SOCIOCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS

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Recent arrivals and refugees have less knowledge about Canada and a lower perception of their own ability to adjust than earlier arrivals and immigrants, respectively. However, language proficiency acts as an important leveling force in socio-cultural adjustment for these groups. It also trumps religion or ethno-racial origins.

Les nouveaux arrivants et les réfugiés ont moins de connaissances sur le Canada et une perception plus faible de leur propre capacité d'adaptation que les vagues antérieures d'immigrants et les immigrants en général, respectivement. Cependant, la maîtrise de la langue joue un rôle important dans l'ajustement socioculturel de ces groupes, plus que la religion ou les origines ethno-raciales.

Canada is a world leader in welcoming refugees and immigrants. Yet, Canadian media presents refugees as a "problem" and "undesirable" (Jackson and Bauder, 2013). Similarly, there is wider narratives that "good" refugees and immigrants should be allowed while "bad" ones should be barred from entering Canada altogether. The former groups are perceived to be better able to fit in while the latter is perceived to lack such ability. Kellie Leitch, a candidate in the last Canadian conservative leadership race, for example, suggested that Muslims should perform 'values' tests. They are portrayed as "bad" refugees and immigrants who are unable or unwilling to "fit in" and a threat to the core values of the majority. Evidence, however, shows that once refugees and immigrants develop language proficiency, they adapt to the Canadian sociocultural environment independent of their origins or religions, and concerns and worries are overblown.



Socio-cultural adjustment entails a set of knowledge and skills that enable individuals to negotiate various aspects of the new culture, manage everyday life, "fit in." and live successfully in the new environment. Some of these skills depend on newcomers' motivation, self-efficacy, and knowledge about the new society. Others are developed through contact

with the host society and through cross-cultural experiences and training. Still others are developed in the pre-immigration period in preparation for migration. For example, voluntary immigrants leave their country of birth to improve their quality of life. They are more motivated to integrate in the new society, and in anticipation of their migration they tend to imagine and simulate the new environment by shaping their own knowledge of how they are expected to behave. Accordingly, they prepare themselves for immigration by learning about the host's language, culture, institutions, resources, and services. Anticipatory preparation and positive expectation help with successful settlement and adaptation. On the other hand, forced migrants such as refugees who suddenly decide, or are forced, to immigrate do not have the time and resources to develop the necessary and appropriate expected socio-cultural skills in anticipation of migration. Refugees are different. They flee their own country due to sociopolitical upheavals, war, ethnic cleansing, violence, torture, and rape and experience significant traumatic physical and psychological suffering. These experiences and sudden interruptions of their life routine not only have profound effects on their physical and mental health and their continual struggle to deal with the grief of their past experiences and insecure future, but also prevent them from planning for, anticipating, and making preparation in a new society. Therefore, the difference between immigrants and refugees is fundamental to the speed of their adjustment and integration.

To examine the potential of immigrants and refugees to integrate into Canada, Table 1 presents their perceptions of their own knowledge about and ability for socio-cultural adjustment in Canada. Information is based on a sample of newcomers using services at the Windsor YMCA. These constructs are created by summing 5 Lickert scale questions for the knowledge index and 4 questions for efficacy index for scores ranging from 1 to 21 and t 1 to 17, respectively. The table shows that refugees scored lower than immigrants in both knowledge and efficacy scales. This difference suggests that not only do refugees have less knowledge about Canada, they also seem to have a lower perception of their own ability, which may prevent them from building up skills and knowledge and thus may become increasingly fearful and isolated. However, after five years in Canada, the differences between refugees and immigrants become negligible.

The Table also shows that the longer immigrants and refugees live in Canada, the more they are knowledgeable about Canadian culture and customs, are aware of opportunities to volunteer and to connect to social, community, and professional networks, and know about services and resources to assist with job searches. Similarly, the longer they are in Canada, the higher is their perception of their own efficacy. They are better able to deal with the emotional effects of moving to their new home, to make informed decisions, to plan and set goals for their settlement, and to access community facilities independently. Of interest is the fact that there is little increase in their knowledge and perception of their own abilities during the first three years of residency. The sudden change occurs after three years of residency. Three years seem to be the minimal amount of time needed for newcomers to master language of the majority and become familiar with its cultural environment.

TABLE 1: KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AND PERCEPTION OF EFFICACY TO ADJUST IN CANADA BY REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS

Years in Canada	Refugees				Immigrants			
	Knowledge	N	Efficacy	N	Knowledge	N	Efficacy	N
1	8.4	321	321	331	331	331	12.1	12.1
2	7.9	337	337	351	351	351	12.1	12.1
3	9.0	332	332	340	340	340	12.2	12.2
4	10.0	309	309	311	311	311	12.9	12.9
5	13.5	95	95	97	97	97	13.1	13.1
6+	13.7	245	245	251	251	251	13.8	13.8
Total	**9.8**	**1639**	**1639**	**1681**	**1681**	**1681**	**13.0**	**13.0**

Newcomers' ability to communicate in the language of the majority is crucial for improving knowledge about their new home, accessing resources and services, and becoming confident in their ability to negotiate their daily social encounters. Table 2 confirms these expectations. It shows that those who scored 4 or higher in the Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) have higher knowledge about Canada and feel more able to manage their life than those who scored CLB 3 or lower. This pattern applies to both immigrants and refugees, though on average refugees scored lower in their knowledge and efficacy than immigrants. Language proficiency seem to be an important levelling force. It helps offset the advantage of anticipatory immigration by the immigrant class newcomers.

