




What is success? Examining the concept of successful integration among African immigrants in Canada

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ABSTRACT

Canadian immigration documents such as the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act 2001 stipulate that it is the responsibility of the government to help immigrants to integrate successfully. In part, this is due to the recognition that immigrants have the capital vital for economic and demographic enhancement of the country. To this end, successful integration is an important policy objective, with policymakers outlining indicators that measure the degree of immigrant integration. However, it is unclear the extent to which such policy indicators reflect the perspectives of immigrants. Drawing on in-depth interviews with African immigrants in London, Ontario, we report on a qualitative study that explored the meaning of successful integration. The findings capture some dimensions of successful integration. They indicate that creating avenues for personal growth and development in a context where immigrants have options and opportunities for advancement is an important marker of integration. Moreover, the findings show that achieving pre-migration aspirations – dreams and goals set prior to arrival in the host country are central to immigrants' conceptualisation of integration. Furthermore, as opposed to an action with a definite endpoint, immigrants understand integration as an ongoing process in which immigrants continuously adapt in response to changing demands of the host country.

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Introduction

Globally, immigrants are major contributors to the economic and demographic wellbeing of most receiving societies. Countries such as Canada have recognised the importance of immigrants and have designed policies to attract over three hundred thousand migrants on a yearly basis (Hou and Lu 2017). Beyond attracting them, some receiving countries such as Australia and New Zealand also adopt specific policies aimed at promoting and facilitating the successful integration of immigrants (Samers 2017) by outlining a number of guidelines or milestones that immigrants must attain in order to achieve successful integration. Although these guidelines may seem beneficial especially to a certain

category of immigrants, they may also, lack the perspective of the immigrants themselves. As such, in practice, the guidelines may mean very little to immigrants who are supposed to be the intended beneficiaries (Kortmann 2015). One implication of this is a policy that has the opposite effect of either alienating immigrants failing to improve their wellbeing within the host society (Huot et al. 2013). Since most immigration policies and programmes seek to ensure ‘smooth’ transition of newcomers into the host society, the perspective and experiences of immigrants of how they understand integration are important – both in terms of policy considerations and improvement as well as scholarly relevance. Likewise, given the continual shift in immigrant source region from Europe to other regions, policymakers in Canada and elsewhere are interested in understanding the nature of recent immigrants in order to formulate programmes to enhance their integration into host societies (Bloemraad 2006; Alba and Foner 2015). This makes successful integration an important subject for investigation, both scholarly and practically.

In Canada, immigration policy is geared towards improving the country’s economic productivity and addressing demographic challenges (Sweetman and Warman 2008; Termote 2011). Immigration policies through the points-based system awards high scores to economic immigrants within specific age bracket who can help replace an ageing and declining population (Termote 2011; Biles and Andrew 2012). Likewise, these policies reward immigrants with high human capital who can help maintain Canada’s economic advantage and competitiveness in a globalising world (Buzdugan and Halli 2009).

These policies focus on the core process by which immigrants become part of the Canadian society (Li 2003). The ability of immigrants to become an integral part of the new society is measured against the performance of native-born Canadians together with their normative and behavioural standards (Frideres 2008). Economically, immigrants are considered as having integrated successfully if they earn the equivalent or more than the native-born Canadians (Li and Li 2013; Mata and Pendakur 2016). Socially, successful integration is measured by the extent to which immigrants are able to uphold Canadian values and attitudes (CIC 2002). Although these measures may serve as good indicators and provide a useful baseline for measuring success, they may not necessarily reflect the interests, perspective and actual experiences of immigrants. Further, since integration as a process relates to different aspects of life, success in one area might not translate to another, thereby making the issue of success quite complex. Robinson (1998, 122) argues that integration is a personal and individualised process, and ‘since it is individualized, contested and contextual, it requires qualitative methodologies which allow the voices of respondents to be heard in an unadulterated form’.

Thus, the current paper provides an avenue for the voices of immigrants to be heard regarding their understanding of successful integration. It achieves this objective by examining the perspective of those targeted by such policies and how their views on successful integration align with stipulations of the policy. In doing so, it addresses the broad question: what are the perceptions of immigrants regarding successful integration and how do their perceptions correspond to official policy indicators and standards used by the Canadian government?

The paper contributes to our understanding of what immigrants perceive as successful integration. We conducted in-depth interviews with African immigrants residing in London – a mid-sized city in Ontario (Canada), which is increasingly becoming a

major centre of immigrants' settlement. Along with attracting immigrants in general, the city has been a key centre of resettling Syrian refugees since 2016. The City of London prides itself as a welcoming community¹ with a diverse immigrant population that represents 22 per cent of the total population (Esses 2010; City of London 2018). The city considers 'the creation of support for the attraction, retention and integration of newcomers, international students and foreign-trained professionals and multigenerational immigrants a top priority' (City of London 2018, 2). Like elsewhere in Canada, the city sees immigrants as a potential replacement for an ageing population and declining birth rates. As such, the city provides employment opportunities, fostering of social capital, positive attitudes towards immigrants through organisations such as the London Multicultural Community Association (LMCA).

