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## Integration and Career Challenges of Newcomer Youth in Newfoundland in Canada


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# Integration and Career Challenges of Newcomer Youth in Newfoundland in Canada

## **Abstract**

Faced with a labor shortage and low profile of diversity, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Canada has been making an effort to attract and retain newcomers. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, this qualitative study investigates the challenges faced by newcomer youth, including permanent residents coming as immigrants or refugees and temporary residents with student visas or work permits, who were either already in the work force or could join it in the immediate future. Major themes surfacing from the data include inadequate public transportation, limited social interaction, language barriers, and dim employment prospects. The authors conclude that the key problems lie in lack of funding for needed support, coordination among existing programs, convenient transportation, and job opportunities. The province can expect an increased retention rate of newcomers when these issues are considered and resolved, along with bridging programs established to bring the local and newcomers together.

## **Keywords**

Refugee· International student· Transportation· Social interaction· Employment

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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# **INTEGRATION AND CAREER CHALLENGES OF NEWCOMER YOUTH IN NEWFOUNDLAND IN CANADA**

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## **Introduction**

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador (“Newfoundland” in short as most of the newcomers and newcomer services in the province are located on the island of Newfoundland, which is the focus of our study) has seen an increase in the population of newcomers in spite of its local population decline in the past decade (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2013). Youth make up a significant proportion of the newcomers who are permanent residents (who arrive as landed immigrants and refugees) or temporary residents (who come with student visas or work permits). For example, about half of the 741 permanent residents who came to Newfoundland in 2012 were between the ages of 16 and 39. At the same time, the province received 2050 temporary foreign students (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012), among which 1694 were registered in Memorial University of Newfoundland (Fowler, 2013).

Leaving behind their familiar social-cultural environment, and in most cases, their parents, family, and friends, what are the biggest challenges of these young people in Newfoundland? How are they supported in their academic and social life? How do they articulate their sense of belonging? And how do they feel about their future career in relation to the local labor shortage and the provincial government’s effort at attracting newcomers?

In this article, we will address the above questions by presenting findings from our study on newcomer youth integration and challenges in Newfoundland. While most studies involving newcomer youth have been conducted in large, ethnically-diverse cities, youth adaptation in smaller centers with low ethnic minority populations has not been given sufficient attention. Our study is among the earliest ones looking into newcomer youth lives in Newfoundland, and in particular, in St John’s, where newcomers to this province cluster. We hope that the findings from

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our study will shed light on newcomer youth support and integration in Newfoundland communities and hopefully in other smaller centers in Canada.

### **Theoretical Framework**

We used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as the overarching conceptual framework to guide this study. This theory identifies that an individual's development is influenced by five environmental systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, with the individual and the characteristics of the individual positioned at the center of these systems. Level of education and wealth, for example, are individual's characteristics. The microsystem represents the closest relationships that the individual has with immediate surroundings, which includes family, teachers, and peers. The next layer, mesosystem, refers to the interactions or cooperation between the various microsystems, for example, the collaboration between schools and community organizations. Exosystem is other people or organizations that may have an indirect relationship with the individual but have a large effect on him or her, such as community agencies. Macrosystem, the outermost layer, is comprised of things such as ideologies, attitudes, values, and customs found in the society. Chronosystem includes transitions and environmental changes in the individual's lifespan.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides a useful framework for investigating the integration and career challenges faced by newcomer youth as it allows us to consider both individual's characteristics and different layers of relationships that may affect newcomer youth's development, positively or negatively. Newfoundland is a new world to newcomer youth, in particular refugee youth who flee their countries due to wars or prosecution. When they land here, it is a big milestone in their chronosystem and they experience drastic changes in all other systems, starting with the macrosystem.

### **The Context of Newcomer Integration in Newfoundland**

The economic boom in Newfoundland is confronted with a shortage of skilled workers resulting from out-migration, the aging population, and the low fertility rate. The province has an annual interprovincial migrant deficit in the past years. During July 2011--June 2012, 10,829 people moved from Newfoundland to other provinces and territories while only 9,273 came to this province (Newfoundland Statistics Agency, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). In addition, the current population of Newfoundland is aging fast. In 2011, the province had the third highest percentage of seniors. It is estimated that by 2036 almost one third of the local residents will be 65 or over (Employment and Social Development Canada, n.d.). To add to the gravity of population decline, the fertility rate is comparatively low in Newfoundland. In 2011, the fertility rate in this province was the second lowest in the country (Statistics Canada, n.d.). The population deficit has been a concern of local businesses and industries. The provincial government began to realize that attraction and retention of newcomers as a solution to labor shortage is crucial to the development of the Newfoundland economy. In 2007, the first provincial immigration strategy was launched (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Human Resources, Labor and Employment, 2007), with its goals "to increase awareness of the benefits of immigration and the role it can play in a community's economic, social and cultural development" (p. 5); "to increase awareness among potential immigrants of the benefits of choosing Newfoundland and Labrador as their new home" (p. 6); and "to encourage Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to welcome immigrants into our communities and celebrate cultural diversity" (p. 7). At the same time, the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism (OIM) was established to implement the strategy and a

Provincial Nominee Program (NLPNP) was set up to expedite the processing of locally needed immigrants (Arsenault, 2008). At present, NLPNP has a Skilled Worker category and an International Student category.

