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Assessment of the Polish Diaspora's Access to Education in the Toronto Metropolitan Area and Their Evaluation of the Level of Education in the Context of Quality of Life

Abstract

The main objective of the article is to depict access to education, both in terms of objective factors (quality of life) and subjective factors (standard of living), in the assessment of the Polish community living in the greater Toronto metropolitan area (GTA). The results of the research are presented on the basis of a questionnaire conducted among 583 Polish people living in the GTA. The results confirm that the Canadian Polish community evaluates highly the schools and other educational institutions operating within the study area. Another goal of the research was to investigate the possible influence of gender, income, or household size on the evaluation of access to education, which translates into a higher assessment of quality of life. In the study, the women and the respondents with higher income rated access to education more highly, while people in households with two to four people evaluated it the highest.

Keywords: Polish diaspora; Canada; Toronto; quality of life; education

Introduction

International migration will evolve in a manner similar to trade – increasing continuously. Almost all countries and regions deal with immigration and emigration, as these phenomena constitute an integral element in the life of contemporary society. Currently, more and more people – motivated by various factors – are deciding on a temporary or long-term change in their place of residence. Migrants consist of people leaving their country voluntarily, whose priority is to improve their economic situation or achieve professional advancement in the host country, as well as participants of international educational programs. Migration to a new country (irrespective of the cause) is challenging from a psychological and social point of view, since it brings about a number of changes, including in the field of education. Education has a key role to play, not only in providing opportunities for migrant children to reach their full potential, but also in forming a just, inclusive, and diverse society.

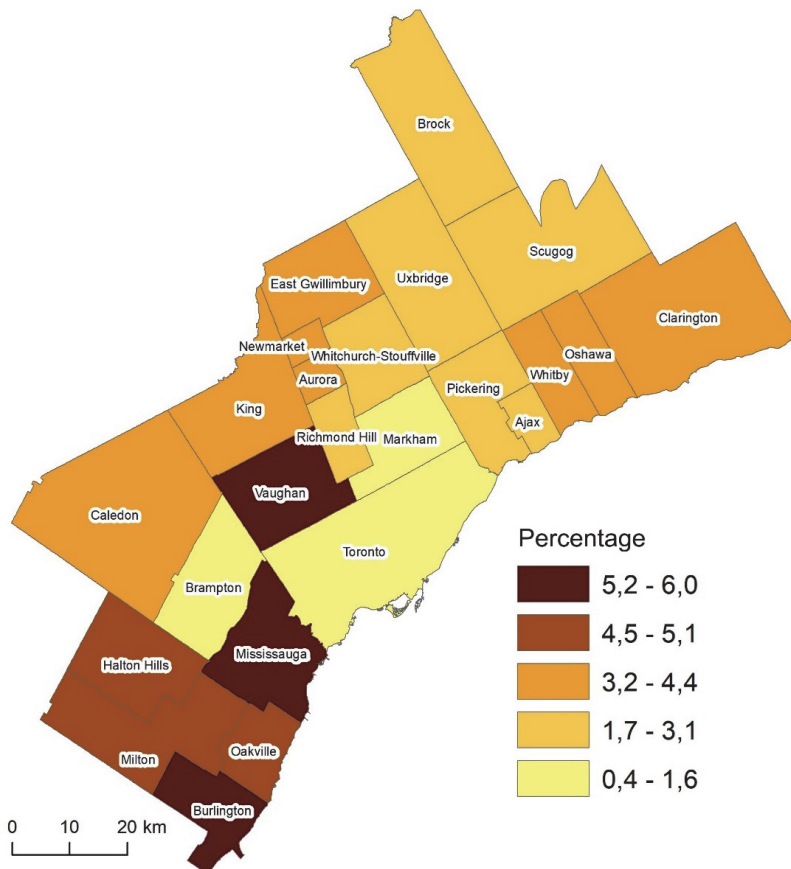
In 2016, 35,151,728 people lived in Canada, of which 1,106,585 were of Polish origin. This represents 3.9% of the total population. Ontario, the province in which the GTA is located, is the most populous of those with a Polish population. A total of 523,490 people lived in Ontario in 2016. The provinces of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories are home to the smallest number of people of Polish origin (Reczyńska, 2007).

