



# Provision of Afterschool Programs: A Response to the Educational Needs and Outcomes of Newcomer Students in Canada

Edward Shizha<sup>1</sup>, Edward Makwarimba<sup>2</sup>

Wilfrid Laurier University Brantford Campus, Canada<sup>1</sup>  
University of Alberta Retiree, Canada<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*Newcomer students (both immigrants and refugees), in Canada, feel excluded in the education system, which does not fully support their learning needs. Although Canada is considered a safe country for immigrants, newcomer students often face challenges integrating into their new school environment. This raises the question of the future for these students' educational outcomes and assistance programs or strategies that should be developed to assist them? The objective of this study was to build knowledge and understanding of the educational needs and experiences of these newcomer students and identify the availability and nature of afterschool programs (ASPs) and how they could be effectively used to support newcomer students' learning and academic outcomes. Data were collected through a literature review and an internet environmental scan of provincial and territorial service provider organizations (SPOs) to inform our analysis. The scan revealed that there are available ASPs for newcomer students in Canada. The study found a significant combination of ASPs that are provided by SPOs that include scholarships, homework clubs, tutoring, and language programs that help newcomer students develop self-confidence and resilience for academic success. The study concludes that appropriate ASPs for newcomer students are an educational strategy that improves their academic outcomes.*

**Keywords:** *afterschool programs, educational outcomes, newcomer students, resilience, service provider organizations, strengths-based approach*

## 1. Introduction

Throughout Canada's history, immigrants and refugees have come to Canada to seek opportunities, freedoms, and protection. The Government of Canada provides permanent residency to thousands of newcomers every year [1]. Regardless of how newcomers arrive in Canada, they all have one thing in common: they want their children to succeed in school [2]. With over 400,000 new immigrants recorded in 2021 [3], in addition to tens of thousands of refugees, the role of the school in assuring viable integration of newcomer learners into Canadian schools is as important as ever [4]. However, these students often face challenges integrating into their new school environment. For young people, these challenges often intensify as they work to overcome major social challenges, school adjustments and acculturative stress [5]. So, the questions that come to mind are a) What is the future for these students' educational outcomes? b) How are they supported to achieve their educational goals? c) What supports are available to them? Challenges experienced by newcomer students in Canada are complex in nature and several factors contribute to those challenges, hence the need for afterschool programs (ASPs) that are offered by service provider organizations (SPOs). Paramalingam and colleagues [6] argue that ASPs provide space for students to reclaim a positive strengths-based identity. Because newcomer students differ by immigration status, programs offered by SPOs should meet specific needs of targeted students and the students' own strengths that they utilize in their learning and educational outcomes.

### 1. Purpose of the Study

This project was conducted in partnership with and funded by the Supports for Student Learning Program (SSLP), a unit in the Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), a Canada federal government department. The SSLP was created in 2019 to support students to stay in school, continue with their studies, graduate from high school and proceed to post-secondary education (PSE) [7]. The SSLP empowers students and enriches their education through targeted investments in ASPs delivered by SPOs outside of the formal education system. The purpose of this study was to build the SSLP's knowledge on available ASPs for newcomer students in the country's 10 provinces and 3 territories and recommend how the SSLP can complement SPOs in supporting programs that enhance the educational success of newcomer students in Canada.

### 2. Methodology



In Canada, the education system is decentralized with no federal system and is governed by the 10 provinces and 3 territories. Data was collected through a literature search as well as an internet scan of provincial and territorial SPOs to inform our analysis. A template was created by SSLP staff with the input of the researchers to create a form for entering data on ASPs offered by SPOs in the 10 provinces and 3 territories. It utilized qualitative and quantitative internet-based research where data was obtained by mining information and identifying numerical data from SPO websites on programs that are provided to newcomer youth in the provinces and territories in Canada.

