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Résumé de l'article

L'alphabétisation dans la langue du pays d'accueil facilite l'intégration et réduit la marginalisation sociale et économique. Ainsi, l'accès à l'apprentissage de la langue est une question de justice sociale. Les réfugiés réinstallés au Canada sont admissibles à une formation gratuite en anglais/français. Entre 2015 et 2017, le Canada a réinstallé 47 735 réfugiés syriens. Nous avons exploré les prédicteurs de la participation aux cours de langue pour les réfugiés syriens, en examinant les données de 1 915 réfugiés syriens adultes dans des cours de langue financés par le gouvernement en Colombie-Britannique, en Ontario et au Québec. Les facteurs entravant la participation variaient selon la province et comprenaient le sexe, la santé physique/mentale, l'éducation, l'alphabétisation en anglais/français et l'emploi. Des recommandations pratiques et politiques sont discutées.

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Syrian Refugees' Participation in Language Classes: Motivators and Barriers

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ABSTRACT

Resettlement country language literacy facilitates integration and counteracts social and economic marginalization. Thus, access to language learning is a social justice issue. Resettled refugees in Canada are eligible for free English/French language training. Between 2015-2017, Canada resettled 47,735 Syrian refugees. We explored predictors of language class participation for Syrian refugees, examining data from 1915 adult Syrian refugees in government-funded language classes in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec. Findings suggest access to language programs are shaped by provincial policies. Factors hindering participation varied by province and included gender, physical/mental health, education, English/French literacy, and employment. Practice and policy recommendations are discussed.

KEYWORDS

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refugees; language; integration; Syria; resettlement; literacy

RESUMÉ

L'alphabétisation dans la langue du pays d'accueil facilite l'intégration et réduit la marginalisation sociale et économique. Ainsi, l'accès à l'apprentissage de la langue est une question de justice sociale. Les réfugiés réinstallés au Canada sont admissibles à une formation gratuite en anglais/français. Entre 2015 et 2017, le Canada a réinstallé 47 735 réfugiés syriens. Nous avons exploré les prédicteurs de la participation aux cours de langue pour les réfugiés syriens, en examinant les données de 1 915 réfugiés syriens adultes dans des cours de langue financés par le gouvernement en Colombie-Britannique, en Ontario et au Québec. Les facteurs entravant la participation variaient selon la province et comprenaient le sexe, la santé physique/mentale, l'éducation, l'alphabétisation en anglais/français et l'emploi. Des recommandations pratiques et politiques sont discutées.

INTRODUCTION

Canada provides protection to refugees from overseas through three different programs: the Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR) program, the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program, and the Blended Visa Office-Referred program (BVOR). Regardless of program, all refugees resettled by Canada are provided financial and settlement support for the first year of settlement. They are also entitled to reception, orientation, focused assistance with language training, housing, physical and mental health supports, education, employment, referrals to essential federal/provincial programs and settlement programs, and financial assistance (Hynie et al., 2019). Resettled refugees are eligible for free Government of Canada–funded language training in English and French, delivered through Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)/Cours de langue pour les immigrants au Canada (CLIC) or Quebec's Linguistic Integration Program.

Myriad environmental forces shape the short-term resettlement experience and long-term integration of newcomers (Ives et al., 2020). Settlement workers typically adopt a holistic systems approach to practice, and those who work with refugees also incorporate an understanding of the importance of context, particularly experiences in the country of origin, during the journey to the host country, and social and material factors in the country of resettlement (Hynie, 2018). In the resettlement phase, there is a particular focus on services that comprise "integration practice," that is, "activities and perspectives relating to long-term integration and its processes" (Valtonen, 2008, p. 15). **Integration** is a contested term but has been defined most broadly as economic and social inclusion (Hynie et al., 2016; Phillimore, 2021). Thus, services or activities that include connecting refugees to services that enable them to improve their job marketability and provide opportunities for training and social participation outside their cultural/linguistic community are included in the conceptualization of integration practice.

Competence in a resettlement country's official language(s) is a key component of successful integration as it facilitates labour market integration, access to necessary information, and development of social

capital (Boyd & Cao, 2009; Ertorer, 2016; Nawyn et al., 2012; Wilkinson & Garcea, 2017). Official language literacy is also important for refugees' overall well-being. It enhances communication and relationship building with the broader society in the long term (Ives & Sinha, 2010; Tip et al., 2019) and addresses the loneliness and isolation that can result from limited to no proficiency in the official language(s) (Casimiro et al., 2007; Choudhry, 2001).

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) funds language training services outside of Quebec for both of Canada's official languages, English and French; these are delivered in multiple formats, including classroom, online, and blended formats, although 94% receive their training in a classroom (IRCC, 2017a, s. 5.5). Language assessments are conducted to assess clients' language skills (in English or French) for placement in a language training program using tools based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) or the Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens. Language training clients receive, on average, about 215 hours of training (IRCC, 2017a). The language programs are administered provincially and are usually provided by local service provision organizations (SPOs).

