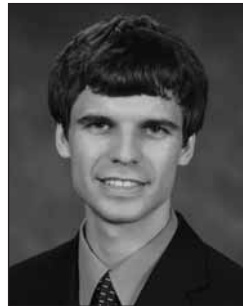


THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND THE EDUCATION OF IMMIGRANT CHILDREN IN BELGIUM¹

Richard Sypeck



Introduction

In the past two decades, the Belgian education system has undergone several changes to both the structure and the availability of programs that strengthen the performance of its schools. Research studies confirm that Belgium consistently has problems bringing the academic performance of students of immigrant backgrounds to the same level as that of native Belgian students. Differences between the performance of native students and immigrant students are not unique to Belgium, of course. Other countries throughout the world see similar differences. However, Belgium has a unique set of reasons that contribute to the differences that are observed. One prominent reason is the lack of a well-defined and thorough language support program for those immigrant children who need it. Many other countries have language support programs that are structured and comprehensive. Belgium could ben-

efit from the introduction of a language support program in its educational system.

This article will address some of the factors that create problems for an immigrant student's success in the Belgian education system with an emphasis being placed on language development programming and language usage in the classroom. Immigrant students coming to Belgium with prior knowledge in the language of instruction, while also having difficulties adjusting and performing, are relatively better equipped to immerse themselves into regular classrooms without additional language assistance.

From 2000–2003, Belgium saw a significant inflow of immigrants from Northern, Eastern, and Western Europe. ("Belgium: Inflow of Foreign Population . . ." (a)) An immigrant by

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Table 1**Top Five Countries of Origin of the Foreign Population Living in Belgium in 2004**

Country of nationality	Number of people	Percent of total foreign population
Italy	183,021	21.3
France	114,943	13.4
Netherlands	100,700	11.7
Morocco	81,763	9.5
Spain	43,802	5.1
All other countries	336,058	39.1
Total	860,287	100.0

Source: Institut National De Statistique (National Institute of Statistics), Population et Ménages: Population Etrangère (Population and Households: Foreign Population), Table 02.01 GT "Population par Pays de Nationalité, Groupe d'âges et Province — Belgique" ("Population by Country of Nationality, by Age Group and Province — Belgium") www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/countrydata.cfm?ID=496.

definition is any individual who leaves one country and takes up permanent residence in another country. The top countries that contributed to Belgium's foreign population² in 2004 were Italy, France, the Netherlands, Morocco, and Spain (See Table 1).

The origin of an immigrant family has an impact on the immigrant student's integration into Belgium. The degree of similarity of a country to Belgium can affect the rate of integration for a student into the education system.

An important distinction exists between first- and second-generation immigrants. A first-generation immigrant is someone who either has immigrated to a country directly or is the child of immigrant parents. A second-generation immigrant is someone who is part of the first generation of individuals actually born in the new country. These individuals are usually born in the destination country but their parent(s) were not. This article will use the distinction between first- and second-generation immigrants provided because statistical data are presented according to these definitions. It should be noted that the terms "first- and second-generation" are somewhat ambiguous because they do not allow for a distinction between those individuals who immigrated dur-

ing childhood and those who were born in the new country. The term "one and one-half [1.5] generation" (or 1.5G) has been used to identify those immigrants who were not born in the country but arrived during the early stages of their life. While data are not broken down for the 1.5 generation, it is still important to mention because the experiences of these groups of people can be significantly different from those of the first- and second-generation immigrants.

Defining the Problem

As immigrant populations³ grow and academic performance levels become an increasing concern for many countries, it is important to address the particular academic performance problems facing immigrant students and to discuss possible solutions for the disparity in performance levels as well as ways to help mitigate these problems.

Belgium has a complex education system due to its two culturally distinct regions, Wallonia and Flanders. Since 1987 the field of education has undergone several changes that relate to this cultural division. One change that had an extraordinary impact took effect in 1989. This change occurred when there was a transfer of authority pertaining to educational affairs from the national level to the language communities. (Wielemans, p. 168) The Belgian educa-

²Foreign population here does not include foreigners residing illegally in Belgium or individuals who have obtained Belgian nationality. Therefore, the immigrant population exceeds in number that of the foreign population in Belgium.

