

ASPEKTY KULTUROWE I SPOŁECZNE UTRUDNIAJĄCE ŻYCIE IMIGRANTKI BEZ ZNAJOMOŚCI JĘZYKA

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Adnotacja. Celem badania jest zbadanie i analiza wyzwań kulturowych i społecznych stojących przed imigrantkami nie znającymi języka, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem ich wpływu na życie codzienne, integrację społeczną oraz skuteczność strategii pokonywania tych barier. Wyniki badania zagłębiają się w doświadczenia imigrantek, ujawniając złożony zestaw wyzwań, przed którymi stoją. W artykule zwrócono uwagę na problemy komunikacji werbalnej i niewerbalnej, szczegółowo opisując, w jaki sposób bariery językowe prowadzą do nieporozumieństw w codziennej komunikacji i utrudniają interpretację mowy ciała, gestów i sygnałów społecznych w nowym kontekście kulturowym. Badanie rzuca również światło na trudności, jakie napotykają imigrantki w dostępie do podstawowych usług, takich jak opieka zdrowotna, edukacja i udogodnienia publiczne, ze względu na bariery językowe.

Slowa kluczowe: imigrantki, bariery językowe, adaptacja kulturowa, integracja społeczna, problemy komunikacyjne.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS THAT COMPLICATE THE LIVES OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN WITHOUT LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

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Abstract. The purpose of the research is to investigate and analyze the cultural and social challenges faced by immigrant women without language proficiency, focusing on their impact on daily life, social integration, and the effectiveness of strategies to overcome these barriers. Research results delve deeply into the experiences of women immigrants, revealing a complex web of challenges. It highlights the struggles with both verbal and non-verbal communication, detailing how language barriers lead to misunderstandings in everyday interactions and hinder the interpretation of body language, gestures, and social cues in a new cultural context. The research also sheds light on the difficulty's immigrant women face in accessing essential services such as healthcare, education, and public amenities due to language limitations.

Key words: immigrant women, language barriers, cultural adaptation, social integration, communication challenges.

КУЛЬТУРНІ ТА СОЦІАЛЬНІ АСПЕКТИ, ЯКІ УСКЛАДНЮЮТЬ ЖИТТЯ ЖІНОК-ІММІГРАНТОК БЕЗ ЗНАННЯ МОВИ

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Анотація. Мета дослідження – вивчити та проаналізувати культурні та соціальні виклики, з якими стикаються жінки-іммігрантки без знання мови, зосередивши увагу на їхньому впливі на повсякденне життя, соціальну інтеграцію та ефективність стратегій подолання цих бар'єрів. Результати дослідження заглиблюються в досвід жінок-іммігранток, розкриваючи складну низку викликів, з якими вони стикаються. Стаття висвітлює проблеми вербалної та невербалної комунікації, детально описуючи, як мовні бар'єри призводять до непорозумінь у повсякденному спілкуванні та ускладнюють інтерпретацію мови тіла, жестів та соціальних сигналів у новому культурному контексті. Дослідження також проливає світло на труднощі, з якими стикаються жінки-іммігрантки у доступі до основних послуг, таких як охорона здоров'я, освіта та громадські зручності, через мовні обмеження.

Ключові слова: жінки-іммігрантки, мовні бар'єри, культурна адаптація, соціальна інтеграція, комунікаційні проблеми.

In recent years, the world has witnessed a significant increase in migration to developed countries, driven by a confluence of factors including the search for economic opportunities, political instability, and conflicts in various regions. According to the United Nations, the number of international migrants reached an estimated 280 million in 2023, accounting for 4% of the global population, with a considerable proportion of these migrants being women. This demographic shift presents unique challenges, especially for women immigrants who often face a myriad of hurdles in their host countries.

Women immigrants are particularly vulnerable to challenges that range from verbal and non-verbal communication barriers to difficulties in accessing essential services such as healthcare and education, finding employment, and adapting to new cultural norms. These barriers are not merely linguistic but extend to a broader spectrum of social and psychological challenges. They often grapple with issues of social isolation, emotional and psychological stress, and the struggle to establish meaningful social connections in unfamiliar environments. This complex scenario affects their ability to integrate effectively into their new societies.

