed home-based strategies to compensate for gaps in library provision. For example, one parent described intentionally using Chinese-language media at home: "we let him watch cartoons in Chinese to support his understanding of the language" (Parent 1). These strategies supported language maintenance; however, parents emphasized that they required additional effort and could not fully replace access to diverse, age-appropriate materials through the public library.

Overall, findings from this section suggest that although multicultural educational resources existed at the researched branch, their availability was fragmented across formats and insufficiently aligned with the needs of multicultural families with young children. These patterns provide important context for understanding how access and awareness were further shaped by institutional and organizational practices, discussed in the following section.

4.3 Structural and Institutional Mediation of Access and Awareness

Beyond availability, participants' experiences revealed that access to and awareness of multicultural educational resources were strongly mediated by institutional structures and organizational practices. How resources were labeled,

promoted, and communicated shaped whether families were able to independently locate and use them.

Three interconnected patterns emerged: low visibility and inconsistent organization of resources, centralized control over promotion and signage, and reliance on informal, staff-dependent pathways for awareness.

4.3.1 Low Visibility and Inconsistent Organization of Resources

As noted in the previous section, multilingual materials were limited in quantity and difficult to locate. Participants further described challenges related to the visibility and organization of these resources within the library space. Another parent noted that although a Chinese section did exist, its organization was not immediately clear: “the book classification was confusing at first, so we needed to ask” (Parent 2). This initial confusion meant that independent discovery of resources was challenging, particularly for first-time users.

Field observations supported these accounts, indicating that multicultural resources were not consistently marked or visually distinct from the surrounding collections. In some cases, multilingual materials were grouped together in small sections that were not clearly labeled, while in other instances they were integrated into broader collections without clear indicators of language or cultural focus (see Figure 1).

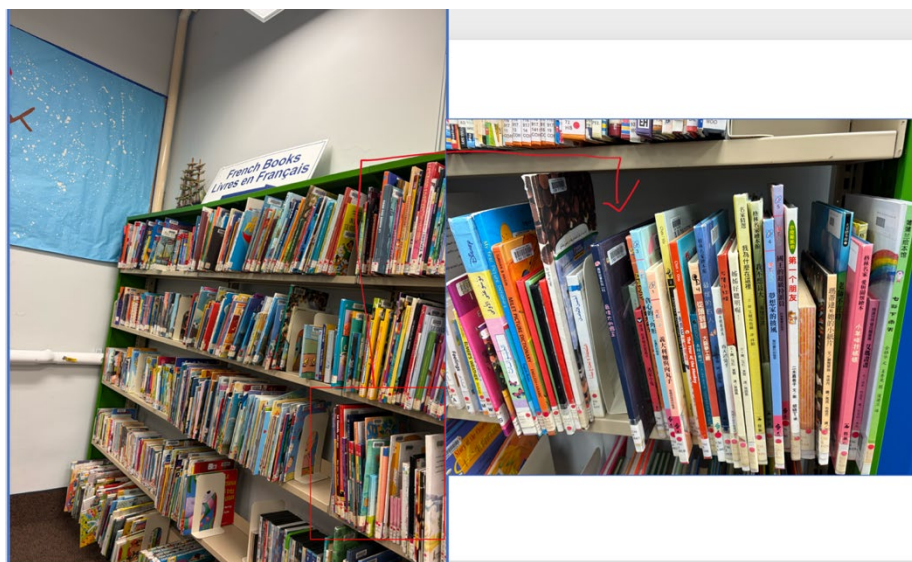


Figure 1

Staff participants acknowledged these challenges, noting that signage and labeling within the children's area were limited and that space constraints often influenced where materials could be placed. One staff noted that, "if you don't already know where to look, it's very easy to miss other language materials" (Staff 1).

4.3.2 Centralized Control over Promotion and Signage

Findings also indicated that promotional practices and signage were shaped by centralized institutional decision-making. While parents were largely unaware of internal governance structures, their experiences reflected the outcomes of limited promotion. Two parents reported that they learned about resources only through repeated visits or informal conversations, rather than through visible signage.

Staff participants described having little control over how resources and programs were promoted. One staff member explained that frontline staff were unable to independently create signage or promotional materials and that such decisions were managed at higher administrative levels. This contributed to the limited visibility of multicultural physical resources within the branch and reduced opportunities for families to encounter them independently. Although the library also provided digital

resources, this study focused primarily on physical collections and in-person library spaces because the participating families have young children, for whom extended screen use would generally be limited.

4.3.3 Informal and Staff-Dependent Pathways to Awareness

In the absence of consistent signage and targeted promotion, awareness of multicultural resources depended on direct interaction with library staff. Parents described staff members as helpful and supportive when asked directly. One parent recalled, “at the beginning, we asked staff, and they told us where the Chinese books are” (Parent 2). After learning the location, the parent explained, “once we knew where the Chinese books are, we didn’t need to ask anymore” (Parent 2). However, one parent also acknowledged that not all families felt comfortable asking for help, particularly when language barriers or uncertainty about available resources existed.

Staff participants similarly described their role in guiding families toward resources through conversation at service desks or during programs. However, they also acknowledged that this form of mediation was dependent on staff availability, individual knowledge, and opportunities for interaction. In busy periods or when families did not feel comfortable initiating questions, such informal pathways were less likely to occur.

4.4 Partial Alignment With Multicultural Families’ Needs

Findings indicate that while the library effectively supported certain aspects of multicultural families’ educational needs, particularly English literacy and socialization, while other needs, especially heritage language maintenance and in-depth cultural learning were only partially addressed.

Three related patterns were identified: strong support for English literacy development and peer socialization, limited institutional support for heritage language maintenance, and a form of cultural learning that emphasized representation over in-depth cultural engagement.

4.4.1 Support for English Literacy and Socialization

Parents consistently described English-language resources and programs as valuable support for their children's learning. One parent highlighted the usefulness of leveled readers, stating, "there are leveled English readers, which makes it easier for learning" (Parent 1). For families who do not speak English as a first language, these resources were seen as particularly helpful: "after all, we're not English speakers, so it's definitely helpful for us" (Parent 1).