With the policies and programs in place, let's take a look at the local readiness for newcomers. In terms of cultural and linguistic diversity, some survey statistics may help us understand the situation. A poll on Canadian local people's attitude toward immigration showed that 76% of the participants from Newfoundland claimed frequent interaction with immigrants (lower than the national rate at 82%) and 13% of the Newfoundland participants reported no interaction with immigrants (higher than the national rate at 8%) (Vote, 2012). This result is not surprising considering that Newfoundland is traditionally mono-cultural and geographically isolated from the rest of Canada. In 2011, the province had the highest percentage of the population that reported English as mother tongue at 97.6% (in comparison to the national rate at 56.9%) and had the lowest percentage of the population identify non-official languages as mother tongue at 1.7% (in comparison to the national rate at 19.8%) (Statistics Canada, 2012).

The lack of diversity is also reflected in religious traditions. According to the 2001 Census (Statistics Canada, 2002), Newfoundland population were predominantly made up of different denominations of Christianity (36.9% Roman Catholic, 17% United Church, 26.1% Anglican). Other religious groups comprised a smaller population (0.1% Muslim, 0.1% Hindu, 0 Buddhist), and 2.5% people were non-religious. The statistics suggest that Newfoundland is not at an advantage when it comes to attracting newcomers from diverse linguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

Youth receptivity of newcomers is another indicator of local readiness for newcomers. A study on Newfoundland post-secondary youth perspectives on immigration revealed that these students were welcoming of immigrants; however, they considered it a pre-requisite for immigrants to possess good education and language skills prior to their arrival (Baker & Bittner, 2013). It seems a basic and reasonable requirement for newcomers of certain categories, such as international students and economic class immigrants, but can be beyond the reach of many refugees who arrive as a result of government or community humanitarian effort.

Career wise, the picture looks fairly gloomy. Locke and Lynch (2005) investigated the attitudes of Newfoundland employers toward the immigrant workers. They pointed out that local firms had little contact with new Canadians or international workers and less than 10% of the employers had hired them in the past five years. Their major concerns were the training costs (e.g., in language and communication, among others) and the low retention rate of newcomers in Newfoundland (which was 36% in 2006). And certainly the low employment rate of newcomers does not help with the retention rate. The documented challenges that drove newcomers away include inefficient processing of foreign credential recognition, language difficulty and lack of Canadian work experience (Sarma-Debnath & Kutty, 2006); daily inconveniences, inaccessibility to ethnic food, and poor transportation systems (Burnaby, Whelan, & Rivera, 2009).

In this paper, we focus on the challenges of newcomer youth who were in the local work force or could join in the immediate future should they stay. We begin with literature review, which provides the background and rationale for our investigation.

### **The Microsystem of Family Support and Social Network**

Living in a new cultural environment, support from family and friends is most important for one's wellbeing and success. Research indicates that parental support is one of the factors that influence immigrant students' academic performance. Immigrant students whose parents attach

great importance to schooling and whose parents could help them with homework are reported to have a high rate of homework completion (Bang 2011).

However, not all newcomer youth have the luxury of parental support and this is particularly true with students of refugee background. Kanu (2008) finds that refugee students living apart from a parent or parents tend to face greater academic frustration because of lack of boundary settings and homework guidance. The ones living with parents can also be challenged. Bitew and Ferguson (2010) point out that most African refugee parents are unable to provide academic help because of their limited education and lack of time. They report that most parents are under-educated or uneducated due to poverty and unstable life, and most parents are taking low-paying jobs in order to maintain their families. In addition, parents' unfamiliarity with the western school system also prevents them from school involvement (Birman & Ryerson, 2007).

Although university international students leave home voluntarily, they have their set of challenges. The biggest one is to deal with homesickness. McLachlan and Justice's (2009) find that 95% of the participants in their study suffered from homesickness when they first came to the U.S. International students who are less independent and less experienced with life away from parents are more likely to feel homesick (Thurber & Walton, 2012). When combined with other factors, such as lower levels of English proficiency and higher levels of perceived racial discrimination, the degree of homesickness becomes more unbearable (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2010). Thurber and Walton (2012) point out that homesickness can lead to mental disorders, physical problems and students' withdrawal from their programs.

Support from friends becomes more critical than ever in the context where families are out of reach or helpless. Students who perceive receiving more social support from a close friend expressed fewer intercultural competence concerns (Yeh et al., 2008). However, building a network of friends is not an easy task. First, there is the issue of lack of interaction. Kanu (2008) points out that African refugee students often feel isolated and excluded in school because they rarely interact with their non-African classmates in both school work and extracurricular activities. They are unable to take part in any school sports activities because they are not familiar with the sports prevalent in Canada.

