

**Exploring Factors Contributing to the Participation of  
Immigrant Children in Preschools**

by

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## Introduction

The rise and fall of the number of immigrants in Canada in the past 150 years can be attributed to Canada's economic status, immigration policy changes, or world events (Statistics Canada, 2016). In 1867, the country This period saw a rise in international immigration made possible by changes in legislation and policies resulting from the confederation, wherein free lands, safety, and infrastructure helped to attract millions of immigrants motivated by economic opportunities and a chance for a better life (Gagnon et al., 2022). The Dominion Lands Act of 1872, the creation of the Department of Interior in 1873, and the construction of a transcontinental railroad were significant changes that led to the immigration boom in 1914. Historians also acknowledged the significant role of the aggressive advertisement campaigns by the Canadian government as part of Canada's immigration program during the great boom, which resulted in a record-high arrival of more than 400,000 immigrants in the country in 1913 (Dunae, 1984; Boyd & Vickers, 2000; Statistics Canada, 2016).

Since then, several waves of immigration have been seen, and opportunities for key industries have grown rapidly, making immigration a tool and a priority for the federal government to boost the economy. In 2022, Canada set a record-high population growth of 1,050,110, and international migration accounts for almost all (95.9%) recorded growth (Statistics Canada, 2022). From 2016 to 2021, the total population of immigrants was recorded to be over 1.3 million, wherein 4.8% were children from 0 to 4 years. According to the government's statistical agency, the Canadian population would reach 47.7 million in 2041, and out of this, 25 million would be immigrants or children of immigrants born in Canada, representing 52.4% of the total population, the largest since the confederation.

## Statement of Topic

Canada's population has been greatly influenced by immigration, which appears to be a significant strategy in addressing skill shortages and gaps in public services. The influx of immigrants has been a major driving force for economic development, and they continue to play a crucial role in Canada's economy. Hence, it is imperative to attract immigrants who possess the necessary credentials and skills to fulfill the country's economic needs, as they contribute greatly to the overall success and growth of the nation.

The government of Canada continues to uphold this cause through an immigration system that continuously develops programs and policies that support newcomers to Canada. Focusing on factors (a) affecting their settlement and integration in society, (b) influencing their families' socioeconomic achievement, and (c) access to housing, education, and employment are some of the key understandings that are essential to ensuring their initial survival, success, and satisfaction. However, immigrant families need help to acquire these needs. For instance, immigrants who come to Canada as temporary or permanent residents can bring their families and enroll their children in the public school system for free (IRCC, 2019). However, this does not include children from zero to five years old. While the local government funds most childcare programs across Canada and receives support from the federal government, most still require families to pay out-of-pocket school fees. Since not all families can afford these costs, will this prevent families from sending their children to preschool?

The primary objective of this research is to address the question of *what factors contribute to the participation of immigrant children in preschools* [emphasis added]. According to Kingsbury et al. (2021), children from immigrant families are less likely to participate in

childcare compared to those from nonimmigrant families. Based on this evidence, it is possible that they are also less likely to participate in early childhood education.

In 2022, the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) recorded the top immigration destinations in Canada (according to the number of accepted permanent residents per province) to be Ontario (184,980), Quebec (68,715), British Columbia (61,215), and Alberta (49,535). According to the 2021 Early Childhood Education Report, less than half of the 2 to 4-year-old population were regularly attending an early childhood program in Alberta (43%) and Ontario (47%), while more than half of the same population was recorded to be actively participating in early childhood programs in British Columbia (55%) and Quebec (73%). These figures suggest that while these provinces continue to welcome a high number of immigrants, it seems that there is still a greater probability that an immigrant child is not participating in preschool or any licensed center-based early childhood program - indicating that there appears to be a gap between the number of immigrants and the extent of support and settlement services received. As the government of Canada continues to increase immigration rate targets and create programs to achieve these targets, policies to support their settlement seem to remain unchanged. Upon review of the literature for this study, limited resources were found on the lived experiences of immigrant families in Canada and how these experiences affect their children's participation in preschool education.

### **Background and Purpose of Study**

The International Student Program is one of the most popular immigration programs in Canada, as evidenced by its exponential growth over the years (IRCC, 2011, 2023). The government highly values international students for their language and employment skills. They

are considered to be “typically well positioned to apply for permanent resident status” (Government of Canada, 2021). Because they are highly valuable members of the population who make immense economic and social contributions to Canada, program policies are continuously being created and improved to assist with their settlement—for instance, international students can bring their spouses and children with them as they move to the country as temporary residents (Government of Canada, 2023.). Starting a new life in a first-world country without having to leave the family behind gives hope for a better life to aspiring immigrants, especially those from developing countries. The “Study, Explore, Work and Stay” campaign by the IRCC promotes studying in Canada as a pathway to permanent residence and citizenship (Government of Canada, 2021). Based on this campaign, the ideal next steps after studying would be finding a job, applying for permanent residency, and eventually becoming citizens.