The capital of the Polish diaspora in Canada is Toronto. The city has more than 83,000 people (32% of Poles in Canada) reporting sole Polish origin and the same number of people reporting their Polish origin as one of many. Since the 1940s, Toronto has attracted the largest number of Polish immigrants. Since the 1980s, the Polish community has been concentrated mainly in Mississauga and Brampton, so the research was conducted not only in Toronto, but it also covered the entire area of the GTA where people of Polish ancestry live (Reczyńska, 2020, pp. 234–236).

The Greater Toronto Area includes the regional municipalities of Peel, Halton, York, Durham and the City of Toronto itself. There are 259,715 people of Polish ancestry living in the GTA, representing 4% of the total population in the area. The largest number of Poles live in Mississauga,

in the Peel Region, amounting to 43,350 people, or 6% of the total population in Mississauga. A significant number of people of Polish descent live in the York Region, in Vaughan: 18,265 people, or 5.96% of the total population in this city. The smallest number of Poles are found in two towns in the Durham Region. These are the town of Brock, which is home to 335 people of Polish ancestry, and the town of Scugog, which is home to 590 (Ziółkowska-Weiss, 2021). Figure 1 shows the study area and the percentage of Polish people in the GTA in relation to its total population in 2016.

Figure 1. Study area with the percentage of Polish people in the Greater Toronto Area in relation its total population



This high concentration of Polish diaspora in Toronto is the author's reason for filling the existing gap in the research on the Canadian Polish community in the GTA and thus investigate the manner in which the Polish people living in the GTA evaluate the access to education and assess the level of education in the context of the quality of life in this city. The main objective of the research is to present the relationship between gender and assessment of access to education in the GTA; household size and declared level of income are also analyzed in this context.

The research on quality of life follows different interpretations and points to various tools and methods for measuring it. In quality of life research, both descriptive and value-based understandings are used. The descriptive approach is the basis for distinguishing between objective and subjective quality of life. As noted in the various definitions, some aspects of quality of life have an objective dimension, but their assessment depends on a subjective value system and a feeling for the degree to which needs and aspirations have been satisfied.

According to one of the many definitions, quality of life consists of the following elements: wealth, understood as material goods in one's possession; health and well-being; security, in terms of health (threats to life), loss of property (crime or natural disasters), and financial (vital financial resources); the state of the natural environment; spiritual wealth, related to access to education and culture in a broad sense; and a sense of belonging to the local community, interpersonal relationships, and influence on decisions concerning individual and collective life. Each of these aspects of quality of life has an objective dimension, but the assessment of quality of life depends on the individual's subjective value system and feelings about the degree to which one's own needs and aspirations are satisfied (Kusterka, 2003).

By standard of living, Piasny (1993) understands the quality of the conditions of existence in terms of the degree to which the more important needs are satisfied and the facilities, comforts, and pleasures of life are available. In this view, it is synonymous with living conditions in the broadest sense, where the standard of living depends not only on the degree to which needs are satisfied, but also on the related expenditures, that is, on the

amount of time spent at work, on the inconvenience of this work, the way in which leisure time is consumed, etc. In this socioeconomic perspective, the standard of living includes all the circumstances surrounding the material, cultural, and social conditions of a society: working conditions, wages or income, consumption, housing, availability of durable consumer goods, health and social care, and the state of education and culture (Piasny, 1993).

Education improves the quality of life of the citizens. Numerous studies in this area have depicted the relationship between education and life satisfaction (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004; Frey & Stutzer, 2000; Headey et al., 2008; Powdthavee, 2008). Many scholars have found a positive and statistically significant relationship between education and self-rated life satisfaction (e.g., Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004; Easterlin, 2001; Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2005). As noted by John V. Winters (2011), one of the most important determinants of the local level of human capital is the presence of colleges and universities in the area. Universities increase the local stock of human capital in at least two ways:

- 1) they increase accessibility to higher education for local residents (Alm & Winters, 2009; Card, 1995) and
- 2) they bring in students from outside the area seeking education, some of whom stay in the city after completing their education (Blackwell et al., 2002; Groen, 2004; Groen & White, 2004; Hickman, 2009).

Winters (2011) suggests that the migration of students to cities with high human capital results from the fact that they transfer to higher education where there are good universities, hoping to graduate from them and – consequently – find a good job that will allow them to assess their quality of life and standard of living highly. Therefore, colleges and universities influence the surrounding areas and their assessment of access to education and satisfaction from it; this is important in terms of assessing their quality of life and standard of living. John V. Winters (2011, p. 451) thinks that colleges and universities improve the quality of life in surrounding areas and that about 26% of this effect results from an increase in the local level of human capital.