Parents also emphasized the importance of the library as a social space. Programs such as story time and play sessions provided opportunities for children to interact with peers and develop social skills. These experiences were described as especially important for families with limited access to other community spaces.

Staff participants similarly emphasized early literacy and social development as core goals of children's programming, reinforcing parents' perceptions that the library played a meaningful role in supporting children's integration into English-speaking educational and social environments.

4.4.2 Limited Support for Heritage Language Maintenance

In contrast, parents described limited institutional support for maintaining heritage languages. One parent explained that the scarcity of Chinese-language books directly affected language development: "there are very few Chinese books, so most of what we read is in English" (Parent 2). As a result, parents reported that children's

English skills often became stronger than their heritage language abilities. One parent observed, “English is much stronger than Chinese” (Parent 2).

Parents linked this imbalance to resource availability, noting that increased access could improve outcomes: “if there were more resources to support it, their Chinese would definitely be better” (Parent 2). Another parent emphasized the central role of language in cultural transmission, stating, “unless it’s written in Chinese, you really have to read Chinese materials” (Parent 1).

Because of these limitations, families relied heavily on home-based strategies and external resources, often at additional cost or effort. While staff participants acknowledged the value of heritage-language resources, they described such support as supplementary rather than comprehensive within the current institutional framework.

4.4.3 Cultural Learning Through Representation Rather than Depth

Findings also suggest that cultural learning opportunities within the library were primarily experienced through representational elements rather than sustained or in-depth cultural engagement. Parents and staff noted that the presence of culturally themed books, displays, or occasional programs that referenced different cultures, often presented in English and designed for broad audiences.

Parents generally appreciated seeing diverse characters and cultural references but noted limitations in depth. One parent commented, “it’s nice to see different cultures in books, but it doesn’t really teach my child about our own traditions or language” (Parent 3).

Staff participants similarly described cultural programming as occasional and event-based, rather than ongoing or embedded within regular programming structures. Cultural elements were often incorporated through themed activities or story

selections, rather than through sustained partnerships or language-specific programming. As a result, cultural learning was experienced as introductory rather than deeply embedded within the library's regular offerings.

4.5 Structural Gaps Between Institutional Intentions and Community Needs

This section focuses on participants' perceptions of gaps between institutional intentions and community needs, as expressed in interviews and observations. Findings indicate that participants perceived several structural gaps between the library's stated intentions to serve diverse communities and the lived experiences of multicultural families using the Thunder Bay Public Library. Staff expressed commitment to inclusivity and community service; however, both parents and staff described institutional conditions that limited the extent to which multicultural educational needs could be fully addressed in practice.

Three interrelated patterns emerged from the data: persistent resource constraints, institutional caution and risk aversion in multicultural programming, and a mismatch between multicultural families' expectations and dominant library service models.

4.5.1 Resource Constraints as Persistent Limiting Factors

Staff participants consistently identified resource constraints as a central factor shaping the scope of multicultural educational resources and programming. Limitations related to budget, physical space, staffing capacity, and time were frequently cited as ongoing challenges that affected collection development, program planning, and outreach efforts.

Staff members described difficulties expanding multilingual collections due to the costs associated with acquiring, cataloging, and maintaining materials in multiple

languages. One staff participant explained, “We only have so much space and budget, so we have to make choices. Multilingual materials are important, but they’re also expensive and harder to maintain” (Staff 2). Space constraints within the branch further limited the ability to increase the physical footprint of specialized collections.

Parents indirectly experienced these constraints through limited availability of materials and programming. While parents did not typically frame these issues in institutional terms, they described outcomes consistent with staff accounts, such as small collections and infrequent cultural programming. One parent noted, “It feels like the library wants to support everyone, but there just isn’t enough there for families like us” (Parent 1).

4.5.2 Institutional Caution and Risk Aversion in Multicultural Programming

Another theme that emerged from the findings was institutional restraint in the planning and implementation of multicultural programming. Staff participants described uncertainty about developing programs that reflected cultural contexts beyond their own experiences, often referencing concerns about cultural accuracy, appropriateness, and potential misrepresentation.

One staff participant explained this hesitation by stating, “A lot of us are worried about getting things wrong. If it’s not your own culture, you have to be very careful, and sometimes that makes people hesitant to try” (Staff 1). This caution was further shaped by organizational structures. Both staff participants noted that programming proposals often required multiple levels of approval and needed to align with standardized institutional expectations.

As a result, multicultural programming was often described as sporadic or event-based rather than sustained or embedded within core programming. Parents observed that cultural activities tended to occur sporadically. One parent noted,

“Sometimes there are cultural events, but they’re not regular. You don’t really know when they’ll happen again” (Parent 3).

4.5.3 Mismatch Between Family Expectations and Dominant Library Models

Findings also revealed a mismatch between multicultural families’ expectations and the dominant models through which library services were delivered. Parents described valuing the library as a safe, welcoming space for children’s learning and social interaction, while also expressing expectations for more robust cultural and linguistic support than was currently available.

Some parents viewed the library as a potential site for heritage language learning, cultural transmission, and community connection. One parent explained, “I hoped the library could help my child keep our language and culture, not just learn English” (Parent 2). When these expectations were unmet, families often adjusted their use of the library, focusing on socialization or English-language resources while seeking cultural and linguistic supports elsewhere.

Staff participants acknowledged these differing expectations, noting that library services were historically structured around broad, general-purpose programming intended to serve wide audiences. One staff member stated, “Our programs are designed to work for as many people as possible, but that doesn’t always mean they meet very specific cultural needs” (Staff 2).

These findings highlight how structural constraints, institutional practices, and differing expectations contributed to gaps between the library’s intentions to support diverse communities and the experiences of multicultural families accessing educational resources at the researched branch.

4.6 The Library as a Potential but Underrealized Multicultural Third Space

Findings suggest that participants perceived the researched branch as a space with significant potential to function as a multicultural “third space”, while also describing limitations that prevented this potential from being fully realized. Both parents and staff emphasized the library’s role as a shared, non-commercial public space that supported social interaction, informal learning, and a sense of belonging. At the same time, participants identified missed opportunities for deeper community engagement and collaboration.

Two related patterns were identified: the library as a site of social connection and belonging, and unrealized possibilities for community co-creation and partnership.