Underneath the promise of an abundant future are the many barriers to a seamless progression from one stage to another. To many, completing a post-secondary education is the first stage of fulfilling the Canadian dream. In doing this, international students should be able to overcome the challenges of increasing costs and shortage of housing, adapt to new ways of teaching and learning in Canadian universities or colleges, and adjust to an unfamiliar social environment, to name a few. After successfully acquiring a Canadian education, the next stage is finding a professional job and contributing to society. However, due to systemic gaps that lead to failure in recognizing foreign credentials and previous experiences, the reality is that many international students may be disqualified from most jobs suited to their Canadian education and foreign credentials. The National Graduates Survey by Chen and Skuterud (2018) found that Canadian study experience does not guarantee success for international students in the labor

market, and international students lagged behind their Canadian-born counterparts in terms of employment rates, hourly earnings, and education-occupation match. Despite this, many persistently apply for permanent residency regardless of their economic status. This could imply that as the number of immigrants and international students increases, the pool of aspiring workers and low-income earners could also increase. As of 2012, the number of low-income immigrants in chronic low income was 51%. It was also 3.1 times higher as compared to those born in Canada. The Statistics Canada website explicitly says in its report, "Time spent in Canada did little to diminish the rate of chronic low income among immigrants relative to the Canadian-born" (Picot & Lu, 2017).

As an international student in Canada, I have personally experienced some of these barriers to settlement. Although settlement for international students differs from that of new immigrants, I gained valuable insight into the challenges of professional and social integration through my experiences. This has allowed me to understand better the struggles faced by new immigrants. Similar to IRCC's study-work-stay concept, I realized that my immediate community is composed of international students (study), work-permit holders (work), permanent residents, and citizens (stay). For example, in my program, I found more international students in each class than our counterparts. Because of these groups' individual and collective newcomer experiences, I was made aware of different barriers to settlement that each one faced, whether as an individual or as a family. As one successfully transitions from one group to another within this community (ex., international student to permanent resident), more valuable information and insights are gained and shared. Those students who have successfully transitioned into becoming permanent residents often serve as the primary source of information who equips newcomers with knowledge and confidence in overcoming obstacles. Being a part of

this community motivated me to contribute to expanding information on the unseen challenges that immigrants face.

As a preschool teacher, my academic interest is advancing early childhood education (ECE). Most of my program's school work allowed me to dive deeper into the key issues in ECE. I was able to do research on different aspects of child development, interview peers who are in the same field, and observe a daycare center in the neighborhood. It did not take long before I realized that there were a lot of immigrant families who did not send their children to preschool. It made me reflect on what could have been the reasons for these families not participating in ECE and if there could have been system improvements that could have made them decide otherwise.

The early years of human development impact the later years of life significantly. Studies show that early childhood learning (a) encourages optimal brain development, (b) produces a long-term effect on behavior and cognition, (c) equips children with human and social capital for success typically manifested by resilience, (d) improves high school academic performance, decreases delinquency, and crime, and (e) is an investment that produces savings later on (Blakemore & Frith, 2005; Mustard, 2006; Masten & Gewirtz, 2006; Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Barnett, 2006). According to the British Columbia early learning framework, as children reach preschool age, they start to explore symbolic representations of their experiences through different forms of expressions. They also develop self-awareness while slowly becoming aware of their environment and begin to perceive objects and events as separate from themselves, leading them to imagine and act out what they see (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008). The long-term impacts of preschool education on children's cognitive attainment continue to emerge (Sammons et al., 2009).

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that will be used to form the research questions and understand literature will draw on Crenshaw's (1989) and Berry's (1992) theories. Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory provides an approach to understanding how the layers of gender, race, sexuality, and social class influence experiences of oppression and social injustice. Because it recognizes that experiences of discrimination and marginalization are shaped by the intersections of these different identities, rather than just one aspect, this theory can help understand the struggles faced by immigrants. This theory is instrumental in exploring the factors contributing to the participation of immigrant children in preschool because it allows the researcher to recognize the complexity of their experiences and, therefore, provide more appropriate and inclusive recommendations promoting social justice and equality. Berry's (1992) model of acculturation explains strategies that individuals use to adapt to their environment. This model is particularly relevant for this study because it informs the analysis of how the interplay between immigrant families' native and host cultures can shape their perceptions of early childhood education in Canada and their decision to send their child to preschool.

