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New Immigrants' barriers to participation in society and the economy¹

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the barriers that new immigrants face, in spite of their utilization of the services provided, to their participation and integration into society and the economy in order to better understand the events, factors, and difficulties that have an impact on their economic outcomes. Qualitative methodology and a grounded theory perspective were used to develop themes and patterns from their stories. An inclusive, multidimensional framework, including institutional, structural, situational, dispositional, informational, and self-determination factors for thinking about their participation and integration into society and the knowledge economy related to employment and education has emerged from this study. These components are different in substance and manifestation, inhibit and/or enhance their integration, and operate independently, and/or complementarily with one another for maximum positive and/or negative impact. However, structural factors for employment and education appear to have a mediating influence on all the other factors.

Résumé: Cet article, portant sur les barrières que les immigrants doivent surmonter dans leur participation et intégration sociale et économique, malgré les services mis à leur disposition, cherche à mieux comprendre les événements, les facteurs, et les difficultés qui ont un effet sur leurs conséquences économiques. On se sert de la méthodologie qualitative et de la perspective de la théorie fondée pour développer les thèmes et les motifs de leurs histoires. De cette recherche, surgit un cadre global et à dimensions multiples, comprenant les facteurs institutionnels, structurels, situationnels, informationnels, et d'autodétermination formant la base de leur participation et intégration dans la société et de leurs connaissances en économie ayant trait à leurs expériences pratiques et à leur formation. Ces composants sont différents en substance comme en manifestation. Ils peuvent entraver ou améliorer leur intégration et s'opèrent soit indépendamment ou de conserve avec les autres pour créer des effets positifs ou négatifs. Toutefois, les facteurs structurels à l'emploi et à la formation semblent avoir une influence médiatrice sur tous les autres facteurs

Introduction

Participation and integration of new immigrants into the knowledge-based economy and society is a critical policy issue for Canada. Those who face language, educational, cultural, and ethnic barriers are less likely to participate and succeed in the economy and society. Economic success and integration are so strongly correlated with credentials, language, and culture that governments

have developed programs and interventions to improve economic and social outcomes for new immigrants. Although efforts have been made to identify barriers to participation and integration in the economy and society, the impact of information technology on new immigrants is difficult to assess. This paper reports on research of new immigrants who used the services provided, and sheds light on the kinds of experiences that can form positive economic and other life outcomes.

Related Literature

There is a dearth of information on the links between new immigrants' barriers to participation and integration into the economy and society, and experiences with information technology. New immigrants are not only marginalized but also deskilled because of lack of Canadian work experience, discomfort with the language, non-recognition of their credentials and qualifications, and labor market conditions (Man, 2004). Although their general level of education is higher than Canadians, they have a lower participation rate in the labor market, higher unemployment, and underemployment than Canadian born (Gawronski, 2001; Man, 2004). This pattern occurs across all age, and gender groups (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Recent Immigrants in the Winnipeg Metro, 2003).

New immigrants form a major component of the Canadian economy because of the projected shortage of 950,000 workers in the Canadian labour force by 2010 (Greenall, & Loizides, 2001). The federal and provincial governments recently renewed a commitment to increase immigration in response to global changes such as declining birth rates, ageing workforce, and competition for skilled citizenry. While the social and human costs of lack of recognition of foreign credentials among new immigrants are difficult to quantify, the economic cost is estimated at \$4 and \$6 billion each year. Attracting and integrating new immigrants into the economy is paramount (Alboim & The Maytree Foundation, 2002; Bloom & Grant, 2001). The effects of these barriers are exacerbated because many new immigrants who enter Canada are uninformed and unaware of the networks and resources that are available to assist them during their integration into the labor market. Building technological skills and competencies is critical to develop capacity to meet skill and labor needs of the Canadian economy and economic self-sufficiency (Greenall & Loizides, 2001).