³The term "immigrant" here will be used to refer to first-, second-, and/or 1.5-generation immigrants.

tional system thus adopted this same cultural division that existed on so many other levels in Belgium. Currently, each language community — Dutch-speaking, Francophone, and German-speaking — has its own educational system and minister of education. Despite this division, the regional educational systems are quite similar. Each regional education system has compulsory education for every person from the age of six to eighteen. Another similarity among the language communities is that both primary and secondary levels of education are comprised of six years of schooling, for a total of twelve years. (Debergh and Teuwen, pp. 1–2) Additionally, within each community the schools are separated into public and private sectors, with a majority of the students enrolled in subsidized private schools, most of which are affiliated with the Catholic Church.

An analysis of Belgian schools in the 1980s reveals that minority⁴ children struggled to attain the same success rates as their Belgian counterparts. (Leman, pp. 141–44) Figures from the Flemish community show that the percentage of foreign students who were required to repeat a year in their schooling was higher than that of the Belgian students. For example, in 1986–87 over 30 percent of foreign students failed one year of their primary education, compared to about 10 percent of Belgian students. This pattern also holds true if one looks at the number of students held back for two years. Fewer than 0.6 percent of Belgian students in their primary education were held back for two years compared to over 6 percent of foreign students. To put this into perspective, at the end of 6 years of schooling only half of the foreign students will have reached their appropriate level in the normal time period. (Leman, p. 141) If at the primary level of education a student encounters such setbacks, the student will probably encounter obstacles at the secondary level as well.

If one looks at the choices that students at the secondary level of education make, it becomes apparent that Belgian students once again have an advantage and more often choose the path that prepares them for a professional career. At the secondary level, students in Bel-

gium have the option of attending programs for a general education, a technical education, or a vocational education. The quality of each program differs. If a student aspires to a professional career, general and technical educational programs are better equipped to offer the skills needed to achieve those aspirations. Vocational programs are usually of a lower quality, and it is within these programs that twice as many foreign students from the Flemish community find themselves studying. (Leman, p. 142) In the French community, similar observations can be made. A larger percentage of Belgian students attend general programs than foreign students. Conversely, a larger proportion of foreign students attend the “lesser quality” vocational schools than Belgian students. (Leman, p. 144) There is a consistent pattern of foreigners⁵ and also immigrant children attending the lower quality schools and being held back, which reflects a serious problem when juxtaposed with Belgian students’ success in obtaining admittance into higher quality schools and being retained less often.

The poor performance of immigrant students in the late 1980s has been linked to various factors including cultural differences, language barriers, social constructions of their role in society,⁶ and expectations of teachers. Attitudes of parents are crucial in providing an advantageous start to their child’s educational development. Leman notes that many parents of immigrant children do not enroll their students in kindergarten. As a result they are not given the same start as other students. The language spoken at home is also very important. A child without the proper stimulation of the language of instruction at home tends to suffer in the classroom because the language of instruction is not reinforced as much outside of the classroom. (Leman, pp. 146–47) Furthermore, societal factors have a role in the development of immigrant children. Often the attitudes of others reinforce ideas or con-

⁴The term “foreigner” refers to an individual from another country who does not seek permanent residence in Belgium and is thus not considered an immigrant but instead is residing in the country for schooling or another temporary purpose.

⁶An example of this is social status, which is “constructed” by those individuals in a particular society and then agreed upon by members in that society.

⁴“Minority” here refers to those individuals who are not of Belgian descent.

cepts among the students. For example, if a child is told that he or she is not expected to do well because of his or her ethnicity and from patterns of performance by that particular group in the past, this expectation may have an effect on the child's motivation to perform at a higher level. The same holds true for teachers' expectations of students. After a teacher encounters difficulties with one student of a minority background, there is a tendency to lower his or her expectations of others of that same group. (Leman, p. 148) When students are presumed to only be able to meet certain lower expectations, teachers may not push them to achieve more.

In 2000 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) began an international study of secondary level students' performance in various school subjects at the age of 15. These tests, known as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), cover math, reading, and science and are conducted every three years. ("PISA 2006 . . .," p. 16) According to the results of these tests for Belgium in 2003, the gap that existed between immigrant students and native students in the 1980s is still present. Measured on various levels, the PISA standard baseline for adequate proficiency in mathematics is Level 2. A student at Level 2 should have the ability to make interpretations, use basic formulas and procedures, and reason through problems. The majority of native students attain Level 2 proficiencies. These are the proficiencies necessary for entering the labor market. However, the results for first-generation students reveal that more than 40 percent of them fail to attain Level 2 proficiency. Furthermore, more than 25 percent of second-generation students fail to attain this level. (Schleicher, p. 510) The PISA data are a starting point for analysts to determine where problems may be occurring within certain demographic groups of students. For example, being able to break down the information by countries has allowed analysts to use this information to make comparisons among the different nations with regard to their educational reforms and societal circumstances. The basis for this article's argument regarding Belgian language preparation for immigrant children has come from some of these research results.