Lack of interaction can be caused by many factors, one of them being discrimination. The high school immigrant youth in Oxman-Martinez, et al.'s (2012) study reported ethnic discrimination by peers in the direct forms of hitting, pushing, and threatening, and in the indirect forms of ignoring and excluding in social interactions. Other studies provide further examples. Japanese students state that they have suffered discrimination "due to physical appearance and/or limited English skills" (Christine et al., 2003, p.490). Afghan students are reported to suffer physical or verbal provocation from their Quebec-born peers, and feel unable to develop friendships with the local students (Steinbach, 2010). Such situations lead to newcomer students' huddling in their own groups. In Chan and Birman's (2009) study, "Vietnamese immigrant adolescents who attended schools with higher diversity indices reported fewer cross-race friends and lower levels of perceived social support from their cross-race friends" (p. 321). Tananuraksakul (2009) concludes that Asian students often seek help from friends who come from the same country.

Most international students have a strong desire to develop friendships with host country peers (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Those who have more friends from the host country tend to be more satisfied and less homesick (Hendrickson, Rosen & Aune 2011). However, making friends from the host country is challenging. Gareis, Merkin and Goldman (2011) report that international students at a large university in New York City "had significantly fewer American friends than

home- or other-culture friends and were less satisfied with the number and quality of these friendships than with the number and quality of their home- or other-culture friends” (p. 164). International female Japanese students feel there are clear boundaries between them and their American peers, which keep them out of their US-born peers’ group (Oikonomidou & Williams, 2012). Similar to the sentiment of immigrant and refugee students, most international students feel more comfortable when they mix with their home-culture friends because of shared language and culture (Brown, 2009).

### **Individual Challenges: Education and Linguistic Concerns**

In today’s knowledge society, a solid education is the first step toward a successful career. However, newcomer youth academic performances can vary greatly due to prior educational experiences and language skills. In the spectrum of newcomer youth, we have those of refugee background who had spent most, if not all, of their lives on the run or in a refugee camp, to those from economically less developed areas who had received education below the Canadian standards, and to those from a highly competitive educational system with excellent English skills and subject knowledge. Studies concerning these different groups have produced different results, but language proficiency frequently surfaces as a primary concern, and language affects their academic work, extracurricular involvement, and future paths.

First of all, limited language proficiency hinders immigrant students’ understanding of the textbook content, and apprehension of their accents keeps them from speaking in front of the class (Kanu, 2008). In addition, immigrant youth with lower English proficiency are less likely to join school activities, limiting their connections to their peers and school personnel (Goldstein, 2003; Schleifer & Ngo, 2005; Walsh, Este, Krieg, & Giurgiu, 2011; Yeh, et al., 2008). Furthermore, language barriers give rise to a feeling of isolation, which adversely affects immigrant students’ academic and social life (Karanja, 2007). Students with a low level of English worry more about their intercultural competence (Yeh et al., 2008) and take part in classroom and daily interactions passively (Tananuraksakul, 2009).

At the tertiary level, although international students are required to reach an advanced level of English proficiency in high-stakes examinations such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and IELTS (International English Language Testing System) before they are admitted to their programs, they are not immune to language problems. Listening comprehension and oral communication are among the most challenging aspects—some have difficulties in following lectures when their professors speak fast and with accents while others feel powerless and even discriminated against due to their limited oral English skills (Kuo, 2011). Research studies along this line also point out that international students feel greatly challenged in leading classroom discussions (Kim, 2006). Some fail to participate in class discussions because their responses are delayed by the mental translation process and thus miss the right moment to join the discussions (Lee, 2009).

Language competency affects not only students’ current academic and social lives, but also their future plans. In Ma and Yeh’s (2010) study, students with good language skills decide to go to college, but those with poor English proficiency plan to find a job after they graduate. By the same token, international college graduates with higher language skills tend to aim high in their future study or employment. However, Arthur and Flynn (2011) point out that international students tend to feel uncomfortable with the way they speak English even after living in Canada for a few years. It is reasonable for us to conclude that language is a residual concern for most of the newcomer youth.

### **Individual Challenges: Financial and Career Pressures**

Other than the above concerns, financial security, be it short-term or long-term, plays an important role in newcomer youth's wellbeing and academic performance. Chow's (2002) study shows that students with a higher self-rated social-economic status had greater access to academic resources because parents could afford to hire private tutors or to send them to special courses. Duffy (2004) and Suarez-Orozco et al. (2010) both indicate that Chinese immigrant students outperform other groups because of the rich resources provided by their families. However, students from refugee families, such as those from the Spanish and Vietnamese speaking groups in Suarez-Orozco et al.'s (2010) study, tend to under-perform.

One of the reasons for these students' lower grades is that they are burdened with financial pressure and have to earn bread for the family. Kanu (2008) reports that more than half the African refugee high school students in her study were working eight-hour full-time jobs to support themselves, help their parents pay off the government loan for resettlement, and support family members back in Africa. While financial pressure is a major source of anxiety, it can also be a drive for academic success. McCartney, Harris, and Farrow (2012) find that Hispanic immigrant students in their study have a strong sense of obligation to their families. While taking part-time jobs, they also study hard for a good job in future. Moreover, newcomer students who have witnessed their parents' financial struggles "seemed to gravitate toward majors that would lead to well-defined, highly remunerated professions" (Kanno & Varghese, 2010, p.321).