Acculturation is the process of developing relationships with a new culture while maintaining its original culture (Berry & Sam, 1997). According to Berry (1980), the two independent dimensions of acculturation are the individuals' links to their ethnic culture and their new settlement place. The key issues often discussed under this framework are the extent to which people desire to maintain their heritage, culture, and identity and the extent to which people wish to interact with society at large (Berry et al., 2006). This concept is crucial in understanding the importance of ethnic culture and sociocultural factors influencing parents' decision to enroll their children in center-based preschool programs, independent of their



economic status. For example, a common reason cited for the non-participation of immigrants in early childhood education is the familism culture that leads parents to have their children at home and be cared for by parents or relatives instead of by nonrelatives in a formal educational setting. Other factors include family structure, home language, and parental beliefs and practices (Liang et al., 2000). Berry et al. (2006) posit that involvement with both national and ethnic cultures, rather than inclination with either one, is the most adaptive mode of acculturation. Therefore, the extent of their involvement with ethnic culture forms the variable ways of acculturating, and other possible sources of variation can be the length of residence, perceived discrimination, and ethnic composition of the immediate neighborhood (Galster et al., 1999).

While acculturation evidently affects participation in early childhood education, recent research suggests that structural barriers strongly influence immigrant children's use of center-based education (Károly & Gonzalez, 2021). Intersectionality proposes contrary to the individual culture-based framework, wherein narratives of gender, race, and class are considered as individual and independent social categories influencing acculturation. Instead, multiple intersecting dimensions work together to produce systemic oppression and inequality, as they are social positions experienced simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1991; Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012). It allows one to examine how having an excellent education and significant professional work experience, for example, is not correlated with wealth for immigrants compared to their native counterparts. Further, even when holding education and experience constant, study shows that interview request rates were 40% higher for applicants whose names sound English versus those with Chinese, Indian, and Pakistani names (Preston et al., 2011). While Canada presents itself as a country that values multiculturalism as protected by its Constitution, there is evidence showing discrimination affecting immigrant work opportunities, where visible minority immigrants are

more likely to experience low income as compared to non-visible minority immigrants and Canadian-born counterparts (Oreopoulos, 2009; Palameta, 2004).

## **Methodology**

This study will primarily draw from the tenets of a constructivist grounded theory method. Glaser and Strauss' Grounded Theory uses data collection and analysis to generate new theories. In the traditional view of this theory, a researcher maintains objectivity to allow themes to emerge naturally without bias (Charmaz, 2007a). However, I recognize that using an unbiased approach is no longer possible because of the personal perspectives I gained through previous studies and my own experiences. Therefore, I found the constructivist approach more appropriate for this study. The constructivist grounded theory is interpretive in nature and involves realities interpreted or discovered by the researcher who adopts subjectivism (Charmaz, 2000).

The design, data collection, and portions of the data analysis included in this paper were part of a pilot study conducted for the research topic. The study was done in partial fulfillment of the requirements for EDPS 509, Research Data Collection and Analysis.

## **Design**

**Acknowledging biases and expectations.** The study used a constructivist grounded theory approach to qualitative research. As mentioned above, this theory recognizes the presence of a researcher's personal biases regarding what the writer expects to find out in the study in relation to the research questions. My view as a researcher is that immigrants are less likely to participate in preschool versus their native counterparts, and this is heavily influenced by their predisposition to discrimination- which ultimately affects their access to early childhood education. Should socio-economic status be rendered equal for all families, I believe that the next

major factor affecting immigrants' decision to enroll their children in center-based preschool programs is their ethnic culture and the extent to which they are willing to embrace the national culture.

The biases that are based on my beliefs as a researcher were shaped by the following:

- My knowledge of early childhood education based on my educational background.
- My knowledge of parents' perceptions of early childhood education based on my experiences as a preschool teacher.
- My knowledge of the narratives on discrimination, racism, and inequality based on my current program, educational policy studies.
- My personal experiences of discrimination as a visible minority.
- My personal experience of acculturation and how my ethnic culture has and continues to, influence the way I live in Canada.
- My knowledge of the hardships experienced by immigrants based on personal encounters and conversations within my community.

**Forming interview questions.** Once these biases were acknowledged and considered, I created the interview questions that could allow me to proactively recognize my beliefs while actively seeking out information that would contradict my beliefs. The questions were formed so that I could confirm whether the participants supported my beliefs and whether the biases were justified. This process would allow me to arrive at answers to my research questions, generate a conclusion for the study, and form recommendations for the future.