TABLE 2: LANGUAGE AND NEWCOMERS' SOCIOCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT BY LENGTH OF RESIDENCY

	Less than Three Years			More than three Years		
	Low English Proficiency					
	Knowledge	Efficacy	N	Knowledge	Efficacy	N
Refugees	7.9	9.9	796	10.8	11.1	454
Immigrants	8.6	11.1	136	11.0	12.6	276
High English Proficiency						
Refugees	11.2	12.2	163	14.3	13.1	194
Immigrants	12.3	13.1	151	14.2	13.9	436

The importance of language proficiency for sociocultural adjustment is not specific to knowledge and the ability of any group of newcomers. Language proficiency often trumps religious beliefs and ethno-racial origins for both immigrants and refugees. Once mastered, most immigrant and refugees can adjust, integrate, and contribute to their adopted country. Table 3 reports differences in knowledge and efficacy of various groups of Windsorite refugees and immigrants. For every ethno-racial group, whether they are from Muslim or non-Muslim origin countries, those with higher language proficiency scored higher in knowledge and efficacy indices than those with lower language proficiency. Ethno-racial differences are larger among those with three or less years in Canada than those who lived in Canada for a longer period. Iraqis, Africans, Syrians, other Middle Easterners, and Latin Americans, more than other groups, benefited the most from higher English proficiency, particularly among recent arrivals.

There are also signs that individuals whose compatriots had settled in Canada earlier scored higher in these indices. For example, among those who have lived in Canada for three or less years, Lebanese immigrants scored higher than Iraqis or Syrians, the former having groups of earlier immigrants who settled in Canada in the early seventies while the latter as groups are among the more recent arrivals. This suggest that newcomers can also adjust better by benefiting from the support of their more established ethnic community.

Taken together, the data show that perceptions about being able to understand and cope in the new environment is an important ingredient for successful integration, and language proficiency speeds up this process significantly. The evidence suggests that successful adjustment and integration of newcomers requires attention to availability of, incentives for, exposure, and free access to Official Language schooling. It helps with development of cultural knowledge, confidence building, social skills, social connections, and access to social services. Language proficiency has also been shown to have negative effects on depression and positive effects on employability (Beiser and Hou, 2001). These benefits will easily compensate the cost of making language classes available and subsidizing newcomers during their attendance in these classes. If Canada aims to be successful in integrating its most recent waves of refugees and immigrants, investing in language pre- and post-arrival is well worth it.

REFERENCES

Beiser, M. and Hou, F. 2001. Language acquisition, unemployment and depressive disorder among Southeast Asian refugees: A 10-year study. *Social Science and Medicine* 53:1321-1334.

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TABLE 3: ETHNO-RACIAL ORIGINS, LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND SOCIOCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

	Low Language Proficiency				High Language Proficiency			
	Three Years and Less in Canada							
	Knowledge	N	Efficacy	N	Knowledge	N	Efficacy	N
Europe	13.9	18	12.9	18	14.1	26	14.0	26
Latin America	8.2	11	9.6	11	14.2	6	14.8	6
Africa	7.6	28	9.6	28	13.2	6	12.1	8
Asia	8.75	28	12.6	29	11.9	46	13.5	46
Lebanon	9.9	11	13.0	11	12.6	19	13.3	19
Iraq	5.6	12	10.3	14	13.1	9	13.8	9
Syria	5.8	10	12.2	10	10.6	5	12.8	5
Other Middle East	6.9	14	8.7	15	10.9	31	11.5	32
Total	**8.6**	**132**	**11.1**	**136**	**12.3**	**148**	**13.1**	**151**
Four Years and More in Canada								
Europe	12.3	16	11.6	16	15.1	34	14.6	34
Latin America	14.8	14	13.2	14	16.0	26	14.2	26
Africa	10.8	14	11.9	14	14.6	42	13.9	42
Asia	10.2	161	12.4	162	13.8	187	13.8	193
Lebanon	14.3	21	13.9	19	13.2	25	13.6	25
Iraq	11.8	18	12.9	18	14.4	18	13.5	18
Syria	10.0	8	12.8	8	14.2	10	13.1	11
Other Middle East	10.5	24	13.1	25	14.4	86	14.1	87
Total	**11.0**	**276**	**12.6**	**276**	**14.2**	**428**	**13.9**	**436**