Between November 4, 2015, and July 31, 2017, Canada resettled 47,735 Syrian refugees (24,410 were 18 years or older) (IRCC, 2017b), creating a unique opportunity to evaluate this resettlement effort. As noted, a key aspect of successful integration is proficiency in the resettlement country's official language(s), but newcomers' ability to access language training may be shaped by municipal and provincial policies and the extent to which they accommodate refugee newcomers' diverse needs. Thus, we asked: What are the predictors of language class participation for Syrian refugees resettled in Canada? This article examines participation in government-funded language classes in a sample of Syrian refugees during their first years of resettlement and, specifically, barriers and motivators in relation to different service provision systems across three Canadian provinces: British Columbia (BC), Ontario (ON), and Quebec (QC).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was informed by critical integration theories (Grzymala-Kazlowska & Phillimore, 2018; Phillimore, 2021). These theorists argue that integration discourses and goals are often driven by the state's motivation to minimize disruption to the prevailing social systems. In this framing of integration, success is determined by how quickly refugees are able to transform themselves to find employment, learn the language(s), and adopt the values and customs of the region into which they settle, with little reflection on refugees' priorities (Farrugia, 2009). Many refugees may indeed be motivated to quickly find work, learn the language, and accustom themselves to local practices. But critical integration theories question who actually determines newcomers' primary integration goals. Moreover, they note that despite an increasing shift to defining integration as a process of mutual change between newcomers and the society into which they settle, integration is still typically operationalized and measured in terms of changes within newcomers alone (Phillimore, 2021; Strang & Ager, 2010).

Focusing solely on changes that refugee newcomers make does not acknowledge the ways in which policies, institutions, and social environments produce social and structural barriers to integration. Our goal was to underscore the multi-faceted adaptation involved in integration, purposefully moving away from conceptualizations of inte-

gration that result in "strategic integration" of refugees and immigrants from racialized backgrounds into "bare life" existence and towards a place where the onus to integrate, adjust, and change falls not just on refugees/immigrants but also on the dominant host society (Hynie et al., 2019). At the same time, limited or no language proficiency in the host society's language(s) poses barriers in multiple facets of integration, depleting the capacity for developing social networks and political power, achieving educational goals and meaningful livelihoods, and participating in the broader community (Hynie et al., 2016; Morrice et al., 2021). The absence of English or French language in Canada, particularly for racialized refugees, practically assures that a resettlement experience is characterized by ongoing poverty, under-/unemployment, and over-representation in low-income, underserved neighbourhoods, which deepen colonial/racialized and gendered inequalities.

METHODS

This article reports on data collected in the first year of a four-year study on Syrian refugee integration in Canada (SyRIA.lth).[1] The larger study compared integration outcomes for government-assisted and privately sponsored refugees resettled as part of Canada's response to the Syrian conflict. The purpose of this article is to examine how resettlement programs in three Canadian provinces and six cities support long-term social integration pathways for refugees via access to official language learning programs.

PARTICIPANTS

Between January 2015 and June 2017, approximately 9,585 adult Syrian refugees were resettled to Ontario, 6,055 Syrian refugees were resettled in Quebec, and 4,000 Syrian refugees were resettled to BC (IRCC, 2017b). Participants were recruited from six urban centres in three of the largest immigrant-receiving provinces in Canada: British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec. Ontario study sites, comprising Toronto, Kitchener, and Windsor, had 865 participants, representing 9% of the total adult Syrian refugees in Ontario. Montreal was the only survey site in Quebec, with 692 respondents representing approximately 11% of those resettled in the province. BC study sites, Vancouver and Okanagan Valley, had 280 participants, representing 17% of those resettled in BC.

The six cities represented the largest city in each province: Vancouver, BC, with 2,737,698; Toronto, ON, with 6,555,205; and Montreal, QC, with 4,364,189. These are large, ethnically diverse cities that are the primary destinations of many immigrants into each province. The three other cities were also sites for the resettlement of GARs but had smaller populations. In Ontario, the Kitchener–Waterloo metropolitan area has a population of 593,882, and Windsor's population is 356,880. In BC, we also worked in the Okanagan Valley, whose largest city is Kelowna, with a population of 222,748 (Statistics Canada, 2021). Although larger cities have a broader range of employment opportunities and more access to culturally and linguistically diverse services, smaller cities have lower housing costs and

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more access to work in factories or trades that may not require linguistic fluency and are generally less precarious than work in the sales and service sector. The Okanagan Valley is a unique setting among the six cities in that it has a thriving tourism industry with opportunities for employment in that sector.

The study aimed to enrol at least 10% of the anticipated 18,000 adult PSR and GAR arrivals between January 2015 and June 2017. Inclusion criteria were as follows: Syrian refugee (GAR, PSR, or BVOR), having arrived in Canada between January 2015 and June 2017, and 18 years of age or older. Recruitment occurred over four months in 2017 through a non-random snowball sampling method, and announcements, flyers, and direct requests at settlement and community agencies, food banks, and in buildings and neighbourhoods with high concentrations of Syrian refugees. A maximum of six participants were interviewed from each household. A total of 1,915 adult Syrian refugees representing 854 households participated in the first year.