4.6.1 Libraries as Sites of Social Connection and Belonging

Parents frequently described the library as one of the few accessible public spaces where their children could spend time with peers in safe and welcoming environments. Regular visits to the library were associated with opportunities for children to interact with others, build friendships, and develop comfort in shared public settings.

One parent described the library as “a place where my child feels comfortable and happy, even without a program happening” (Parent 1). For some families, the library functioned as an informal gathering place where parents could observe and learn from other caregivers, exchange information, and gradually develop a sense of familiarity with the local community.

Staff participants similarly emphasized the library’s role as a space where families from diverse backgrounds encountered one another through programs, play areas, and shared use of resources. As one staff member noted, “people come here

when they don't need a book. They come to be around others" (Staff 2). These highlighted the library's function as a social space that extended beyond its role as a provider of books and programs.

4.6.2 Missed Opportunities for Community Co-creation and Partnership

Alongside these positive perceptions, findings also indicate that opportunities for community co-creation and partnership were limited. Parents and staff described few sustained mechanisms through which multicultural families could actively contribute to program design, cultural activities, or resource development within the library.

One parent expressed interest in greater involvement but uncertainty about how to contribute, stating, "I would love to help share our culture or language, but I don't know who to talk to or how to start something here" (Parent 3). Staff participants similarly described challenges sustaining partnerships due to time and capacity constraints. As another staff member explained, "Partners are possible, but they take a lot of coordination, and we don't always have the resources to keep them going long-term" (Staff 1). As a result, collaborations with multicultural families tended to be episodic rather than ongoing. Families were welcomed as users of library spaces and services; however, their roles as potential co-creators of cultural programming were less clearly supported.

Overall, participants widely perceived the researched branched as a welcoming and socially meaningful space with the potential to support multicultural belonging. However, participants described limited opportunities for sustained community participation and collaborative cultural engagement, which they associated with constraints resulting from limited staff capacity and institutional resources.

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings from interviews with multicultural parents and library staff, as well as observations conducted at the researched branch of the Thunder Bay Public Libraries. The analysis identified several recurring patterns related to the availability, organization, and perceived relevance of multicultural educational resources.

Overall, the findings indicate that the library provides meaningful support for English literacy development and social interaction; however, multicultural families encounter limitations in accessing heritage language materials and culturally specific resources. Institutional factors, including resource constraints, organizational structures, and standardized programming models, further shape how multicultural educational resources are made available and promoted.

These findings highlight both the strengths of the library as a welcoming public space and the structural conditions that influence its ability to meet the diverse educational needs of multicultural families. The following chapter discusses these findings in relation to the existing literature and the study's theoretical framework.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to the policy, theoretical, and empirical literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Drawing on frameworks of multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, heritage language development, cultural learning, and the evolving role of public libraries as community learning spaces, this chapter examines how multicultural educational

resources at the researched library branch are shaped, accessed, and experienced by multicultural families.

5.2 Availability and Visibility of Multicultural Resources

The findings regarding the limited and uneven availability of multicultural educational resources at the researched branch reflect challenges widely documented in the literature on multicultural collection development in public libraries. Effective multicultural collections require systematic planning, sustained investment, and a deep understanding of local community language needs (Hill, 2018; IFLA, 2011). However, as Hill (2018) notes, smaller communities often struggle to move beyond minimal or symbolic representation because of structural constraints rather than a lack of institutional commitment.

The experiences reported by both parents and library staff suggest that multicultural collections at the researched branch remain fragmented, with small quantities of materials in select languages and limited age-appropriate options for children. This pattern aligns with Johnson's (2018) observation that libraries in smaller communities frequently face difficulties maintaining diverse collections because of restricted budgets, limited vendor access, and challenges in assessing cultural authenticity. The findings therefore reflect a broader structural condition in which multicultural resource provision is shaped by systemic limitations rather than isolated institutional failure.

In addition to availability, the limited visibility of existing multicultural resources further constrains access. Findings from Chapter 4 reveal that multilingual materials at the branch are often poorly labeled or inconsistently organized within the physical space, making them difficult to locate without staff assistance. Several

parents reported being unaware that heritage language materials existed at all, suggesting that visibility constitutes a meaningful barrier. Recent research similarly highlights that discoverability and visibility remain key barriers to equitable access in multilingual and multicultural library services, particularly for newcomer communities navigating unfamiliar institutional systems (Wang et al., 2020).

The findings suggest that scarcity and low visibility have become normalized operational conditions within the branch's everyday practice, treated as fixed constraints rather than problems to be addressed. This normalization stands in contrast to the inclusive aspirations outlined in multicultural library literature, revealing a gap between theoretical ideals and everyday institutional practice.

5.3 Promotion, Mediation, and Institutional Power in Public Libraries

The findings related to promotion and awareness of multicultural educational resources highlight the role of institutional structures in shaping how information circulates within public libraries. As discussed in Chapter 2, effective multicultural service requires proactive outreach and relationship-building rather than passive resource availability (Hosley et al., 2003). More recent studies continue to emphasize that community engagement and culturally responsive outreach are central to equitable access in public library services, particularly for diverse populations (Grossman et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2020).

However, the evidence gathered in Chapter 4 suggests that at the researched branch, promotional practices are embedded within centralized decision-making processes that constrain both the visibility of multicultural resources and the degree of agency available to frontline staff, thereby limiting staff's ability to actively support access and engagement. This section examines the implications of that structure,

arguing that it transfers responsibility for inclusion from institutional systems to individual practitioners in ways that are neither equitable nor sustainable, as access becomes dependent on individual staff initiative rather than consistent institutional support.

5.3.1 Centralized Decision-making and Constrained Frontline Agency

The literature on community accessibility emphasizes that awareness of services is not automatically generated through availability alone, but requires intentional, context-sensitive mediation (Best Start Resource Centre, 2010).

Yet as staff interviews documented in Chapter 4 indicate, decisions related to signage, promotional materials, and outward-facing communication at the researched branch are controlled at the system level, with frontline staff having limited authority to adapt their practices to local circumstances. Specifically, staff described approval processes for any branch-level signage, constraints on social media use, and an absence of formal multilingual outreach, structural arrangements that reflect a priority for consistency and organizational coherence over locally responsive engagement.

