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## Confronting The Challenges of Immigrant Student Underachievement: A Comparative Analysis of Education Policies and Programs in Canada, New Zealand, and England

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**Confronting the Challenge of Immigrant Student Underachievement:  
A Comparative Analysis of Education Policies and Programs in  
Canada, New Zealand, and England**  
**Faire face au défi de la contre-performance de l'élève immigrant :  
analyse comparative des politiques et des programmes éducatifs au Canada, en Nouvelle-  
Zélande et en Angleterre**

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**Abstract**

Elementary and secondary immigrant students consistently demonstrate a performance disadvantage when one considers their achievement against nonimmigrant peers. These disadvantages vary across international jurisdictions, suggesting that education-system-level policies or programs may help to ameliorate or worsen these differences. Our work provides a synthesis of trends from education policies and programs that appear to be associated with more favourable immigrant student achievement outcomes, highlighting three international jurisdictions: Canada, New Zealand, and England. This comparative analysis identifies key features of these education systems that have been associated with the success of their immigrant students. We conclude with a critical view on simple policy borrowing and call for contextually responsive adaptation of promising policies and programs within distinct education systems.

**Résumé**

Les élèves immigrants de l'élémentaire et du secondaire manifestent systématiquement un désavantage dans leurs résultats quand on compare leurs résultats à ceux de leurs pairs non-immigrants. Ces désavantages varient selon les juridictions internationales, ce qui suggère que les niveaux des politiques ou les programmes des systèmes éducatifs peuvent contribuer à améliorer ou à aggraver ces différences. Notre travail fournit une synthèse des tendances des politiques ou des programmes éducatifs qui semblent être associées à des résultats d'élève immigrant plus favorables, en soulignant trois juridictions internationales : le Canada, la Nouvelle-Zélande et l'Angleterre. Cette analyse comparative identifie les caractéristiques clés de ces systèmes éducatifs qui ont été associées à la réussite de leurs élèves immigrants. Nous concluons par un point de vue critique sur le simple emprunt de politique et appelons à des adaptations réactives contextuelles des politiques et des programmes prometteurs à l'intérieur des systèmes éducatifs distincts.

**Keywords:** education policy, student achievement, immigrant students  
**Mots clés :** Politique éducative; performance de l'élève; élèves immigrants

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## **Introduction**

The education of elementary and secondary immigrant students has become a prominent concern with the increased mobility to popular and typically Western industrialized nations (United Nations Population Division, 2015). The number of immigrant children worldwide has increased from an estimated 28.7 million in 1990 to 37.9 million in 2019 reaching approximately 14% of the migrant population and almost 6% of the entire population in destination countries (International Organization for Migration, 2020). Governments, particularly those within these countries, are often faced with the unenviable task of developing education policies and programs that support immigrant students against the backdrop of fiscal restraints. Increasingly, these policies and programs are situated within Western industrialized societies that possess a growing and hostile anti-immigrant sentiment (Marsh, 2015). Yet the international research suggests that the prospects for immigrant students are particularly bleak if they are not able to thrive in their respective host education system—with deleterious effects for the social and economic well-being of these individuals and their families and nation states themselves (Volante et al., 2017).

Fortunately, the international community is able to draw upon relative pockets of success within and across countries to isolate policies and programs that ameliorate performance disadvantages of immigrant student groups. Indeed, there are even select jurisdictions around the world where immigrant students may outperform their nonimmigrant peers in select subject areas (see Volante et al., 2019b). Our work highlights education policies and programs that may be associated with more favourable educational achievement outcomes in elementary and secondary student populations. In the remainder of this article, we examine relevant policy frameworks that relate to immigrant students and how achievement data helps situate these experiences in Canada, New Zealand, and England.