MEASURES

The survey contained 245 questions addressing multiple aspects of settlement, migration experiences, and integration. Priority was given to standardized scales that have been validated with Arabic-speaking populations. Professional English-to-Arabic translation was obtained for additional survey questions. The survey was also piloted with 24 recent Syrian refugees. Only questions related to socio-demographic information, language, and health are addressed in this article, including sponsorship status, age, length of stay in Canada (months), education level, need for an interpreter, gender, employment, presence of children under 18 years of age, and physical and mental health,

as well as attendance in language classes.

PROCEDURES

All participants provided informed consent prior to the participation. They were also given a modest honorarium. Survey responses were collected through face-to-face interviews in Arabic with peer researchers. Each survey took approximately an hour to an hour and a half to complete. Because language programs are provincially funded and implemented, we also consulted service providers working with refugees in settlement contexts in each province. We consulted with one to two community and settlement agency staff who provided or oversaw language class provision at each study site to facilitate interpretation of findings. Additionally, research team members also provided contextualization regarding provincial settlement policies.

DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics provided the sample's socio-demographic, health, and settlement characteristics by city.

Two sets of binary logistic regressions were used to examine differences in language class attendance across the provinces. The first logistic regression analysis was an omnibus test conducted for the entire sample, entering province as dummy-coded variables in the first step and participant socio-demographic characteristics in the second step. The second set of logistic regression analyses were then used separately within each province to assess the association between socio-demographic characteristics and language class attendance to determine whether there were differences by city for each province. For logistic regression, attendance was coded as 1 for attending

and 2 for not attending. Among the predictor variables, the following were entered as categorical variables: city, gender, employment, and having young children. The remaining variables were treated as numeric variables. Assumptions of multicollinearity were not violated, as variance inflation factors between all variables within the logistic regression models were less than a value of 2. To facilitate interpretation of the regressions, p values are reported. However, these should not be taken to indicate significance of patterns in the population of Syrian refugees as a whole because the sample is not randomly selected; the p values are being used descriptively (Amrhein et al., 2019).

ETHICS APPROVAL

Ethics approval was obtained at each research site affiliated with the study (York University, University of Windsor, McGill University, and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health).

RESULTS

Descriptive data are presented by city in Table 1.

Overall, the majority of research participants were enrolled in language classes (71.9%), with consistent participation across cities and provinces (ON = 72.4%, QC = 70.7%, BC = 74.4%). On average, Syrian refugees have been in Canada for 13.5 months (SD = 5.45); this was similar across cities. Just over half of participants (51.5%) were women, and this was also fairly consistent across sites.

Some important differences did emerge across the sites. In Toronto, Kitchener, and the Okanagan Valley, the proportion of GARs was between half and two-thirds of the sample. In Windsor and Vancouver, it was over 80%, while in Montreal, it was just over 9%, consistent with the ratio among the city population overall and a provincial decision to direct GARs to smaller centres. Given that GARs and PSRs tend to differ substantially in basic education and language ability, particularly among the Syrian refugee cohort, this may affect language needs and class attendance (IRCC, 2016a, 2016b). Indeed, patterns of educational completion mirrored the distribution of GARs and PSRs. The proportion of respondents with primary school education or less was only 13.9% in Montreal but ranged from 29.5% to as high as 41% in Kitchener. This is particularly important given that it may indicate issues with literacy in their first language, and this can impede language learning. Similarly, those in the two highest education categories, who had completed at least some university, represented almost half of the Montreal sample (47.7%) but only 10.7% of those in Vancouver, 16.4% of those in Kitchener, and between 22.2% and 23.9% of those in the other cities.

Consistent with the pattern of education and migration pathway distribution across sites, the proportion who reported always needing an interpreter ranged from about 28% in Montreal and the Okanagan Valley to 43.3% in Kitchener and almost half (47%) in Windsor. The need for an interpreter also showed some of the expected relationship to employment. Employment rates were particularly low in Kitchener (12.2%) and very high in the Okanagan Valley (41.3%). The Montreal sample also differed in terms of the average age, being somewhat older than other cities (42.1 years, whereas the average in the other five cities ranged from 35.4 to 37.0 years) and less likely to have young children at home (only 44.1% had young children, compared with between a half and three quarters of respondents in the other cities).