Information technology a foundation to access

In today's society, the effective and efficient use of and access to technology that provides the systematic application of knowledge, materials, tools, and skills to extend human capabilities will be important to new immigrants' integration into the economy. Technology incorporates not only the software and hardware but also the impact on processes, systems, society, and the way people think, perceive, and construct their world (Technology as a Foundation Skill Area: A journey Toward Information Technology Literacy). However, access to information technology, resources, and networks represents another

barrier to new immigrants maximizing their potential and contributing to Canadian prosperity. Although information technologies do not replace human interaction and experience in the real world, they permit task completion with speed, accuracy, and reliability; allow access and control of information; support self-directed, independent adult learners; facilitate economic and personal growth; and support contribution to society.

Implementation and utilization of information technology include an exploratory phase in which learners are exposed to and experience the software, hardware, networks, and resources; a skill development phase that focuses on the use of educational software, and skill acquisition; and an application and extension phase that provides application, consolidation, and extension of skills, knowledge, and abilities acquired in the earlier phases (Technology as a Foundation Skill Area: A journey Toward Information Technology Literacy). With an anticipated annual influx of 10,000 new immigrants into the local economy (Manitoba Immigration Facts, Statistics Report, 2002, p.3) beginning in 2004, understanding their barriers to participation and integration into the Canadian workforce will be a critical development policy (Manitoba Immigration Facts, Statistics Report 2002).

Barriers to Participation in the workforce

The Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) implemented in 2002 ties recruitment of new immigrants directly to a human capital model to ensure that immigration results in the greatest economic and social benefits for Canada through selection of skilled immigrants with higher educational credentials, knowledge of official languages, work experience, younger in age, arranged employment, and adaptability (Man, 2004). However, human capital from immigration is not being fully maximized because they continue to have difficulties accessing training and employment (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Recent Immigrants in the Winnipeg Metro, 2003; Hum & Simpson, 2003; Man, 2004).

Multiple factors influence participation and integration of new immigrants into society and the economy, have differential impact upon different groups according to individual and structural factors, and require many models to both understand and overcome their impact. Human capital, certification, and labor market segmentation models may help explain labor market discrepancies (Grayson, 1997; Hiebert, 1999; Sloane-Seale, Wallace & Levin, 2001). Assuming that the labor market is an equilibrium seeking mechanism, and employers make rational employment decisions based solely on educational qualifications, human capital increases with higher education qualifications because university graduates and graduates of certain fields earn more than high school graduates since they have the knowledge and skills (i.e., human capital) employers want. The certification model, in contrast, suggests that university graduates do not necessarily have more knowledge and skills than non-graduates but a university education bestows a positive status valued by employers independent of knowledge and skills achieved. The labor market

segmentation model may help explain employment and income discrepancies among certain groups because it posits that there is not one labor market in which everyone competes fairly on the basis of knowledge and skills. Rather, there are several restrictive markets defined by gender, class (annual parental family income), and ethno-racial origin. As a result, independent of knowledge and skills, groups such as women of color, Aboriginal peoples, and non-European immigrants may have difficulty finding jobs, and if they do, these may be low paying, menial, insecure positions. Thus, with respect to new immigrants, systemic racism, including gender, ethnicity, class, and citizenship as integral components of the practices, processes, and rationale for capitalism and imperialism continue to shape their employment and workforce outcomes (Brouwer, 1999; Gawronski, 2001; Hamilton, 1996; Krinsky, 2002; Man, 2004).

Understanding participation indicates an examination of the multidimensional concept of barriers (Scanlan, 1986) and their interactions that impact participation and integration into society and the knowledge economy. Cross's (1981) framework of participation may be an instructive tool for conceptualising the broader concept of participation, and draws on both achievement and attribution theories of motivation to explain the decision to participate (Pintrich, & Schunk, 1996; Svinicki, 2000). Barriers that adults encounter can be categorized as dispositional, situational, or institutional.

Dispositional barriers include lack of confidence and self-doubt in skills and abilities. Situational factors include lack of childcare, finances, and a support system (Cantor, 1992; Cranton, 1992). Institutional factors include lack of access to licensing standards and requirements; lack of recognition of foreign work experience and credentials; lack of an arm's length appeal process; and lack of national and/or provincial standards to consider experience and credentials (Brouwer, 1999; Gawronski, 2001; Krinsky, 2002; Man, 2004). Efforts to encourage participation normally begin with the removal of barriers and the provision of opportunities. Institutional responses have typically focused on increasing opportunities without the necessary removal of obstacles, with the result that these efforts have done little for minorities, women, and new immigrants who continue to be disenfranchised from participation in the economy (Greenall, & Loizides, 2001).