We acknowledge at the onset that immigrant student achievement results occur within countries that possess distinct educational, cultural, social, economic, and political characteristics. These differences must be considered when attempting to draw “lessons” for the international community. Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw direct causal links between specific education policies and programs and student achievement outcomes, researchers have begun to identify a cadre of broad cross-cultural contextual features that appear to ease the transition of immigrants, and by extension, their children (Migrant Integration Policy Index, 2015; Volante et al., 2018). As a result, our work is also intended to examine these associations and discuss the implications for policy adaption and future research.

While our work has focused on three English-speaking Western countries that have experienced relative success in addressing the immigrant performance disadvantage, there is a significant likelihood that other countries with existing performance differences have also identified promising policies and programs. Thus, individual countries should develop methods to share relevant policies and programs to determine the various approaches that have demonstrated the most promise.

## **Immigrant Student Challenges**

Immigrant students have at least one thing in common: they all face adversity as a function of their migrant status. The level and depth of adversity experienced varies and is significantly influenced by the socioeconomic status (SES) of individual families as well as the characteristics of their migration trajectory and their subsequent experiences (Bilgili, 2017). Immigrant students from low SES groups tend to underperform relative to immigrants from higher SES groups, both within and across countries (Alba et al., 2011; Duong et al., 2016; OECD, 2011, 2012; Volante et al., 2019a).

This “double disadvantage” is perhaps the most prominent challenge for policymakers—namely to improve the achievement outcomes of an immigrant student population whose families are focused on trying to manage their fundamental needs while also struggling to integrate into a new community and host society.

While the issues of socioeconomic and integration may be the most prominent challenges, a number of other characteristics related to migration and the migration trajectory also influence the severity of adversity. Characteristics related to the migration trajectory include (cultural) distance, time and immigrant-generation, migration motivation, and intensity of the migration journey (e.g., level of preparedness) (Bilgili, 2017). For example, refugee students—which represent a subset of first-generation immigrants—face additional challenges because of gaps in their education due to missed school and/or possible trauma resulting from exposure to war (Crosnoe, 2005; OECD, 2012; Patel et al., 2017; Pottie et al., 2015; Volante et al., 2019b). These refugee students can be considered to be at a triple disadvantage in that alongside a precarious economic situation, they may be grappling with gaps in learning and/or lingering psychosocial effects associated with past conflict.

Regrettably, cross-national studies of immigrant student achievement have yet to distinguish between first-generation and refugee student groups or identify the number of entry and re-entry cycles many immigrants face. At present, analyses of immigrant student achievement have largely been confined to distinctions between first- and second-generation status, with the former experiencing the greatest challenges in terms of integration and student achievement. These analyses do not capture the complexity of immigration and the differential impacts associated with immigrant context. As a result, the broad findings from previous research and the overall impact of education policies and programs are unable to identify or address specific subsets of immigrant student groups.

### **PISA and Immigrant Student Achievement**

Policymakers around the world must find ways to understand why immigrant students who share a common country of origin, and therefore many cultural similarities, underperform in particular national education contexts (OECD, 2011, 2012). For example, how does one account for the fact that Turkish-born students in Germany perform almost two academic years lower than Turkish-born students in the Netherlands, even after adjusting for different economic backgrounds (The Economist, 2016). Similarly, why do immigrant students with the same cultural background tend to fare better in the Canadian versus American school systems (Cardoza, 2018). These types of relationships are abundant and underscore the important role that education policies, programs, and national context can play in the life chances of immigrant student populations around the world. From the immigration policies that may differentially attract immigrants based on SES to the explicit policies to support immigrant families and children, it is not surprising that cross-national policies will result in different immigrant student achievement outcomes. Of importance for our work, the extensive literature underscores the critical role that characteristics within and across countries play in influencing the achievement outcomes of immigrant students (see Bilgili et al., 2015; Brunello & Rocco, 2013; Dronkers & de Heus, 2013; Levels et al., 2008; Schlicht-Schmalzle & Moller, 2012; Volante et al., 2018).