Recognizing the multifaceted nature of these challenges, various countries have implemented comprehensive programs aimed at facilitating the integration of immigrant women. These programs, blending language learning with cultural and social integration strategies, are critical in helping these women navigate their new environments. However, despite these efforts, there is a growing recognition of the need for further enhancements and alternative approaches to better address the unique needs of this demographic.

The purpose of the research is to investigate and analyze the cultural and social challenges faced by immigrant women without language proficiency, focusing on their impact on daily life, social integration, and the effectiveness of strategies to overcome these barriers. The following tasks will be performed to achieve the goal:

1. Examine primary challenges, to identify and examine the primary cultural and social challenges that immigrant women without language proficiency encounter, emphasizing communication barriers and the difficulties in understanding and adapting to new cultural norms.

2. Analyze impact on daily life and service access, to analyze how the lack of language proficiency affects immigrant women in their daily activities and access to essential services, including healthcare, education, and community services.

3. Study social isolation and community dynamics, to investigate the impact of language barriers on social interactions, relationships, and the degree of social isolation experienced by immigrant women. This task will also include examining the role of community dynamics in either exacerbating or alleviating these challenges.

4. Evaluate strategies for language barrier overcoming, to evaluate existing strategies and support systems designed to help immigrant women overcome language barriers. This involves assessing the effectiveness of these programs and proposing potential improvements or alternative approaches.

The topic of cultural and social peculiarities of Immigrant Women Without Language Proficiency has been extensively researched, gaining particular relevance as waves of immigration continue to rise. There is a plethora of new studies emerging, complementing and expanding upon earlier research, which collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by this demographic. In exploring the primary challenges, Hunt's (2023) article sheds light on the psychological dimensions, notably imposter syndrome, that often affect expatriates. While her focus is on expats working abroad, the insights can be extrapolated to understand the experiences of immigrant women grappling with language barriers. This psychological aspect is crucial in understanding the broader cultural and social challenges these women face, as it impacts their self-perception and ability to integrate into new environments.

Sedin's (2017) qualitative study in Vancouver, Canada, delves into the impact of English learning and social interactions on immigrant women. It provides valuable insights into how language proficiency, or the lack thereof, directly affects daily life and access to services. Guruge et al.'s (2009) research further emphasizes this point, examining how English proficiency influences immigrant women's access to and utilization of health services. These studies highlight the critical role language plays in accessing essential services and participating in everyday activities.

The social isolation and community dynamics aspect is comprehensively covered in the scoping review by Johnson et al. (2019), which focuses on immigrant and refugee seniors in Canada. While the study concentrates on an older demographic, the findings about social isolation and community integration are pertinent to understanding the experiences of immigrant women of all ages facing language barriers. Moreno's (2002) study, provides a deeper understanding of the identity aspects in the context of international migration.

In terms of strategies to overcome language barriers, a range of studies offers insights. Burns and Roberts (2010) discuss global flows and local transpositions in adult language learning, suggesting the complex interplay between migration and language acquisition. The Council of Europe's (1995) report on immigrant women and integration, along with Msengi, Okor, and Schoer's (2015) work, offer practical insights into educating immigrant women through social support. Norton & Toohey (2011) and Peirce (1995) delve into the interconnection between social identity, investment, and language learning, emphasizing the importance of personal and social factors in language acquisition and integration processes.

Collectively, these studies provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by immigrant women without language proficiency and offer valuable insights into effective strategies for overcoming these barriers.

In this study, the primary methodological approach involves a critical analysis of existing literature, which serves as the foundation for understanding the complexities faced by immigrant women without language proficiency. This process includes the systematic grouping, summarization, and organization of information gleaned from various sources. By critically reviewing and synthesizing academic papers, reports, and studies, the research seeks to build a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

In the era of globalization, migration flows are intensifying, with recent events further influencing these patterns. The increasing migration to Europe, triggered by various factors including economic opportunities and political instability, stands as a prominent example. Additionally, recent conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine and Israel,

have contributed to the growing number of individuals seeking refuge and better lives in foreign lands. This surge in migration highlights a crucial aspect of modern global dynamics, where people are moving across borders more frequently than ever before.