### 3. Theoretical Framework: Deficit Vs Strength-Based Discourse

Newcomer experiences in countries of settlement are often explained using the deficit theory at the expense of the strength-based approach. The deficit discourse represents their experiences in terms of “deficiency – absence, lack or failure” [8]. It situates responsibility for their problems with them and their communities, overlooking structural inequalities, and cultural differences. From this perspective, newcomer students are perceived as the problem lacking appropriate cultural capital, motivation and mindset to succeed in their education. Their lower attainment is viewed as resulting from academic weaknesses, lack of ability or support from family and a community that does not value education [9-11] thus devaluing newcomers’ learning capacities, attributing their failure to cultural dissonance, language barriers, and minimal parental involvement [9, 11], and accent discrimination [10] as students would not speak English in the manner expected by the teachers. On the other hand, the strength-based approach dismisses the cultural deficit theory, which fails to explain why some newcomer students outperform their non-immigrant counterparts. The model identifies and promotes the strengths students bring into their learning without stigmatizing, stereotyping or victimizing them. The approach focuses on supporting the academic growth and empowerment of newcomer students who have existing competencies, assets and resources for their own academic success. It takes a holistic view of students as empowered actors with capacities, visions, talents, and hopes despite experiences of oppression [12]. SPOs focus on these strengths to provide ASPs that work to support newcomer students’ academic outcomes.

### 4. Afterschool Programs

Although much of academic learning takes place in schools, ASPs influence the academic success of newcomer students. Community ASPs are crucial sites for newcomer youth to develop social identities and supportive relationships [13]. Often formed and run by local community members, ASPs operate outside of public-school restrictions and have greater leeway in their practices to empower and assist newcomer students. They play a unique role in filling institutional gaps and strengthening students’ unique identities and talents and facilitating a greater sense of belonging. Although there is paucity on research on impact of ASPs and their academic benefits to newcomer students, ASPs have been found to offer tutoring, peer identity, social networks, social and emotional development and other forms of academic assistance that benefit students in general [14]. Research suggests that the advantages of these programs are greatest for children at risk for poor educational outcomes [11]. Therefore, newcomer students are likely to benefit from ASPs to contain schooling hurdles by applying new skills, personal talents, and cultural competencies that are offered by ASPs to bridge these barriers.

### 5. Findings: Provision of Afterschool Programs in Canada

The purpose of the provincial and territorial scan was to determine the availability or provision of ASPs that are provided to newcomer students/youth by service providers in Canada and recommend how the SSLP could support and complement these ASPs. The scan revealed the following:

#### 5.1. Service Provider Organizations Providing Afterschool Programs

An analysis of the data collected using the provincial and territorial scan showed that there are service providers in each of the 10 provinces and 3 territories of Canada as illustrated in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:** Distribution of Service Provider Organizations by Province/Territory

Ontario	37	Saskatchewan	11	Nova Scotia	2
Alberta	21	Manitoba	8	Prince Edward	2
British Columbia	16	New Brunswick	6	Yukon	2
Quebec	11	Newfoundland	3	Northwest Territories	1



The scan identified 124 SPOs in all the ten provinces and two territories (the Northwest Territories and Yukon). Nunavut had none. The number of SPOs in each province depends on the sizes of the province and where immigrant and refugee families chose to settle.

## 5.2 Number of Programs Provided by Service Provider Organizations

There are about 231 ASPs that the SPOs provide in Canada, as shown in Table 2, that were identified with Ontario having the highest number of 65 (28%), followed by Alberta, 49 (21%) programs, British Columbia, 32 (14%) programs, Saskatchewan, 21(9%) programs and Quebec, 16 (7%) programs for newcomer youth. Atlantic Canada has fewer programs, and the territories have the least number.