Fortunately, immigrant student groups can rise above the challenges they face if they are provided with targeted supports, programs, and evidence-based policies. Policymakers traditionally turn to international assessment measures such as the Programme in International Student Assessment (PISA) to gauge the level of disadvantage that their immigrant student

population may be experiencing in their education system. This triennial survey assesses reading, mathematics, and science literacy in 15-year-old students around the world. In each administration of PISA, two-thirds of the test items are devoted to a major test domain, with the remaining one-third of test items split between the two minor domains. To date, there have been seven administrations of PISA, which began in 2000. Although PISA is not without detractors or limitations, it does provide a robust measure of comparative student performance. Moreover, the achievement gaps noted in PISA are largely congruent with national assessment results—thus enabling reliable inter- and intra-national comparisons of subgroups of students (Volante et al., 2019c).

Reading was the major tested domain in PISA 2018, with mathematics and science assessed as minor domains. Given the importance of language of instruction versus home language, the more prominent reading achievement gaps are to be expected, and especially for immigrant children. Table 1 below provides a comparison of reading performance of nonimmigrant students with their first- and second-generation counterparts in PISA 2018 for Canada, New Zealand, and England, as well as the average of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member states. We have highlighted these three countries as they represent pockets of relative success when compared against the international community and as well as in relation to their particular geographical region (i.e., North America, Australasia, and Europe). As such, they provide important insights on the associations between education policies and programs and immigrant student achievement outcomes. Table 1 also provides the percentage of academically resilient immigrant students—namely those students who were able to score in the top quarter of reading performance in their respective country. Academic resiliency for at-risk students such as immigrants and those from lower SES backgrounds attracts considerable attention in research and policy spheres (see Daher et al., 2019; Griffith, 2017; Johnsen et al., 2017; Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2017; OECD, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018).

**Table 1: PISA 2018 Reading Mean Scores and Mean Score Differences Between Nonmigrant (NI) and First-Generation (FG) and Second-Generation (SG) Students**

	Percentage Immigrant Students	Performance in reading			Score-point difference in reading performance associated with immigrant background	Academically resilient immigrant students
		NI	SG	FG	After accounting for gender, and students' and schools' socioeconomic profile	
	%	Mean Scores	Mean Scores	Mean Scores	Score Difference	%
<b>Canada</b>	35.0	525	535	508	-1	26.2
<b>New Zealand</b>	26.5	510	518	500	-8	26.5
<b>United Kingdom</b>	19.8	511	493	488	-4	20.5
<b>OECD Average</b>	13.0	494	465	440	-24	16.8

**Source:** These results were adapted from OECD (2019a) *PISA 2018: Combined Executive Summaries—Volume I, II, and III*.

It is important to note that while there are other countries with more favourable score-point differences and/or higher shares of academically resilient students in the PISA 2018 results, Canada, New Zealand, and England have been consistent in demonstrating relatively positive outcomes for immigrant students on the various cycles of PISA (Volante et al., 2018). Additionally, these three countries possess sizable and growing numbers of immigrant students within their respective student population. Collectively, these relative pockets of immigrant student success offer the broader community an important reference point when contemplating educational policy reforms.

### **Education Policies and Programs—Canada, New Zealand, and England**

Patterns of international immigration have changed considerably in the last two decades, resulting in an increased diversity of cultures migrating to Western nations. Given the increasing diversity of migrants, both in terms of cultural and financial backgrounds, it is not surprising that more bespoke policies and programs are being implemented to support immigrant student groups around the world. Canada, New Zealand, and England represent relative pockets of success that deserve our attention if we are to begin to identify ways to provide effective systematic support for immigrant students. We concede that a comprehensive analysis of economic, political, health, and other related sectors that impact immigrant children (and families) is critically important. Nevertheless, such a broad policy examination is beyond the scope of our present analysis. Rather, our analysis focuses on salient national and/or regional education policies and programs that are explicitly designed to support immigrant students and their families.