Amidst these flows, the number of immigrants, particularly women, is on the rise, each facing their unique set of challenges upon arrival in a new country. These challenges are not just about adapting to a new environment but also encompass complex cultural and social issues, especially for those who lack proficiency in the local language. The following Tab.1 systematizes these problems, providing a categorized overview of the key challenges faced by immigrant women.

Table 1

Comprehensive overview of challenges faced by immigrant women without language proficiency

Challenge	Description
Verbal communication barriers	Struggles with language leading to misunderstandings in everyday interactions.
Non-Verbal communication issues	Difficulties in interpreting body language, gestures, and social cues in a new cultural context.
Access to essential services	Hindered ability to access healthcare, education, and public services due to language limitations.
Employment opportunities	Challenges in finding employment or career advancement without language proficiency.
Social isolation	Limited social interactions and network building, leading to feelings of loneliness and isolation.
Cultural norms and practices	Difficulties in understanding and adapting to the new cultural norms, traditions, and practices.
Parenting in a new culture	Challenges in supporting children's education and integrating into school communities.
Legal and administrative navigation	Complexities in understanding and navigating legal and administrative systems.
Dependency and autonomy	Increased dependency on others for daily tasks and decision-making, affecting personal autonomy.
Psychological stress	Emotional and psychological stress due to communication barriers and cultural adaptation challenges.

Note: based on Hunt's (2023) and Sedin's (2017) studies

Consequently, immigrant women face a variety of challenges, as illustrated in the table. These range from practical barriers in communication and accessing essential services, to more profound struggles with social isolation, cultural integration, and psychological stress. The table's detailed descriptions emphasize the complexity and interrelated nature of these challenges, highlighting the crucial role of language proficiency in navigating a new cultural environment. The insights derived from this analysis, grounded in literature such as Hunt's (2023) and Sedin's (2017), not only enhance our understanding of these issues but also underscore the need for targeted support and interventions to assist immigrant women in overcoming these multifaceted barriers.

The impact of language barriers on the daily lives and access to services for immigrant women in the United States is a multi-dimensional issue, influenced by a variety of factors. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the foreign-born population in the United States doubled from 20 million in 1990 to 40 million in 2010, including nearly 17 million children, more than 15 million of whom are U.S.-born citizens. Immigrant women and girls constituted more than half of the 44.7 million immigrants in the United States in 2018, with 48% of all female immigrants above the age of 5 being Limited English Proficient (LEP) (Krista et al., 2012; Betalova, 2020).

In Canada, similar challenges exist for immigrant populations, particularly regarding language barriers in accessing healthcare. Immigrants, constituting two-thirds of Canada's population growth, face significant barriers in the healthcare system due to linguistic challenges. This is especially evident among elderly immigrants, who often contend with both mental and physical health issues along with linguistic barriers.

A study by Johnson et al. (2019) and collaborators examined the impact of linguistic barriers on healthcare among immigrants, revealing that non-language proficient (NP) immigrants over 65 years of age were less likely to seek medical attention for emergency healthcare needs than their language proficient (LP) counterparts. Sedin (2017) emphasizes the importance of exploring the true effects of immigrant health and healthcare utilization at a population level, acknowledging that language challenges reinforce systemic and social-cultural barriers to accessing healthcare services, which are strongly associated with poor health outcomes.

In the realm of education, the number of English learners in American schools is on the rise, with parents and families who do not speak English requiring support to be actively involved in their child's schooling. Despite the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights requiring schools to provide translation services, many schools, such as those in Philadelphia, often use students for translation, which can lead to inadequate communication and misunderstandings.

In the United States, the impact of language barriers on immigrant women extends beyond healthcare and education to various aspects of social life and access to essential services. Over the past 20 years, the foreign-born population in the U.S. has doubled, with many immigrant families facing challenges due to language barriers, especially in accessing public programs like Medicaid, CHIP, SNAP, and TANF (Guruge et al., 2009).

