Immigrants more likely to be unemployed than Canadian-born adults, study finds

Immigrant workers were more likely to be unemployed than Canadian-born adults, even when other factors such as skill levels were taken into account, according to a new study published by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO).

The probability of being unemployed declined among immigrants with higher levels of literacy and numeracy skills, as it did for all adults, according to the study. When other controlling factors were considered, skill levels and immigrant status were both significant factors in determining employment status. On average, immigrants had lower skills scores than native-born Canadians.

"While skill level and education advance prospects for immigrants, the gap between immigrants and Canadian-born adults [found in this study] reinforces the results of other research, which suggest that significant barriers exist for immigrants," the report states.

The report, *Immigrant Labour Market Outcomes and Skills Differences in Canada*, is part of a series of reports published under the Research Initiative on Education and Skills, a research project led jointly by HEQCO and the Mowat Centre. It used the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Skills (PIAAC), a test of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, to better understand the effect of literacy and numeracy skills on the employment outcomes of immigrants and how they compare to those of Canadian-born workers.

The study found that immigrants were more likely to have a postsecondary degree than Canadian-born adults and were more likely to have an education in the science, technology, engineering and math disciplines. Immigrants had lower literacy and numeracy scores on the PIAAC test.

The findings suggest that new approaches to skills assessment might provide an alternative to other forms of assessing international credentials, which previous research has shown are undervalued in the Canadian labour market, the authors conclude. They note that microcredentials, which offer credentialing and evidence of specific skills at a much more fine-grained level than typical certificates and degrees, might offer an alternative to skills testing.

Immigrant Labour Market Outcomes and Skills Differences in Canada was written by Wendy Cukier, Ryerson University, and Kevin Stolarick, Ryerson University and OCAD University.