#### ***Canada***

Canada has long been a source of high levels of immigration, and close to 21% of the Canadian population were born outside Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017). Immigrants accounted for over 80% of Canada's growth in 2018/2019, a peak in a trend that began in the 1990s (Statistics Canada, 2019). Fuelled by immigration, Canada's overall growth rate of 1.4% in 2018/2019 was the highest among the G7 nations (over double the United Kingdom and USA in second), and just under Australia and New Zealand (1.6% each) amongst industrialized nations (Statistics Canada, 2019). The vast majority of immigrants are found in the four most populous provinces, Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta. Most migrants to Canada can be considered skilled, and selection for immigration is through a federally regulated points system that values education, skills, language ability, and training. Based on the most recent 2016 census, over half of the immigrants to Canada over the previous 5 years had a bachelor's degree or more (Statistics Canada, 2017). Nevertheless, immigrants continue to struggle to find employment based on their skills and training and are more likely to experience low SES (Picot & Hou, 2014). This has been further exacerbated in recent years due to an influx of refugees who do not enter through the point system.

Canada has a high proportion of students who are first- or second-generation immigrants, ranking second amongst OECD countries (Huddleston et al., 2015). In spite of this large portion of immigrants, Canada is one of the international jurisdictions in which the immigrant disadvantage is less pronounced or not found. Indeed, previous administrations of PISA have shown first- and second-generation immigrant students outperforming their nonimmigrant peers in provinces such as Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario which are relatively large and more

culturally diverse (Volante et al., 2017). At the same time, it is important to note that immigrant student outcomes vary across the decentralized Canadian context which does not possess a federal ministry of education and where provinces are autonomous in the development and implementation of education policies.

Not surprisingly, immigrants to Western industrialized countries tend to have a lower SES in relation to the majority population (Sporlein & van Tubergen, 2014). And, as described above, many immigrants in Canada are unlikely to obtain employment in their specialized fields, resulting in a lower SES relative to others with the same or similar level of education. This has potentially important implications from an educational perspective. As found across jurisdictions, Canadian children from lower SES backgrounds also have lower educational outcomes (e.g., Belley et al., 2014). Education policies related to immigrant students have sought to find methods to address this negative association. These policies may be aided by the immigration system that attracts immigrants with higher levels of education.

SES is often considered a proxy for educational value, and a strong predictor of SES is a father's and/or mother's education. In the case of immigrants to Canada, there is a disconnect between parents' education and SES. While less affluent, these parents instill a deep sense of importance towards education. This phenomenon is easily observed in the Canadian context with high levels of first- and second-generation immigrants attending university (Hu et al., 2019). Moreover, the most recent Canadian census data in 2016 indicated that approximately 40% of immigrants aged 25 to 64 had a bachelor's degree or higher compared to just under 25% of the Canadian-born population (Statistics Canada, 2017).

While federal immigration policies provide an advantage for immigrant families in terms of recognition of the importance of education, such policies are insufficient. Indeed, a recent scoping review of all 10 provincial education systems found no less than 199 separate policy documents that explicitly noted immigrant and refugee student provisions (Volante et al., 2020). Not surprisingly, policies related to linguistic and academic support for immigrant students were the most prominent areas noted in this pan-Canadian policy analysis. Given the importance of language acquisition for positive educational outcomes, curriculum expectations and provincial policies throughout the country have a long history of providing publicly funded English and French language learners (ELL/FLL) support for both first, second, and where required, subsequent generations of immigrant students (and adults) for whom English or French is not their first language (e.g., Alberta Education, 2017; British Columbia Government, 2018; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). These policies typically enable schools to provide resources and embed ELL teachers with the goal to “facilitate student success and inclusion in school and society” (British Columbia Government, 2018, p. 4).