**Data collection and analysis.** After finalizing the interview questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather an in-depth understanding of the insights and experiences of the respondents. The data collected from interviews with immigrant families, represented by the

mothers, were used as an “attempt to understand the world from the subject’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Kvale, 1996, p.1). While drawing on the theories identified, the data from the responses were analyzed to gather initial insights and generate findings to respond to the research inquiry.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

My target respondent group was recruited based on the following requirements:

- must be a parent belonging to an immigrant family
- must currently be living in Canada
- must come from a developing country as country of origin prior to coming to Canada
- must have a child in Canada
- must be either currently deciding or have previously decided on sending their child to preschool

Convenience sampling was the feasible selection method for the study due to ease of access, availability, and time considerations. The immigrant mothers who participated were aged 31 to 42 years old and were mainly Filipinos. While race from any developing country could participate in the study, the final group of respondents was not racially diverse because of limitations on my network as a researcher.

The first step in the selection process was identifying people in my immediate community who fit the criteria. I asked a friend if she would participate in an interview. I explained the nature and purpose of the study and sought her consent. Then, I asked if she could refer other members in her circle whom she deems fit for the criteria. Through her, I was able to obtain my second and third respondents. However, in order to expand the scope of my demographics, I

decided to include data from a preliminary interview with an international student from Sri Lanka. While there would be limited generalizability in the sample due to the sampling method chosen, I ensured that respondents who represent different stages of Canadian immigration were included in the sample. I had a group of five accessible respondents, four of whom were the actual respondents. The group comprised two races (Filipino and Sri Lankan) and different immigration statuses (international student, permanent resident, and Canadian citizen).

### **Profile of Participants**

Patricia is a Filipino who became a permanent resident of Canada in 2012. She is married to a Canadian-born citizen and has a 3-year-old daughter who is enrolled in a licensed, center-based daycare program in Edmonton, Alberta. Currently, she works as an administrative staff.

Sam is also a permanent resident of Canada and a Filipino. She earned a Canadian degree in administration and is currently working as an administrative officer. She and her husband have a 2-year-old son.

Leah is a Filipino who landed as a permanent resident and is now a Canadian citizen. She is married and has two children, a 7-year-old and a 3-month-old. She has experience working as an early childhood educator and is currently on maternity leave. She is considering finding a job that will allow her to work from home full-time.

Amanda is an international student from Sri Lanka who is accompanied by her husband and two children. Her husband is on an open work permit and is currently looking for a job. While Amanda can work part-time as an international student, she cannot engage in any work because of her children. She is currently searching for an affordable child program for her younger child.

## **Data Collection**

To allow the respondents to narrate their experiences and freely express their thoughts and emotions, I used a semi-structured interview to gather qualitative data. I developed a set of interview questions to serve as my starting point and guide in conducting all of the interviews. However, as the conversations with each respondent developed, I added further questions based on their response.

In developing my interview questions, I first developed an initial set of questions I could later test with two colleagues. I used my interview with one of them as my preliminary data and have included her responses in analyzing the themes that emerged from this study. Through these interviews, I had the opportunity to amend the questions to improve the quality of the data collected. After several revisions, I scheduled my final interview with the three other respondents who agreed to participate. I sent them a copy of the questions in advance to encourage a rich discussion. Some of the questions included in the interview were:

- Would you send your child to preschool when they turn 3 or 4? Why or why not?
- Some people would say that attending preschool is not a necessity but a privilege for families who can afford it. What would you say to them?
- If you (or your spouse) were a stay-at-home parent, would you still send your child to preschool? Why or why not?

Because of schedule conflicts, I settled on doing an online interview via Zoom. I emailed each participant the invitation link, and each meeting was set to 30 minutes. Upon acquiring their consent, the participants were informed that the interview would be audio-recorded. To record the interview data, I used Zoom's record function from the beginning until the end, wherein each session lasted 20 to 40 minutes. After completing all of the interviews, I used the interview data

recorded to transcribe the conversations. I initially used Otter to get a base transcription output of each session and edited for several rounds using manual transcription afterward. Quick follow-up questions on missing information were conducted personally and through text messages.

Finally, after further reflection on what I aim to accomplish in this study, I have streamlined my research questions to focus on preschool as the main topic of inquiry. Follow-up questions needed to be repeated to confirm if some of their responses were explicitly concerned with daycare or if they also applied to their thoughts about preschool.

### **Data Analysis**

A combination of interpretational analysis and reflective analysis was used to analyze the data collected. The analysis involved a five-step procedure. First, interpretational analysis was used to examine "case study data closely in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied" (Gall, et al., 2007, p. 466). Next, once the interviews were transcribed, everything was compiled into a computer database. Each transcript was then divided into segments, wherein one question and the corresponding answer were treated as one segment. To begin coding segments, I printed out the transcripts and ran through them to develop initial coding frames. After this, I developed the categories relevant to my study to group information I marked based on the initial coding. Themes and sub-themes emerged during the next round of analysis, which involved focused coding. They were highlighted according to categories up to the point of theoretical saturation, wherein no theme is left uncategorized and no additional categories are necessary (Gall et al., 2007).