This pattern reflects broader institutional dynamics identified in previous research, where centralized control over messaging can inadvertently constrain localized responsiveness (Hosley et al., 2003). While system-level consistency has clear administrative benefits, it distances decision-making from the everyday interactions through which families, particularly newcomers and those with limited English proficiency, engage with library spaces. As a result, promotional strategies are unlikely to reflect the lived language needs and cultural realities of diverse community members. The Best Start Resources Centre (2010) has similarly observed that effective access for newcomer and multicultural families often depends on

flexible, relationship-based approaches rather than standardized communication strategies alone.

5.3.2 Staff as Informal Cultural Brokers and the Limits of Reliance on Individuals

Despite these structural constraints, findings from Chapter 4 indicate that frontline staff often play a critical role as informal cultural brokers, mediating access to multicultural resources through personal interactions, explanations, and recommendations. Hosley et al. (2003) emphasize that trust-based relationship between institutions and community members are essential for effective multicultural service, particularly when families face language barriers or unfamiliarity with institutional norms. In this study, staff-mediated pathways frequently compensated for gaps in formal promotion and signage, particularly by improving the visibility of available resources and supporting families in navigating the library system to locate relevant materials. Several parents interviewed in Chapter 4 reported discovering relevant resources only after direct conversation with a staff member, underscoring the extent to which staff-mediated pathways currently serve as a partial substitute for formal systems of promotion.

However, reliance on individual staff members as primary mediators raises important concerns regarding sustainability and equity. As the literature suggests, informal mediation can be highly effective but also uneven, depending on staff availability, experience, confidence, and cultural awareness (Best Start Resources Centre, 2010). Recent empirical research supports this concern. Grossman et al. (2023) surveyed public librarians across multiple U.S. states and found that professional training related to serving multicultural populations was limited, and that libraries were perceived as insufficiently equipped to meet the needs of these

communities. These findings suggest that without structured institutional support, culturally responsive service delivery remains inconsistent and dependent on individual initiative rather than organizational provision.

The findings from this study reinforce this concern. Well-intentioned staff efforts coexist with institutional arrangements that limit their broader impact, and the absence of formalized cultural brokering roles means that the quality of multicultural service delivery varies considerably depending on individual capacity. When access to information depends on who happens to be on duty, or on whether a family feels comfortable initiating conversation, equitable access becomes contingent rather than guaranteed. Addressing this tension requires more than greater staff awareness; it calls for institutional changes that embed culturally responsive outreach within formal policy and practice, ensuring that inclusion is a structural commitment rather than an individual responsibility.

5.4 Alignment and Misalignment with Multicultural Families' Needs

The findings suggest that multicultural educational resources and services at the researched branch demonstrate partial alignment with the educational and cultural learning needs of multicultural families. Building on the structural analysis in Sections 5.2 and 5.3, this section examines where that alignment holds and where it breaks down. When assessed through theoretical frameworks of bilingual development, acculturation, and cultural learning, the data reveal meaningful support for English literacy and social integration alongside significant gaps in heritage language maintenance, cultural continuity, and the depth of cultural learning opportunities.

As discussed in Chapter 2, multicultural education is most effective when it supports both engagement with the dominant culture and the maintenance of heritage identities (Berry, 2005; Cummins, 1986). Recent research further supports this dual emphasis, highlighting that public libraries play an important role in supporting both language development and social integration among multicultural families (Delgado, 2024). The findings indicate that the library contributes meaningfully to certain dimensions of this process, particularly social participation and English-language exposure; however, its current practices do not fully reflect the balanced, integrative approach advocated in the literature.

5.4.1 English Literacy and Social Integration as Dominant Success Narratives

The strongest area of alignment between library services and multicultural families' needs lies in the promotion of English literacy and social integration. Findings from Chapter 4 indicate that library programs and spaces effectively support children's exposure to English-language materials and facilitate opportunities for social interaction with peers from diverse backgrounds. Parents described the library as a welcoming space that supports informal English practice and cross-cultural friendships, both of which contribute to social interaction, and community belonging (Bialystok, 2001).

From an acculturation perspective, this focus reflects an integration-oriented approach in which families are supported in developing competencies within the dominant language and culture (Berry, 2005). Such support is associated with positive academic and psychological outcomes, particularly when children have opportunities to build social networks and participate in shared community spaces. The library's contribution here is genuine and should not be understated.

However, the strong emphasis on English literacy and social interaction as key indicators of success reflects a broader institutional tendency to equate integration with proficiency in the dominant language. This emphasis is supported by research on the cognitive and social benefits of early English exposure (Bialystok, 2001); however, it may narrow the scope of multicultural education by privileging dominant-language outcomes over more holistic forms of bilingual development and cultural learning. Weisleder et al. (2024) argue that supporting multilingualism in immigrant children requires a broader cultural shift away from English-only standards, one that recognizes communicative competencies across languages as equally legitimate developmental outcomes. From this perspective, an institutional focus on English literacy, while valuable, risks reproducing assimilationist pressures when it is not accompanied by parallel support for heritage language development.

5.4.2 Heritage Language Maintenance and Cultural Continuity as Unmet Needs

In contrast to the strong support for English literacy, findings indicate limited alignment with families' aspirations for heritage language maintenance and cultural continuity. As outlined in Chapter 2, extensive research demonstrates that maintaining a first or heritage language supports cognitive development, facilitates additional language learning, and contributes to stronger cultural identity and intergenerational connection (Cummins, 1986). From this perspective, the limited availability of heritage language materials and culturally specific programming at the researched branch represents a significant gap between theory and practice.

Parents interviewed for this study expressed interest in supporting children's heritage languages and cultural backgrounds through library resources yet reported encountering few materials relevant to this goal. This imbalance has important implications for acculturation outcomes. Berry's (2005) model suggests that

integration, rather than assimilation, yields the most positive developmental outcomes, because it allows individuals to maintain cultural continuity while participating in the broader society. When institutional support for heritage language maintenance is minimal, families may experience pressure toward assimilation, even when their preferences align more closely with integrative or bicultural pathways.