Participation studies, including Cross's framework, often take a psychological or individual approach that indicates attitudinal changes are required to succeed (Beder, 1991; Courtney, 1992). Cross's framework does not address cultural and systemic issues such as racism, sexism, or the politics, context, and culture of the situation, yet these constitute major barriers for new immigrants (McCann, 1995). Other studies offer a sociological or structural approach to challenges that inhibit participation and integration, and suggest structural change, and community-based empowerment (Beder, 1991; Cervero & Kirkpatrick, 1990; Man, 2004; Quigley, 1990). Despite these contributions, more specific information is required about new immigrants' barriers to full participation in the economy and society, and experience with information technology. Moreover, an inclusive framework of the links between psychological and sociological factors, information technology, and

participation and integration in the economy and society would fill a gap in the academic literature.

The Study

This study examines participation and barriers to employment and education among new immigrants who use community-based programs and services. The objective of the study was to develop a better understanding of events, factors, and difficulties that have an impact on the integration outcomes of those who have used the community-based services and programs since 1999. Specifically, the study focused on participants' decisions, choices, barriers, and strategies to access and use information technologies to facilitate their employment and education. The study also collected information that may assist in developing a website (portal) that new immigrants may find helpful in integrating into the Canadian economy and society, as well as in assisting community programs, government agencies, and policy makers to understand how to act more effectively in developing programs and services for new immigrants.

Population and Sample

The population of new immigrants was defined as those who accessed the programs and services of various providers. Given that one of the purposes of these programs and services is to help new immigrants integrate into the Canadian society and the economy, the criteria served to attract new immigrants. Providers normally offer an integrated set of services, including social, financial, resume writing, interviewing, presentation, and access to information technology. Participants were drawn from 1999 users because this allowed them time to integrate into society and the economy. A letter was provided to eight service providers to invite participants. Of the 17 signed consent forms returned, six agreed to participate. Those who responded represented different levels of education (e.g., Arts, Engineering, Management, and Trades), continents (e.g., Europe, Africa, and South America), gender, levels of English, and immigration status (e.g., independents, business, or political asylum).

Method

The study examined the personal meanings and understandings that participants used to construct their worlds; ensured that their experiences were understood from their perspectives and their own words; and attempted to capture the themes that emerged from their stories based on their decisions, choices, and experiences. Therefore, qualitative methodology (deLeeuw, 1992) and the grounded theory perspective were used. Grounded theory facilitated the development of themes and patterns from their responses (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 1998; Franklin, 1996; McCracken, 1988; Tutty, Rothery & Grinnell, 1996).

A letter explaining the purpose of the study was distributed in 2005 to users of services who were asked to indicate their consent and willingness to participate in the study. Of the 17 who responded, six agreed to participate in the in-depth, face-to-face interviews. Subsequently, telephone contacts to set up the

interviews were made with those who agreed to participate in the study. Data were collected over a two-month period commencing in March 2005. Each interview of approximately one-hour was audio taped and later transcribed. The interview transcripts were mailed to participants for accuracy and completeness.

Data Analysis

Data were collected through a semi-structured, in-depth interview process. The interviews allowed probing, redirecting, and summarizing information as well as the collection of rich, thick data. Data collection and analysis were intertwined and ongoing throughout the research process. Transcripts were analyzed individually and collectively using a horizontal and vertical, content analysis process to confirm and refute categories, and develop themes and patterns. The data were initially color-coded and preliminary labels assigned to categories from the responses to the interview questions. Provisional interpretations and categories were identified through matching related concepts, observations, events, and activities. As concepts were reiterated, their relevance to a category was enhanced. Categories were then confirmed, refuted, or expanded in subsequent interviews. Validity was attained through triangulation of data; that is, observing participants during the interview process, debriefing with the interview team after each interview, checking with participants the accuracy and completeness of the data, and reflecting on the field diary that was kept during the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

The data are discussed in four interrelated sections that parallel the structure of the interview guide: 1) demographics; 2) experience with computers and the Internet, including knowledge, access, uses, and barriers; 3) use of and experience with computers and the Internet related to employment and education; and 4) strategies and recommendations to improve services, networks, and resources. Due to space limitations, excerpts from three participants (one from each continent) are used to represent the themes that emerged from the data. Pseudonyms are used to protect their confidentiality and anonymity.