At the age of 15, students in the Belgian school system have only three more years of compulsory education. Discovering that many of the first- and second-generation immigrant students at this age are unprepared for the labor market presents several challenges. First, there is the challenge in making certain that schools are educating these students to the adequate PISA performance levels by the time they reach 18 years of age. Second, special programs and preparation techniques for assisting first- and second-generation immigrant students in primary school are not adequate nor are they sufficiently utilized by the schools. Finally, there is a distinct advantage to being Belgian in the Belgian school system according to the performance levels measured. This poses a problem, especially in light of educational decrees made by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training in 2002 proclaiming "equal chances in education." (Tas)

In Belgium, as in many other countries, performance gaps also still exist between native students and second-generation students. What are the factors that contribute to these performance gaps? Two factors that seem to have an impact are the lower socioeconomic status and the lower levels of parental education among the immigrant populations. While these specific characteristics are contributing factors, they may not be the only factors involved in the performance disparity, however. (Schleicher, pp. 510, 513)

Another component that may contribute to this gap is the lack of exposure to a different language in the household. The PISA survey has shown that immigrant students who do not speak the language of instruction at home perform more poorly in mathematics. One indication can be seen in the performance gap between the two larger language regions of Belgium. The French-speaking region of Wallonia has a large first- and second-generation student population (18.3 percent) whereas the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders has a much smaller one (7 percent). (De Meyer, et al., p. 31) The importance of these population differences can be seen in the following distinction between the two language regions. Fifteen-year-old first-generation students in the Flemish community scored significantly higher in mathematics than their French-speaking counter-

parts. (De Meyer, et al., p. 32) From these data, additional use of the language of instruction either at home or at school can be advantageous to the students.

Additionally, Flemish first-generation students, on average, did better than the second-generation students. (De Meyer, et al., p. 32) This observed pattern does not follow that of many other countries where second-generation students almost always performed better than their first-generation counterparts. One of the contributing factors may be the fact that there are a high number of Dutch-speaking students from the Netherlands who are enrolled as first-generation students in the Flemish education system. (De Meyer, et al., p. 32) According to immigration records for 2003, 12.4 percent of the immigrants to Belgium for that year came from the Dutch-speaking country of the Netherlands. ("Belgium: Inflow of Foreign Population . . ." (b)) Out of the approximately 68,800 first-generation immigrants who entered the country in 2003, 8,500 were native Dutch speakers. Undoubtedly, a good number of these immigrants are school-aged children who have the distinct advantage of growing up in a household where Dutch is the primary language. The importance of this language environment should not be minimized. Flemish 15-year-olds who can speak Dutch or French scored on the 2003 PISA mathematics survey an average of 119 points higher than those students who speak a different language at home. (De Meyer, et al., p. 33) Since some of the highest scores attained by students from various countries are only in the mid-550s, 119 points is a considerable difference. These data reveal that the number of first-generation immigrants to Flanders might account for their better performance because many more of these individuals can speak one of the national languages fluently. This observation confirms the importance of language acquisition for immigrants and demonstrates the need for developing this skill for those who lack fluency.

As for the French-speaking community, the same inferences cannot be made. In 2003 the inflow of first-generation immigrants into Belgium who were French-speaking (16.7 percent) exceeded those immigrants who were Dutch-speaking. ("Belgium: Inflow of Foreign Population . . ." (b)) In absolute numbers, this

represents approximately 11,500 immigrants. Despite this, among 15-year-old students tested in 2003 second-generation students scored better in math on the PISA test than first-generation students. This finding is much like the patterns seen in many other countries that participated in PISA. The best explanation for the better performance of second-generation students, in general, is the better assimilation of second-generation students into the culture and language of Belgium.