Alongside the dimensions of supporting language acquisition, provinces across Canada also address other policy dimensions including efforts to increase parental involvement, intercultural education, and psychosocial support (Volante et al., 2020). As one example, nine of the 10 Canadian provinces have explicit policies that establish learning environments that value, respect, and promote diversity in schools (e.g., Alberta Education, 2017; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008a, 2008b; Government of New Brunswick, 2016; Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 2017; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). The range of documented policies is largely congruent with the previously noted literature on academic resilience.

Provincial education policies are also complemented by federal policies that recognize the need for more focused policies and programs for immigrants that not only support language development, but also integration, reunification, and protection (Braun, 2016; Cheng & Yan,

2018). The Government of Canada provides free language training to permanent residents and protected persons (asylum seekers and refugees) to similarly support their inclusion into their respective communities. As previously suggested a range of policies and programs extend beyond Canadian classrooms with the aim of increasing “parental involvement”—providing adequate information through various communication channels, promoting the use of interpreters, and providing reception and orientation support for immigrant families. Ontario, for example, possesses more than 200 settlement centres. These community organizations, funded in part by the federal government, are meant to help immigrants and refugees begin a “healthy social, economic, and cultural integration” into Canadian society (Cardoza, 2018). These centres provide a range of services to immigrants such as computer classes, help with finding jobs, and/or navigating the free provincial health system. Overall, the Canadian context is noted for providing a range of accommodations and supportive programs for newly arriving immigrants. These federal accommodations and provincial policies contribute to Canada’s international ranking of fourth on the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) for educational supports for immigrants (Huddleston et al., 2015).

### *New Zealand*

New Zealand provides another example in which there is a relatively high level of immigration but little evidence of immigrant underachievement. While small in actual numbers due to the small population size of New Zealand (approximately 4.9 million people), immigrants account for approximately 25% of the people living in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2017). Immigration numbers have remained relatively consistent over the past 10 years. For example, for the 12 months ending in July 2019, New Zealand had a net migration of approximately 53,000 people (Statistics New Zealand, 2019). The vast majority of immigrants to New Zealand come from Asia (China and India), the United Kingdom, and South Africa. Since 2013, China and India have replaced England as the major source of migration to New Zealand. Further, the diversity of countries of origin has increased over the recent years (Law et al., 2013; Poskitt, 2018). New Zealand allows for short-term and long-term immigration to qualified applicants. International students graduating from a New Zealand tertiary institution are able to work within New Zealand for 3 years after graduation. Applications for long-term work visas or residency are based on a point system, with higher levels of tertiary education and/or skills in identified shortage areas being required to meet the minimum level.

Overall, New Zealand targets skilled immigrants who will provide maximum innovation, entrepreneurship, or investment (White et al., 2002). Along with economic and skilled immigration, New Zealand also accepts approximately 1,000 refugees each year as part of its responsibility through the United Nations’ quota program. Refugees can also enter New Zealand through family reunification and through request for asylum. Combined, these immigration policies have led to a substantial increase in the migration of young people (ages 12–24) to New Zealand, increasing from 17% in 2001 to 23% in 2013 (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment [MBIE], 2017). The proportions of youth immigration have remained relatively steady since that time. Just under 50% of the youth have come to New Zealand through the skilled/business pathway, 40% through family immigration, and just over 15% through refugee immigration (MBIE).

Given these immigration rates, there is a growing proportion of first- and second-generation immigrant children in New Zealand’s schools, especially in urban locations (e.g., Auckland, Christchurch, Dunedin, Hamilton, and Wellington). As in Canada, an achievement

disadvantage is not generally found for immigrant children in New Zealand, especially those from Asian countries (Poskitt, 2018). There is a significant achievement disadvantage for immigrant children from the Pacific nations. Children from this ethnic group have the lowest levels of PISA performance in New Zealand, highlighting the combined impacts of immigration with lower levels of socioeconomic status (Volante et al., 2017).