## **Results and Discussion**

Upon completing the comprehensive analysis of the interview data, distinct themes began to surface, which were subsequently organized into two overarching categories. The first category encompassed factors that serve as catalysts for encouraging active participation in preschool programs. It included aspects such as perceived benefits of early childhood education, location convenience, government subsidy availability, and information access. These elements were pivotal in motivating immigrant families to allow their children to engage in preschool education and contribute positively to their well-being.

On the other hand, the second category revolved around factors that act as deterrents, impeding participation in early childhood education. This category encompassed various challenges and obstacles, including the high cost associated with preschool programs, location, and limited availability of slots in preschool centers. Other significant factors were associated with familial preferences, such as cultural beliefs and practices, the mother's feelings of attachment to the child, the family's perception of homeschooling, and the mother's personal preschool experiences.

### **Contributors to Participation in Preschools**

#### ***Perceived Benefits***

All, except one respondent, believed that sending their child to preschool benefits their children. Those who said they would send their child to preschool before kindergarten stated that they believe preschool would positively impact their child's development. According to these mothers, they believe that attending preschool will allow their child to develop:

- independence
- social skills



- language
- communication
- Literacy
- leadership skills
- other necessary skills to prepare children for primary school

Shuey and Leventhal (2020) found that while low-income Latina immigrant mothers recognized their children's learning opportunities in formal center-based programs, they did not perceive it as preparing them for kindergarten or primary school. The differences in perception of the benefits of early childhood education are associated with ethnic background and educational attainment (Yung, 1992; Annonciata & Nadege, 2020).

### ***Convenience***

All respondents have experienced participating in some form of Early Childhood Services or ECS, whether in a dayhome, daycare, or preschool. Each expressed that convenience factors, such as accessibility and location, helped them decide to go for a particular program. Both Patricia and Sam said the location has to be along or near their route to work so they can quickly drop their child off and pick them up at the end of the day, while Leah prefers a location close to transit.

According to Alberta's 2020 Early Childhood Education Report, the province has 378 school authorities offering Early Childhood Services programs, including preschool. Through its accredited 93 private operators, Alberta offers 123 ECS programs as of 2020.

### ***Government Subsidy***

The respondents in this study are all residents in Edmonton, Alberta, and are all aware of the availability of the government subsidy for child care. Among all the respondents, Amanda is

the only one still determining if her family is eligible for the program. Patricia, whose daughter is in a licensed daycare, receives a government subsidy. Sam participated in child care for a few months when her child was a year old and could also receive the subsidy.

In Alberta, the government provides childcare subsidies to eligible low-income families. The eligible families include those who have children attending a licensed facility-based program such as preschool. Alberta's Cost Control Framework and For-Profit Expansion Plan aim to improve the accessibility and affordability of childcare facilities for families living in Alberta. As of January 2022, licensed childcare fees will be reduced by an average of 50% for families with children 0 to kindergarten age. In addition, families earning less than \$180,000 per annum will receive a subsidy for their children attending a licensed childcare program. Eligible families can apply for a preschool subsidy of \$125 per month and may not receive more than one subsidy type should their child be enrolled in more than one licensed program (e.g., daycare and preschool). In this case, the family will receive the highest subsidy rate.

The current subsidy schedule for children attending full-time daycare has a minimum subsidy of \$106 and a maximum subsidy of \$266. The second to the highest income bracket of \$170,000 to \$174,999 is eligible for a \$120 subsidy. It means that families with a combined gross income lower than \$170,000 can receive a higher subsidy for sending their child to daycare (\$133-\$266) than sending their child to preschool. (Government of Alberta, n.d.). Principal applicants admitted under the economic immigration category in 2018 had a median wage of \$43,600, while their dependents had a median wage of \$27,600 (Statistics Canada, 2021). Adding both figures gives insight into what an average household income for immigrant families could look like- an estimated \$71,200 per year. In this example, since the income falls under the lowest income bracket, the family can apply for the maximum subsidy of \$266 for daycare. The

implication of this is that it is more practical and logical for immigrant families falling under the low-income category to send their children to daycare rather than to preschool if they were to choose only one program for their child.

### ***Information on Child Care and Education Programs***

All respondents, except Amanda, said their information on child care was enough and helped them decide on their childcare arrangement. Both Leah and Patricia believe that the government of Alberta's website contains extensive information that could easily be understood by families seeking child care. Sam stated that information from her community friends helped her make decisions more. All three of them and their families were already on permanent resident status at the time of their search. Only Amanda stated that she needed help finding useful information despite her research. Compared to the rest of the group, Amanda and her family are newcomers to Canada and have only been there for four months.