Therefore, while Flanders presents an exceptional case, it is one worth noting because it highlights some of the complex issues that arise when examining immigration patterns. Overall, the importance for students to have native speakers of the language of instruction at home is affirmed. There appears to be a clear indication that students who do not have this environment are at a distinct disadvantage in school. Furthermore, the significance of this is seen not only between generations of immigrants but, more importantly, between immigrants and native Belgian students. In order to better understand the performance gap and how language affects it, I now discuss the various language support systems in Belgium's education system.

Types of Language Support Programs

As immigrant populations increase around the globe, language support programs will become increasingly popular in many countries. A language support program is focused on the education and immersion of students of an immigrant background into the dominant language and culture of the host country. These programs consist of courses on the development of the immigrant's grammar and vocabulary knowledge and usage. The first type of language support program teaches immigrant students at the pre-primary level by providing structured language support. An example of this type is the development of language acquisition skills by children in preschool or kindergarten. One can think of this as a preparatory program for introducing students to the language of instruction. This preparation is useful because children at this age level are especially receptive to learning languages. (Finegan, pp. 539, 559) Schools prepare students with language support at the

pre-primary level only in educational systems where there are already well-structured primary and secondary language support programs in place. Pre-primary-level support is not implemented in a school unless there already exists primary- or secondary-level support. It is usually initiated as supplemental programming to those programs at primary and secondary levels. Support at the pre-primary level is quite rare, with only the Netherlands and British Columbia, Canada, providing such support. (Schleicher, p. 514) Other countries' educational programs often do not include such programs because policy makers and administrators believe that at this level in the student's development additional language support is not necessary, and that the child can immerse himself/herself into primary education with opportunities similar to native students for learning the language of instruction. To a certain extent, immersing a student at this age may in fact be sufficient for the child to learn the language of instruction properly or at the very least until he or she reaches the primary level of education. While some believe that pre-primary level language support programs may not be necessary, those countries that do include a pre-primary language support program often have seen students performing much better throughout the remainder of their education.

More common than pre-primary structured language support programs are those that take the form of a supplementary preparation program for educational systems that utilize immersion programs. An immersion program is one in which students are placed into standard classrooms where the language of instruction is used without regard to the ability level of students. These classrooms are most suitable for native speakers of the language of instruction. The preparatory program that may go along with this immersion program does not immediately result in a student being placed into regular classrooms. Instead the student is given language and culture instruction for a certain period of time (six to twelve months) to help the student transition into the regular classroom. For an immigrant student, such courses might be useful as long as the student is at the proper level of language development. There should be concern, however, for an immigrant student's overall performance in other classes

where, without a basic understanding of the language of instruction, certain specific terms (e.g. scientific terminology, theater directions, etc.) or less frequently used vocabulary may not be comprehensible to the student. Additional language instruction would prove to be most useful in aiding the student in these classes.

Preparatory programs are more often offered to students who are entering the school system at the secondary level. The reason for the popularity of these programs is the complexity of the course content and the necessity to have a firmer grasp on the language before being able to attend classes. (Christensen and Stanat, p. 7; Scheicher, p. 514) If one examines the rationale for incorporating language programs at this level but not at others, there is little reason why preventative measures cannot be taken. Yet, the preventative approach is usually not taken. Instead of providing support programs early on to help develop language ability at a young age, some students are left to struggle until they reach the secondary level. However, at this point students may not have the capacity or ability to match their language abilities with those of native Belgian students and learn without difficulty in the regular classroom. Still, providing language support programs at the primary level (if not earlier) is not an approach that many countries see as feasible because of costs.

The availability and quality of a country's language support program have become important indicators of an immigrant student's educational performance. There is a correlation between good language support programs and the relative performance of immigrant and native students. This positive correlation can be seen in countries such as Canada, where certain schools employ an extensive immersion program for immigrant students to learn the language of instruction. There are several language support program levels, ranging from different types of immersion programs (those with a preparatory language support program and those without) to transitional bilingual programs, which teach the student initially in her/his native language and gradually transition to the language of instruction. Countries where first-generation and second-generation immigrant students consistently perform better have more extensive language support programs in

place. Due to the complexity of comparing the effectiveness of different programs, this comparison will not be made here. However, it is often debatable which type of program is most beneficial for students — a traditional immersion or a transitional bilingual program. In the case of the French-speaking community of Belgium, there is no structured language support system in place at the primary level of schooling. Furthermore, the entire Belgium school system provides very little additional language support to immigrant students at the secondary level. (Christensen and Stanat, pp. 7–8) Immigrant students are simply placed into normal classrooms. The standard curriculum in the schools does include courses that focus on the usage and development of the language of instruction. Yet, these courses are no different than the standard English courses taught in schools within the United States. The courses require a basic, if not advanced, understanding of certain aspects of the language in order to further develop language skills. Thus, immersing a student into the normal classroom without a basic grasp of the language means that learning the language in this classroom will be less effective than if the student were able to fully understand the instructor.