As a relatively small nation in terms of size and population, government policy is done at the federal level, with provisions to ensure treaty rights with Māori are met. Immigrant policies and practices have also been guided by federally supported immigration research programs conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the “New Settlers’ Programme” led by Andrew Trlin at Massey University and the Population Studies Centre at the University of Waikato being prominent examples. Given the increasing proportion of immigrant children who do not speak English as a first language, current education policies and programs focus on language acquisition and positive integration.

New Zealand is third in terms of educational supports for immigrants according to the MIPEx (Huddleston et al., 2015). As one example of such support, immigrants from non-English speaking countries receive New Zealand’s Educational Support for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) funding, directing resources to schools and teachers to effectively meet students’ integration and English language development needs (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017). After two terms in school, immigrant and refugee students’ English language is assessed on their language capabilities (with a range of assessments such as the English Language Learning Progressions) and those with the greatest needs obtain ESOL funding for up to 5 years (Poskitt, 2018). As Poskitt further states in her analysis of targeted policy initiatives in New Zealand: “...targeting resources to students who most need it is a strategy that may actually address performance differences and equity challenges associated with immigrants and students from less advantaged backgrounds” (p. 191).

The Pacific (Pasifika) Education Plan (PEP) provides a specific example of such targeted immigrant resources. The PEP began in 2013–2017 with the intention to “strengthen engagement in all areas of learning and raise achievement for Pasifika learners” at all levels of education (New Zealand Ministry of Education, n.d., p. 2). Rather than a focus on integration, a critical aspect of the PEP is its focus on family, community, and Pacific culture. The ongoing development and implementation of the PEP is a result of close collaboration amongst the Pacific community, government, and national and international agencies. The government of New Zealand has further extended the PEP with continued community engagement and almost \$28 million in funding beginning in 2019.

### ***England***

The United Kingdom consists of four constituent countries: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The highest concentrations of first-generation immigrants are found in England (15.5%), followed by Scotland (9%), Northern Ireland (7.2%), and Wales (6%) (Sturge, 2019). Not surprisingly, first-generation immigrant students are particularly represented in London, with 35% of people living in the United Kingdom, who were born abroad, making the capital city their home (Sturge, 2019). Similar to Canada and New Zealand, the majority of immigrant children have parents whose first language is not the language of instruction—English (or also French as in the case of Canada). Within the English context, these students are referred to as English as an additional language (EAL) pupils—a designation that is reflected in targeted policies and programs to support this at-risk student population.

It is worth noting that the United Kingdom's constituent countries enjoy significant autonomy in education policy development and implementation and the disaggregation of U.K. PISA results has consistently indicated that England is the highest achieving country when compared to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (European Commission, 2016, 2019). Similarly, while England's PISA performance over time has been relatively flat, immigrant students have enjoyed steady improvements over time—making it a noteworthy country to examine within the United Kingdom (Jerrim, 2018). Indeed, when compared to other European nations, the United Kingdom (and England in particular) has possessed one of the most favourable relationships between the performance of immigrant and nonimmigrant student groups (European Commission, 2016, 2019). Collectively, the previous points suggest that England is an important international context, particularly since immigration into England has significantly accelerated since 1991 (Sturge, 2019).

There are a number of high-profile education policies and programs that have been explicitly designed to support immigrants and EAL students in England. Through the National Curriculum, the Department for Education (2013) outlines two key expectations for teachers related to EAL students:

(4.5) Teachers must also take account of the needs of pupils whose first language is not English. Monitoring of progress should take account of the pupil's age, length of time in this country, previous educational experience and ability in other languages; and (4.6) The ability of EAL pupils to take part in the national curriculum may be in advance of their communication skills in English. Teachers should plan teaching opportunities to help pupils develop their English and should aim to provide the support pupils need to take part in all subjects. (United Kingdom Department for Education, 2014)

The previously noted curriculum expectations are also supported by a wide range of resources and programs that support EAL students and their parents. For example, an *EAL Assessment Tracker* was recently developed to provide a free digital tool to support strategies that provide practical ways to support EAL learners at each stage of their language development (Bell Foundation, n.d.). Similarly, *Challenge Partners* is a national association that encompasses a network of local school partnerships that delivers EAL in mainstream classrooms across twelve different locations in England (Challenge Partners, n.d.). The goal of the program is to help classroom teachers develop expertise and build capacity working with EAL students. England also possesses a *Family Skills* intervention that provides 30 hours of literacy contact time, through a mixture of parents-only and parent-child sessions (Husain et al., 2018). Collectively, the English context underscores a pronounced focus on English language program supports for immigrant student groups.