Education not only influences individual income, but also allows individuals to make better decisions about health, marriage, and family life. For example, studies have confirmed that individuals with a higher level of education have, on average, better mental and physical health (Lleras-Muney, 2005; Powdthavee, 2010). More educated people face a higher risk of unemployment, but when they are unemployed, they do not remain so for very long (Kettunen, 1997). The above-mentioned aspects are important from the point of view of quality of life.

The Educational System in Canada

The educational system in Canada is decentralized: individual provinces are responsible for organizing, implementing, and financing primary, secondary, post-secondary, and vocational education. Each province has its own core curriculum, assessment methods, and minister of education. No ministry or department of education exists at the federal level. The functioning body is the Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC). Canadian schools are divided into public, Catholic, and private schools, while the age at which students start and finish compulsory education varies between provinces and territories (ranging from 5 to 18 years of age). Within the study area, in the province of Ontario, the schooling obligation is applicable from the age of 6 to 18.

The educational system in Canada is divided into several stages, starting with kindergarten (pre-school), for which the tuition fees are CAD 5,000 to 16,000), and elementary school (primary school), which covers grades 1–6. In Ontario, primary school includes two years of kindergarten: junior and senior kindergarten. Math, Science and Technology, Health and Physical Education, Music, Art, English, French, a Second Foreign Language, History, Reading, and Social Studies constitute the main subjects at school. Afterwards, comes high school, which is divided into two stages: junior high school and high school. The first stage includes grades 7 and 8, where students learn Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Business, and World Religions. The second stage

prepares students for higher education and lasts an additional two years. Higher education in Canada is governed by the provincial government. Aspects such as tuition fees, the language of instruction, and the organization of studies and the enrolment procedure vary from territory to territory. The educational system in Canada at the academic level is divided into three degrees: bachelor's, master's, and doctoral studies. The cost of a university education is from CAD 15,000 to 55,000 per year.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted during 2017, 2018, and 2019. In 2017, a pilot study was conducted, whereas the actual research in Canada was carried out in two stages. The first stage of the field study took place from August 16, 2018 to September 18, 2018, while the second stage lasted from September 10, 2019 to September 19, 2019.

One form of quantitative studies is the diagnostic survey method, which uses questionnaires. This method was used in this research. The primary empirical base was the results of a survey conducted among the Polish community living in the GTA. The empirical part of the research took the form of a diagnostic survey, conducted using a representative method among the GTA Polish population. A total of 612 respondents took part in the survey, while 583 questionnaires were included in the analysis. The survey was conducted among individuals who were at least 15 years old. There were two language versions of the questionnaire, Polish and English; it consisted of 17 questions and 15 questions on personal information. In quantitative surveys, answers are most often in the form of "give," with respondents indicating one of the answers. Conducting the survey among people aged 15 and older (adolescents) ensured that the respondents understood the questions and that their answers were reliable.

The questions in the questionnaire were formulated so as to refer to the respondents' experiences in 2017 and 2019, as well as over the previous few years. This approach captured the average assessment of quality of life of the respondents. When analyzing quality of life, factors such

as gender, age, education, religion, occupation, financial situation, household size, and regularized residence status were used. This allowed for the study group to be described in more detail and any relationships between the aspects of interest to be identified.

The statistical method applied in the research was chi-squared tested, computer-processed statistical material (constituting a specific database) subjected to statistical analysis, enabling regularities in the study group to be detected (Sojka, 2003, p. 118).

The chi² test of independence, which determines statistical significance of the relationship between two variables measured on a nominal scale (i.e., qualitative data), was applied in order to identify differences in particular research groups and in an attempt to answer the hypotheses established at the beginning. In the study, as in most studies in this field, it was assumed that a statistically significant result is one for which the “alpha” value is less than 0.05. Thus, it can be concluded that at the significance level $\alpha = 0.1$ $\chi^2_{\alpha} > \chi^2$; consequently, there are no grounds to reject the null hypothesis, and we can assume that there is no relationship between the tested characteristics (Sojka, 2003, pp. 123–125).