Table 1

Demographic Information by City

Measure	Toronto, ON (n = 501)	Kitchener, ON (n = 134)	Windsor, ON (n = 230)	Montreal, QC (n = 692)	Vancouver, BC (n = 234)	Okanagan Valley, BC (n = 46)
	n (%)					
Currently attending language classes (yes)	358 (71.5)	97 (72.4)	166 (72.2)	489 (70.7)	177 (75.6)	34 (73.9)
Sponsorship						
GAR	313 (62.5)	86 (64.2)	185 (80.4)	65 (9.4)	186 (79.5)	24 (52.2)
PSR	187 (37.3)	48 (35.8)	45 (19.6)	627 (90.6)	48 (20.5)	22 (47.8)
Gender						
Male	243 (48.5)	62 (46.3)	114 (49.6)	323 (46.7)	124 (53.0)	22 (47.8)
Female	256 (51.1)	72 (53.7)	116 (50.4)	368 (53.2)	110 (47.0)	24 (52.2)
Children under 18 years (yes)	351 (70.0)	95 (70.8)	162 (70.4)	305 (44.1)	151 (64.5)	35 (76.1)
Currently employed (yes)	104 (20.8)	24 (1)	28 (12.2)	193 (27.9)	61 (26.1)	19 (41.3)
Education level						
Very low: elementary school or less	148 (29.5)	55 (41.0)	72 (31.3)	96 (13.9)	84 (36.0%)	16 (34.8)
Low: middle school	101 (20.2)	35 (26.1)	59 (25.7)	75 (10.8)	68 (29.1)	15 (32.6)
Moderate: high school	136 (27.1)	22 (16.4)	48 (20.9)	191 (27.6)	56 (23.9)	4 (8.7)
High: university	45 (9.0)	9 (6.7)	25 (10.9)	144 (16.5)	12 (5.1)	5 (10.9)
Very high: post-graduate	71 (14.2)	13 (9.7)	26 (11.3)	216 (31.2)	13 (5.6)	6 (13.0)
Need interpreter						
Always	183 (36.5)	58 (43.3)	108 (47.0)	197 (28.5)	82 (35.0)	13 (28.3)

Table 1 continued

Measure	Toronto, ON (n = 501)	Kitchener, ON (n = 134)	Windsor, ON (n = 230)	Montreal, QC (n = 692)	Vancouver, BC (n = 234)	Okanagan Valley, BC (n = 46)
Sometimes	200 (39.9)	55 (41.0)	92 (40.0)	235 (34.0)	122 (52.1)	16 (34.8)
Never	118 (23.6)	21 (15.7)	30 (13.0)	260 (37.6)	30 (12.8)	17 (37.0)
Perceived physical health						
Excellent	93 (18.6)	23 (17.2)	62 (27.0)	115 (16.6)	29 (12.4)	21 (45.7)
Very good	34 (18.8)	22 (16.4)	44 (19.1)	138 (19.9)	37 (15.8)	8 (17.4)
Good	151 (30.1)	46 (34.3)	68 (29.6)	255 (36.8)	79 (33.8)	13 (28.3)
Fair	115 (23.0)	31 (23.1)	39 (17.0)	153 (22.1)	62 (26.5)	4 (8.7)
Poor	48 (9.6)	12 (9.0)	17 (7.4)	31 (4.5)	27 (11.5)	-
Perceived mental health						
Excellent	90 (18.0)	14 (10.4)	65 (28.3)	119 (17.2)	33 (14.1)	24 (52.2)
Very good	112 (22.4)	17 (12.7)	36 (15.7)	146 (21.1)	37 (15.8)	7 (15.2)
Good	144 (28.7)	61 (45.5)	70 (30.4)	249 (36.0)	74 (31.6)	11 (23.9)
Fair	116 (23.2)	35 (26.1)	47 (20.4)	149 (21.5)	62 (26.5)	4 (8.7)
Poor	39 (7.8)	7 (5.2)	11 (4.8)	28 (4.0)	28 (12.0)	-
	M (SD)					
Length of stay in Canada (months)	13.1 (5) (min. = 1, max. = 30)	13.4 (5.5) (min. = 1, max. = 33)	12.7 (5.4) (min. = 2, max. = 24)	13.8 (6) (min. = 1, max. = 35)	14.1 (4.6) (min. = 3, max. = 30)	12.6 (5.7) (min = 1, max. = 19).
Age	37 (13) (min. = 18, max. = 82)	35.4 (12.1) (min = 18, max = 82)	36.6 (12) (min. = 18, max. = 76)	42.1 (15.2) (min. = 18, max. = 90)	35.8 (12) (min. = 18, max. = 70)	35.6 (11.6) (min. = 18, max. =61)

Note. ON = Ontario; QC = Quebec; BC = British Columbia; GAR = Government-Assisted Refugees; PSR = Private Sponsorship of Refugees; M= Median; SD = Standard Deviation.

In terms of perceived health status, there was a cluster of cities where between 16.6% and 18.6% of residents reported excellent health (Toronto, Kitchener, Montreal), with Vancouver slightly lower at 12.4%. A much larger proportion of respondents did so in Windsor (27%) and the Okanagan Valley (45.7%). In terms of poor health, numbers were low in all cities, ranging from 0% and 4.5% in Okanagan and Montreal, respectively, to between 7.4% (Windsor) and 11.5% (Vancouver) in the other cities.

In terms of mental health, the pattern was similar. Mental health was rated as excellent by 28% of those in Windsor and over half (52.2%) of those in Okanagan, while the other cities ranged between 10.4% (Kitchener) and 18% (Toronto). No respondents in the Okanagan Valley rated their mental health as poor. In the other cities, rates were mostly low, ranging from 4% in Montreal to 7.8% in Toronto, with a slightly higher rate of 12% in Vancouver.