Factors contributing to lower application and take-up rates among eligible immigrants include complex application processes, administrative burdens, language, literacy, and cultural barriers, and climates of fear and mistrust. Immigrant families often struggle with understanding applications for benefit programs, which can

be lengthy and require proof of citizenship and Social Security numbers. This is compounded by limited education, language, and computer literacy skills.

Language barriers significantly hinder immigrant families' ability to learn about or apply for programs. Despite efforts to provide materials in languages other than English, many immigrants do not speak English proficiently, leading to challenges in navigating public agency websites and obtaining necessary information. The urgent need for more bilingual and bicultural staff across various service sites is highlighted, as existing staff often cannot keep up with the demand, and immigrant clients frequently rely on untrained interpreters, like family members, for assistance. This reliance on untrained interpreters poses risks, including confidentiality breaches and misinterpretation of crucial information (Krista et al., 2012).

These findings underscore the multi-dimensional impact of language barriers on immigrant women in the U.S., affecting not only their health and education but also their ability to access vital social services, contributing to a complex web of challenges that hinder their integration and well-being in society (Msengi et al., 2015).

Migrant women, according to a study Johnson et al. (2019) and Moreno (2002), often describe social isolation as a loss of family support and familiar social/cultural networks. The feelings of loneliness they experience stem from being in a new country with limited support, especially challenging for mothers.

Research has shown that immigrant and refugee seniors face unique risk factors like racism, discrimination, and language barriers, which lead to weak social networks and increased social isolation. The pandemic has further highlighted these risks and their differential health and economic impacts.

Moreover, socioeconomic, environmental, and psychosocial barriers contribute to limited social networks among immigrants in the U.S., which also contribute to their experiences of social isolation. Understanding these barriers is crucial for developing social support interventions to improve their health.

Linguistic isolation plays a significant role in the lives of immigrants. Being able to speak the dominant language of the host country not only affects labor market opportunities but also significantly impacts social capital and the sense of belonging.

To effectively address the cultural and social interaction challenges faced by immigrant women, various countries have developed and implemented state programs focusing on language learning and social integration. These programs provide practical examples of how to build strategies that facilitate the successful integration of immigrant women into their new societies.

- *Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)*. In Canada, the LINC program offers free language training in English and French for adult immigrants. It's not just about language proficiency; the program also includes components that educate immigrants about Canadian culture and values, assisting in their overall integration process.

- *Intensive Language Courses in the USA*. The United States offers intensive English language courses specifically designed for immigrants. These programs often include cultural orientation to help newcomers understand and adapt to the American way of life, thereby easing their social integration.

- *Integration Courses in Germany*. In Germany, integration courses combine language instruction with information about German law, culture, and history. These courses are aimed at helping immigrants better understand and participate in German society.

- *Civic Integration Programs in the Netherlands*. These programs are mandatory for new immigrants and include language learning as well as civic education. The goal is to provide immigrants with the necessary tools to participate actively in Dutch society.

- *SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) in Sweden*. This program offers language courses to immigrants to help them learn Swedish. It also provides information about Swedish society, laws, and culture, promoting better integration and understanding.

These programs, as discussed in studies such as Norton & Toohey (2011) and Peirce (1995), show that effective language learning strategies should go beyond mere language acquisition. They must also include elements of cultural orientation and social integration to foster a sense of belonging among immigrants. As highlighted by Burns and Roberts (2010), and the Council of Europe's report (1995), these programs should be adaptable to the diverse backgrounds of immigrants, providing them with tailored support that considers their unique challenges and experiences.

Msengi, Okor, and Schoer's (2015) work also emphasizes the importance of social support in the educational journey of immigrant women, suggesting that language learning programs should include components that build and strengthen social networks.