At the tertiary level, tuition fees for international students are much higher than those for domestic students, and yet scholarships for international students are much fewer (Hopkins, 2012; Mewett, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Sawir, 2009). Even if some of the international students have received scholarships, the amount is not enough to cover their tuition and other extra fees (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2009). To solve the financial problem, some of them have to take part-time jobs, which are scarce to them, and failure to do so will negatively influence their academic and personal life (Chen, 1999), and decrease their confidence in themselves (Huang, 2011).

The international students who choose to live in Canada need to apply for permanent residence. The application process adds to their existing academic, social, and financial pressures (Suter & Jandl, 2006). They need to meet the requirement of one-year employment in Canada in their field of study, excluding their off-campus and on-campus odd jobs, and their internship work ("Meeting Canada's Labor Needs", n. d.). Considering their cultural and language barriers and lack of "Canadian" experience, their opportunities of getting such employment are very much restricted.

The above-mentioned challenges faced by high school newcomer students and tertiary international students are well-documented in studies carried out in metropolises like Vancouver, Toronto, New York, and other large cities. Less attention has been paid to youth in smaller cities where immigrant population is relatively small and resources for them are more limited, which may cause additional challenges that have not been noted or documented. As part of a comprehensive project investigating newcomer integration and retention in Newfoundland, this study focuses on three groups of newcomer youth—those attending high school, those studying at university, and those in the workforce.

### **Methodology**

We employed a qualitative case study approach. We appreciated its focus on the discovery, insight, and understanding from the participants' perspectives and the depth of social life and



human experience such an approach can offer (Creswell, 2007; Curtis & Pettigrew, 2010). Multiple cases were studied in order for us to gain a deeper insight into the research problem through rich descriptions and explanations.

Participants in this study include six newcomers who fell in the range of 17-39 in age and arrived in Newfoundland within three years before the interview, and five employees from different newcomer serving agencies in Newfoundland. The newcomers were two high school students of refugee background, two international undergraduate students, one permanent resident and one work permit holder in the process of obtaining permanent resident status. The newcomer youth represented six kinds of family, financial, linguistic and cultural backgrounds with one thing in common—the desire to stay in Canada. We assigned code names YouthA, YouthB, YouthC, YouthD, YouthE, and YouthF to protect their identities due to the relatively small number of newcomer youth in Newfoundland. Because service providers were easily identifiable in the small city, they were not associated with their agencies in this article. Code names Service ProviderA, Service ProviderB, Service ProviderC, Service ProviderD, and Service ProviderE were used to better protect their identities. The table below provides demographic information of the youth participants.

Table 1

| <i>Youth Participant Demographics</i> |               |            |                                 |                                  |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <u>Code Name</u>                      | <u>Gender</u> | <u>Age</u> | <u>Academic/Career Status</u>   | <u>Year Arriving Canada (NL)</u> |
| YouthA                                | Male          | 19         | Grade 12 high school            | 2010                             |
| YouthB                                | Female        | 17         | Grade 11 high school            | 2011                             |
| YouthC                                | Female        | 23         | 4 <sup>th</sup> year university | 2001-2009                        |
| YouthD                                | Male          | 21         | 2 <sup>nd</sup> year university | 2011                             |
| YouthE                                | Male          | 29         | Construction worker             | 2012                             |
| YouthF                                | Female        | 39         | Self-employed                   | 2011                             |

YouthA was from Liberia. Before he came to Canada, he had been living in a refugee camp in Sierra Leone for eight years. At the time of the study, he lived with his mother in Canada, but was separated from his father and his younger siblings back in Liberia. YouthB was from Iraq. Her parents were very protective of her while fleeing Iraq and in their subsequent life in Syria. Now she lived with her parents and three younger siblings in Canada. Both YouthC and YouthD were international undergraduate students. YouthC first came to Canada when she was eleven years old and had lived here for about six years with her parents. She then returned her home country Latvia with parents. In 2009, she came back for tertiary education and majored in business. YouthD was from India majoring in Computer Science.

YouthE works for a local construction company. His family fled from their native country Uganda to Sudan due to political upheavals. In 1992 when he was seven years old, they escaped to a refugee camp in Kenya owing to the Sudanese civil war. . He lived in the camp for twenty years from 1992 to 2012 under the care of his grandmother because his parents passed away in Sudan. After completing eight years of education in the camp, he attended a technical school to learn motor vehicle mechanics and worked for several NGOs in the camp until he came to Canada. YouthF came to Canada from Peru with her husband on work permits. Her husband has worked as an engineer at a Canadian company, first in Peru for seven years, then in Montreal for three years since 2009, and currently in St John's since 2011. She had worked at a daycare center in

Montreal but was self-employed selling her crafts at the moment. They had a daughter studying in grade five in a French-immersion school in St. John's.