LOGISTIC REGRESSIONS

The first regression analysis, which was the omnibus test for the entire sample, explored whether differences existed between provinces in language class attendance. At step 1, the regression model was not significant ($X^2[2] = 2.27$, p = 0.321) and accounted for < 1% of the variance (Nagelkerke pseudo R^2) in class attendance. As shown in **Table 2**, there were no significant differences between provinces regarding language class attendance at step 1. When individual characteristics were entered in step 2, the regression model was significant ($X^2[10] = 98.17$, p < 0.001) and accounted for 8% of the variance in class attendance. There was still no difference by province, but those who were less likely to attend language

classes across provinces were PSRs, never needed an interpreter (i.e., had better language skills), were women, were employed, did not have children under age 18, had poorer perceived physical health, and had better perceived mental health. Overall, all 12 variables in our regression analysis accounted for 8% of the variance in class attendance ($X^2[12] = 100.45$, p < 0.001).

The next three analyses explored what factors influence language class attendance within each province. For Ontario, at step 1, the regression was not significant ($X^2[2] = 0.04$, p = 0.979) and accounted for < 1% of the variance in class attendance. As seen in **Table 3**, there were no significant differences between cities in Ontario regarding language class attendance at step 1. When individual characteristics were entered in step 2, the regression model was significant ($X^2[10] = 84.56$, p < 0.001) and accounted for 14% of the variance in class attendance. There was still no difference by city, but those who were attending language classes across cities were less likely to be younger, women, and employed; have no children under 18; always need an interpreter; and report poorer physical health. Curiously, those reporting poorer mental health were more likely to attend language classes. Overall, all 12 variables in our regression analysis accounted for 14% of the variance in class attendance ($X^2[12] = 84.60$, p < 0.001).

For Quebec, which included only one city (Montreal), the regression was significant, ($X^2[10] = 46.77$, p < 0.001) and accounted for 9% of the variance in class attendance. As seen in **Table 4**, four factors predicted language class attendance here. Those who were less likely to attend language classes were older adults who had lower education levels, were employed, and reported poor physical health.

Table 2

Predicting Language Class Attendance Across Provinces

Variable	β	SE	p	OR	95% CI OR	Hosmer–Lemeshow test	Sig.	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1						0.00	1.000	0.000	0.000
ON = 1, QC & BC = 2	0.06	0.11	0.590	1.06	0.85–1.33				
BC = 1, QC & ON = 2	0.24	0.16	0.135	1.28	0.93–1.75				
Step 2						5.28	0.728	0.080	0.080
ON = 1, QC & BC = 2	−0.21	0.14	0.134	0.81	0.61–1.07				
BC = 1, QC & ON = 2	0.07	0.19	0.733	1.07	0.73–1.56				
Sponsorship (GAR = 1, PSR = 2)	0.30	0.15	0.045*	1.35	1.01–1.82				
Age	0.00	0.01	0.348	1.00	1.00–1.01				
Length of stay in Canada (months)	0.00	0.01	0.985	1.00	0.98–1.02				
Education level (very low 1, very high = 5)	−0.08	0.05	0.071	0.92	0.84–1.01				
Need for an interpreter (always = 1, sometimes = 2, never = 3)	−0.24	0.09	0.005**	0.79	0.66–0.93				
Gender (male = 1, female = 2)	0.45	0.12	< 0.001***	1.57	1.25–1.98				
Currently working (yes = 1, no = 2)	−0.95	0.14	< 0.001***	0.38	0.29–0.51				
Children under 18 years (yes = 1, no = 2)	−0.40	0.12	0.001***	0.67	0.54–0.84				
Health (excellent = 1, poor = 5)	0.11	0.06	0.040*	1.12	1.01–1.25				
Mental health (excellent = 1, poor = 5)	−.12	0.05	0.019*	0.88	0.80–0.98				

Note. β = unstandardized regression coefficients; SE = standard error; OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval; Sig. = significance; R^2 = Nagelkerke pseudo R^2; ON = Ontario; QC = Quebec; BC = British Columbia; GAR = Government-Assisted Refugees; PSR = Private Sponsorship of Refugees.
* p < 0.05. ** p < 0.01. *** p < 0.001.

Table 3

Logistic Regression: Factors Predicting Language Class Attendance in Ontario (n = 865)