By incorporating these insights, the aforementioned programs demonstrate a holistic approach to addressing the social and cultural challenges faced by immigrant women, facilitating their successful integration into their new homes. To formulate a comprehensive strategy for the adaptation of immigrant women, it's crucial to assess existing language barrier strategies and support systems. These strategies should not only focus on language proficiency but also on broader aspects of social and cultural integration.

In evaluating the strategies employed to overcome language barriers for immigrant women, it's evident that while current programs cover key areas, they also present opportunities for enhancement. Most language learning programs, including Canada's LINC and the intensive courses in the USA, prioritize language proficiency. However, integrating real-life scenarios and practical language applications relevant to daily and professional life could significantly enhance their utility.

Cultural orientation is another critical aspect, effectively addressed by programs in Germany and the Netherlands. These courses educate immigrants about the social norms and values of their new country, aiding in cultural adaptation. Yet, the incorporation of more interactive and experiential methods could further enrich these learning experiences. A notable gap in some programs is the focus on social integration. The development of community engagement opportunities and group learning scenarios is essential for fostering a sense of belonging and helping immigrants establish supportive social networks. The adaptability of language learning to the individual's background, as suggested by Burns and Roberts (2010), is crucial. Programs should be flexible enough to accommodate various educational backgrounds, learning styles, and age groups, ensuring that the needs of a diverse immigrant population are met. This tailored approach would not only improve language skills but also aid in the overall adaptation and integration process of immigrant women.

To further enhance the effectiveness of language learning and integration programs for immigrant women, exploring potential improvements and considering alternative approaches is essential. This involves identifying gaps in current strategies and proposing innovative solutions that cater to the unique needs and challenges faced by this demographic.

- *Mentorship programs.* Pairing immigrant women with local mentors can provide them with practical language practice and cultural insights. Mentors can be a valuable resource for navigating day-to-day challenges in a new country.

- *Online and mobile learning tools.* Utilizing digital platforms for language learning can offer flexibility and accessibility, especially important for women who may have childcare responsibilities. Gamification and interactive content can enhance engagement.

- *Community engagement initiatives.* Encouraging participation in local events and volunteer opportunities can provide practical language usage situations and help in building social networks.

- *Vocational language training.* Language training tailored to specific job sectors can enhance employability and practical language use. This approach can be particularly beneficial for professional immigrant women.

- *Childcare support.* Providing childcare during language classes can increase participation rates among immigrant mothers, ensuring they have the opportunity to attend these crucial sessions.

- *Feedback mechanisms.* Regular feedback from participants can help in continuously improving and adapting the programs to meet the evolving needs of immigrant women.

Overall, a holistic approach to language barrier strategies for immigrant women should encompass not only language and cultural education but also practical, social, and emotional support. By evaluating the effectiveness of existing programs and considering these potential improvements, a more inclusive and effective strategy can be developed to aid the adaptation and integration of immigrant women into their new societies.

Conclusions. The rising migration to development countries, spurred by factors such as economic opportunities, political instability, and war conflicts. Women-immigrants encounter various hurdles, from verbal and non-verbal communication barriers to difficulties in accessing essential services, employment opportunities, and navigating cultural norms. These challenges, ranging from communication difficulties to social isolation and psychological stress, underscore the multifaceted nature of their experience in new environments. The impact of these barriers is profound, affecting their ability to access essential services, employment opportunities, and to establish meaningful social connections. As such, it's clear that addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach, one that not only focuses on language proficiency but also considers the broader social and cultural context in which these women are trying to find their place.

To address the complex challenges faced by immigrant women, various countries have implemented comprehensive programs that blend language learning with cultural and social integration strategies. These programs not only focus on language proficiency but also aim to educate immigrants about the cultural and societal norms of their new homes. In addition to these existing frameworks, there is a recognized need for further enhancements and alternative approaches to better cater to the unique needs of this demographic. Innovations like mentorship programs, online and mobile learning tools, community engagement initiatives, vocational language training, childcare support during classes, and regular feedback mechanisms can significantly augment these programs. Such improvements would not only aid in language acquisition but also in the broader adaptation and integration process, ensuring a more inclusive and effective strategy for helping immigrant women navigate their new environments.

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