**Table 2:** Distribution of Programs by Province/Territory

Provinces	AB	BC	MB	NB	NL	NS	NU	NWT	ON	PEI	QC	SK	YT	Total
Number of programs	49	32	11	11	6	10	0	1	65	7	16	21	2	231
%age of total programs	21%	14%	5%	5%	3%	4%	0	0%	28%	3%	7%	9%	1%	100%

KEY: Alberta — AB British Columbia — BC Manitoba — MB New Brunswick — NB Newfoundland & Labrador —NL  
Nova Scotia — NS Nunavut —NU Northwest Territories —NWT ON —Ontario Prince edwaed Island —PEI  
Quebec — QC Saskatchewan — SK Yukon — YT

## 5.3 Programs Provided to Newcomer Youth by Ethnocultural Community Organizations

The scan revealed that there are ethnocultural community organizations that provide ASPs to newcomer youth living in their communities. Table 3 shows that the most frequently provided services for newcomer youth are homework clubs and tutoring combined (18%), other forms of academic supports (15%), peer networking, (11%), school readiness (10%), scholarship, and methal health programs (10%). The least provided services are academic language skills training and counselling services.

**Table 3:** Types of Programs Provided to Newcomer Youth by Ethnocultural Community Organizations by %age

Type of program	Percentage (%)
Homewok clubs/Tutoring	18
Academic support	15
Peer networking	11
School readiness	10
Scholarships/bursaries	10
Mental health & social wellbeing	10
Culturally responsive programs	8
Leadership skills	7
Academic language skills	4
Volunteering	4
Counselling	4

## 6 Discussion

The discussion below examines some of the programs that were identified from the web-scan.

### 6.1 Cultural Adaptation

Newcomer youth may experience complex conflicts between the values, expectations and cultural practices of their home/family and those of their peer group and school, thus struggling with the acculturation process when entering a new school environment. According to Ward cited in Schachner and others [15], acculturation is dealing with psychological stress, acquiring new skills, and developing a sense of identity and belonging during cultural transition. Newcomer students go through cultural adaptation, and may experience mental health challenges when adjusting to a new school life. Mental health challenges that



include depression, stress, anxiety, post-traumatic disorders impact academic achievement [9] that may require students to seek counselling. Some SPOs in Canada provide mental health and academic counselling to newcomer students who may be struggling to adapt to stressful and traumatic events when they feel socially and academically excluded in their schools. They may also be traumatized by racism and discrimination practiced by teachers and their white student peers because of their race and accent. This may lead to loneliness and hopelessness because the school undervalues them and their 'ethnic' cultural capital, which in turn, may lead to acculturative stress and educational 'failure' [9]. Unlike schools, SPOs have settlement workers in schools (SWIS) who work as cultural brokers and provide culturally responsive programs that consider "ethnicity as a resource" [16] to overcome the impact of the white middle-class school culture. Ethnic and community resources (cultural practices, values, expectations and knowledge) are utilized to convey a dynamic, synergistic relationship between the students, provided activities and SPOs' staff. Developmental scholars argue that an individual will thrive in a setting when their interactions with the setting are mutually beneficial [17] and where they may have opportunities to be co-constructors of essential culturally responsive activities.

## **6.2 Language and Communication**

Some newcomer students and parents, especially those from non-English and non-French speaking countries struggle with these two Canadian official languages. For those who come from countries where neither of the official languages is used in their previous school, their accent is perceived to inhibit communication [18]. Lack of or insufficient language skills may affect understanding of instructional programs, and can lead to school disengagement. The language problem extends to their parents in cases where schools provide critical information in the language they do not understand further limiting parents' abilities to support their children as they may not understand the educational content.

This study found that many SPOs provide language classes to newcomers. However, the classes are not tailored to students who needed academic English/French for schooling. The language programs are mainly for adults looking for work or in need of community connections. For example, the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada Program (LINC) is a service funded by the Government of Canada for adult newcomers to help them learn practical English for life in Canada. The program is not for newcomer students who need an academic language they will encounter in school. The observation mirrors that by Anderson [19] who points to lack of appropriate language used in engaging newcomer students in academic discourse in classroom discussions, scholarly assignments and understanding course expectations. SPOs provide opportunities for newcomer students to practice English or French skills through immersive conversation circles, extra-curricular activities, summer camps, and networking with peers. These community-based activities can also bring together majority- and minority-language speakers in cross-cultural settings that can improve integrative language skills. These practices draw from social capital framework that asserts that trust, shared norms, and belonging, or affective social bonding are key for the development of productive social connections and communications [20, 21].