Variable	β	SE	p	OR	95% CI OR	Hosmer–Lemeshow test	Sig.	R2	$\triangle$R2
Step 1						0.00	1.000	0.000	0.000
Toronto = 1, Windsor & Kitchener = 2	−0.04	0.22	0.852	0.96	0.63–1.47				
Windsor = 1, Toronto & Kitchener = 2	−0.02	0.24	0.945	0.98	0.61–1.58				
Step 2						5.09	0.748	0.140	0.140
Toronto = 1, Windsor & Kitchener = 2	−0.02	0.23	0.925	0.98	0.62–1.54				
Windsor = 1, Toronto & Kitchener = 2	−0.10	0.26	0.694	0.90	0.54–1.51				
Sponsorship (GAR = 1, PSR = 2)	0.37	0.21	0.074	1.45	0.96–2.18				
Age	−0.01	0.01	0.050*	0.99	0.97–1.00				
Length of stay in Canada (months)	0.02	0.02	0.302	1.02	0.98–1.05				
Education level (very low = 1, very high = 5)	0.10	0.07	0.156	1.11	0.96–1.28				
Need for an interpreter (always = 1, sometimes = 2, never = 3)	−0.42	0.14	0.004**	0.66	0.50–0.87				
Gender (male = 1, female = 2)	0.72	0.17	< 0.001***	2.05	1.46–2.87				
Currently working (yes = 1, no = 2)	−1.13	0.23	< 0.001***	0.32	0.21–0.51				
Children under 18 years (yes = 1, no = 2)	−0.69	0.17	< 0.001***	0.50	0.36–0.71				
Health (excellent = 1, poor = 5)	0.20	0.08	0.014*	1.23	1.04–1.44				
Mental health (excellent = 1, poor = 5)	−0.24	0.08	0.004**	0.79	0.67–0.93				

Note. β = unstandardized regression coefficients; SE = standard error; OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval; Sig. = significance; R^2 = Nagelkerke pseudo R^2; GAR = Government-Assisted Refugees; PSR = Private Sponsorship of Refugees.

* p < 0.05. **p < 0.01. *** p < 0.001.

Table 4

Logistic Regression: Factors Predicting Language Class Attendance in Quebec (n = 692)

Variable	β	SE	p	OR	95% CI OR	Hosmer–Lemeshow test	Sig.	R^2
Step 1						10.49	0.232	0.090
Sponsorship (GAR = 1, PSR = 2)	−0.23	0.31	0.448	0.79	0.44–1.44			
Age	0.01	0.01	0.050*	1.01	1.00–1.03			
Length of stay in Canada (months)	−0.001	0.02	0.939	1.00	0.97–1.03			
Education level (very low = 1, very high = 5)	−0.21	0.07	0.002**	0.81	0.71–0.93			
Need for an interpreter (always = 1, sometimes = 2, never = 3)	−0.07	0.12	0.557	0.93	0.73–1.19			
Gender (male = 1, female = 2)	0.00	0.19	1.000	1.00	0.69–1.44			
Currently working (yes = 1, no = 2)	−0.77	0.22	< 0.001***	0.46	0.30–0.71			
Children under 18 years (yes = 1, no = 2)	−0.26	0.18	0.157	0.78	0.54–1.10			
Health (excellent = 1, poor = 5)	0.20	0.09	0.031*	1.22	1.02–1.47			
Mental health (excellent = 1, poor = 5)	−0.09	0.09	0.293	0.91	0.77–1.08			

Note. β = unstandardized regression coefficients; SE = standard error; OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval; R^2 = Nagelkerke pseudo R^2; GAR = Government-Assisted Refugees; PSR = Private Sponsorship of Refugees.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 5

Logistic Regression: Factors Predicting Language Class Attendance in British Columbia (n = 280)

Variable	β	SE	p	OR	95% CI OR	Hosmer–Lemeshow Test	Sig.	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1						0.00	1.000	0.000	0.000
Vancouver = 1, Okanagan Valley = 2	0.09	0.06	0.803	1.10	0.53–2.26				
Step 2						6.25	0.619	0.160	0.160
Vancouver 1, Okanagan Valley = 2	−0.45	0.45	0.315	0.64	0.26–1.54				
Sponsorship (GAR = 1, PSR = 2)	0.49	0.36	0.174	1.63	0.81–3.30				
Age	0.01	0.02	0.402	1.01	0.98–1.04				
Length of stay in Canada (months)	−0.04	0.03	0.211	0.96	0.90–1.02				
Education level (very low = 1, very high = 5)	−0.23	0.15	0.122	0.80	0.60–1.06				
Need for an interpreter (always = 1, sometimes = 2, never = 3)	−0.41	0.27	0.128	0.66	0.39–1.13				
Gender (male = 1, female = 2)	1.29	0.40	0.001***	3.65	1.66–8.01				
Currently working (yes = 1, no = 2)	−1.70	0.43	< 0.001***	0.18	0.08–0.43				
Children under 18 years (yes = 1, no = 2)	0.23	0.35	0.508	1.26	0.63–2.51				
Health (excellent = 1, poor = 5)	−0.27	0.16	0.082	0.76	0.56–1.04				
Mental health (excellent = 1, poor = 5)	0.04	0.14	0.790	1.04	0.79–1.36				

Note. β = unstandardized regression coefficients; SE = standard error; OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval; Sig. = significance; R^2 = Nagelkerke pseudo R^2; GAR = Government-Assisted Refugees; PSR = Private Sponsorship of Refugees.

* p < 0.05. ** p < 0.01. *** p < 0.001.

For BC, at step 1, the regression was not significant ($X^2[1] = 0.06$, p = 0.804) and accounted for < 1% of the variance in class attendance. As seen in **Table 5**, there were no significant differences between cities in BC regarding language class attendance at step 1. When individual characteristics were entered in step 2, the regression model was significant ($X^2[10] = 32.18$, p < 0.001) and accounted for 16% of the variance in class attendance. There was still no difference by city, but those who were less likely to attend language classes were women and were employed. Overall, all 11 variables in our regression analysis accounted for 16% of the variance in class attendance ($X^2[11] = 32.24$, p = 0.001).