5.4.3 Representation Versus Depth: Symbolic Inclusion and Its Limits

Beyond language, the findings point to a broader pattern of cultural inclusion that emphasizes representation over depth. Multicultural resources and programs, when present, tend to take the form of occasional thematic activities or surface-level cultural markers rather than sustained, in-depth engagement with cultural knowledge, histories, and practices. While such representation can introduce children to cultural diversity, it does not fully align with theoretical models of multicultural education that emphasize critical engagement and meaningful cultural understanding (Gay, 2000).

Phinney and Ong (2007) suggest that structured opportunities for cultural exploration and affirmation support the development of a positive ethnic identity. More recent research similarly highlights the significance of meaningful cultural connection in library context. Shuva (2024) found that immigrant library users specifically valued multilingual collections and culturally relevant programming because these resources helped them feel connected to their heritage language and culture in ways that supported emotional well-being and a sense of belonging. In this study, however, the findings point to some limitations to what the library currently provides for cultural learning and exploration. In this sense, symbolic inclusion operates at the level of recognition rather than deeper engagement, acknowledging diverse cultural backgrounds while offering limited support for families to explore and sustain them in meaningful ways.

What deeper engagement might look like in practice is suggested by the literature: culturally specific programming developed in partnership with community members, sustained heritage language story times, curated bilingual collections organized by language and age, and community-led cultural workshops. The gap between this possibility and current provision helps explain why multicultural families experience only partial alignment with library services, benefiting from social inclusion and English-language support, while finding limited resources to affirm and sustain their cultural and linguistic identities as they raise their children within a new cultural context.

5.5 The Public Library as a Multicultural Third Space

The concept of the public library as a “third space” provides a valuable interpretive lens for the findings of this study. As discussed in Chapter 2, third spaces are neither home nor school but function as neutral, accessible environments that support informal learning, social interaction, and community connection (Oldenburg, 1989). In multicultural contexts, such spaces hold potential to facilitate cross-cultural engagement, language development, and a sense of belonging for children and families navigating multiple cultural worlds. This perspective has been further expanded by Aabø et al. (2021), who emphasize the role of public libraries as inclusive community hubs that support social connection and informal learning in increasingly diverse societies.

The findings suggest that the researched branch demonstrates several characteristics consistent with the third space concept, particularly in its role as a welcoming site for social interaction and informal learning. However, when examined through multicultural education and acculturation frameworks, this potential remains

only partially realized for multicultural families. Structural constraints, limited cultural depth, and uneven mediation restrict the library's ability to function as a fully inclusive multicultural third space.

5.5.1 Libraries as Social and Cultural Meeting Spaces

Consistent with the literature, the findings indicate that the public library serves as an important social meeting space where children and families from diverse backgrounds can interact in low-pressure, non-institutionalized ways. Oldenburg (1982) emphasizes that successful third spaces are characterized by accessibility, neutrality, and opportunities for spontaneous social interaction. These features were evident in how families used the library as a place for children to play, read, and socialize alongside peers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

From an educational perspective, such informal encounters are significant. Research suggests that social interaction in shared community spaces supports language development, peer learning, and social integration, particularly for children acquiring a new language (Bialystok, 2001). The library's open, child-centered environment thus aligns with theories that highlight the role of informal learning contexts in fostering cognitive and social development. As parents reported in Chapter 4, the library is often one of the few spaces where their children interact regularly with other children outside of school, which is a function that carries particular value for newly arrived families still building local social networks.

In addition, the library functions as a point of connection not only for children but also for parents. Opportunities for casual interaction among caregivers can facilitate information-sharing, social support, and community connection, which are particularly valuable for newcomer and multicultural families. In this sense, the library operates as a space where social belonging is enacted through everyday

practices rather than formal programming, reflecting the inclusive potential described in third space literature (Elmborg, 2011).

5.5.2 Why the Third Space Remains Underrealized for Multicultural Families

Despite these strengths, the findings indicate that the library's role as a multicultural third space remains underrealized. As discussed in previous sections, the dominance of English-language resources, limited heritage-language support, and surface-level cultural representation constrain the depth of cultural engagement available to multicultural families. Roessingh's (2011) work, introduced in Chapter 2, suggests that third-space approaches can be strengthened when learners' linguistic and cultural resources are meaningfully recognized in learning activities.

From an acculturation standpoint, Berry's (2005) framework suggests that optimal outcomes occur when individuals are supported in maintaining their heritage culture while engaging with the dominant society. While the library provides opportunities for social participation, the limited support for heritage language maintenance and sustained cultural learning shifts the balance toward dominant-culture integration rather than fuller bicultural engagement.

Furthermore, the underrealization of the space is reinforced by institutional structures discussed earlier in this chapter. Centralized decision-making, constrained frontline agency, and reliance on informal staff mediation limit the library's capacity to respond dynamically to community cultural knowledge and to co-create programming with families. As Elmborg (2011) argues, third spaces require not only physical openness but also institutional willingness to share authority and recognize community members as contributors rather than passive users.

These factors suggest that while the library possesses many foundational qualities of a third space, its multicultural potential is constrained by structural,

linguistic, and institutional factors. The findings therefore position the public library not as a failed third space, but as a space with significant unrealized capacity to support deeper cultural continuity, bilingual development, and reciprocal community engagement for multicultural families.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Implications

6.1 Overview of the Study

This study examined the availability, accessibility, and perceived usefulness of multicultural educational resources at one branch of Thunder Bay Public Libraries, with particular attention to how these resources were perceived and experienced by multicultural families with young children. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with parents and library staff, as well as field observations, the study explored both institutional practices and lived experiences to identify areas of alignment and tension between library intentions and community needs.

Guided by qualitative thematic analysis, the research addressed four key questions: the types of multicultural educational resources available at the library, how awareness and access to these resources are promoted, the extent to which resources align with multicultural families' educational and cultural learning needs, and the gaps that exist between institutional goals and community expectations.

6.2 Summary of Key Findings

The findings indicate that while the library provides a welcoming environment and plays an important role in supporting English literacy and social interaction, multicultural educational resources remain limited in scope, visibility, and depth. Multicultural collections were unevenly distributed, often small in scale, and

concentrated in a limited number of languages, with few age-appropriate materials available for children.