Demographics

Participants were asked about their country of origin, length of time in Canada, status under which they entered Canada, family, and age. Four males (two Europeans and two visible minorities from Africa) and two females (South America) were interviewed. Their partners were not interviewed. All participants were married, all except two had at least one child that required child and day-care programs, all except one was between 31- 45 years old, all except one had arrived with a partner, all except one had post-secondary education, most were not fluent or proficient in English, all except one was in the economic and business class, and the two Europeans and two South American males were employed in positions related to their educational background. In contrast, the women (dependents), including the visible minority

women and men were underemployed. All participants sought supports from service providers, including friends, family, and community.

Barry, his wife, and two-year old daughter, visible minorities, came from Africa as sponsored, political asylums in winter 2003. Barry had family in Winnipeg. He had completed four-years of a five-year Electrical Engineering degree, and his wife was employed in the Retail business in Customer Service. Although his English was very proficient and fluent, he was unable to get employment in his field, received no recognition for the degree courses completed, and is employed in a coffee shop. His wife, also unable to find employment in the retail sector, is employed in a factory.

Bob came alone, and as an independent, in winter 2004 from Eastern Europe. He had no family or friends in Winnipeg. Bob was an Accountant by profession, and did not possess a high level of proficiency nor fluency in English. Bob, however, was able to find employment in his field. He has applied to sponsor his wife.

Cathy and her husband came as independents from South America in 2003. Cathy had family support and a community network in Winnipeg. She had an undergraduate degree in Anthropology and worked in this field, and her husband worked in computers. Cathy is currently unemployed but doing volunteer work at a Day Care center where her sister-in-law is employed. She has medium proficiency and fluency in English. Her husband continues to be employed in computers.

Computer and Internet Experience

Participants were asked about their experience with computers and the Internet. A number of interrelated themes with respect to their experience with computers and the Internet, including knowledge, access, use, and barriers were identified as critical to their integration into society and the knowledge economy.

Knowledge and Access to computers and Internet

Most of the participants were knowledgeable in computers, some software packages, emails, and the Internet related to education, employment, and/or communication purposes in their home country. They were mostly self-taught and had not taken any formal training related to computers; that is, their computer experience and knowledge were gained through requirements for major papers in degree programs, pre-requisites for other courses, and on-the-job training related to work.

On arrival in Winnipeg, most eventually accessed the services of various providers for employment and communication purposes. Most, however, now have access (either dial-up or high-speed) at home, use the computer and Internet on a fairly regular basis, feel fairly comfortable navigating the technology, and ask for help from family members, or technical support personnel if needed. Themes related to the requirements of daily life, earning a living, integrating into the community, and connecting with others in the community had the greatest impact on knowledge and access.

I have been using the computer since 1989 in my country...I used e-mail instead of fax... for correspondence with my suppliers and companies abroad... and for courses at university...I am self taught...I was involved in different projects in management...I was an entrepreneur, running my own business... I use it daily [in Winnipeg]... I have high-speed...if you are more enlightened on what you need...you can maximize the benefits...by asking precisely for what you need...I sometimes call Microsoft; they have a toll free number...I also discuss issues with friends (Barry).

I am an accountant by profession and you have to have computer knowledge and skills to work with computers... In Europe, I used Excel ...and UNIX system ...here you have some other software...I use the computers at service providers... because I do not have a computer at home... Everybody needs support because they are learning ...even the ...IBM specialist... I call the 1-800 numbers ... (Bob).