This study focused on African immigrants for several reasons. Compared to other groups, African immigrants are a relatively recent group in Canada. However, Africa is ranked second, ahead of Europe as a source of recent immigrants to Canada, constituting 13.4 per cent of all recent immigrants as at 2016 (Statistics Canada 2016). Because of their recent history, Africans are the least researched of all immigrant groups in Canada and little is known about how their integration experience may be similar or different from other immigrant groups (Mensah 2010). The critical importance of immigration on the demographic, cultural, and economy of Canadian society, and the growing numbers of African immigrants in particular calls for research of this nature. Further, African immigrants fare poorly on many integration indicators in Canada that potentially derail their integration (Darden 2015; Meta and Pendakur 2016). Thus, revealing their unique experiences would provide an opportunity for their needs to be addressed by policymakers. Lastly and importantly, African immigrants typically arrive in Canada under the three broad categories of immigrants (economic, family reunification, asylum seekers); as such this provides a good overview for studying them.

Integration: a brief overview of some key issues

Before examining the question of successful integration through the perspectives of immigrants within the Canadian context, it is worthwhile outlining some key underlying arguments about integration. The term integration is subjective, problematic, and complex in nature (Ager and Strang 2008; Schunck 2014). It is complex because there is no generally accepted definition of what it is or how it should be measured (Harder et al 2018). Its meanings vary across countries and time, and depend on the interests, values and perspectives of the individuals discussing the issue (Ager and Strang 2008). Castles et al. (2001, 12) note that the concept is 'individualized, contested and contextual, controversial and hotly debated'. Other scholars assert that the different meanings and interpretations given to the term prevent it from possessing sound theoretical foundation upon which to build scholarly arguments (Ager and Strang 2008). Despite the definitional uncertainties, one thing remains uncontested; integration of immigrants in the host societies continues to be a challenging process and a subject of policy and research.

Initially, integration was conceptualised as a one-way process in which immigrants were responsible for their integration (Wong and Tézli 2013; Kuire et al. 2016a). However, in recent times the term has gone through some refinements and is understood as a two-way process that demands effort on the part of the immigrants while the receiving

society provides the needed societal and institutional support for the immigrants (Frideres 2008; Biles and Andrew 2012; Kuuire et al. 2016b).

Alba and Foner (2015) suggest that in a multicultural society, integration is a process through which the whole population acquires civil, social, political, human and cultural rights, which creates the conditions for greater equality. Implying that in such societies, there is no clear-cut distinction between the native-born and the immigrants since policies and programmes are aimed at achieving equality for all. Similarly, Li (2003) contends that in Canada, policy makers conceive of integration as desirable ways by which newcomers become members of the receiving society. Desirability, therefore, is a core component of integration policies referring to a situation whereby there is low conflict between immigrants and native-born and respect for immigrants' rights and values.

Another key feature of integration is that it is a multidimensional process consisting of social, cultural, political, economic, and identity elements (Biles 2008). Because of the multi-dimensionality, some scholars suggest the need to be cautious when discussing integration since immigrants may be better integrated into some dimensions than others (Phalet and Swyngedouw 2003). Nonetheless, the overarching goal of many host societies is for immigrants to contribute to their economy (Li 2003). These countries therefore enact policies that provide some avenue for immigrants to achieve this objective. However, immigrants often encounter challenges in achieving this objective. This has caused some scholars to criticise integration policies noting that they serve to preserve a few while others have noted that such policies rather impose on immigrants what the state expects them to do instead of guiding them (Li 2003).

Political incorporation² is an important dimension of the integration process due to the benefits attached to it, and the process is often aided by policies in the host society. Bloemraad (2006), for instance, reveals that since the Canadian government favours incorporating immigrants politically, it provides specific assistance such as subsidising classes for non-English speakers to learn English and policies such as multiculturalism to that effect. In contrast, relatively little and specific assistance is offered in the United States, to legally recognised refugees to the neglect of other immigrants towards their political integration. In Europe, Koopmans (2005) examines political claims making and public discourse regarding the integration and citizenship of immigrants in Germany, France, Britain, Switzerland and the Netherlands. He shows that negotiations over citizenship are a 'central element of the institutional and discursive opportunity structures that shape patterns of contention over immigration and cultural diversity' (7).