Access to existing resources was further shaped by institutional structures, including centralized decision-making, limited promotional strategies, and inconsistent signage. As a result, awareness of multicultural resources often depended on informal interactions with staff rather than systematic outreach or clearly communicated pathways.

The study also found partial alignment between library services and multicultural families' needs. While families valued opportunities for socialization and English language development, support for heritage language maintenance and deeper cultural learning was limited. Cultural representation was often symbolic rather than sustained, reflecting broader institutional constraints rather than a lack of interest or commitment.

Finally, the findings suggest that the library holds significant potential as a multicultural third space, offering opportunities for social connection and informal learning. However, this potential remains underrealized due to structural limitations, cautious programming practices, and limited mechanisms for community co-creation. These findings point to several important implications for public practice, particularly in the areas of resource development, programming, and institutional support.

6.3 Implications for Public Library Practice

The findings of this study suggest several potential implications for public library practices in multicultural contexts. These implications should be interpreted as context-dependent considerations rather than prescriptive recommendations. Drawing on the patterns identified in the data, the following sections discuss implications

related to resource development and visibility, programming and community partnerships, and staff training alongside institutional support. These implications are consistent with recent discussions in library and information science, which emphasize the evolving role of public libraries as inclusive and community-responsive social infrastructures in increasingly diverse societies (Rivano Eckerdal et al., 2024).

6.3.1 Implications for Resource Development and Visibility

The findings of this study suggest that public libraries serving increasingly diverse communities need to move beyond minimal or symbolic multicultural collections toward more intentional and responsive resource development strategies. While budgetary and logistical constraints are well documented challenges for smaller and mid-sized libraries, limited availability and low visibility of multicultural educational resources may unintentionally reinforce inequitable access for multicultural families.

One implication for practice is the need for strategic prioritization rather than expansive collection growth. Given the uneven distribution of languages and limited availability of children's materials identified in this study, libraries may consider focusing on depth over breadth by developing more robust collection in a limited number of community-relevant languages, particularly for children. Such an approach aligns with principles of multicultural and inclusive library service, which emphasize responsiveness to local demographic realities and community-specific needs rather than generalized diversity goals (Trembach, 2022). Regular assessment of community language needs, even through informal consultation or usage data, may help libraries allocate resources more effectively within existing constraints, as previous research

highlights the importance of understanding community-specific information needs and providing responsive library services (Wang et al., 2020).

Visibility is equally critical to equitable access. The findings suggest that multilingual resources may remain underutilized when they are inconsistently labeled or poorly integrated into library spaces. As a result, libraries may benefit from implementing clearer signage, consistent categorization, and visual cues that make multicultural materials more easily discoverable without staff mediation. Improving visibility does not necessarily require significant financial investment, but rather intentional design choices that signal inclusion and invite independent exploration by families unfamiliar with library systems.

6.3.2 Implications for Programming and Community Partnerships

Beyond collections, the findings point to the importance of culturally responsive programming as a key area for institutional development. While libraries may offer inclusive, English-language programs that support socialization and literacy, the limited presence of culturally specific or community-informed programming suggests missed opportunities to support heritage language maintenance and deeper cultural learning. This observation is grounded in parent perspectives gathered during interviews, which consistently highlighted concerns about limited access to heritage language materials, as well as the absence of sustained culturally specific programming observed across the study period.

One implication for practice is the potential value of community co-creation in program design. Rather than positioning the library as the sole provider of cultural knowledge, libraries may consider partnering with community members, cultural organizations, or parent groups to co-design and facilitate culturally relevant programs. Such partnerships can enhance cultural authenticity, reduce institutional

risk, and distribute responsibility for programming in ways that are more sustainable within constrained budgets.

Additionally, programming does not need to be frequent or extensive to be meaningful. Even a small number of well-designed, recurring cultural events or workshops can signal institutional commitment and provide continuity for families seeking cultural affirmation. Aligning programming with community calendars and cultural celebrations may further enhance relevance and participation, particularly when strategies are adapted to the communication practices of multicultural communities.

6.3.3 Implications for Staff Training and Institutional Support

The findings underscore the central role of library staff in mediating access to multicultural educational resources, often serving as informal cultural brokers for families navigating language barriers and unfamiliar institutional systems. While individual staff initiative contributes significantly to inclusive practice, reliance on informal mediation alone raises concerns regarding sustainability and equity.

An important implication for practice is the need for institutional support structures that recognize and strengthen staff capacity for culturally responsive service. This may include professional development opportunities focused on cultural awareness, communication across language differences, and understanding the educational significance of heritage language maintenance and cultural learning. Even modest training initiatives can help staff feel more confident and supported in their interactions with multicultural families.

At the institutional level, clearer guidelines and shared responsibility for multicultural service provision may reduce the burden placed on individual staff members. When culturally responsive practices are embedded within organizational

policies and workflows, access becomes less dependent on personal initiatives and more consistently available to all users. This shift also aligns with broader equity goals by framing multicultural inclusion as a collective institutional commitment rather than an individual responsibility.

6.4 Contributions of the Study

This study contributes to the literature on multicultural education and public library services in several ways. First, it extends existing research by examining multicultural educational resource provision in a mid-sized Canadian city, a context that remains underrepresented in library and education scholarship. By focusing on Thunder Bay, the study highlights how demographic change intersects with institutional capacity in smaller communities, offering insights that are often absent from research concentrated in large urban centres.

Second, the study offers a comparative perspective by incorporating both parent and library staff voices. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how institutional intentions translate into everyday experiences, revealing points of alignment as well as mismatch.

Third, the findings underscore the importance of visibility, mediation, and institutional structure in shaping access to multicultural educational resources. Rather than framing challenges solely as issues of collection size or funding, the study illustrates how organizational practices and decision-making processes influence equity and inclusion in subtle but meaningful ways.

6.5 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The small number of participants and the focus on a single library branch limit the transferability of the findings to other contexts. The experiences documented in this study reflect specific institutional and community contexts and may not fully represent practices across other library branches or cities. Furthermore, the small sample size may have constrained the diversity of perspectives captured, potentially underrepresenting families from smaller or less visible linguistic communities who may face distinct barriers to access.