I did my thesis on the computer...I communicate with family on the Internet, and use the web...everything is connected to the Internet. You can find information on the papers, maps, and tourist guide books...I have some difficulty with the Internet here to find job opportunities because you have to know how the website is made...if you have an interpreter it is easier...I used the computers of service providers for resume writing and job search... I have high-speed...my husband is in computers... I get help from him...I need help to find information not to use the computer... (Cathy).

Uses and barriers with computers and Internet

All participants used the computer and Internet for a variety of purposes and experienced barriers related to its uses. They used it mostly for job searches, distributing resumes, on-line shopping, locating information, communicating with friends and family, and problem solving.

Some suggested that they experienced barriers while using the computer and Internet, including finding information, impersonal and facelessness, technical difficulties, and cultural barriers. However, its negative impact was related to the themes of isolation, technical difficulty, and language and culture.

Sometimes I get frustrated with the drama of hackers and viruses...the connection is slow if you have a virus...You can download anti-virus software...you do not have to buy every bit and piece...I use different programs at home...I hate pop ups ... (Barry).

...I concentrate on job search. If you use specialized software for accounting...you need knowledge to use this software...and if it is not your first language it is difficult... It is a good device...for communication...but sometimes you need more information and you have to go to somebody... it can only do so much...Getting a job has to be more personal...You have to know what

employers want...I use the computer to communicate, locate books, specialty foods, and housing... (Bob).

... I have difficulty with the Internet here to find job opportunities because ...you have to know what website to check, how to search, and organize your search...perhaps, it is cultural... you have to know the steps to find the information, and I had to ask the counselor for help... You have to know the National Occupational Classification to search for jobs... everything is organized but we are not organized...we cannot remember every step...I found it hard...it was my first month here... it was a lot of information...the Internet was good for transit, numbers, bus routes... (Cathy).

Employment and Education Experience

Participants were asked about their use of the Internet to find information related to employment and education, the barriers they encountered, and how they addressed them. They identified a number of interrelated themes that impact their employment and education experiences.

Employment Experience

With little exception, the themes of lack of recognition of credentials, no Canadian work experience, unreasonable credentials for work, systemic discrimination, and the challenge of a new language, culture, and lifestyle had the greatest impact on their employment.

I use the Internet daily...I can find the website that is not a problem...the bottleneck here is... we do not have Canadian experience...and sometimes the accent...they see your resume and once they do not see any employment in Canada, they do not give you credit...I match my qualifications and apply for the job...they ask for more credentials...most of them do not want you to call them. Everything is behind the curtain...you cannot see behind the curtain...the medium is missing in which the employer and employee can get together...you want to get a job where society values your knowledge and you feel that you are a fit...(Barry).

You have to look 24-hours [for employment]. I used it when I was outside Canada...I did a lot of research...I got some offers...A lot of places answered and said whenever you come...if the positions are available you can contact us when you get your visa. You have to show that you are motivated, have some knowledge, are interested...and progressive...are the right person if you want to be successful... you have to know what the employer expects to hear and see, even your appearance...there is cultural adjustment...my current job is related to what I do...(Bob).

...I try newspapers, counselors, Internet, and email...to find a job ... I do not like the internet because...I do not feel comfortable searching...if you know people and they present you to the companies... it is easier...At service providers, everyone, regardless of whether you have knowledge and skills [i.e.,

a professional] or a beginner, is told 'you have to have a two to three year goal, you have to start at the bottom, and you have to get Canadian experience.' ...I think it is because we come from another country...it is marketing yourself...if you go with the idea that you have to start at the bottom, it will happen to you...I am volunteering at a daycare...I do not know if I want to do it...I am searching... (Cathy).

Educational Experience

Participants experienced a number of barriers that were more general than specifically related to the use of the Internet for educational purposes. Lack of financial resources, inflexible schedules, unreasonable, wait times, no recognition of foreign credentials and life experience, and language and culture difficulties were themes that had the greatest influence on their educational experience.

Whenever, I need information on education, I look on the Internet. I use it quite frequently...I use Google. I have taken English for Academic Purposes at the college...I was referred...but my level (English) was fit for university... they should give you credit for life experience...and recognize your credentials. Information on the Internet that spells out these barriers and requirements would have been helpful... (Barry).