Additionally, researchers in England have increasingly focused their attention on EAL students—which represent the majority of immigrants to this country. Indeed, the EAL designation is noted in England's National Pupil Database (NPD), garnering a great deal of attention and interest. Using the NPD, Strand et al. (2015) research aligns with the general pattern of PISA results and suggests that EAL students catch-up with their First Language English (FLE) peers during their time in England's schools. Collectively, analysis of PISA and NPD data sets have led to a general commitment to evidence-based policies in the English context—particularly as they relate to EAL students. Lastly, the fact that English immigrant students have substantially and significantly more positive attitudes to school than nonimmigrant children suggests they may be well positioned to enjoy relative academic success in the future (Burgess & Heller-Sahlgren, 2018).

### **A Brief Caveat about Ongoing Challenges**

Collectively, these three countries demonstrate that even in the presence of substantial levels of immigration, targeted policies that focus on immigration, transition and community support, language acquisition, and educational integration can provide effective supports for migrant children and their families. Admittedly, Canada, New Zealand, and England are not without their own ongoing challenges when addressing immigrant students within their education systems. For example, in Canada, immigrant students are more likely to be directed into lower academic streams designed for a vocational postsecondary pathway in some provinces—a tracking policy that tends to lead to reduced university prospects for immigrant and lower SES students cross-nationally (see Chykina, 2019; Murdoch et al., 2017; van de Werfhorst & Heath, 2019). Similarly, in New Zealand, school choice provisions, which also represent a form of tracking, have increasingly led to greater social stratification and the concentration of immigrant and minority (i.e., Māori and Pacific Island) students in low-achieving schools (Poskitt, 2018). Lastly, in England, the educational attainment of students with Caribbean, African, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi immigrant backgrounds are on average below that of students without an immigrant background—even after accounting for students’ SES backgrounds (Lenkeit et al., 2015). The latter suggests that particular immigrant student populations do not benefit in this country’s relative success—a general pattern found in many other educational jurisdictions.

### **Policy Adaption and Future Research**

The three countries we have profiled highlight that a combination of immigration and education policies may help to ameliorate the commonly seen immigrant disadvantage in educational achievement. At the same time, migrant inequities still exist in these jurisdictions, suggesting that while these national profiles provide a range of promising policies and program directions, policymakers need to exercise a degree of caution and carefully consider their specific contexts when attempting to adapt current policies and practices to their own unique education system. Undoubtedly policies, like people, do not migrate over international borders without understanding where they came from and how they are situated within national education systems.

Policy adaption is conceptually distinct from policy borrowing efforts which seem to “borrow” in a rather simplistic, and some would argue, dangerous manner (see Grek, 2009; Meyer & Zahedi, 2014; Volante, 2018). Policy borrowing approaches always seem bound to fail and risk diverting a great deal of finite resources and attention from more viable approaches that are responsive to regional and national contexts. For example, while it is generally agreed that the school choice and streaming/pathway tracking provisions previously noted tend to lead to negative student outcomes for at-risk student groups such as immigrant and low SES students, this is not a universal phenomenon. Germany, a country that in some *Länder* (states) tracks children earlier than in any other European country, still managed to decrease educational inequalities due to the introduction of a number of education policies that balanced out the impact of tracking on educational inequalities (Volante et al., 2019d).