Results

The results presented in Table 1 confirm the respondents’ overall satisfaction with their lives in the GTA, without taking into account the individual factors that influence the quality of life assessment and the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

The first question concerned the individual’s satisfaction with their own education, to which more than half of the respondents declared being very satisfied or satisfied with their education. Only 53 people out of 583 respondents declared that they were not satisfied with their education. Regarding the next question, 72 people were very satisfied and 145 people satisfied with the fact that they possess the relevant qualifications to perform a profession, while only 36 people were very dissatisfied. The Polish people living in the GTA were very satisfied ($n=263$) and

Table 1. Overall satisfaction with education as rated by the Polish community living in the Greater Toronto Area

Element of satisfying of the education the needs in the city	I am very satisfied	I am rather satisfied	I am moderately satisfied	I am dissatisfied	I am very dissatisfied	I have no opinion
• satisfaction with individual education	118	215	96	27	26	101
• satisfaction with having proper qualifications to perform a job	72	145	110	59	36	161
• access to education	263	160	80	15	20	45
• satisfaction with activities of schools and other educational institutions	77	203	74	72	48	109

satisfied (n=160) with the overall access to education in the metropolitan Toronto area. They were also highly satisfied with schools and other educational institutions (n=77 for “very satisfied” and n=203 for “satisfied”). Only 20 people were very dissatisfied with access to education; 48 people expressed dissatisfaction with the activities of these institutions.

The main objective of the research is to present the relationship between gender and assessment of access to education in the GTA, as well as the contribution of household size and declared income level to assessment of access to education. The hypotheses formulated for the research assumed that

- women rate access to education more highly,
- individuals in two- to four-person households rate access to education and training highest, and
- individuals with a higher declared monthly income rate access to education more highly.

One of the hypotheses posed by the author was that women living in the GTA would rate access to education more highly than men. The research was intended to find out whether gender influences the assessment

of access to education and whether it matters more to women than to men. In line with the dominant tendency of portraying the role of women as mothers and wives, a lot of attention is paid to their family situation. For many, it is a measure of success in life. In spite of the various role models, a traditional view of the role of a woman prevails, so that women still bear particular responsibility for the functioning of the family. An attitude of self-sacrifice for the good of the family and an her ability to combine family and professional duties are repeatedly shown (Polkowska, 2007, p. 138). Often, it is also a woman's responsibility to educate her children and help them with their studies in the early years of their education.

In terms of gender, it is usually emphasized that women are more likely than men to attach importance to a sense of security, stability, and good social relations at work, as well as their level of education, professional achievements, and professional qualifications. In a study by Czarnota-Bojarska and Łada (2004, p. 11), it was found that young people have similar career ambitions and hopes, but that gender is still a determinant of their social and professional role. Jezior (2005) reported that women were twice as likely as men to emphasize the importance of both their own and their children's education (Jezior, 2005, p. 23). Research conducted on the Polish community in the GTA confirmed the author's hypothesis that women attach a greater role to access to education and their education. Table 1 presents the statistical calculations for the findings related to this hypothesis.

At the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, λ_2 alpha was less than λ_2 . Thus, we can reject the null hypothesis and say that there is a correlation between gender and assessment of access to education. Consequently, the research hypothesis that women living in the GTA would rate access to education more highly than men is confirmed.

The second research hypothesis was that people living in households with two to four people would rate access to education and training the highest. Table 2 presents the statistical calculations for the findings related to this hypothesis.

Table 1. Gender and access to education

Access to Education	Gender		Total
	Female	Man	
Very good	148	115	263
Good	89	71	160
Average	46	34	80
Bad	6	9	15
Very bad	2	18	20
No Opinion	11	34	45
Total	302	281	583
Degrees of Freedom	df = 6		
λ^2	27.28		
λ^2 alpha	15.07		

Table 2. Size of household and access to education

Access to Education	Size of Household			Total
	1 person	2–4 people	4+ people	
Very good	28	139	96	263
Good	31	69	60	160
Average	6	27	47	80
Bad	1	8	6	15
Very bad	2	13	5	20
No Opinion	18	6	21	45
Total	86	262	235	583
Degrees of Freedom	df = 10			
λ^2	138.16			
λ^2 alpha	28.39			

At the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, λ_2 alpha was less than λ_2 . We can therefore reject the null hypothesis and state that there was a correlation between the size of the respondents' household and their assessment of access to education. Consequently, the research hypothesis that people living in households with two to four people would highly rate access to education and training is confirmed.

The final hypothesis applies to the respondents' assessment of their financial situation and of access to education. The hypothesis states that assessment to education would increase along with a very high assessment of one's personal financial situation. Table 3 shows the statistical calculations for the findings relate to this hypothesis.