Data for this study were drawn from participant interviews, about one hour each. We asked open-ended questions regarding the challenges they faced in their school life and daily life as well as their specific needs. According to Creswell (2012), open-ended questions enable participants to “best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the research or past research findings” (p. 218). All the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Our first step in analyzing data was a preliminary exploratory analysis (Creswell, 2012) which “consists of exploring the data to obtain a general sense of the data, memorizing ideas, thinking about the organization of the data, and considering whether you need more data” (p. 243). We read all the transcripts several times and wrote short memos in the margin of transcripts. In further analysis, we coded each transcript, reduced the list of codes to a smaller number, and then further reduced them to a manageable size of themes.

### **Findings and Discussions**

Not surprisingly, some of the themes coming out of our study concur with the results from other studies, such as language difficulties, lack of support, social isolation, and so on. However, other aspects emerged from our study indicating areas that demand more attention in smaller centers and newer destinations of immigration. In the following, we will present our findings with analysis and discussions integrated, focusing on the different layers of environmental systems and the individual in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979).

#### ***Public Transportation in the Exosystem***

Public transportation is indispensable to most newcomer youth for their daily commute. It is understandable that tertiary level students need to take care of their own transportation if the university or college does not have an agreement with the local bus service. However, when transportation to school is a concern of high school students, we have to look at the matter more closely.

The school bus service takes care of students in the school zone. However, because all newcomer high school students were placed in one school and yet their residence was mostly arranged outside the school zone, these newcomer youth were left to their own devices to attend school. YouthB said, “In winter time, it is a disaster” because the days were cold and short. One afternoon when it was getting dark, she missed the bus going home and had to wait for 45 minutes. A man approached her and asked if she wanted to smoke. She was “really scared” and started to cry at the bus stop. YouthA's house was further away from the school and the buses were even less frequent. Going to school was a struggle for more reasons. He had few clothes to keep warm and there was no direct bus route to school. He usually woke up at 6:00 in the morning in order to catch the bus at 7:00 so he could be at school before 8:50. The worst times were when the bus passed earlier than scheduled and he had to wait an extra hour for the next one or when he missed the transfer bus. However, a long wait at the bus stop was not his major concern. He was more worried about the five-dollar bus fare each day that he had difficulty paying. His big wish was to be able to take a school bus so he would not have to suffer the inconveniences and financial pressure.

Most international students choose to rent near the university to avoid the hassle of taking buses, including YouthC and YouthD. However, they did need to get around for groceries and other activities. For YouthC, the inefficient bus system constrained her from moving around.

Taking a cab or owning a car was beyond her means. She complained, “I enjoy being outside, here you actually can’t go outside, because it’s windy, and hard to get around because buses are terribly bad.” She also pointed out that walking was sometimes faster than taking the bus due to its winding routes. Her workplace was thirty minutes’ walk away, but it would take her an hour to get there by bus. “That makes no sense ... I think this is a big disadvantage”, she said.

The problematic transportation to school was raised in Burnaby, Whelan, and Rivera’s (2009) study. Many newcomer youth with refugee background live beyond the school bus zone because their accommodation is arranged by the government immigration services and their family cannot afford the rent in neighborhoods close to school. Service providers in our study voiced their frustration with budget cut that resulted in the cut of the bus-passes for the After School Homework Program. Considering the small number of this group of youth in Newfoundland, it is not unreasonable to request that the government take some initiative to meet the practical need of these students. Accommodation within the school zone is certainly the most plausible solution. However, when such an arrangement is not possible, other options such as tailored pick-up and drop-off service and free bus-passes would also help.

### ***Family Support and Social Interaction in the Microsystem***

Our data was in concert with other studies in terms of support to newcomer youth from parents, teachers, peer students, and community organizations. They were unanimous in the friendliness of the local people, the kindness of their teachers, and the helpfulness of the programs and services designed for them. However, they all counted on family members for moral support and were all acutely aware of the difficulties of making local friends.

Our participants were the luckier ones in comparison to refugee students without a parent, international students lacking parental guidance, and newcomers living alone without family. The degree of support they received varied greatly. YouthA’s mother was uneducated and relied on him in all language-involved matters. Although after many years he finally learned about the whereabouts of his father, there was no chance for the family to reunite soon. His mother’s resilience in the face of hard life helped to draw out his inner strength to deal with difficulties and maintain his dignity. He attended the After School Program every Wednesday to get help with homework, and refrained from asking classmates for help because he was rejected the first time he asked. YouthB, with college-educated parents, was extremely lucky in terms of home support. Her father worked hard to provide for the family while her mother stayed home to take care of her and her younger siblings. YouthB described her mother as “great”, saying, “If I have any problem with anything, Science, Math, English, anything in my life, I just go ask her and I know she will give me the answer.” While fleeing from her home country, her parents always made sure she was protected physically and emotionally. As a result, she turned out to be a positive, extraverted young woman. This worked to her advantage at school. Different from YouthA’s experience, she said, “If I ask for help, a lot of people help me.” In addition, all her subject teachers were obliging. In particular, she appreciated the support she received from her Math teacher and the teachers in the After School Program.

