



Best Practices for English as an Additional Language Programs

Investigating language instruction in small and mid-sized population centres

Background

Immigration to Canada has reached record highs in recent history and is recognized as a central part of Canada's social and economic future. Increasingly, newcomers, particularly refugees, are settling outside of the major urban centres of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver¹. Instead, immigrants are settling in smaller to mid-sized communities such as Peterborough. For many of these newcomers, access to English and/ or French is critical for economic and social integration.

IMMIGRANTS WITH A CANADIAN OFFICIAL LANGUAGE AS MOTHER TONGUE



Methodology

A literature review integrating academic and grey literature sources, such as newcomer centre reports and government census and program information. Key areas of research included gendered and racialized experiences of language learning, newcomer perspectives on language instruction programs, comparative methods of learning and program delivery. Thematic analysis resulted in the following themes:

- Barriers to instruction along gendered, cultural, and geographical lines
- Informal and formal methods of learning
- The influence of curricula

1. Statistics Canada. (2022). *Immigrants make up the largest share of the population in over 150 years and continue to shape who we are as Canadians* <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026a-eng.htm>

Findings: Barriers

a. Gender:

- Newcomer women often have less proficiency in English and less education experience prior to coming to Canada compared to men
- Most women require childcare services so they can access language classes

b. Cultural:

- The materials and instruction in language courses often imply assimilationist approaches to economic and social integration
- Identity formation is a complex part of the migration journey, and occurs throughout the settlement process, including during language instruction
- Cultural humility, acculturation theories, and recognition of justice approaches can promote true multiculturalism as valued diversity

c. Geographical:

- Most newcomer research is done on larger urban centres
- Newcomer services receive less government funding in mid-sized population centres
- Newcomers often report a lack of transportation services to access classes

Findings: Informal and Formal Language Learning

English language learning for newcomers falls under two types of programs, formal programs such as formal standardized classrooms with the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, and informal programs such as casual conversation groups or social events. Both types are often offered at newcomer centres in mid-sized population centres and have advantages as well as disadvantages.

Findings: Curriculum

The curriculum of language classes has a strong influence over the knowledge and opportunities presented to newcomers. As such, language instruction can be adapted to include employment preparation, community or workplace participation, and psychosocial support.

Recommendations

- Newcomer centres could provide free bus passes to newcomers to improve their access to classes in mid-sized population centres
- Service providers working with newcomers can include workplace safety expectations and worker rights in language instruction programs
- Engage newcomer's own language and identities during learning.
- Any workplace language placements or partnerships should ensure constant feedback and communication
- Organize programming during accessible times or in alternative formats