Other studies that address successful integration include that of Kortmann (2015), whose accounts examine the perceptions of Muslim immigrants regarding successful integration into two Western European countries: Germany and the Netherlands. His work reveals that the perceptions of Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands are likely to be influenced by specific integration policies that provide opportunities for them; while those in Germany view integration as moderate forms of keeping their culture and identity and at the same time creating hybrid identities within Germany. However, Kortmann's analysis is limited to representatives of Muslim organisations without paying attention to the broader Muslim population. Kortmann also fails to account for the voices of the different categories of immigrants within these two countries. Another study that examines successful integration is the work by Huot et al. (2013) which examines the migration experiences of francophone immigrants in London, Ontario. Their goal was to challenge

certain assumptions associated with successful integration within policy documents. They found that integration for most participants involved a process of starting a new life experience in the new environment, which is rooted in a good understanding of the host society. This they argue can be achieved primarily through one's occupation. However, this account does not highlight what immigrants perceive to be successful integration. Hung and Fung's (2016) study on migrant women in Hong Kong also explored the concept of successful integration. They examined the relationship between socioeconomic status, social capital and successful integration in comparison with the local population. They found that migrant women had less social capital than the local population and that possessing social capital does not necessarily result in successful integration. Although their work provides a good basis to understand successful integration, the primary focus is on the role of social capital and not immigrants understanding of successful integration.

Filipescu (2009) also examines successful integration of the Roma population in Romania by reviewing integration programmes initiated between the years 2000 and 2007. The accounts indicate that most programmes were successful. However, Roma political elite criticised the programmes citing a lack of objectivity and the prevalence of issues such as exclusion and limited autonomy of the Roma population. Despite its importance, Filipescu's account dwells on the content of the programmes and that of the voices of Roma elites, to the neglect of the ordinary Roma migrant. Harder and colleagues (2018) also discuss successful integration arguing that although successful integration is an important policy issue, the scientific study of the concept is affected by the absence of common measures of integration. Accordingly, they propose the immigration policy lab integration index to measure immigrant integration. The proposed index is based on a 12-item short form and 24-item long form and revolves around 5 dimensions of integration that is economic, political, social, linguistic, and navigational. Although an important work, the study is based on a review of policy which may not capture the voices and experiences of immigrants. The current study differs from the work of Harder et al. (2018) since the central focus is on immigrants' understanding and experiences, and no limit is placed on the dimensions of integration that is captured by immigrants.

Despite the absence of studies that explicitly examine immigrants' perception of successful integration, scholars have outlined a number of factors that leads to successful integration. Some cite household support that immigrants receive from their immediate family, especially women, as an important factor for successful integration (Creese, Dyck, and McLaren 2008). Others also note that belonging to social groups that offer various forms of support also results in successful integration (Pottie, Brown, and Dunn 2005). In addition to these, Jedwab (2002) argues that economic integration is essential to successful integration for both immigrants and native-born. Others also identify immigrants' access to adequate and affordable housing and local services as critical to their successful integration (Teixeira 2014; Simone and Newbold 2014).

Policy indicators of successful integration in Canada

In its 2001 policy document, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) outlined some characteristics of successful integration. These attributes include proficiency in one of Canada's official languages, the ability to find and keep a job, and the ability to transfer,

and make use of, previously acquired occupational skills and educational credentials. Other key markers include the ability to integrate commonly held Canadian values and attitudes and the ability to access and fully participate in the institutions and associations that are available to all Canadians” (CIC 2001, 31). Although these are good indicators of successful integration, the excessive focus on abilities suggests that the onus is primarily on the immigrants themselves. If this is the case, then immigrants should have a say in setting the criteria for gauging what it means to integrate successfully.

Similarly, the list of indicators outlined in the policy documents is skewed towards quantitative measures. However, success is a subjective concept which can be measured either quantitatively or qualitatively. This means CIC’s indicators might not necessarily capture what immigrants conceive as constituting successful integration if those attributes are not amenable to quantification. Given this apparent limitation, it is important not to limit the discussion to pure quantitative indicators, because such consideration may not capture the full range of attributes or dimensions that constitute successful integration. Against this backdrop, it is important to explore immigrants’ perception of successful integration in order to gain a nuanced understanding of the concept, and enrich policymaking.

In addition to the 2001 policy document by CIC, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) 2001 also discusses successful integration. Section 3 of this document stipulates that the Act aims to ‘promote the successful integration of permanent residents into Canada, while recognising that integration involves mutual obligations for new immigrants and Canadian society’ (IRPA 2001, 1). Several insights can be drawn from this policy objective. First, it suggests government’s continual commitment to the wellbeing of immigrants. Such commitment is evident through programmes and services (e.g. language training, educational programmes, job training, skills development programmes, etc.) that have been initiated over the years to help immigrants integrate into the Canadian society (Biles 2008).

Second, it is clear from the policy objective that priority is given to permanent residents who fall under the category of economic immigrants and family reunification over other categories of immigrants even though refugees have been given some attention. For immigrants under the different stream such as visitors, temporary workers and students, the Act stipulates that the government seeks to facilitate their entry (IPA 2001, Section 3: Objective G), however, it is unclear what exactly constitutes this facilitation. Third, government sees the process of integration as a two-way process whereby immigrants are expected to facilitate their integration whilst the receiving society provides an enabling environment to ensure smooth transition.