The on-the-spot support from parents was not there for the two international students, but they received important moral support from them. They both came to Canada for higher education partially due to parents’ influence. YouthD’s professionally successful father had high expectations for him so he came to the university offering him the best scholarship and YouthC’s earlier experience in Canada with parents drew her back. In place of parental support, YouthE and YouthF had company of other family members. YouthE lived with his uncle and cousin who also

came to St. John's as refugees. They supported each other. YouthE acknowledged the initial financial and employment support from the settlement agency and was determined to become financially independent of the government assistance. He told his uncle and cousin, "I will struggle as much as I can to pay all the bills, to pay the rent until you people get jobs somewhere". YouthF was living in a family with stable income so she was able to focus on improving her language and running a small business. She volunteered with a newcomer service agency but was not eligible to using most of the services provided due to her temporary resident status. She used the internet to search for the information on how to make her teacher certificate recognized in Newfoundland.

In their social life, though, they all felt the strain of making local friends. YouthA felt out of place in non-ESL classes where his peers knew where he was from but barely knew anything about his country. On top of their lack of effort to help him academically, some were "not so nice" to him so he hung out mostly with students from his ESL classes. YouthA used to be in the school soccer team, but he had to give it up due to his hip injury the previous fall. At the time when we interviewed him in May, he walked with a limp and had been waiting for the surgery in July. He loved Math, but after we told him about the Math Club at school, he was hesitant to join because of his awkward feelings of taking grade 10 Math while being placed in grade 12.

YouthB, and YouthD, and YouthF were YouthA acquainted with quite a few local Canadians through fundraising activities, mixed social events or joint projects. However, in terms of friendship, YouthB said, "my real friends are just in Syria and Iraq." She kept in touch with them through Facebook. Same with YouthA's perception, she thought her classmates didn't have much knowledge of or interest in her Iraqi culture, in which she took pride. In YouthD's case, he credited the lack of in-depth connections with local friends to "the cultural difference." Although YouthC was extroverted and enjoyed talking with people, she also thought it was "the biggest challenge" for international students to make Canadian friends, "because Canadians are in their friends circle and internationals seem to always find internationals. It's just the way it works." Furthermore, she felt the two groups were from "different worlds", having "different things to worry about" and "different conversation topics". Thus, she felt it easier to mingle with her Latin American friends who shared similar cultures with her boyfriend. Why not her own group? It was difficult to find another Latvian on campus.

None of the participants complained about anything as grave as straightforward racism; however, they all felt the transparent screen between them and the English-speaking locals. They could feel it and wanted to lift it, but the button was not on their side. Service providers were all aware of the situation, noting that some local people were "friendly" but not "inclusive". They viewed newcomers as rivals in the job market and cultural practices. One of the service providers particularly pointed out that "settlement and integration are two different concepts" that people often mix up, and the lower newcomer retention rate in the province reflected the local attitude. Newcomers would call Newfoundland home when they felt welcomed and appreciated. Otherwise, it would simply be a stepping stone toward their next destination.

### ***Individual's Over-stated Language Barriers***

All the participants were articulate and fluent in English. English was the official language in the home countries of YouthA and YouthD, and YouthB and YouthC both started to learn English at an early age. YouthE learned English enthusiastically in the refugee camp in Kenya. When he landed in Canada, he was placed in the Canadian Language Benchmark Level Five class, which is the highest level offered by the Newfoundland LINC program, and graduated in two weeks' time. YouthF's English proficiency was lower than the other participants because she

only started to learn English after she came to St. John's nine months ago. When we interviewed her, she was already able to understand most of our questions and was willing to express herself.

However, all the participants were not free from language concerns. YouthA and YouthB both loved reading but both felt that their understanding was hampered by limited English vocabulary. From our perspective, it was not simply language issues; it is rather issues with educational gaps and curriculum differences. In YouthA's refugee camp school, the difficulty level of such courses as Math was far below the Canadian curriculum requirements, and subjects like World Geography and Social Studies were never taught. In YouthB's previous schooling in Iraq and Syria, she learned most subjects in Arabic. The transfer of knowledge from one language to another was probably a challenge she was not able to articulate. Although YouthB did not have problems understanding teachers in class, she noticed that some other newcomer students did. It seemed to her not all the subject teachers knew how to teach ESL students. Sometimes, they spoke very fast, oblivious of ESL students' challenges. She considered it necessary that a training program or a workshop be offered to all subject teachers on how to work with ESL students. She seemed mature beyond her age and had insights into many things. However, there was no sign of her being empowered by her multilingual competence.

YouthC and YouthD were similar in their English proficiency. The former learned English at an early age and the latter as part of his prestigious educational package in India. However, they had different concerns. YouthD was worried about his spoken English because "I didn't use this kind of English back home ... sometimes ... the professor didn't get what I was trying to say." He was embarrassed by his Indian accent and his Hindi-English mix, and hoping that the university could offer a program to help international students reduce their accent and practice their spoken English. YouthC spoke of the language-based discrimination against international students in her class. She found that some international students "can't express what they want to say". Some of their Canadian peers assumed their ability on the basis of their oral English skills and refused to do group projects with them. In her view, international students simply needed more opportunities to speak the language, and extra English classes or conversation groups could help.