Similarly, it is generally agreed that immigrant students suffer a late-arrival penalty and have more difficulty catching up to their same-age peers, when they migrate to a new country at the age of 12 years or older and have spent at most four years in their new country (OECD, 2013). These late-arriving students lag farther behind students in the same grade in reading proficiency than immigrants who arrived at younger ages, which in turn negatively impacts their opportunities

for postsecondary education. However, cross-national research suggests that this late-arrival penalty varies by national context, where immigrant children experience this penalty at an earlier or later age (Volante et al., 2018). Collectively, the preceding points underscore the complexity of policy evaluation and adaptation efforts. Ideally, proposed education policies and programs would build on the available empirically validated best practices in the field, while accounting for the constellation of characteristics and issues that impact immigrant student achievement outcomes within distinct national contexts.

It is also worth noting that while the international research literature on immigrant student outcomes is quite broad, it is also constrained by the available student achievement data and corresponding surveys that are administered by international organizations such as the OECD. As previously noted, these international achievement surveys have not accounted for circular migration patterns, which represent the norm for many first-generation immigrants around the world (Skeldon, 2013). As such, this limits the ability of researchers and policymakers to fully understand the impact of migration on social integration and educational outcomes for different subsets of this population—including families that have experienced an uneven transition process.

For example, do tracking provisions and/or the late-arrival penalty result in more negative outcomes for immigrant children whose families have undergone multiple re-entry points and/or significant disruptions to their migration? Similarly, are there specific policies and programs that seem to have particularly beneficial outcomes for immigrant children that have experienced circular migration patterns? Obviously, the inclusion of disaggregated achievement results that account for these relationships may provide policymakers with a more nuanced understanding of their immigrant student population and the necessary supports to facilitate their academic success.

Relatedly, there also remains a pressing need for the international community to have access to more robust policy and program evaluation research findings—an area that is typically not funded or is woefully underfunded by federal/national research agencies. Indeed, recent reviews by the OECD (2019b, 2015) suggest there are a plethora of national education policies and programs that are largely unscrutinised in many countries—including those we have profiled. Such education policies and programs would benefit from longitudinal and/or counterfactual impact evaluation research to help policymakers make better sense of “what works” in education. Additionally, systemic policy and program evaluation research would provide the added benefit of generating formative and summative evaluation recommendations to help inform policymakers’ decisions to revise or discontinue particular education policies and/or programs that do not appear to be promoting their intended outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

It is widely accepted that the success of nations around the world is inextricably tied to the development of their citizens—particularly children and adolescents—who embody the future cognitive, cultural, social, and economic well-being of countries. When one considers the increasing share of migrant students in numerous education systems globally, it is easy to understand the importance and urgency for understanding the educational policies and programs that support their successful integration in host societies. Indeed, the trajectory of academic success for immigrant children, with similar cultural and economic backgrounds, varies significantly based on the destination/host country education system and national context, which further underscores the relevance of these education policies and programs. Although it should be conceded that immigrant students are not an invisible group and have increasingly attracted greater attention in

both policy and research spheres, there is a need for more fine-grained research and analyses to assist governments in their efforts to develop contextually adaptive policies and programs.

The preceding discussion provided a range of policies and programs in three educational jurisdictions that have enjoyed relative success in their immigrant student integration efforts. The noted policies and programs are not meant to provide prescriptive solutions for other nations via policy borrowing, rather they are best viewed as areas of focus when contemplating education reforms. No doubt, the expression of education policies and programs for immigrant students is impacted, both positively and negatively, by broader contextual and structural factors that influence student adjustment processes (Berry et al., 2006; Levels et al., 2008; Ungar, 2011). Our work here suggests that while immigrant children will undoubtedly face challenges in adjusting to their host society, the provision of promising education policies and programs can help them successfully integrate and achieve high academic standards. We have suggested that these promising policies and programs require policymakers to make greater use of empirical evidence and apply research findings to the policy development process in a manner that recognizes their unique national, cultural, and educational characteristics.

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