The final comment relates to the ambiguity of the concept ‘successful integration’. It raises questions such as: what exactly is successful integration? What are the measures or criteria for measuring success? How do these measures match against the expectation of immigrants who are supposed to be beneficiaries of the policy? Answering some of these questions will provide useful insights for policymakers who seek to promote successful integration of immigrants in Canada and elsewhere.

Methods

We employ an exploratory qualitative research approach to reach a conclusion and provide an answer to the previously mentioned research question (Babbie and Mouton

2005). The use of qualitative research methods means non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and pattern of relationships. It also helps to explore individual or situational perspectives and gain an in-depth understanding of personal feelings and experiences (Babbie and Mouton 2005; Creswell 2007). In this case, it was used to obtain the perspective of African immigrants regarding successful integration.

The study was conducted with 29 African immigrants (19 males and 10 females) living in London, Ontario, and drawn from 7 African countries namely Ghana, Nigeria, Burundi, Eritrea, Kenya, Sudan, and Malawi – countries of extreme diversity in terms of linguistics and colonial history. London is a mid-sized Canadian city with a population of 383,822 (Statistics Canada 2016), located between Toronto, Ontario and Detroit, Michigan. For many decades London was a white European settler society. However, in recent years, the city has witnessed an increasing number of immigrants. Between 2011 and 2016, for instance, the immigrant population increased by 9 per cent from 76,585 to 83,770 (City of London 2018).

Participants were identified by sending emails to the various ethnic associations within the city asking volunteers to participate and share their perspectives. Ethnic associations play a pivotal role in the integration of immigrants providing the platform for building social capital and networking for its members (Kuuire et al. 2016b). These networks help them to navigate various Canadian institutions such as hospitals, schools, and banks. A total of 27 identifiable ethnic associations were contacted. Although 45 individuals initially expressed interest, 29 individuals ultimately took part in the study; the remaining 16 could not participate because of scheduling conflicts and personal reasons. Thus, the final sample size reflects the number of people who accepted the invitation and participated in the study.

Admittedly, this is a small number of African countries represented in the study, and recruitment through the ethnic association could produce a bias sample and thereby making it difficult to generalise the findings. In addition, studies indicate that the immigration status and educational background of immigrants influence their immigration experience (see Sweetman and Warman 2008). This may be the case of participants in our study which accounts for their view point on successful integration. However, within the context where there is no reliable and comprehensive database for recruitment, it represents the most viable avenue to reach immigrants within the city. We also recognise that an exploratory study of immigrants' views cannot fully account for the ideal understanding, complexities and indicators of successful integration. However, it can illuminate the context within which immigrants think about success in relation to integration. Ultimately, this will help to improve and broaden policy understanding of successful integration (Table 1).

Conducted by the lead author, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with each participant. Participants were interviewed either in their homes or public spaces such as coffee shops, libraries and parks. Interviews were audio-recorded, lasted on average about an hour, and addressed issues relating to participants migration to Canada and their knowledge about integration. The interview guide specifically solicited for information regarding the following issues (with various prompts): motivations for coming to Canada; perspectives about integration and successful integration; factors influencing successful integration; barriers to successful integration; and government responses to

Table 1. Demographic overview of participants.

		Women (n = 10)	Men (n = 19)
Age	>30		1
	30–40	4	7
	40–50	4	7
	50–60	2	4
Reasons for migrating	Education		8
	Join spouse	8	3
	Refugee/Asylum	2	5
	Economic		3
Marital status	Married	10	14
	Single		5
Level of Education before entering Canada	Masters/post graduate		2
	Bachelors/college	10	17
Level of Education attained in Canada	PhD		6
	Masters/postgraduate	1	9
	Bachelors/college	9	4
Employment status	Employed – full time	9	14
	Employed – part time	1	3
	Unemployed		2

barriers of integration. The interviews were transcribed, summarised and coded manually to identify the main themes and sub-themes. The transcripts were analysed independently and cross-checked by co-authors to ensure uniformity (Pallaveshi et al. 2017).

Results

In the following sections, the study draws on individual interviews to illustrate participants' perspectives of successful integration. In keeping with participants' wish for anonymity, pseudonyms were substituted for actual names. The results are organised around the main study objectives and themes. Quotes are used throughout the results section to illustrate key issues raised by the immigrants interviewed.

Explaining integration

Given the vagueness of the idea of integration, a key issue explored with the participants was their own personal understanding of the concept. All 29 immigrants responded that they knew what the term integration means. To describe it, participants used phrases such as 'becoming part of', 'fit into', 'transition into', 'fully members', 'active involvement in spheres of society', and 'settle into'. Majority of the participants noted that integration mainly involved the process of becoming a part of the host society. To illustrate, Frank said: 'integration is the ability or the process that will help the immigrant to transition into society, into his or her new community. So, if you're able to make that transition, then that is integration.' Other participants echoed this theme with one noting, 'integration implies your ability to fit into the system where you begin to feel a part of the new society; you get to know how things are done in order to fit in comfortably' (Mike).