Similar to YouthD, YouthE had concerns over his accent. He noticed that his Kenyan-British accent was different from the way Canadians speak, and even farther away from Newfoundlanders' unique accent. In order to improve his communication skills, he took an online course which he thought would be beneficial to his future career and success in Canada. He was in the process of looking for the Adult Basic Education program which was recently privatized and moved out of the community college that he wished to attend. YouthF achieved high-level French proficiency in her three years in Montréal. She attributed her rapid progress to sufficient language support and "well-organized" classes. However, she found she was not eligible to most of the services in St. John's because she was here on work permit. The language classes were beyond her means, so she had to learn on her own.

Our data indicates that these young people were challenged not so much by their language skills than by factors manifested through language. In the case of YouthA, it was the content knowledge that he had never or insufficiently learned; and for YouthB, it was the transfer of knowledge from her other languages to English. YouthC was bothered by the linguistic discrimination against international students. As for YouthD, it was not his English proficiency but his spoken English that is not appreciated in North America. YouthE and YouthF were frustrated with finding appropriate programs to improve their language.

Due to her white skin color, YouthC did not stand out sharply as a non-native English speaker, and her English accent was considered "cute", while the accents of the other non-white

participants were all treated as deficient and problematic. We are not entitled to make any generalizations based on such a small sample size, but it might be worthy of probing whether certain accents are considered more legitimate and certain skin tones more prestigious than others, and whether we can separate language predicament from social injustice in today's multicultural world.

Although they all claimed difficulties with language, they had no problem responding to our interview questions. Other than YouthA who was a little reticent and offered answers only when asked, the other three five were very articulate during the interviews. Even YouthF who had been learning English for nine months was able to express her thoughts and opinions. It seemed that their notion of language difficulties was a subjective matter—it was more a self-perception of deficit than objective evaluation.

Service providers also emphasized that the importance of language skills for newcomers' integration into Newfoundland society. Service ProviderC said that English proficiency was a prerequisite for accessing services and support. Service ProviderA pointed out that language was an "essential" skill particularly in Newfoundland because "we don't have the critical mass of places like Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver ... no matter where you come from, you can move to Vancouver never speak English. But you won't get that in Newfoundland and Labrador, especially outside St. John's". Most of these service providers spoke highly of the language training program offered to refugees and immigrants. However, some of them spotted that newcomers who came to Canada through categories other than refugees and immigrants might fall into cracks. Service ProviderD found that family members of immigrants had limited access to resources because "different provincial government takes different attitudes. How much support they are going to provide for these people because the great proportion of immigrants here is in fact families of people who immigrated here because they got hired for a job or that sort of thing?" We are pleased to see that some of the service providers not only started to pay attention to the needs of different categories of newcomers, but also started to take actions to fill the gap. For example, Service ProviderC began offering evening ESL classes to newcomers without requirements on their immigration status. Service ProviderE also provided informal conversational English class to encourage newcomer women to practice English with each other.

### ***Individual's Financial Difficulty and Job Pressure***

The participants' pressure of getting a job was tied to their financial situation, parental expectations, and personal ambitions. All of them aspired to succeed in Canada, but their financial and employment status would only allow them to go certain ways. Among the six newcomer youth, the three with a refugee background wanted to go on with higher education in Newfoundland for a brighter job prospect and the three educated ones wanted to leave for better career options.

Newfoundland higher education is among the least expensive in Canada. Financially speaking, it is the best choice for YouthA, YouthB, and YouthE. However, only Youth B would be able to go to university in the near future. Her father worked and their family were receiving government subsidy. She felt the impending pressure the following year when the government assistance came to an end. Her father's income would not be enough to cover all the expenses. She had a sense of responsibility to help her parents and take care of the three younger siblings. She planned to begin with a restaurant job in the coming summer to save money for her future study in a business or law program. Not as lucky, YouthA and his mother were on the waiting list for government subsidized housing. Their \$900 monthly rent was their heaviest burden. Their only income was from his mother's part-time job. She worked long hours of night and weekend shifts

with minimum wage and no benefits, folding and packing newspapers. To save strength for work, she had to quit the daytime LINC classes, which she needed badly for improving her English. YouthA was deeply indebted to his mother because she shouldered all the family responsibilities. YouthA used to take part-time jobs to help pay the bills. Unfortunately, his hip was injured several months before and was waiting for surgery. He felt guilty for being unable to work, mumbling, “I can’t help, I see her struggling ...” He had to put his university dream on hold and hoped to get a college diploma and a job fast. As for YouthE, he had to find the relocated Adult Basic Education program and complete the required courses in order to be admitted into the community college to learn computer programming and website design, which would lead to a better job and possibly a university program, which would in turn lead to higher social status and better jobs. To him, education, employment, and financial security are all related in an upward spiral.

As international students, YouthC and YouthD were both independent and ambitious. From her second academic year, YouthC started to pay tuition on her own. In order to pay off her student loans, she held two part-time on-campus jobs through the university’s undergraduate career experience program. She first worked as a German tutor. Then at the end of her first year, she started working in the library. Toward graduation, she had an off-campus job in an immigrant service organization. All of these were “good experience” for her and she learned a lot. YouthD came from a middle class family in India and was provided with a university scholarship. His parents were wealthy enough to pay his tuition but he chose to get a bank loan. It was his own decision to come to Canada and he particularly asked his parents not to pay for his education. He spent four months in Toronto working in a café during his first summer. The job was low status but good pay. He was hesitant telling us the nature of the work because it was not the kind of job that matched his family background and education.