Immigrants often require access to information and resources to help them with their settlement. These everyday information needs include employment, education, housing, healthcare, and immigration. Despite the critical role of information in the successful integration of immigrants, a survey among immigrants in Canada reveals an association between the difficulties encountered within the first four years of immigrating to Canada and difficulties finding specific information (Statistics Canada, 2007). The top information sources for immigrants in Canada are interpersonal (friends and family), mediums (newspapers, internet, TV, radio), and different organizations (Caidi et al., 2008).

## **Contributors to Non-participation in Preschools**

### *Cost*

According to the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), the monthly cost of child care in Canada is around \$1000. Among the provinces, Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Saskatchewan have the lowest childcare costs compared to the other provinces (Macdonald & Friendly, 2019). The median fees for infant and toddler care in Calgary are \$1300 and \$1100, respectively, while the median fees in Edmonton are \$1075 and \$917, respectively. Preschool-age fees are lower in both cities; the median fee in Calgary is \$1100 and \$875 in Edmonton.

While Patricia is receiving a subsidy for daycare and Sam has also received it previously, they all agree that early childhood services in Canada are expensive. They believe that cost can be a deterrent in availing these services.

**Sam** [7:53] Yes, I think because it's really expensive. It's as if I'm working just for paying.

**Leah** [13:22] Yes, it is. It's a factor. Day home at that time before COVID, dayhome is cheaper than daycare at her age. Because one year old, the younger in daycare is more expensive.

**Amanda** [undetermined] Yes. The amount, the cost also. Because I heard it is up to \$950 per month and the government provides a subsidy. But in my case, since I'm a student, also I don't have enough information whether I'm eligible or not

Five months after arrival in Canada, Amanda's 4-year-old still stays home and has not been enrolled in any licensed facility-based program. Amanda mentioned that she will pursue

this once she can find a job. Only Patricia clearly expressed that cost is not the only factor among the group. She neither agrees or disagrees with the statement that preschool is not a necessity but a privilege for families who can afford it.

### ***Attachment***

Amanda feels her son is very close to her and always likes playing with her. She is also currently taking care of him full-time. Patricia, whose child was born during COVID-19, considers herself as her child's "everything" (6:21, Line 3). Her child spent her first two years and three months only in her mother's presence, so she initially preferred a day home where only three kids were under their care.

**Patricia** [6:21] I'm the only you know, I'm the Mom, I'm the teacher, I'm the manager and everything in her life is just me.

She also said that it is vital for her and her husband to have enough time to bond with their daughter, so they only plan to send her to a half-day program in preschool. On the other hand, Sam and Leah prefer to homeschool their child if given the opportunity. Sam reported missing her 1-year-old son immediately after being separated for a few hours. She said that if she were a stay-at-home mom, she would not soon send her son to preschool or formal schooling. Leah, who just gave birth to her second child, is already transitioning to working from home full-time. Her older daughter is currently doing a homeschooling program with curriculum sources from different homeschooling organizations and platforms. The homeschooling setup allows her to be her child's teacher and facilitator for learning. This setup is based on her belief that her children can learn best from her.

The concept of maternal attachment is evident in the responses of the mothers. Bowlby's theory of attachment emphasizes that maternal care is critical to a child's overall health and

development. He believes a young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother. He argues that full attention is only possible for a mother who derives satisfaction from witnessing the different phases of childhood (Vicedo, 2011). Other scholars supported his work and agreed that mothers should try to the best of their abilities to take care of their children during the first years of their lives (Myrdal & Klein, 1956).

### *Own Preschool Experience*

The respondents were asked about their own preschool experiences growing up. Sam and Leah narrated that their child care was purely from their mother. Leah's mother was a stay-at-home mother, and her first experience of non-maternal child care and center-based education was when she attended school at around 4 or 5 years old. Sam also had the same experience and went straight to kindergarten at five. Based on the interview data, both stated that they would not send their child to preschool if they could personally care for them.

Meanwhile, Patricia's experience differs from the group's because she went through all preschool levels during childhood. Contrary to the preferences of Leah and Sam, Patricia stated that even if she gets to stay at home during maternity leave for a second child in the future, she will still send her first child to daycare, preschool, and eventually to kindergarten.

From earlier years until the 1980s in the Philippines, early childhood was categorized into three levels: nursery, kindergarten (or kindergarten 1), and preparatory school (or kindergarten 2). In Canadian education, nursery is equivalent to preschool for 3-year-olds, kindergarten is equivalent to preschool for 4-year-olds, and preparatory school or kindergarten 2 is equivalent to kindergarten. However, while the law does not require preschool education to enter primary school, it was a common practice for families to send their children to any form of preschool

education as an entry stage to primary education. Only in 2012 was kindergarten made compulsory and mandatory for all children under The Kindergarten Education Law (Department of Education of the Philippines, n.d.)