I got the information on the service provider's website...If you want more specific information...It is better to go to the institution... At the university, I felt frustrated with the Professional English because the schedule is only full-time... there is no part-time program... If you have a job there is no time...most immigrants ...need a job and after that they need to study. You have to register one year and be on a wait list... (Bob).

I went to the college for a course ... it was a challenge because of the English. I applied to the program but I did not attend because they lost my application and it was two weeks after the course started...I find it a challenge because we are from another country and have another language...I have a BA ... they did not credit it... It is a real challenge to live in another country, learn another culture, and speak another language...I took some ESL courses that were very good for university. The service provider was very helpful...they teach you the culture...it is not only to learn English... You try and connect with other Canadians...it is what you learn, see, and know...the day-to-day...it is also social... it is part of the integration into society ...If you have a connection it is good, you can connect the places with people... it teaches you how people behave here... and become confident despite how you feel... (Cathy).

Strategies and recommendations to overcome barriers

Participants used a number of strategies to overcome barriers related to employment and education. Some used service providers and personal contacts, developed a personal philosophy, and formulated an action plan.

I cope with patience...ultimately my faith...I have to do my homework...so the ball will be in their court...I joined toastmasters...to get to know people but...they prefer privacy...I try to keep a positive attitude...I use service providers ...they give good advice...they assess your aptitude, help with resume writing, and how to approach employers... One cannot always be happy; the endurance of life does not always bring happiness...Coming to Canada was good...I was looking for peace... Life is always a challenge... you have to face the challenge of life... (Barry).

I sent out many resumes and did research...if you are negative and think you cannot do the job, this will not help. You have to be motivated, communicate, even if your English is not good, but if you can prove that you are the right person for the job that is important. Show that you have the experience, are interested ...are positive... are able to communicate with people...are sophisticated...it is psychology. When you go to an interview you have to listen carefully to the questions that are related to the job...I took courses for higher level English with the service providers and the university. I found information on website... (Bob)

I try to find alternatives to the Internet...Not everyone is at the same level...but we are told we have to start at the bottom. I think it is hard because it disappoints you...what you expect and what you have... I volunteer so that I can get Canadian experience... When you know someone it helps...you have to be confident, promote, market, and sell yourself. Counselors and headhunters can help... service providers care because ...we can ask if we have doubts about how to do a resume...we have to learn to search, and do an interview...the English workshop...was very helpful because you not only learn the language but also the culture, and how to connect and integrate because you see what people want, how they look at things, and how they come to know...You also meet other immigrants who experience the same problems. You see you are not alone... (Cathy).

Improving services, networks, and resources

Participants were asked for recommendations to improve the services, networks, and resources for new immigrants. The most important suggestions related to employment and education included the need for new immigrants to know about language requirements, Canadian work experience, and credentials. The themes of community and personal connections, centralized information, positive attitude and soft skills, and learning the culture and language to integrate into society and the economy were stressed.

...All the services... can be... on a website...if we have one site where people can go and get access to all the different services ...how credentials will be credible, contacts ...it would be a one-stop shop...once they grasp the website, and see all the data and information...I think it is a matter of clicking...you have to set up the website in such a way that it will be accessible to those with limited knowledge...they will find it very important in guiding their life... (Barry).

You have to be open-minded, friendly...learn and adjust to the culture... people... We have to be patient, listen ...accept the culture...to become part of the society...Immigrants need more information about the culture...what to expect... so that they are not shocked... If you provide this, it would be helpful...you are prepared for this. Give information on each region, on education, community associations, colleges...if you expect a good job... work on your English everyday...provide a means to share information and communicate ... communication is key... (Bob).

Link the services and providers; manage the data in a central place. The web page could have a map, information on transportation, emergency, health, and women's health, and make it easy to use... (Cathy).

Discussion

Understanding the lived experiences of new immigrants is critical to policy makers, educators, and service providers. The experiences that participants shared provided insights into the barriers that they must overcome to fully participate and integrate into society and the knowledge economy. A number of observations about demographics, use and access to computers and the Internet, experiences with employment and education, and strategies to overcome barriers can be made with these data and the literature.