Despite these interpretations, some participants challenged the concept; noting that integration may not be the right term to explain immigrants' incorporation into a host society. These participants argued that the term has varied meanings and potentially

negative undertones. Mathew, a temporary immigrant turned permanent resident, for instance, asserted:

The process of becoming part of the new society you might call it integration but I don't think that is the right word to use. I think that word belies a lot of oppression and power structures that operates to coerce immigrants ...

Another participant argued that 'integration is an administrative buzzword and so I would like to use the term "participatory ability" that is immigrants partaking in all spheres of their new society' (Obi, an economic immigrant). Obi's assertion is synonymous with other perspectives. For instance, in Kortmann's (2015) study in Germany and the Netherlands, some Muslim leaders disliked the term integration, preferring the term participation. To them, participation is better since it refers to immigrants' ability to fit into the host society.

Ways of ensuring successful integration

When asked to talk about factors that lead to successful integration, many participants identified indicators consistent with measures outlined in policy documents (CIC 2001). For instance, participants noted that mastery of the English language, high levels of education and being able to transfer their skill set onto the job market in their new environment, together with finding a job amounts to integration. In a way, these views suggest an alignment between the immigrants' perception and that of policy indicators.

The following quotes capture the various successful integration factors identified by the participants. For instance, with respect to education, Margaret, a family reunification immigrant, who joined her husband with their three kids in Canada, and works as a settlement worker commented:

Education is very important in Canada for an immigrant. The Canadian culture is woven into the education system. They use the educational system as an instrument to promote particular cultural practices. So if you don't have any way of getting access to education, integration becomes very difficult for you, as there are many things to learn about the society, some are obvious and others are subtle.

Underscoring the importance of language, Zion, who arrived in Canada as a refugee claimant and subsequently became a permanent resident, commented:

Well the big thing here in this country is language. That is huge and learning to pick a bit of their accent is big. There is nothing more frustrating that after many years in this country you're talking to people and they can't hear you and won't say pardon they go like 'huh', or 'what?' If you don't know the system you'll say that this person is mean or has something against you so language is certainly an important thing.

Commenting on work, Kofi, a temporary immigrant who had obtained his master's degree in chemical engineering from Canada posited that:

Work is a vital component of your integration. If you're gainfully employed and you like what you are doing and it fits with your broader career objective then it is definitely a factor that will result in you integrating well. The monetary aspect may not be too important, in terms of how much you earn, whether there is a disparity in how much you earn and how much a Canadian earn. But if you develop a career in one area and you find a job in that area, that for me is successful integration.

Participants also indicated some factors that were not easily identified in policy documents, such as having a positive mindset at all times to assist in the integration process. For instance, Rebecca a family reunification immigrant noted:

One critical component of integration is having a positive mindset; a positive mindset in all spheres of life. Since you're coming from a different culture, you need to tell yourself that you want to make it no matter the odds and work hard in addition to ensure that you succeed in the new society.

Rebecca's comment reveals the idea of hard work. This was also reinforced by majority of the respondents. Papa, an economic immigrant revealed:

My experience has taught me that you need to work extra hard to fit in. You need to possess all the attributes of someone who works hard that is been reliable, credible, a team player, etc. So, if you're at school, you need to work hard, if you're at work you need to be on top of your game. That to me I think is a key component to being successful in Canada.

Success is achieving pre-migration aspirations

Beyond the well-known measurable elements of integration as indicated above, a number of other interesting issues emerged. We focus on two items that are not well represented in the literature. Based on the discussions with the participants it was clear that they placed greater emphasis on these items than measurable items which had often been the subject of discussion. The first item is achieving the individual's pre-migration aspirations. Most participants linked successful integration in Canada to their ability to realise personal goals and ambitions for migrating to Canada:

I believe a person can make the claim that s/he has successfully integrated in the society if his or her ambition is realized within that host country or the person happens to have had the opportunity to realize every aspiration s/he may have brought or conceived upon entry into the host country. So when you realized your goals and ambitions in life as an immigrant or as a foreigner within a different environment, then I consider that to be successful integration (Nana, a family reunification immigrant).

Along the same line, Edwin who immigrated to Canada together with the wife and had worked in a variety of jobs and in different positions before starting his graduate studies, commented as follows:

Successful integration to me is when one is able to attain his/her pre-immigration goals. These include that you have acquired some relevant education or got a good job after upgrading your skill set and not having to do the same menial jobs that you used to do when you first immigrated to Canada and achieved those goals you set for yourself.