FEEDBACK FROM SETTLEMENT WORKERS

In addition to individual interviews with refugees, we consulted community and settlement agency staff across all six sites. To ensure confidentiality, no organization or agency is individually identified.

As facilitators to integration, settlement workers reported that language classes offered participants opportunities to break their isolation by getting out of their homes and mingling within Canadian society. Workers also noted that the availability of settlement resources and of settlement workers at language learning sites increased language learning attendance. However, they emphasized the challenges they saw that refugees faced. Their focus was on the class attendance difficulties faced by women, generally around transportation, childcare, and language course format.

In BC and Ontario, women were less likely than men to attend language classes. Settlement workers reported that men's educa-tion was prioritized and that some women found community classes intimidating and were not comfortable with men and women being together. Many stopped going to school because of pregnancy or having newborn children. Many women preferred to stay home to care for young children, and for those who did want to attend classes, access to childcare was an issue. Across sites, settlement workers reported that the presence of preschool children interfered with mothers' attendance at language classes. This did not emerge clearly in the regressions, however, with only Ontario showing a significant effect of young children in the home. Settlement workers also highlighted that employed refugees faced difficult choices between "work and family" and "work and school." They noted that some clients indicated work and school would prevent them from spending time with family, particularly young children.

Settlement workers reported that transportation costs were an issue for Syrian refugees in Ontario and BC, particularly during the first year. Settlement agencies offering LINC are not allowed to give bus tickets to GARs during their first year of settlement as they are already receiving a travel allowance in their monthly stipends. However, these stipends are modest and difficult to live on, particularly given rental housing's high costs. If they have resources, settlement agencies offering LINC can give bus tickets to low-income families on income assistance through the provincial government, which would be after GARs and PSRs finish their first year of settlement. Colleges that offer LINC classes are able to offer students subsidized monthly passes and GARs, and PSRs are eligible for this subsidy during their first year in Canada, making them more attractive.

There is a strict absence policy for LINC; no more than 25% of class time per month can

be missed (although some programs did try to be flexible). Settlement workers reported that while participants had good reasons for missing classes, such as a sick child or a medical appointment, some did not feel comfortable enough to call the program and let them know they would not be attending. When a student loses their program spot, they return to the waiting list for admission, creating an added layer of difficulty for parents to complete classes.

Settlement workers identified the lack of information regarding language learning options available within communities as a barrier to class attendance. Workers in Ontario and BC saw a shortage of evening and weekend sessions for those who were employed or studying full-time. On the other hand, the Kitchener–Waterloo site (ON) has been exemplary in recognizing the power of a local response. A task force of community agencies was formed to identify and address barriers to accessing language services. They created an infographic of locally available language program options and circulated it to frontline service providers.

DISCUSSION

Research in resettlement countries has consistently shown that a lack of proficiency in the host society language limits integration and the potential for livelihood (Hynie, 2018; Okyay, 2017; Valenta & Bunar, 2010). However, the socio-political context in which refugees settle generates the policies, institutions, and social environments that can create social and structural barriers to integration. This underlines the importance of understanding integration as a two-way street, with policies and institutions needing to make integration goals possible by ensuring that services are accessible. Indeed, some have argued that the definition of social inclusion requires considering not only economic and social inclusion but also access to services (Bhalla & Lapeyre, 1997).

In this study, we found that most Syrian refugees were in language classes in their first year of settlement, suggesting that these classes are largely accessible. However, the analyses suggest that these classes are not equally accessible for all, in particular, women and older adults, although this was not the case in every province.

Great strides have been made in the development of language learning opportunities for those who cannot attend conventional classes. The Kitchener–Waterloo site in Ontario initiated a program with volunteer tutors who went to the homes of women who were not attending the classes. This program was well received by participants. They had ties to members of the host community who provided useful settlement information in addition to language learning. The women's participation in the agency programs also increased, demonstrating the value of community outreach. BC's Immigrant Settlement Services offers a program to newcomers at CLB level three to improve their English and become more engaged in the community. The program, Learning in Action, provides one-on-one outings with volunteer partners on evenings or weekends, with opportunities to join other participants and volunteers for fun group outings and activities.

Ironically, poor ability to speak and understand the host language was a factor that limited attendance at language classes. Research has shown a major barrier to settlement is the lack of proficiency in the host language (Boyd & Cao, 2009; Ertorer, 2016; Nawyn et al., 2012; Wilkinson & Garcea, 2017). Settlement workers typically link newcomers to information about language

assessment and language classes, but perhaps the process is too difficult for those who have little or no command of the host language. As settlement workers noted, the first level of language classes may prove to be too difficult, resulting in discouragement and withdrawal. In Quebec, people with lower education levels were those not accessing classes. People with low literacy in their native language are not being supported within the current system. A British study found that refugees

> were not benefiting from the ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] classes because the classes were designed for literates who had some knowledge background and could basically read and write in their mother tongue and have some English background as well.
>
> *$, 2019, p. 392*

Research by Holm and Dodd (1996) indicates that illiteracy in one's first language poses significant limitations on that person's abilities to ever be fluent in a second language. Some people may be discouraged from trying; more needs to be done to reach those with the most limited literacy who are struggling with learning a new language in resettlement (Casimiro et al., 2007).