Table 3. Assessment of financial situation and access to education

Access to Education	Assessment of Financial Situation						Total
	Very good	Good	Average	Bad	Very bad	No Opinion	
Very good	82	56	44	21	29	31	263
Good	42	81	18	7	5	7	160
Average	17	26	12	5	5	15	80
Bad	0	2	6	2	2	3	15
Very bad	0	4	5	1	3	7	20
No Opinion	20	12	6	1	1	5	45
Total	161	181	91	37	45	68	583
Degree of Freedom	df = 22						
λ_2	81.27						
λ_2 alpha	28.43						

At the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$ λ_2 alpha < λ_2 , i.e. we reject the null hypothesis, therefore we can say that there is a correlation relationship between assessment of the material situation and access to education. Consequently, the research hypothesis assuming that assessment of access to education increases with a very high assessment of the personal material situation is true.

Conclusion

According to the traditional human capital model, people invest in education in the hopes of securing greater wealth and lifelong consumption. Although evidence concerning a significant financial return from education is well documented in the literature on education, we still know little about how this effect may contribute to an individual's assessment of their overall quality of life.

One of the conclusions presented in the research hypotheses presenting the findings is the fact that women in the GTA rated access to education more highly than men. In their research in Australia, Powdthavee et al. (2015) noted that on average men gained slightly greater benefits from education than women and rated it more highly – partly because education is considerably more associated with a higher likelihood of employment for men. These findings do not match those of the present study. On the other hand, the authors also noted a significant correlation between wealth and both the assessment of the need for education and the evaluation of its availability. They proved that income has the largest estimated indirect effect of education on life satisfaction for both men and women.

From the results, it appears that people who rate their material situation very well assess access to education more highly than those in a worse financial situation. Income is naturally perceived as the main factor that mediates education in terms of an individual's well-being (Clark et al., 2008). According to economists, financial returns and financial situation constitute the main benefits people gain from investing in additional human capital (e.g., Harmon & Walker, 1995; Leigh & Ryan, 2008). It is emphasized that the rate of financial return from education is economically and statistically significant and has causal interpretations; for instance, education enables people to become more efficient and productive in the labor market, resulting in better earnings than less educated people.

There are also other, non-monetary effects of good education that may improve well-being, including social relations, attitudes towards work and job satisfaction, and even the ability to trust other people

(e.g., Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2011). Numerous studies have confirmed that income and education have a positive and statistically significant relationship with life satisfaction (Clark et al., 2008; Oswald, 1997). Regarding the non-monetary benefits of education, Oreopoulos and Salvanes (2011) report that education is one of the most important predictors of health status, employability, and the likelihood of marriage as indicators of life satisfaction (Layard, 2005; Oswald, 1997).

Education not only makes individuals more attractive in the labor market, but also more attractive in other settings. Men and women with higher earning potential or prestige tend to be perceived as relatively more attractive in the competitive marriage market (LaFortune, 2013).

Household size also has a significant impact on the overall assessment of access to education and opportunities to participate in training courses (often paid), translating into general assessment of quality of life and standard of living.

Abundant evidence on the relationship between having children and life satisfaction suggests that parents are either less satisfied with their lives or report the same level of life satisfaction as non-parents (Clark et al., 2008; Di Tella et al., 2003; Powdthavee et al., 2015; Smith, 2003). It was confirmed that being a parent has a stronger negative impact on subjective well-being in the UK and USA than in Europe and Russia (Di Tella et al., 2003; Smith, 2003), as it contributes to higher costs of living for the family, which in turn necessitates a reduction in additional paid courses and paid education, for example. The present study demonstrates that people in two- to four-person households rated access to education more highly than those in households consisting of more than four people. This may indicate that the cost of living for a large family may contribute to a limited amount of money being spent on additional paid education.

In addition to the research hypotheses, some conclusions about the Canadian Polish community can be drawn on the basis of the study:

- They are definitely satisfied with their education, with one in five being moderately satisfied with their qualifications to perform their jobs and one in three having no opinion on the matter.

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- More than half of them are very satisfied or satisfied with access to education and the activity of schools and other educational institutions.
 - One in three is moderately satisfied with their job, while one in five is dissatisfied.

This research has investigated how the Polish diaspora living in the GTA evaluate access to the school system and their education, which translates into their quality of life and standard of living. The research may contribute to researchers studying how satisfaction with education influences general life satisfaction in other parts of the world and among different study populations.

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