Additionally, the study relied on self-reported experiences and observations within a defined time frame. Perspectives may vary across seasons, staffing changes, or shifts in library policy. The single-site focus, while enabling depth of inquiry, means that branch-specific characteristics, such as staffing arrangements, spatial design, or community demographics, may have shaped the findings in ways that limit their generalizability.

The study also relied on adult perspectives, as interview data were collected from parents and library staff, and children's voices were not directly included. As a result, the findings reflect adult interpretations of children's experiences rather than children's own perspectives.

Finally, the researcher's positionality should be acknowledged. As an international student and parent who regularly used library services, the researcher's experiences and cultural background may influenced data interpretation. While reflexive practice was employed to enhance analytical rigor, this positionality may nonetheless have shaped the framing of themes and the interpretation of participants' accounts.

Despite these limitations, the depth of qualitative data provides valuable insight into how multicultural educational resources are experienced and interpreted in practice.

6.6 Directions for Future Research

Future research could build on this study by examining multicultural educational resource provision across multiple library branches or cities to allow for comparative analysis. Longitudinal studies may also help capture how institutional practices evolve in response to demographic change and policy initiatives.

Further research could explore children's perspectives directly, offering insight into how young library users experience cultural representation, language resources, and programming. In addition, studies focusing on community-led initiatives may provide practical models for collaborative approaches to multicultural education in public institutions.

6.7 Final Reflections

Public libraries occupy a unique position at the intersection of education, community, and culture. This study demonstrates that meaningful multicultural service extends beyond the presence of diverse collections; it requires intentional attention to visibility, community voice, and institutional structures that embed equity into everyday practice rather than treating it as an add-on.

By centering both community experiences and staff perspectives, this research highlights the importance of moving beyond symbolic inclusion toward more sustained, equitable, and responsive approaches to multicultural educational service. As communities like Thunder Bay continue to diversify, public libraries will remain

vital spaces where inclusion, learning, and belonging can be actively cultivated. Realizing this vision will depend not only on the goodwill of individual staff members, but on the institutional intentionality that transforms aspiration into equitable, everyday access, particularly in rapidly diversifying smaller cities where libraries often serve as anchor institutions for newcomer families.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions – For library staff

1. What are the library's formal policies regarding multicultural resource acquisition and collection development?
2. How does the library prioritize multicultural materials within its overall budget allocation?
3. What strategic planning processes guide the expansion of multicultural resources?
4. How do you assess the effectiveness and usage of multicultural collections?
5. What criteria do you use for selecting culturally authentic and representative materials?
6. What challenges do you face in sourcing materials in diverse languages and formats?
7. How do you ensure cultural authenticity when selecting resources from cultures you may not be familiar with?
8. What role does community input play in your collection development decisions?
9. How does the library collaborate with cultural communities and organizations in collection development?
10. What mechanisms exist for community feedback on multicultural resource needs?
11. How do you identify gaps between what the library offers and what communities actually need?
12. What outreach strategies does the library use to promote multicultural resources?
13. What training do library staff receive regarding multicultural competency and resource management?
14. How do you support staff in helping diverse community members access appropriate resources?

Appendix B

Interview Questions – For Multicultural Parents

1. How long have you been living in Thunder Bay? How old is your child now?
2. What is your native language? What traditional culture do you hope your child will maintain?
3. Do you regularly take your child to Thunder Bay Public Library? How often do you visit?
4. What are your main purposes for visiting the library?
5. How long do you typically stay at the library? What activities do you mainly engage in?
6. Are you aware of what multicultural resources the library offers? Can you describe them specifically?
7. How did you learn about these resources? (Staff introduction, self-discovery, friend recommendation, etc.)
8. Have you ever proactively asked library staff about resources related to your native language or culture?
9. Can you easily find books and audiovisual materials in your native language?
10. Does the library have materials about your cultural background? How would you rate their quality and quantity?
11. Do you feel the existing multicultural resources meet your child's needs?
12. Have you encountered any difficulties when using these resources?
13. Have you participated in any multicultural events organized by the library? Do you find these activities helpful for you and your child? Why or why not?
14. What kind of cultural activities would you like the library to organize?
15. Has the library helped you connect with other families from your cultural

background?

16. What is the biggest challenge you face in helping your child maintain their heritage language and culture?
17. What do you see as the shortcomings of the library's current services?
18. What multicultural resources or services would you like the library to add?
19. What kind of support would you like the library to provide for children's bilingual learning?
20. Before coming to Thunder Bay, what expectations did you have about public library multicultural services?
21. How does the reality compare to your expectations?
22. Would you be willing to participate in the library's multicultural service improvement initiatives?

Appendix C

Library Observation Coding Sheet

Site: Thunder Bay Public Library

Observation Focus: Visibility, Educational resources, accessibility, institutional practices, and learning environment supporting multicultural families' bilingual literacy development, and cultural-educational relevance of multicultural resources.

Code Category	Sub-codes	Observation Notes
1. Resource Type and Format	1. Bilingual/Multilingual books and heritage language materials 2. Educational tools and multicultural learning aids 3. Interactive learning materials (games, worksheets, multimedia) 4. Parent-child engagement resources 5. Early literacy development materials	
2. Physical Location and Accessibility	1. Location within library space? 2. Child-friendly placement (eye-level, reachable)? 3. Age-appropriate organization (preschool section)?	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Is browsing encouraged (e.g., open bins)? 5. Clear categorization and labeling system? 	
3. Cultural Responsiveness and Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Authentic cultural representation? 2. Languages and cultures represented? 3. Cultural learning contexts (beyond holidays/events) 4. Community-specific cultural content? 	
4. Institutional Practices and Curation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evidence of collection development strategies 2. Staff curation and recommendation displays 3. Professional multicultural service materials 4. Community feedback integration indicators 5. Multilingual signage and service information 	
5. Learning Environment Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family interaction spaces 2. Quiet vs. interactive learning zones 	

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Community gathering areas 4. Cultural learning atmosphere creation 	
6. Multicultural Educational Programming	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Multicultural events notices and programming 2. Educational displays and exhibitions 3. Author/cultural celebration features 4. Bilingual literacy program materials 	
7. Barriers, Accessibility, and Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Physical barriers: height, location, organization issues 2. Linguistic barriers: English-only labeling, instruction 3. Cultural barriers: limited representation, relevance 4. Systemic barriers: policies, procedures, services gaps 5. Educational barriers: lack of learning support tools 	

Observation Protocol Notes**Ethical Considerations:**

1. Observations will be non-intrusive and conducted during public hours.
2. No individuals will be recorded or identified.
3. Field notes will focus only on space, signage, resources, layout, and institutional practices.

