

Human capital development of Immigrant Youth in Canada

By

Urvashi Dhawan-Biswal¹

(Senior Research Officer)

urvashi.dhawanbiswal@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca

and

Tomasz Gluszynski

(Research Officer)

tomas.gluszynski@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca

Address: *National Learning Policy Research
Learning Policy Directorate, SPP
Human Resources and Skills Development
140 Place du Portage
Gatineau Qc K1A 0J9*

¹ Please contact the author for any future correspondence. Phone # 819-994-4465, Fax # 819-997-5433.

ABSTRACT

Context

In light of Canada's increased reliance on immigration it is important to examine the human capital development of immigrant youth. Aging population and declining fertility rates pose significant challenges for the future labour market in Canada. Increasingly immigration is seen as a panacea for Canada. It is expected that immigrants will account for all net labour force growth by 2011 and for all net population growth by 2031 (Denton, Feaver and Spencer, 1999). In 2002, over 220,000 immigrants arrived in Canada and a significantly large proportion of them (37%) were between the ages of 0 and 24. These young immigrants are an important addition to the current as well as future labour force. Their successful integration in the Canadian economy (education and labour market participation) is, therefore, of utmost interest.

Research Questions

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the skill development of immigrant children (15 year olds) and youth (18-20 year olds) using the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) data and examine its implications for public policy. The research will focus on answering the following two sets of questions of interest:

1. Performance of 15 year olds

- Does the age at which immigrant children arrive in Canada have an impact on their academic integration in schools?
- What are the relative influences of individual, family and school factors on the academic performance of 15 year old immigrants? How do they differ from their Canadian counterparts?

Data and Methodology

The first set of questions will be analysed using the PISA and YITS data. In 2000, 15 year olds in Canada participated in an international assessment of reading, math and science skills. These 15 year olds were also administered a detailed survey under YITS. YITS is a longitudinal survey and is collected every two years. The outcome variable of interest is the reading achievement of 15 year olds. The estimation techniques employed account for the nature of the dependent variable (measured in plausible values) and the balanced repeated replicate weights to reduce sampling error.

Preliminary Results

The initial regression results indicate that recent immigrant children who have been in Canada for five years or less are likely to perform at almost half a proficiency level lower than their Canadian counterparts, controlling for other factors. This disadvantage tends to disappear after the children have been in Canada for more than five years.

2. Performance of 18-20 year olds

- How are the trajectories of immigrant youth shaping up – their high school completion, participation in education beyond high school and their first experiences with the labour market? Do their work and study patterns differ from their native born counterparts?

Data and Methodology

The second set of questions will be analysed using the YITS data. Another cohort of 18-20 year olds was also surveyed in 2000 to capture the transitions of youth from high school to post secondary and labour market. Some of the outcome measures of interest include high school completion (probit model), participation in PSE (probit), and labour market activities (self-selection model). The data set is fairly rich in terms of the availability of explanatory variables.

Preliminary Results

Some initial results indicate that immigrant youth are less likely to drop out of high school compared to Canadian youth and are likely to prolong the time taken to complete high school. Immigrant youth have higher aspirations for careers in science or business compared to native born students who hold higher aspirations for careers in arts, social sciences and services.