One concept that can be used to understand the respondents' differences in preferences is Main's, Kaplan's, and Cassidy's (1985) work on adult attachment. The study of Main et al. suggests that parents' attachment representations, or how they remember their childhood experiences, influence how their attachment to their child is organized. Based on the narration of their childhood care history, Patricia had more exposure to non-maternal care than Leah and Sam. Their responses suggest a similarity between their current early childhood education preferences and their own experiences as a child. Their construct of attachment to their caregivers as their source of nourishment and learning may have consciously or unconsciously influenced their present treatment of their children; however, this is not theorizing these experiences.

### **Availability of Slots**

Another challenge commonly experienced by families in finding a licensed program is the availability of slots in their preferred child centers. The responses suggest early planning and registration are crucial to securing a slot.

**Patricia** [13:56] [line 1] We waited for a month, but we were just lucky kasi nga parang may bigla lang nag-pull out from the program so naisingit kami [because someone suddenly pulled-out from the program so we were accommodated]. [line 14] Sobrang hirap maghanap ng daycare na swak sa needs namin [It is very hard to find a daycare that caters to all our needs].

The majority of the respondents expressed their belief that securing a spot in a daycare center was an exceedingly challenging task. This sentiment aligns with the findings from CSPCCS (2022), which reported that a staggering 78% of childcare centers maintained active waitlists. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this situation, it is important to investigate the specific reasons behind children being placed on these waitlists. Additionally, it is essential to collect data regarding the different types of centers and age categories in which available spaces exist. This analysis can help us determine if there is a misperception regarding the availability of slots in childcare centers. For instance, at the preschool where I am currently employed, there are approximately 40 children waitlisted for the daycare program, while there are still around 30 vacant slots within the preschool program. This stark contrast highlights the need for a more nuanced examination of the situation.

### *Cultural Beliefs and Practices*

The respondents were asked whether they think Filipino culture has influenced their current beliefs, preferences, and practices in child care. This is with the exception of Amanda whose interview questions did not include this subject. Inductive reasoning suggests that culture shapes their construct of how child care should be. These factors identified are as follows:

**Perception on age-appropriateness.** Filipinos commonly believe children should start formal schooling at around 4 to 5 years old. This is also the age requirement (5 years) to attend kindergarten, a mandatory level to qualify for primary education (Bustos-Orosa, 2022).

However, many families, especially the older generations, still think that children three years old or younger are too young to attend a center-based child program. This may be because it was in the 1950s that the preschool system in the Philippines began to develop (Ocampo, 1996).

Moreover, because the concepts of respect for elders, group harmony, and kinship are cultural



norms (Sanchez & Gaw, 2007), the perceptions of their parents likely influence the younger generation, Filipino parents. Decisions, including practices on child care, are commonly made in consultation with the family.

**Preference for relatives.** Filipinos are generally reluctant to seek formal help and prefer to seek help from family members (Martinez, et al., 2020). This includes a preference for relatives to care for their children when they cannot. In this study, all Filipino respondents expressed considering their mother as the first option to be the caregiver for their child after their maternity leave. The pandemic hindered Patricia's plan to bring her mother to Canada for this purpose, while Sam's mother has been caring for her son since he turned one.

**"Siesta".** Siesta is the Filipino habit of "idlip" or a short nap in the afternoon. The influence of Spanish colonization brought about this tradition, which is still widely practiced. One thing that discouraged Sam from choosing a childcare center is the absence of nap time in its program. Filipino parents consider this an essential part of a child's daily routine.

**Diet.** Leah sent her child to a day home owned by a Filipino, where Filipino snacks and meals were part of the program. She mentioned that it would be taxing for her to change their household meals if her daughter happened to be fed with non-native food while in a childcare center. She prefers to let her daughter have meals she is already familiar with.

**Hygiene and Sanitation.** Filipinos are known for good hygiene, and bath time is a daily ritual sacred to Filipinos. During the interview, Patricia said that one of their priorities when finding a childcare center is the cleanliness of the place. She shared an experience where they saw toilet paper lying on the floor in a place they were considering, making them exclude it from their list. She is very particular about how self-hygiene is practiced in a childcare center and asks how the program implements this aspect.

### *Preference for Homeschooling*

Another contributing factor found is the convenience and availability of the homeschooling curriculum. Sam says she will homeschool her son if she can because programs are now easily accessible online. Leah's daughter is currently homeschooled and plans to do the same for her second child. Both view social skills can be acquired by participating in activities outside the home.

It is important to highlight that all the Filipino respondents in our study identified as evangelical Christians. In the United States, homeschooling is a prominent aspect of Protestant education, with a majority of homeschooled children belonging to the evangelical Christian community (Jeynes, 2012). The increasing prevalence of homeschooling among Christians is a growing trend that shows no signs of slowing down. Therefore, when seeking to comprehend the landscape of early childhood education in Canada, it is imperative to consider homeschooling as a noteworthy phenomenon and a valid educational choice that extends beyond Christian families.