An important theme from Edwin's assertion is that of social mobility. Canada is identified as one of the most socially mobile countries in the world (see Kelly 2014); thus participants expected that with time they would be able to 'rise up the ladder' in their respective field of endeavour as is expected of most people. This, they attributed to an upgrade in their human capital as expressed in Edwin's quote.

As a follow up to the broad theme of 'pre-immigration aspiration', participants were asked to identify some of their dreams prior to emigration to Canada. Here, a variety of items were mentioned in line with their intended purpose for migrating to Canada. For

some participants, completing their various educational programmes and finding a befitting job emerged as their pre-migration aspirations. For instance, Kana noted: 'my immediate goal was to finish my masters and once that was done, find a job in my field and settle down. I have been able to do that so I do consider my integration to be successful'. Other participants also expressed similar views with many citing things such as finding jobs, improving skills set, obtaining citizenship, buying a house, and finding a life partner as some of their aspirations and goals. Denis, one of the temporary residents turned permanent resident and subsequently became a Canadian citizen revealed:

Well in my perspective, I consider my integration to be successful because I've become a citizen. One of my primary goals for migrating to Canada was to obtain citizenship and I've been able to achieve it. I know the benefit there is to obtaining this so I put in effort and worked diligently to get it.

Denis further mentioned some benefits associated with being a citizen. He indicated that he is able to travel to various European countries without visa restrictions, he is able to exercise his civic responsibility by voting in federal, provincial and municipal elections and importantly he has been able to invite some of his family relatives to visit Canada which in his words 'gives me much pleasure'. Similarly, participants who migrated as international students considered securing a Canadian legal status as part of their pre-migration aspirations and it influenced their decision to choose Canada over other countries. Michael, who first came as an international student (temporary immigrant) noted:

I had offers from the UK, Sweden, Norway, the United States and Canada. But I decided to settle on Canada because I knew I could apply for the three year working permit that would enable me to work and at the same time apply for my permanent residence. Since my long term plan was not to go back home, I decided to settle on the Canadian institution.

Although participants generally indicated that achieving pre-migration aspirations constituted successful integration, they also explained that meeting those objectives comes with its own set of challenges. The challenges experienced are similar to what many new immigrants experience in the host society (see Makwarimba et al. 2013; Kazemipur and Nakhaie 2014; Schroeter and James 2015). Here, participants cited challenges related to their mode of entry into Canada. For family reunification immigrants and economic immigrants who were hoping to enter directly into the labour market upon arrival, lack of recognition of their prior skill sets, professional training and experience was the main challenge. Eugene, an economic immigrant, articulated this challenge as follows:

Finding work was the most difficult part of the integration process for me. I came here thinking this is Canada where immigrants are welcomed and so I will find work with my qualifications. I was searching for a job with the qualifications back home and I was looking to get any decent work. I did not find a job with the qualifications I had outside of Canada.

Another theme that also surfaced during the interview revolved around race relations. By and large, participants acknowledged that racism and discrimination are present in the city – which until recently was a white European dominated society. Specifically, participants mentioned the struggle of entering and climbing up in certain areas of the labour market, the challenges of being seen as 'foreign', and having to frequently answer questions such as 'where are you from?' These issues, some participants pointed out have

been challenging, and to some extent have shaped their perception and experiences of successful integration. Interestingly, however, most put a positive spin on it by stating that navigating racial relations and having the awareness that such challenges exist made them resilient and more determined to succeed in Canada.

Participants who arrived in Canada as temporary residents, such as international students, also revealed some challenges in terms of their education, including adapting to a new educational system. Most found it ‘challenging at the beginning’ but with hard work and determination, participants in this study indicated that they prevailed, with some describing their migration to Canada in words such as ‘worthwhile’, ‘successful’, and ‘unregrettable’. The experiences gained, enabled some to pursue further studies for which they equally attained success.

Success is creating avenues for personal growth and development

In addition to achieving one’s pre-migration aspiration, the second item identified as constituting success is creating an avenue for personal growth and development. Participants indicated that success involves opening up new avenues for individuals to advance in the different spheres of life. This was articulated by Lamptey as:

Successful integration means being able to create a platform for self-development, economic advancement, social integration, participating in a way as good as possible and being able to systematically advance your lot and the lots of the important people around you over the course of time.

The perspective above involves a range of issues that needs unpacking and also shared by participants. First, it indicates that successful integration is achieved when immigrants put in specific measures to achieve personal growth; that is, improving upon their human capital in some form. Most participants felt they had ‘moved a step higher’ in their human capital whether through formal education or informal education. Second, success is linked to economic advancement. Participants explained that gainful employment is a good sign of their integration. They noted that their primary concern is about finding a good job and not pay equity with native-born Canadians, an issue that has become the subject of interest for scholars (see Pendakur and Pendakur 2011; Coulombe, Grenier, and Nadeau 2014). To them, a little bit of hard work hard eventually brings appropriate compensation and ultimately corresponding recognition.