## **6.3 School Readiness**

One important role of ASPs is to prepare students for school, graduate and to transition from high school to PSE. School readiness is the level of cognitive and noncognitive [22] preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed in education. Cognitive preparation is focused more on performance and measurable skills (e.g., academic content knowledge and problem-solving) [23] while noncognitive preparation includes the mind-sets (including self-efficacy), behaviors, and motivation students need beyond the cognitive factors to succeed in education [22]. Refugee students represent a subset of newcomers who face challenges because of gaps in their education due to missed school and/or possible trauma resulting from exposure to war. These students experience gaps in both cognitive and noncognitive preparation because of lingering psychosocial effects associated with past conflict [11] hence the need for programs that prepare them for school.

Research illustrates that in Canada, there is a fractured policy landscape where there is a heavy emphasis on language development, and acquisition for newcomer youth, but there remains a lack of policies to support a more holistic transition [24]. There are no cognitive and noncognitive programs that are provided by provincial/territorial governments to prepare newcomer students for the Canadian school environment. Consequently, the onus is on SPOs to help newcomer youth to develop strategies that can help them when they enter the education system. Some ASPs have youth cultural ambassadors who guide newcomer youth make transitions between their culture and the Canadian school culture by making the students aware of how to navigate school policies, expectations and deal with emotional and psychological aspects of cultural shock and racism. SPOs have programs that can motivate newcomer youth, spark their curiosity and connect to school by providing spaces and opportunities for teamworking and experiential learning through various activities that involve problem-solving and decision making. They have the capacity



to strengthen newcomer students' capabilities and capacities to engage in school and set high aspirations for themselves in line with the strength-based approach.

#### **6.4 Parental Involvement and Educational Success**

In Canada, research has revealed that some newcomer parents, especially Asian and African parents, have high expectations for their children's academic outcomes and these parents want their children to graduate from high school and proceed to PSE [18]. Literature links the influence of parents over adolescents' decision-making processes to academic achievement pointing to parental "will ambition" [25] as a push factor. Even some immigrant youth who have parents with no higher education go on to pursue PSE at rates above their parents because immigrant parents are 'education inclined' and promote a 'culture of education' regardless of their own educational level. Immigrant youth acquire values transmitted by their parents and community members, which guide their academic choices [10, 26]. This results in their high PSE participation rates, which are substantially due to parents who act as role models and mentors (esp. for children of economic immigrants). Since their parents tend to have more education, the children of economic immigrants tend to follow in their parents' footsteps.

Collaboration between immigrant parents and SPOs' staff and taking part in ASPs provided by the organizations may have a positive impact on the well-being of their children and how they adapt and adjust to the education and school programs of their host society and overcome difficulties associated with acculturation. Furthermore, collaboration enables parents and community SPOs' staff to develop vital problem-solving competencies to assist students socially, culturally, emotionally, and scholastically [27]. Parental participation, support for their child's education, and their relationship with SPOs can motivate their children to engage in ASPs and can promote academic participation and success. Thus SPOs in our study had programs that involved parents and their children in ASPs such as homework clubs to encourage their children to attend school, complete assignments and raise school performance.

#### **6.5 Academic Supports and Homework Clubs**

After school assistance is vital for newcomer students who might be missing some aspects of learning in school. The role of homework clubs needs to be considered within the context of the broader educational needs of the students and their academic performance. A homework club can be described as "an after-school support which provides a structured environment for students to complete their homework and serves as a preventative method for school failure and early school dropout" [28]. Engaging students in school and helping them work towards school completion has long been a challenge for many newcomer parents and educators thus making afterschool homework clubs an effective platform of improving the students' social, academic and affective aspects of education that can contribute to an improved academic self-concept. Academic self-concept refers to a person's knowledge and perception of themselves regarding achievement in school [29]. Homework clubs involve peer networking and peers working together and helping each other in solving academic problems [29]. Research has shown positive relationships between homework clubs, academic self-concept, self-esteem, academic achievement, motivation, capacity to cope with stress, and increased social skills and competencies [30]. This study found several SPOs that offered homework clubs that were supervised by volunteer parents and senior students. These clubs can serve as a protective factor provided through by positive adult and peer support to newcomer students who maybe at risk of school failure.