The two students, however, do not have a positive view of their job prospect in Newfoundland. YouthC was graduating and going to apply for the three-year post-graduation work permit which would allow her to work in Canada. Her major was international business, and accumulating relevant work experience was of great importance. However, she said, “I have been working here since I got here, but I haven’t been working in my field ... everywhere you applied, they always responded, ‘you are young, you just need five years of experience.’” In addition, she thought it was easy to find a minimum-wage job, but it was “complicated” to find a well-paid job. “You can make sandwich anywhere and they will hire you right away. I don’t know if you can work and survive on minimum wage”, she said. For SD, his area of computer science seemed to promise an easier employment opportunity. However, lack of diversity and of opportunities for international students in Newfoundland was a big concern. He planned to go to Toronto after graduation unless a miracle job in his area of training became available to him locally.

YouthD had an additional concern that his limited English communication skills might affect his future job-seeking in Canada. He said, “When you fight for any job, the first thing they want you to have is the good communication skills”. Currently, he was not satisfied with his language skills and communication skills, ranking both around five on a scale from one to ten. In particular, he would like training in public speaking because sometimes he dreaded speaking in front of his class. The fear was due to his lack of confidence in his spoken English, which was unnecessary in our view because he was very articulate and fluent in our interview. However, it was a legitimate worry for him as an international student who spoke English with an accent unfamiliar to and a communication style different from the local people. Communication skills are among the concerns of local employers (Sarma-Debnath & Kutty, 2006). An isolated location has made Newfoundland a less diverse place, and lack of diversity has placed more barriers for

newcomers to settle and establish themselves. This situation in turn has caused lower interest among newcomers to stay. It is a vicious cycle that needs to be broken.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The challenges faced by newcomer youth as documented in previous studies—lack of family support, financial pressure, linguistic concerns, difficulty to build up social circles, and employment worries—all surfaced in our research. The recurrence of such themes makes it more urgent for relevant parties to take actions in helping these young people by creating a healthy mesosystem. We are pleased to see many services for newcomer youth have been developed in Newfoundland in recent years, particularly in the capital city St. John's, including ESL classes for high school newcomer students, the After School Program, Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program, Literacy Enrichment and Academic Readiness for Newcomers (LEARN) program, and international student advising service. However, the concerns raised by our participants should not be neglected. They indicate a gap between the available services and newcomer youth's practical needs.

The problem may not lie in lack of services but rather in lack of funding for needed support and lack of coordination among the programs. As a result, the services are fractious because "the rules of various governments' conflict and force service bodies to work sub rosa" (Burnaby, 2010, p. 15). For example, free bus passes had been provided to students attending the After School program but was removed shortly after. If the channel of communication was open, such critical needs should have been considered by the government funding agency even at a time of tight budget. If students were not able to attend school regularly, any other services to improve their academic work would be of little use. Another example. The labor shortage is a recognized issue in Newfoundland but international students with the needed skills are often blocked on the other end of barrier. A bridge is needed for the interested parties to meet and communicate. We see necessity for joint effort and coordinated services among all stakeholders—the school, the university, the community, service providers, policy-makers, and funding agencies.

The size of the city of St John's and its attractions seemed different for the participants. For YouthB, the city provided an environment away from danger and with lots of potential opportunities for future. It was a great place for her and her family to start their new life in Canada. For YouthA, though, he was transferred from one kind of isolated life to another. He was no longer confined to the refugee camp but he was not so free in the free world of St John's. He lived a life constrained by financial pressure, by lack of friends, mobility, paternal support and social support. He was not receiving any counseling to help get over the trauma of war, family separation, and poverty. The city was a bigger and better place than the refugee camp, yet the pressure to survive remained huge for him.

The city of St John's looked smaller for the two undergraduate students who planned to look for a job in Toronto for its conveniences and opportunities which they thought they couldn't find in Newfoundland. Big cities with efficient public transportation make moving around easy for car-less people, particularly for newly graduated students in the early stage of their career. Career opportunities are probably the biggest attraction of any city to young people. Although it is reported that the economy in Newfoundland is booming, it seems that these international students were still pessimistic about their career prospects in the province. They were concerned with finding a job related to their fields of education so they could meet the criteria for permanent residence application in Canada.



It is not uncommon that immigrant and international students wish to stay at their place of education. Moving to another city means more adaptation and challenges. If convenient transportation and job opportunities are available in this province, we can expect an increased retention rate of newcomers in Newfoundland. Another factor that contributes to newcomer youth decision to stay or leave is the local reception. The gravity of the population deficit and labor shortage and the lack of diversity may not be fully understood by local people. In such cases, bridging programs to bring the local and newcomers together are in high demand. When newcomers are not viewed as additional burdens who demand support but rather potential skilled workers who will contribute to the prosperity of the province in the near future, when the government and service providers are committed to the retention and integration of newcomers, these educated young people will stay and call Newfoundland home.

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