Participants’ understanding is also emphasised in the need for social integration. Social integration refers to the involvement of immigrants in the host institutions, manifested by the extent of ties immigrants make within their environment as well as how these ties are maintained over time (Frideres 2008). Participants were very mindful of this, stressing that a good understanding of the society is required to engage with various host institutions. For example, Daniel, a temporary resident turned permanent resident explained: ‘... you know the society very well. You can find your way around. You know where to look for a house; you know where to look for employment and among others’. Others also stressed on the importance of maintaining ties with co-ethnics and other nationals: ‘You also have ties with individuals in your community and those from outside your community’ (Berlinda, a family reunification immigrant). In short, Kana summarises that for social integration: ‘... your social connections get stronger, you’re part of the social fabric

of society, and you're actively involved in activities in your community and consulted on issues happening within your community'.

Another related issue that emerged is the length of time to attain success. Many of the participants maintained that integration is an on-going and gradual process without an end, or as one participant put it, 'you can never say I've reached the end of my integration'. Lois, a 42-year-old woman who accompanied her husband to pursue education, explained the on-going idea this way:

I see integration to be an on-going process. I don't think you will come to a point where you feel like you have completely integrated. You know, I have been here a decade and occasionally certain modes of communication comes up and it baffles me. I am like whoa, I have been here for a while and I have never heard about this. So, every now and then some things come up that reminds you that you still have to learn new things regardless of the length of stay here.

Lois' assertion of integration as an on-going process echoes other scholars (e.g. Huot et al. 2013; Kazemipur and Nakhaie 2014). Related to this, some have also stated that integration occurs in stages which results in immigrants being 'successful' in one area compared to other areas of integration (Phalet and Swyngedouw 2003).

In addition to acknowledging that integration is an on-going process and continuous learning experience, participants also confirmed that the pathway to success is fraught with challenges. Participants revealed that certain social and economic factors derail the pace of integration together with some individual factors. With respect to individual factors, participants revealed that it had to do with their mindset; a mindset that prevents them from embracing Canada as the new home for the long term. Patricia, a family reunification immigrant, articulated this idea as follows:

The problem with many of us is that we are double minded. Although we left our countries a long time ago, we never really migrated. We have one leg here and another leg back home. We are constantly thinking about going back but are never bold enough to make the decision. Hence, instead of concentrating and ensuring that we integrate successfully in Canada, we spend our energy on acquiring property home instead of here.

The general perception among the participants was that such 'double mindedness' can significantly influence the extent and level to which immigrants are successfully integrated into the host society.

Discussion and conclusion

Our goal was to explore the perspectives of immigrants concerning the issue of successful integration in Canada in order to determine how it aligns with policy dimensions. A further goal was to illustrate the processes by which successful integration is attained in the host society. This study is of great relevant and has provided some new understanding of 'successful integration' that are currently overlooked in official policy documents and existing scholarship. Thus, the study has widened our understanding of what constitute successful integration means through the lens of the experiences of the immigrants themselves and potentially inform policy in host societies.

The findings of this study show that integration entails 'fitting in' or 'becoming a part of the host society'. While these perspectives align with some existing work on integration

(e.g. Kortmann 2015), they also contrasted with others (e.g. Huot et al. 2013). Whereas Hout et al. (2013) argue that integration according to francophone immigrants in Canada primarily involves starting a new page in their life, the findings of the current study suggest that integration is the process of 'becoming a part and parcel of the host society' and 'fully engaging with all parts of the new society'. This involves a good understanding of the new society in order to adjust ways of doing things in order to be successful. Our findings also align with recent works such as Castañeda's (2018) account of immigrants in New York, Paris, and Barcelona, who reveals that uncertainties such as language barriers, differing social norms and labour market challenges act as barriers to the successful integration of immigrants in these locations.

Consistent with CIC policy, participants identified a range of other markers of successful integration in Canada such as gainful employment, fluency in the English or French language, and the ability to transfer and make use of one's acquired skill set via education (CIC 2001). Beyond these well-known indicators, the findings show that attributes such as working hard in all spheres of life in the host society together with a positive mindset to succeed at all cost are equally relevant. The fact that these markers are absent in policy documents is problematic since they constitute important considerations in immigrants own understanding of their integration in the Canadian society.

Additionally, in comparison with Canadian policy indicators of successful integration, two new dimensions of successful integration emerged from participants' perspectives in this study; first, achieving pre-migration aspirations; and, second, creating a platform for personal growth and development. These perspectives differ from Canadian policy documents on integration that primarily emphasise economic aspects of immigrant integration such as economic contribution and economic parity (Canada 2006; Li 2003; Huot et al. 2013). Although participants acknowledge the importance of having a good economic base as vital to the integration process, they see successful indicators as beyond economic elements. From their point of view, economic success is a by-product of hard work.