Demographics

Although at least half of the new immigrants are within the economic class (i.e., skilled or business) the visible minority participants and women are unemployed or underemployed in menial, insecure positions. These data are consistent with the picture presented in the literature with respect to the themes of higher unemployment, underemployment, and lower participation rates among new immigrants, including women, and visible minority men and women who may experience double jeopardy (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Recent Immigrants in the Winnipeg Metro*, 2003; Hiebert, 1999) and their concomitant marginalization from and deskilling within the economy and society (Gawronski, 2001; Man, 2004).

Computer and Internet Experience

The majority of participants used all the supports and services; appeared to be comfortable accessing and using the services and networks, and their own high-speed systems; and used formal or informal technical supports as needed. They used the Internet to conduct job searches, gather information related to requirements of their daily living (e.g., transportation, health, resume distribution), integrate into their community (e.g., find information on their community), and connect with family and friends. It seems that most have achieved the first learning phase with respect to use and access to information technology; that is, they have exposure to and experience with software, hardware, networks, and resources that may extend their capabilities and integration into the new economy and society, and consequently their self-

sufficiency. This theme appears to be consistent with the literature. (Technology as a Foundation Skill Area: A journey Toward Information Technology Literacy).

The second and third learning phases for successful use and access of software are skill acquisition and development, and consolidation and application of skill development and use (Technology as a Foundation Skill Area: A journey Toward Information Technology Literacy). In this study, there seems to be variations between their level of development and application; therefore, development in these two phases may be required for their successful use of a portal, and participation and integration into society. Most suggested that information technology is helpful and useful for conducting job searches, efficiently and effectively distributing resumes, and finding some information, but it does not replace human interaction and experience in the real world. These themes are consistent with the literature. Moreover, these participants by virtue of the fact that they have left their country to begin a new life may already be independent and self-directed learners. In addition, they faced a number of interrelated barriers, including feelings of isolation because of language and cultural difficulties, and technical difficulty. Contrary to the literature (Greenall & Loizides, 2001; Technology as a Foundation Skill Area: A journey Toward Information Technology Literacy) although access and use of the information technology has allowed more speed, accuracy, and reliability with task completion, it does not appear to have significantly enhanced their economic and personal status.

Employment and Education Experience

These new immigrants faced a number of interrelated barriers to employment and education, and consequently participation and integration into society and the economy that are consistent with the literature. These included institutional, dispositional, situational (Cross, 1981), and systemic barriers. Institutional barriers related to employment included rigid counseling policy (e.g., advice to all new immigrants regardless of background was that they must have a two to three year goal, need Canadian work experience before employment, and start at the bottom), little or no recognition of their credentials and life experience, no Canadian work experience, and unreasonable pre-requisites for work (Brouwer, 1999; Gawronski, 2001; Krinsky, 2002; Man, 2004). For education, institutional barriers were inflexible schedules (e.g., full-time study versus part-time study), language and culture difficulties, and the politics of education (e.g., no recognition of their credentials and life experience).

Despite the fact that most of these immigrants had human capital (i.e., higher educational qualifications), the visible minorities and women experienced systemic employment barriers that included the politics of counseling policy, discrimination, racism (e.g., the Eastern European was encouraged to apply for positions; was employed in a related field despite the lack of Canadian experience, and recognition of credentials, while the visible minority male could not even get an interview, and the man and women were un/under employed) and language, culture, and lifestyle difficulties that may be explained by a labor

market segmentation versus certification model (Grayson, 1997; Hiebert, 1999). Systemic educational barriers included inadequate resources, services, and inflexible schedules (e.g., a one-year wait list, and full-time versus part-time study), and the politics of education (e.g., no recognition of credentials and life experience).

Situational barriers for education included few financial resources and time constraints (e.g., both partners couldn't attend classes because of need to earn a living and child care needs). Also, inadequate resources and services (e.g., lack of available child care and after school programs, and wait lists) were barriers some participants experienced (Cantor, 1992; Cranton, 1992). For employment, dispositional barriers included feelings of social isolation and alienation from the culture and lifestyle, and language differences. These barriers appeared to lead to low self-confidence and self-doubt.