Data Collection Focus:

1. Document educational function of resources
2. Note institutional practices support multicultural families
3. Observe learning environment design for 3-6 years old
4. Record evidence of culturally responsive pedagogy

Appendix D

Information and Consent for Library Staff

Dear Library Staff Member:

You are being invited to take part in this research study about multicultural educational resources in Thunder Bay Public Libraries.

Before you decide whether you wish to take part in this project, please read this section carefully to understand what is involved.

PURPOSE

This study is research being conducted by Mengyue Jin as part of her master's thesis at Lakehead University under the supervision of Dr. Tanya Kaefer. We are examining how public libraries support multicultural families and their children's learning needs through educational resources.

WHAT INFORMATION WILL BE COLLECTED?

During the interview, you will be asked about your professional experiences regarding multicultural educational resources, your interactions with multicultural families, the library's role in supporting diverse communities, and suggestions for improving services. Your name and other identifying information will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.

WHAT IS REQUESTED OF ME AS A PARTICIPANT?

If you agree to participate, you will take part in one semi-structured interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will be conducted at a time and location convenient for you. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription. You are asked to share your professional experiences and perspectives honestly.

If you wish to participate, you are asked to ensure that you meet the requirements of the study, including being a current employee of Thunder Bay Public Library involved in daily interactions with library users or collection development.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?

Participation is completely voluntary. If you decide you would like to take part in the interview but change your mind, you can withdraw at any point. Your employment status will not be affected by your decision to participate or withdraw.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND BENEFITS?

This study has only minimal risk. The questions are about your professional experiences and may prompt reflection on institutional practices.

The primary benefit of participating in this study is the contribution to research that may improve library services for multicultural communities and benefit similar libraries across Canada.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE MAINTAINED?

Your privacy will be carefully protected. You will be assigned a pseudonym in all research materials. Any identifying information will be removed from transcripts.

Your employer will not be provided with individual responses.

WHAT WILL MY DATA BE USED FOR?

This study is part of work done towards a master's degree. It may also be presented at academic conferences and published in peer reviewed academic journals.

WHERE WILL MY DATA BE STORED?

During the period of analysis, data will be stored on password-protected devices and encrypted cloud storage. Once analysis is complete, all data is stored securely and maintained for a minimum of 7 years as required by Lakehead University policies.

HOW CAN I RECEIVE A COPY OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS?

If you wish to receive a copy of the results, you can contact the researcher and a summary of the findings will be sent to you when the study is complete.

WHAT IF I WANT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

You may withdraw at any time by contacting the researcher. If you withdraw before the interview, no data will be collected. If you withdraw after the interview but before analysis begins, your data can be destroyed. Once analysis has begun, complete removal may not be possible, though confidentiality will be maintained.

RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Mengyue Jin at mjin5@lakeheadu.ca.

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD REVIEW AND APPROVAL:

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sheena Beach at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8010 ext. 8933 or research.ethics@lakeheadu.ca.

Appendix E

Information and Consent for Multicultural Parents

Dear Parent/Guardian:

You are being invited to take part in this research study about how public libraries support multicultural families and children's learning.

Before you decide whether you wish to take part in this project, please read this section carefully to understand what is involved.

PURPOSE

This study is research being conducted by Mengyue Jin as part of her master's thesis at Lakehead University under the supervision of Dr. Tanya Kaefer. We are looking at how multicultural educational resources in Thunder Bay Public Libraries help children from diverse cultural backgrounds with their language learning and cultural identity development.

WHAT INFORMATION WILL BE COLLECTED?

During the interview, you will be asked about your family's experiences using library resources, how these resources support your child's learning, challenges you have faced, and suggestions for improvement. Your name, your child's name and other identifying information will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.

WHAT IS REQUESTED OF ME AS A PARTICIPANT?

If you agree to participate, you will take part in one interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will be conducted at a time and location convenient for you, including via video call if preferred. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription. You are asked to share your experiences honestly.

If you wish to participate you are asked to ensure that you meet the requirements of the study, including being a parent/guardian from a multicultural background with at least one child aged 3-6 years who uses Thunder Bay Public Library services and speaks a heritage language other than English.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?

Participation is completely voluntary. If you decide you would like to take part in the interview but change your mind, you can withdraw at any point. Your decision will not affect any library services you receive.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND BENEFITS?

This study has only minimal risk. The questions are about your experiences, and you may feel some discomfort discussing challenges you have faced.

The primary benefit of participating in this study is the contribution to research that may improve library services for multicultural families and help libraries better serve diverse communities.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE MAINTAINED?

Your privacy will be carefully protected. You will be assigned a pseudonym in all research materials. Any information that could identify you or your family will be removed from research documents.

WHAT WILL MY DATA BE USED FOR?

This study is part of work done towards a master's degree. It may also be presented at academic conferences and published in peer reviewed academic journals to help improve library services for multicultural families.

WHERE WILL MY DATA BE STORED?

During the period of analysis, data will be stored on password-protected devices and encrypted cloud storage. Once analysis is complete, all data is stored securely and maintained for a minimum of 7 years as required by Lakehead University policies.

HOW CAN I RECEIVE A COPY OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS?

If you wish to receive a copy of the results, you can contact the researcher and a summary of the findings will be sent to you when the study is complete.

WHAT IF I WANT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

You may withdraw at any time by contacting the researcher. If you withdraw before the interview, no data will be collected. If you withdraw after the interview but before analysis begins, your data can be destroyed. Once analysis has begun, complete removal may not be possible, though confidentiality will be maintained.

RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Mengyue Jin at mjin5@lakeheadu.ca.

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD REVIEW AND APPROVAL:

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sheena Beach at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8010 ext. 8933 or research.ethics@lakeheadu.ca.