With respect to achieving pre-migration aspirations, participants indicated obtaining Canadian citizenship as vital, citing a wide range of benefits to that effect. They indicated that pathway to citizenship was a key factor in the decision to migrate to Canada and one that they diligently worked on upon arrival in Canada. Others reported that completing their education, settling down with a family among others constitute success in their opinion. These lines of thinking are not reflected in integration policy since policy makers are unable to share and appreciate the importance of these items to the ordinary immigrants.

Regarding the issue of creating avenues for growth, participants indicated that success involves making the necessary provisions to succeed. Participants suggested that a deep understanding of the workings of society, a sense of belonging, and feeling comfortable are important. For many, successful integration cannot be attained without having adequate knowledge of the new environment, or if they do not feel welcomed and accepted, and do not feel a sense of belonging in that space and 'a desire to return to that space' when they move out.

Participants also cited challenges that may undermine their ability to succeed. The major ones include difficulty in finding work, non-recognition of foreign education credentials, discrimination, linguistic, housing and among others. These experiences shared by participants are consistent with those shared by immigrants in the Greater

Toronto Area and elsewhere (see Bevelander and Pendakur 2014; Branker 2017 ; Akbar 2019). For example, Huot et al. (2016) find that immigrants in London experience labour challenges such as exclusion. However, some participants attributed their inability to integrate successfully, in part; to the tendency among immigrants themselves of maintaining a double-mindedness in the host society that is focusing their attention on their home country and host society simultaneously. Participants suggested that African immigrants often do not detach themselves from their origin country upon arrival in the host society. Although, they may have transitioned to permanent resident or citizen they often consider themselves as passengers on transit. This mindset, they believe can prevent one from fully concentrating and striving to integrate successfully in the host society.

Another view of immigrants that is different from those outlined in the policy documents relates to the desired pace and duration. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) for instance stipulates that: 'CIC's integration strategy aims to enable newcomers to settle, adapt and integrate as quickly and comfortably as possible so that they may become contributing members of the Canadian society' (2002, 28). However, participants felt that integration is and should be a gradual and on-going process, as it demands enormous time and effort to achieve their goals and contribute to the society. Most immigrants upon arrival in the host society require ample time to acquaint and adjust to the new life. As result, some are unable to reach their full potential in a relatively short time, contrary to expectations set by CIC. However, this does not apply to all categories of immigrants. Those who receive job offers prior to arrival and/or have sound financial support upon arrival tend to integrate faster and contribute more readily; a case in point are the millionaire migrants from Hong Kong (see Ley 2011).

This study has several policy implications. First, the findings reveal a range of subjective factors such as achieving pre-migration aspirations which have been largely absent from policy documents. Based on the interviews with the participants these subjective factors are important for their successful integration, as such, these should constitute considerations for policymaking. Further, given that participants re-echoed familiar challenges such as access to the labour market participation in their ongoing integration, this should constitute an avenue for a renewed policy focus, with the goal of removing structural and institutional barriers through work place policies. There could also be a systematic educational effort on the benefits and advantages of employing immigrants (Liu 2007; Branker 2017). Also, accreditation centres could learn valuable lessons as they seek to improve the accreditation process through the development of systems to recognise degrees outside of Canada after a period of assessment. Once a better system is developed, employment agencies can provide volunteer opportunities and internship programmes as pathways into the labour market for immigrants. This would potentially ensure that immigrants find work in their respective fields and contribute more meaningfully to the economic growth of the country and in the process be successfully integrated.

In order to increase our understanding of the concept of successful integration, future studies can provide a gendered analysis of the process to determine whether variations exist between males and females as well as between highly educated and less educated immigrants. Other studies can compare the perception and experiences of immigrants in larger metropolitan areas such as Toronto and Vancouver with that of mid-size Canadian cities such as London, Windsor, and among others. This would bring into perspective

the role of place and social networks in accounting for immigrant's perspective of successful integration.

Overall, this study has the potential to contribute to the understanding of the perceptions of successful integration among immigrants – an issue that has received considerable policy and scholarly attention in recent years (e.g. Huot et al. 2013; Kortmann 2015). Using a series of in-depth interviews, the study demonstrated that, beyond attributes stipulated by the CIC, immigrants' associate successful integration with a range of other intangible measures. The distinction between immigrants' perception of successful integration and official policy indicators underscores the importance of including the perspectives of immigrant's within policy documents. To this end, calls by scholars such as Robinson's (1998) call for more qualitative studies that give immigrants the opportunity to be heard and their suggestions incorporated within policy documents is well placed.

Notes

1. A welcoming community is a physical location in Canada that is a town, city or region that meets the needs of immigrants and where immigrants feel valued and appreciated (Esses 2010).
2. The process of becoming a part of mainstream political debates, practices, and decision making as well as obtaining citizenship (Bloemraad 2006, 6).

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