Employment was also a factor limiting attendance at language classes across all sites. Getting a job is typically an urgent goal of working-age refugees. A small number do have competency in the host language and may be better positioned to secure work. While their English- or French-language skills may be sufficient to get a job, it is unclear what the level of fluency is, whether they would benefit from further language training, and whether the job is appropriate to their skills and experience. Our results were consistent with Hauck et al.'s (2014) finding that for refugees who need further language

learning, working can limit the time available to attend classes.

Being able to access affordable, quality childcare was a barrier in Ontario. In Windsor, only five LINC sites had childcare for infants older than six months, and only one site had childcare for infants older than three months. According to an IRCC study (2017a), 11% of newcomers who received referrals to IRCC-funded or co-funded language classes were waiting for admission. Reasons included the following: no spaces available in classes at the appropriate CLB or skill level, no classes offered by the client's preferred SPO, and no classes available at the client's preferred schedule or timeslot. Mothers also reported their preference to be home with their young children. Limited support services such as childcare and transportation were also issues (IRCC, 2017a).

A vast majority of both GARs and PSRs in Quebec did not consider childcare a barrier to accessing education, as paid childcare costs, up to a maximum of $25 per day per dependent child, could be reimbursed in that province. Although this amount is sufficient to pay for private daycare where available, this policy does not address parents' financial ability to pay fees first and be reimbursed later. While students who attend part-time French classes receive no financial assistance, they may be eligible for financial aid to help reduce childcare expenses for a dependent child, set to $7 per day of training.

In Quebec, newcomers also receive financial incentive for attending language classes. Unlike countries such as the United States, which provide only tuition-free language courses (Government of the USA, 2018), in addition to tuition-free language courses, full-time students also receive a participation allowance of $141 per week, regardless of immigration category within eligibility criteria. They are also eligible for a transportation

or commuting allowance, if applicable. Having financial support that includes childcare subsidies allows parents with younger children to access language courses. Both groups (GARs and PSRs) are eligible for both Canada and Quebec child benefits, thus increasing the family income.

In Ontario and Quebec, those who perceived poorer physical health were less likely to attend language classes. The presence of ability and/or mobility issues could make it difficult for participants to travel to and sit through classes. The IRCC **Outcomes Report** (2019) notes that hearing problems were a common ailment of Syrian refugees and there was a need for specialized services such as sign language classes. A significant barrier in Montreal was health status; nearly 25% of PSRs and nearly 45% of GSRs reported fair or poor physical health. Physical and mental health status can influence the extent to which one is able to participate effectively in language courses (Finn, 2010; Gordon, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Different issues emerge across provinces with regard to specific populations struggling with accessibility to language learning. A major concern is that those who had the lowest scores in their ability to speak and understand English in Ontario were least likely to take classes. This group is at risk of integrating poorly if at all. Employment and health issues also reduced participation. These findings suggest that language class accessibility may be susceptible to provincial policies that limit or facilitate access.

Although there appear to be provincial differences, a number of strategies could be pursued to promote access to language classes. For some, classes held only in the host language may not be accessible; participants may benefit initially from having instructors who can speak their language. Using their home language in language classes can encourage and empower newcomers as they draw upon their first language skills (Tadayon & Khodi, 2017). Adding lower levels to the LINC curriculum could also facilitate access. The needs of those with lower literacy levels can be addressed through less formal ways of learning in conversation circles. A major message from settlement workers in Ontario was "Don't take literacy for granted" as literacy is foundational to all integration elements.

As shown in Quebec, access to high-quality affordable childcare can improve access to language learning classes, especially for women with young children. In Ontario, there is limited childcare for infants, and waitlists can average a year for toddlers and beyond. To increase women's participation in language learning, funding must be allocated to increasing access to childcare as well as more outside-classroom learning opportunities, especially for those with infants.

Efforts to pursue settlement opportunities should not be hindered because of access barriers. We urge those working in settlement programs and overseeing language learning programs to review integration-focused practices and policies in light of study findings. Resettlement country language literacy facilitates integration and counteracts social, political, and economic marginalization. A recent evaluation of the Canadian settlement program called for a review of the language training program that would do the following: consider the needs of different groups of learners and respective determinants of success; build on the strengths and weaknesses of existing approaches (curricula, modes of training, etc.); leverage best practices from adult education theory and practice and the field of teaching English and French as a second language to adults; and

"consider new and innovative approaches to language training for adult immigrants" (IRCC, 2017a, p. vii).

Our research with Syrian refugees in their first two years in Canada strongly supports such program revisions. Immediate and ongoing investment in host country language learning for resettled refugees contributes to sustainable economic and social integration.

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