The French-speaking community of Belgium does not offer any of these types of support for immigrant students. Because the French-speaking community has a larger first- and second-generation immigrant population, providing such support systems might be a wise decision in bridging the performance gap that is so apparent within this community's schools.

An Ideal Language Support Program

Simply providing a language program for immigrant children will not solve the language problem. Many countries that use structured language support programs still experience a performance gap between students because the programs do not have a well-defined and structured curriculum. The schools are not effective in adhering to a strict theoretical framework (using proper language-learning models) or implementing the programs to meet self-prescribed long-term goals for the success of the program. Many programs are founded and operated on the basis of short-term aid to the

student without truly looking at the long-term or overall development of the individual. An indication of what should be in place in countries such as Belgium might be realized from other countries that have faced the same problems that Belgium now faces in its educational programming. The cases that I will refer to that have shown the greatest successes are Australia, Canada, and Sweden. All three of these countries' programs have set language program standards that schools work to attain. The implementation of standards is systematic and includes all participating schools, follows teaching models based on theoretical language acquisition models, has researched methods of instruction, and has long-term goals for the progress and success of the students. Differences exist at each school because each learning environment is different and the teaching must be adjusted to the specific environment. However, the reference for the curriculum in all schools is the commonly established goals for the programs set forth by the country's educational authority. Furthermore, these countries' program models focus on the quality of the program and its ability to bring students to the adequate level. The programs are both time-intensive and provide continuous development by being offered at the primary and secondary levels. Also, teachers in these programs have received specialized training on the topic of second-language learning, and there tends to be a good relationship between the teachers of second-language learners and their regular classroom teachers. This can help further meet the needs of the immigrant students by allowing regular classroom teachers to understand the students' abilities and look for ways that they can assist them. (Christensen and Stanat, p. 8)

The Australian, Canadian, and Swedish language support programs have been developed to encompass some of the most important aspects of not only the teaching of languages but also teaching in general. The main components of a successful program include: 1) language support programs that are based on well-researched theories with structured goals and a common curriculum, 2) a broadly structured curriculum that allows it to be narrowed down to suit the needs of students from all cultural backgrounds, and 3) a flexible curriculum that allows for teachers to adapt it to their school's

specific environment and prepare students for entering the normal classroom. Research has not yet determined which of the several components of the above programs is most vital to the success of the program; but the combination of these components seems to reduce noticeably the performance gap among students.

Johan Leman (pp. 146–49), professor of social and cultural anthropology at the Faculty of Social Sciences at K.U. Leuven and former chief of cabinet of the Royal Commissioner for Migrant Policy in Belgium, has written widely on the topic of the education of immigrant children in Belgium. He provides several explanations for why there is a disparity between the performance of immigrant and native students. In addition to the language problem, he notes that teachers often do not understand the differences among immigrant students (e.g. the extent of family support, socioeconomic status, and cultural upbringing). Instead, teachers tend to group them together in their minds. Therefore, the expectations the teacher might have for one student will be passed on to other students. For example, a teacher who expects all immigrant students to not perform well because one immigrant student in the past did not perform well may not see the potential that other immigrant students have. The teacher may simply assume they are all the same. Conversely, a teacher who expects too much from students may lead some students to feel like they are failures because they do not meet their teacher's expectations. A good language support program should promote communication between various teachers of second-language learners. This would allow for a better understanding of each student as an individual and, therefore, provide a different set of expectations for each student. Furthermore, there are three additional provisions that will greatly assist a student. First, a language support program that frequently provides specialized language instruction to the student can help alleviate the problem of not having enough exposure to the language of instruction in the household (individuals who converse in the language regularly or can assist the student in reading and writing and comprehending cultural references). This problem is more serious for first-generation immigrant children. Second, providing more time with the language of