#### **6.6 Tutoring Newcomer Students**

Closely connected to homework clubs are tutoring programs organized by SPOs. The study revealed some ASPs that provide tutorship opportunities to newcomer students. These were identified in some bigger provinces and none in the territories. Tutors can provide academic instruction and offer guidance and support to help newcomer students excel at school. Tutors can be senior peers who have gone through the Canadian education system or who are still in school and have experience of the Canadian education system. This cross-age peer-tutoring model is one of the most used models with newcomer youth. Youth who are new arrivals in the country are paired with youth who have settled and integrated in the country in one-on-one or in small groups in a community-based setting. Group tutoring occurs in a small group context, with one or more tutors and a group of students. Tutors can be older adolescents, university students, and/or adults who demonstrate an interest in helping newcomer students. The program applies a strengths-based model that focuses on utilizing community capacities to assist new students foster belonging and integration into a new school. For newcomer youth, peer support plays an important role in the development of a sense of belonging, social inclusion, and new relationships, as well as enhancing their mental well-being and resiliency to adapt to a new cultural and academic environment. Research shows that tutoring interventions provided through ASPs benefit newcomer students as they can serve as protective factors in their transition



to a new school [31]. Oberoi [31] also reports that peer tutoring can facilitate positive outcomes, such as social integration, a sense of belonging, acculturation, and academic success.

### **6.7 Resilience and Motivation for Success**

There is paucity of research that examines how recent newcomer students adjust and cope in Canada using the strength-based model as research has been dominantly deficit-focused [32]. Newcomer youth possess profound strength and resilience factors that help them adjust to new environments. Resilience is complex and varies across culture and context [33]. Yet, each culture and people possess cultural and personal attributes that contribute to hope and success despite difficulties. For example, Shizha and colleagues [10, 18] argue that various attributes of African culture such as humility, industriousness, respect for authority, and emphasis on learning are highly compatible with those required for academic success. Coping strategies (such as problem-solving, sense of agency, hope, and personal growth) have been noted as protective factors contributing to resilience outcomes [34]. Challenges can make newcomer students feel helpless and hopeless in school as they may feel like their life is based on 'negotiating a second-class citizenship' [35] when they experience discrimination, racism, and negative stereotypes detrimental to their will and ambition to succeed in education. Some newcomer students may feel stereotyped and being labelled as 'dodgy' 'lazy' or 'troublemakers' [10, 18] and their academic performance undervalued. For this reason, they use their perseverance, determination, resilience and self-motivation to disrupt these imposed hegemonic racial stereotypes of teachers' low-expectations and determined to prove teachers wrong [36] in what Griffin and others [37] describe as the 'proving process'.

Resilience is about "not losing hope" and working your way up despite difficulties. Community SPOs, provide role models of immigrants who have succeeded in Canada who can help newcomer youth develop confidence and ambitions to foster educational success. Stories of success, despite oppressive barriers encourage and motivate newcomer students and SPOs have a special place in helping to foster resilience among newcomer populations by offering motivational role models, problem-solving skills, school readiness and orientation, leadership skills and tutoring and mentorship.

## **7 Conclusions and Recommendations**

A look at the data concludes that there are programs for newcomer students provided by SPOs in Canada. However, the distribution of programs shows that there are more SPOs and programs in provinces where more newcomer families settle and where there are likely to be more newcomer youth who need these programs. From the web search conducted, Ontario provides the highest number of services and programs, followed by Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Quebec. SPOs in Atlantic Canada (New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island) provide fewer programs compared to other provinces. Fewer newcomer families settle in the Atlantic Canada because of limited employment opportunities and other needed services. However, newcomer immigrants and their children, no matter how few they are, require programs that serve their needs, especially the youth who are attending school in the territories and whose educational outcomes are not yet known compared to the rest of Canada.

