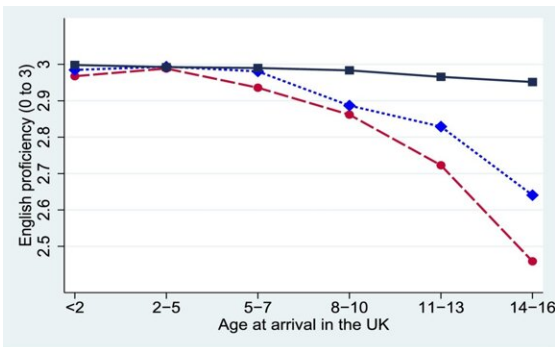
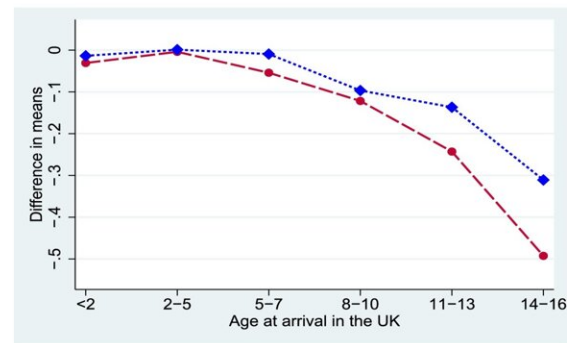


Language skills key to understanding residential segregation, says study

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(a) Mean English proficiency



(b) Difference in means

—●— Large-distance country - - -◆- - - Small-distance country —■— Anglophone country

English language skills and age at arrival of migrants who arrived in the UK during their childhood. Credit: *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* (2024). DOI: 10.1016/j.jebo.2024.03.015

Language skills are one of the key factors to explain residential segregation and play an important role in understanding immigrant residential environments, new research from the University of Aberdeen has found.

The study, [published](#) in the *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, looked at the causal effects of English proficiency on residential location choices of immigrants.

Previous research has identified a correlation between host-country language proficiency and ethnic residential clustering and that there is a relationship between having lower English language skills and living in areas with high ethnic concentration.

The University of Aberdeen study is the first UK study to look at the causal effects of English language skills on location choices in different types of immigrant enclave, and on location choices in neighborhoods with differing levels of deprivation.

Dr. Yu Aoki, Lecturer in Economics at the University's Business School led the study. She said, "There is a significant extent of [residential segregation](#) in the United Kingdom. For example, over half of Britain's ethnic minority population lives in only three cities, London, Manchester and Birmingham. Given that residential environments are found to have a significant impact on social, behavioral and labor market outcomes, it is informative to know the role English language skills play in explaining [immigrant](#) residential environments."

The researchers used a unique dataset from the Office of National Statistics Longitudinal Study linking it to the measures of neighborhood deprivation in England. This allowed them to gain insights into the residential environments in which immigrants with different English skills live.

They also constructed measures of the extent of residential clustering of immigrants, aimed at capturing the concept of enclave along four dimensions: main language spoken by residents (language enclave), ethnicity (ethnic enclave), country of birth (country-of-birth enclave), and world region of birth (region-of-birth enclave); enabling them to study the impact of English skills on living in different types of enclave.

Dr. Aoki added, "Distinguishing different types of enclave is important,

as for example, immigrants fluent in English may not choose to live in a language enclave, if the reason for living in an enclave is simply for linguistic convenience. However, immigrants proficient in English may decide to live in an ethnic enclave if they value other aspects of living in an enclave, such as offering employment networks, cultural amenities, or protection from possible discrimination they might face outside of the enclave."

The study found differing outcomes across the different types of residential enclave.

"Our results suggest that poorer English skills lead immigrants to live in a language enclave. In contrast, we have found that better English skills lead immigrants to live in an ethnic enclave," said Dr. Aoki. "This last effect is in contrast to the majority of the findings of previous correlation studies, showing the associations between poorer language skills and residency in an ethnic enclave.

"Additionally, we are the first to analyze the effects of [language skills](#) on the quality of the neighborhood immigrants live in and found strong evidence that poorer English skills lead immigrants to live in a neighborhood with a higher level of deprivation."

The authors suggest that helping immigrants improve their English skills, via for example providing English language courses, could be effective in reducing residential clustering, by promoting immigrants to live in linguistically less segregated areas with lower concentrations of people speaking their own native language.

However, better language proficiency leads immigrants to cluster in areas with higher concentrations of individuals from the ethnicity, suggesting that aspects other than linguistic convenience, such as the availability of good employment networks, are likely to play an

important role in determining migrant residential locations.

More information: Yu Aoki et al, Where to live? English proficiency and residential location of UK migrants, *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jebo.2024.03.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2024.03.015)

Provided by University of Aberdeen

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