instruction in school in the form of language support classes or outside of school with additional classes or tutoring will help the student familiarize herself/himself with the language more quickly. While this is no substitute for having the language spoken at home, the additional language exposure could help mitigate some disadvantageous effects such as speaking with a heavy accent or not having the confidence to speak. Both of these could affect the student's ability to do well in the classroom or to obtain a job in the future. Lastly, having teachers who are given special instruction in helping second-language learners provides these students with a support network of people who understand the difficulty that the students encounter in learning the language and adjusting to the school. This may be important to the students who might be looking for role models but not finding them among their regular classroom teachers. Positive role models can create positive learning environments for these students, who will in turn perform better in their studies. In theory, training teachers should also increase the number of people who will be aware of the problems of immigrant students. Such teachers can also serve to voice complaints against policies and tests that do not accommodate the interests of immigrant students or where ambiguity may exist for a second-language learner (e.g. testing using cultural context that the student does not know and is not relevant to what is being tested).

Hindrances to the Implementation of Language Support Programs

The implementation of a language support program may also face difficulties. These include: 1) financial costs, 2) political opposition to devoting additional resources to immigrant students' education, and 3) widespread implementation and evaluation of the programs. Due to the divided governmental structure that exists in Belgium and the fact that each community is responsible for its own educational system, the implementation of such support programs becomes a more complicated issue. Different problems face each language community, such as differing attitudes toward immigrants or differing amounts of support for educational programs in general.

Despite the differences among the language communities, if they wish to provide an adequate language support system for immigrant children, each community must commit resources for long periods of time. (Christensen and Stanat, p. 11) The limiting factor in committing such resources may be the uncertainty of performance improvement levels. When politicians consider implementing educational programs, any uncertainty as to the causes of the students' performance gap⁷ may mean a lack of adequate support for a language support program that would be beneficial. Some research on this topic has suggested that language is but one factor affecting immigrant student performance. The research has also not conclusively shown a direct relationship between the quality of a language support program and the performance gains of students who have participated. With several other factors (such as parents' education levels, language knowledge, and socioeconomic level) all affecting the student's success in school, the problem is to determine the importance of each of these factors. Furthermore, many solutions to these problems have spillover effects. For example, if a student has a good command of the language of instruction, he/she is more likely to perform better in school and thus achieve success later in life. In this way, a language support program could mitigate other problems that hinder the success of immigrant students.

Conclusion

The implementation of a language support program in any Belgian language community should most likely be a permanent initiative. Such programs are necessary as long as there is a sizeable immigrant population. (Christensen and Stanat, p. 11) For Belgium, the inflow of immigrants has been large enough that language support programs could be utilized to educate and aid students well into the future. ("Belgium: Inflow of Foreign Population . . ." (b)) Based on the existing administrative struc-

⁷One could compare the "anti-preventative" logic here to that which global warming agencies are challenging today. There is a lack of support for preventative measures that do not have conclusive data to support changing the current way of doing things.

ture, it may be too difficult to have an existing administrator absorb the tasks necessary to implement a proper country-wide language support program. As a result of the need to implement these programs on a permanent basis, the creation of new administrative positions to manage and support these programs would be necessary.

To achieve the best results for immigrant students, Belgium should adopt a carefully planned and comprehensive language support program in each language community, one that ideally is modeled after one of the three comprehensive programs in Australia, Canada, and Sweden. In order to implement the same components of these model programs, Belgium would need to have a specialized task force made up of government officials, educators, and experts in the area of language learning and support. This task force would identify the unique problems facing Belgian immigrant students relating to language education and develop a standard curriculum to be followed within the schools.

It is important to stress that, by not supporting a student who is learning a new language and allowing for his or her culture to be expressed in the language of instruction, Belgian society — and any other society for that matter — is being counterproductive in its attempt to become a global society. Neglecting the needs of immigrant students by not providing language support programs might someday result in a shift in immigrant populations, a detriment to those countries that depend on immigrant populations residing in the country. According to Jim Cummins, professor in the Modern Language Centre at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, "A society that has access to multilingual and multicultural resources is advantaged in its ability to play an important social and economic role on the world stage." (Cummins) By not providing adequate services to support growing immigrant populations and thereby allowing them to become more successful, a country is putting itself at a disadvantage globally. My hope is that the information in this article will serve as a means of inviting Belgium and other countries to analyze their educational systems more closely and determine a way to correct the inequalities that exist.

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