An understanding of the educational needs and strengths of newcomer students indicates that they experience both success and 'failure' in their educational outcomes. Their success is explained by the strength-based approach which focuses on human agency as key to overcoming their educational challenges. The students are considered as agentic social actors in resolving some barriers through their resilience and the ASP interventions provided by SPOs in various provinces and territories. While the impact of the ASPs has not been fully investigated and was not the scope of this study, there is no doubt that newcomer students benefit from these programs. As observed in the study, the programs provide educational support to students who might be struggling and falling through the cracks. The provision of the programs is embedded in the strengths-based approach rather than the deficit model. Most newcomer youth who struggle in educational attainment come from ethnocultural communities. Hence, ethnocultural community organizations are important to newcomer youth because they provide spaces where youth can interact with their ethnic peers, develop peer networking and friendships that facilitate collaborative learning that promote academic success. These are cultural spaces where the youth feel a sense of belonging and acceptance unlike in schools where they feel as strangers, intruders or 'second-class students.' ASPs for newcomer students are an educational strategy that improves their academic outcomes. SPOs provide programs that help newcomer students develop self-confidence, determination, build academic self-concept and resilience for academic success.

## **8 Recommendations**

One of the purposes of this study was to recommend how the SSLP could complement the services and programs that are provided to newcomer youth/students by SPOs in Canada. The recommendations were to focus on out-of-school programs and not school-based programs.



### **8.1 Gaps in Funding, Financial Barriers and Resources**

- The SSLP should complement school readiness programs provided by community organizations (ethnic organizations are a first point of contact for many newly arrived refugee and immigrant families and their children). Community organizations provide linguistic and cultural familiarity while also assisting young people with the settlement process that introduces them to the ‘Canadian culture’ that happens to be the school culture. These organizations are funded mainly through subscriptions and donations that are not financially sustainable in starting new programs or scaling up existing programs that help their youth. SSLP should also assist recently arrived refugee youth to access post-secondary education by funding SPOs to create academic bridging programs such as targeted scholarships and bursaries to help them overcome financial barriers to accessing PSE.

### **8.2 Tailored, Needs-based and Culturally Appropriate Programs**

- The SSLP should fund culturally responsive programs targeting particular newcomer students who need special services, such as newcomers defined by immigration status (e.g., refugee vs immigrant youth). Counselling programs should not be provided as part of the generic mental health programs that may be available to all youth in general. Culturally appropriate and responsive counselling programs can make students focus more on their educational performance than on factors that may lead to stress, depression and anxiety.

### **8.3 Overcoming Language Barriers**

- The SSLP should facilitate, through funding, the development of youth-led language immersion programs that do not stigmatize newcomer students’ accents but empower them to acquire the academic language through self-initiated programs to provide better educational outcomes through language proficiency.

### **8.4 Systemic Racism, Stereotypes and Academic Outcomes**

- The SSLP should support the development of long-term partnerships between SPOs, other youth-serving organizations and local school boards in order to advocate and mediation for safe school settings on behalf of newcomer students. It should provide resources for hiring or engaging cultural brokers specialized in designing and delivering anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion programs and workshops to teachers, school staff and administrators.

### **8.5 Being Left Behind: Missing out on Schooling among Refugee Youth**

- SSLP should fund organizations that are providing school readiness transitional programs—in the form of tutoring and mentoring—run by ethnocultural community organizations for refugee youth as part of academic support services and help with social and school integration. School readiness transitional programs can be used to prepare refugee youth to enter the mainstream school system when they are ready. In addition, it should fund tailored refugee youth programs that will prevent youth from dropping out of school and enable them to re-enter the standard school system at the correct level for their age and ability.

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