Strategies to overcome barriers

Participants used a number of structural and personal strategies to overcome barriers to employment and education. Structural approaches included accessing and using courses and information technology for a variety of purposes (e.g., job search, resume writing and distribution, ESL, social contacts, finding information, and community contacts) at service providers and the university. Most used personal contacts and supports (e.g., friends, and other immigrants who experience the same problems). Those who felt less isolated and alienated may have drawn upon a personal philosophy, family members, and friends (e.g., positive attitude, patience, connections with others on a personal level, and volunteer work). Others suggested an action plan that included research, personal contacts, soft skills, and positive attributes such as motivation, persistence, market, and self-promotion (e.g., send resumes, conduct research, keep positive, be motivated, communicate, listen, and demonstrate experience).

In spite of the barriers they experienced, participants recommended improvements related to information technology; work and credentials; culture, language, connections; and personal attributes. They suggested improvements in networks and resources (e.g., link services and providers, with detailed, easy-to-use, One-Stop Shopping, centralized data management system including information on employment, education, language, culture, expectations, resources, communities, educational institutions, and programs). Improvements for work experience and credentials included the need for clarification of language barrier, Canadian work experience, and credentials. For culture, language, and connections, they suggested the need to understand the culture and learn the language, use personal contacts, and bulletin boards for the exchange of information.

Finally, in addition to an action plan, personal attributes were stressed for participation and integration into the economy and society (e.g., open-minded, friendly, self-confidence, and knowledge of the culture, societal values, and attitudes). These strategies provide policy direction toward improving integration into society and the economy.

Conclusion

An inclusive, multidimensional framework for thinking about participation and integration of new immigrants into society and the knowledge economy related to employment and education has emerged from this study. This framework includes institutional, structural, situational, dispositional, informational, and self-determination factors that may be embedded within human capital, certification, and labor market segmentation theory (Grayson, 1997; Hiebert, 1999). Institutional factors for increasing employment opportunities are having appropriate and helpful practices and policies related to, for example, foreign credentials, life experience, Canadian work experience, and counseling. For education, institutional themes include, for example, flexible schedules and practices, part-time and full-time options, language and cultural programs, and recognition of foreign credentials and life experience.

Structural factors for employment are, for example, an examination of systemic issues related to counseling policies, hiring processes, racist practices, language and cultural differences against a backdrop of the three aforementioned theoretical explanations. Structural themes related to education include flexible child care and after school programs, reduced wait times, flexible schedules, and examination of the politics of credentials.

Situational factors for education include improved financial options for programs and child care needs, and provision of adequate resources and services related to childcare and after school programs. Dispositional themes for employment include reduced feelings of social isolation and alienation from the culture and lifestyle, building self-confidence, and addressing language difficulties. Informational factors for networks and resources are for example, linking services and providers, and providing a One-Stop management, data portal related to employment, education, language, and culture. Self-determination themes related to employment and education include an action plan, personal connections and attributes such as a personal philosophy, open-mindedness, self-confidence, friendliness, and knowledge of the culture, societal values, and attitudes.

It is my belief that in spite of the overwhelming employment and education difficulties that new immigrants face to participation and integration into society and the economy, and despite the importance of information factors such as effective and efficient access and use of the networks and resources, and dispositional factors such as self-confidence, and cultural and language competence, and self-determination factors such as action plan, personal connections, soft skills, and personal attributes, that structural themes for education (e.g., child care and after school programs, wait lists, flexible schedules, and the politics of credentials), and employment (e.g., the politics of counseling, systemic discriminatory and racist employment and hiring practices, language, culture, and lifestyle difficulties) have a mediating effect on all factors, including institutional and situational. As a result, highly educated, new immigrants, including visible minority men and women become underemployed, unemployed, and deskilled. Thus, the new immigration policy for skilled labor

to meet the demands of the economy is negated through systemic racism, including gender, ethnicity, class, and citizenship that continue to shape education, employment and workforce practices, policies, and processes.

Note:

1. The study was conducted with the assistance of Nicole Hamilton, Sabena Singh, and Jean-Paul Fradette team members on the project.

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