### **Summary**

To summarize, the study has led to the main finding that several factors contribute to the participation and non-participation of immigrant children in early childhood education. In response to the research question: What factors contribute to the participation and non-participation of immigrant children in early childhood education? The findings from this study suggest that the factors that influence participation are the perceived benefits of early childhood education, convenience of location and program schedule, government subsidy and information,

and barriers to participation include high costs, maternal attachment, own preschool experience, lack of slots, cultural beliefs and practices, and preference for homeschooling.

Most of the respondents agree that sending their child to preschool will produce benefits to the development of their child. Holding this factor constant, it appears that among the aspects contributing to participation in early childhood education, government subsidy is the most important factor immigrant families consider when deciding whether to put their child in a licensed facility. Similarly, it seems that the most significant barrier contributing to non-participation in early childhood education is the high cost of programs. Only one of the respondents felt that cost was secondary to the benefits her child could get from attending preschool. At the same time, the rest thought that they would only be able to afford the high costs of programs with the government subsidy. The majority agreed that if cost was not a consideration, they would want their child to attend preschool.

The cultural beliefs and practices those respondents mentioned were also significant. The highest consideration among these was their perception of the facility's hygiene and sanitation. The majority felt that the hygiene and sanitation practices in most of the centers they knew did not meet their expectations and were different from what they were used to. Because of this, they believe that their child is at higher risk of sickness when they are in child centers than when they are home. Further, a common belief within the cultural group to which the majority of the respondents belong is the appropriate age for a child to start preschool. In the Filipino culture, any child younger than 4 is too young to be in school, while the majority still believe that 5 is the best age to start any formal education.

Finally, there was no consensus on whether the respondents would still send their child to preschool if they had the chance to be a stay-at-home parent. Half of the respondents said they

would still send their child to preschool, while the other half said they would probably do home-schooling.

The immigrant families represented in this study were likelier to have a low income. Without a significant subsidy, the cost of preschool is the most critical factor that can contribute to their non-participation. Faced with a choice between putting their child in daycare or sending their child to both daycare and preschool, many immigrant families choose a stand-alone daycare program because a full-day program allows the mother to work, and they would not be able to afford the costs of two programs. These findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that the cost of preschool is a significant barrier immigrant families face (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011, Greenberg et al., 2016).

The cultural beliefs and practices based on ethnic background were also linked to preferences in center selection, further pointing to how an immigrant family's acculturation shapes their child's participation in early childhood education. Compelling factors identified in this study involving household traditions and child-rearing practices suggest that non-participation of immigrant children in preschool may not be solely attributable to the socioeconomic status of the family or high program costs.

Grounded in Crenshaw's intersectionality theory, the study delved into the potentially complex levels of racial injustices and poverty faced by immigrant families (Rank, 1999) and how these circumstances may impact their children's participation in preschool due to financial constraints. Nevertheless, results show that their inability to afford preschool programs is not the sole reason for not sending their child to school. The study suggests that acculturation plays a significant role in determining participation.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings of this study advance the conclusion that immigrant families vary in the extent to which their ethnic culture centers on child development practices and that parental beliefs are predictive of their decision to have their child participate in formal schooling. The analysis of the results sheds light on the complex interplay of factors that influence the participation of immigrant families in early childhood education and underscores the importance of addressing both encouraging and discouraging factors to promote better early childhood education practices.

Considering all factors, this study's findings suggest that improving access to affordable preschool education for immigrant children positively impacts their participation in such programs. The following recommendations are suggested to address this concern:

1. Provision of subsidy programs for the families of newcomers and international students.
2. Evaluation of current subsidy programs for center-based education with low-income immigrant families taken into consideration by:
  - examining utilization of existing programs
  - examining the spread of participation of immigrant families in each program
  - examining the information available to immigrants and possible barriers to access and understanding
3. Evaluation of how preschool fees can be restructured in such a way that preschool may be viewed as a practical yet more beneficial alternative to daycare or as a complementary program when full-day preschool programs are not available.

4. Exploration of funding support from private and not-for-profit organizations through financial aid programs for eligible immigrant families, specifically for those organizations and families belonging to the same cultural ethnicity.

Furthermore, it is also crucial for policymakers and other stakeholders to recognize that while advocacy for early childhood education continues to progress, not all families believe that sending their children to a formal center-based program is best for them. In this regard, the challenge is to find the right balance between equipping the parents with the knowledge about possible risks to their children's development and likelihood of academic success in primary school and respecting parenting practices and beliefs based on their ethnic culture.

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