

Honors Thesis Proposal

Student

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Working Title

Where We Come From and Where We Go: The Impact of Country of Origin on Immigrants' Perceptions and Performance in School

Project Purpose

I want to study the perception and performance of immigrant students across the countries which participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and identify the systematic differences based on country of origin. The central question is whether immigrant groups' perception of education and performance in school is influenced by factors in the country they immigrate to or where they emigrated from.

Project importance

Immigration in the United States and abroad has become a more pressing issue lately as war and natural disasters have caused forced migration and increased globalization has made it more common for people to migrate for work more often. Education systems in every country have tried to address the issue of integrating first- and second-generation immigrant children successfully. Understanding what factors influence the success of these students is crucial in making the policy decisions surrounding what programs to implement and how to better engage with immigrant families.

Project Overview

Background and Related Research

The achievement of immigrant students in the United States and abroad is a highly researched topic due to the long-term impact education has on individuals. Studies have found that immigrant students in general were at a disadvantage in the school system after controlling for demographic characteristics.¹ Other research focuses on how immigrants differ from natives and affect the educational outcomes of the natives in the classroom.² These studies and others focus on immigrants as one group – my thesis is more concerned with how immigrants from different countries vary from each other.

Initially I became interested in the variations within the immigrant populations when I came across Barry Chiswick's 2004 paper which analyzed educational attainment by immigrant generation.³ Chiswick found that where children or their parents immigrated from greatly impacted the educational attainment of the children. His study was focused on immigrant populations in the United States. I believe that country of origin will play a role in all the countries in my analysis – specifically I am interested in how immigrants with the same country of origin living in different countries will have similar characteristics, or if there are factors in the new country that cause one group of immigrants to perform better than another.

My interest in this differentiation came in part from the work and research of Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou in their book, *The Asian American Achievement Paradox*.⁴ Lee and Zhou

¹ Meunier, Muriel. "Immigration and Student Achievement: Evidence from Switzerland." *Economics of Education Review*, vol. 30, issue 1. 2011.

² Brunello, Giorgio, and Lorenzo Rocco. "The Effect of Immigration on the School Performance of Natives: Cross Country Evidence using PISA Test Scores." *Economics of Education Review*, vol. 32. 2013.

³ Chiswick, Barry R., and Noyna DebBurman. "Educational Attainment: Analysis by Immigrant Generation." *Economics of Education Review*, vol. 23, issue 4. 2004.

⁴ Lee, Jennifer and Min Zhou. *The Asian American Achievement Paradox*. Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 2015.

argue that it is not only cultural characteristics that explain why Asian Americans excel in the US education system, it is also the perception that Americans specifically have about Asians, which subsequently leads to differing self-perception. This may be caused by peer effects or the response of immigrant groups navigating the US education system. Studying similar immigrant groups that live in other countries beside the United States would be able to shed light on whether it is how certain immigrant groups perceive themselves after arriving to a new country that give an advantage or disadvantage rather than the home-country's culture.

Data

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) administers a standardized exam to fifteen-year-old students in participating OECD countries. These students are tested on reading, math, science, and practical skills. In addition to the exam, the students complete a questionnaire that asks demographic questions and questions that gauge how students perceive school, certain subjects, and other areas. PISA makes this data publicly available from 2000-2018 (the test is administered every three years). After ensuring that my key variables are compatible across the data sets, I plan to use the data from each of the six testing periods.

Methodology

I plan to compare students from key countries or regions that come from similar backgrounds using a matching method. This method compares individuals from similar (ideally identical) backgrounds to exploit the differences in achievement based on the key differences. In this case I would examine students from similar families and socioeconomic backgrounds and compare groups that remained in the home country, with those who emigrated to different countries. I hope that by matching on as many observable characteristics possible, the unobservable characteristics will be similar as well.

My main concern in this analysis is that immigrants who immigrate to a certain country may be systematically different than those who immigrate to another country because choosing where to immigrate to is not random – although for some groups, such as refugees, it may be. Because of this limitation, I will need to perform a number of robustness checks and test the results using a few different models to ensure that my results hold.

Implications of Research

If I do find that it is not merely where someone immigrates from that affects their educational attainment, but rather it is how they are integrated and perceived by the natives in the new country, this would change how policy makers and educators approach working with certain immigrant groups. Countries that are able to more successfully integrate immigrant students into the education system can be looked to as a model for change. While my paper would not offer insight in exactly how immigrant students from certain groups can be better served, it would bring us one step closer to asking the right questions and looking at the issues from a more effective and practical way.

Qualifications of Thesis Committee

1. *Faculty Advisor:* Dr. Donald Baum, Assistant Professor in the Educational Leadership and Foundations Department, McKay School of Education

Donald Baum is an Assistant Professor with areas of expertise in education policy, international development, the economics of education, and quantitative research methods. His research focuses on the behaviors and contributions of the private sector in education, including the expansion of for-profit education markets, private schooling for the poor, and state regulation of private schools. Additionally, his research addresses the provision and expansion of early childhood education in the Global South, with the primary geographic focus of Sub-Saharan

Africa. From 2012 to 2015, he worked as an Education and Evaluation Specialist for the World Bank.

After taking his class on Education Policy in Developing Countries Fall 2018, I began to work with him as a Research Assistant. His insight as an expert in international education policy has helped me better understand the different frameworks that education policy questions can be approached and understood.

2. *Faculty Reader*: Dr. Eric R. Eide, Professor in the Economics Department, Family, Home and Social Sciences

Eric R. Eide is a Professor of Economics whose research focuses on the economics of education and health economics. In his K-12 research, he has studied how education policies such as school spending and grade retention affect students' educational and labor market outcomes. He has published articles in a number of academic journals, and his research has been cited in publications such as The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, and the Chronicle of Higher Education. From 2001-2003, Professor Eide worked for the RAND Corporation where he was part of a management team that assisted the country of Qatar in reforming their K-12 education system. He served from 2002-2010 as an Associate Editor for the Economics of Education Review, where he is currently on the Board of Editors.

Dr. Eide taught my Economics of Education class Winter 2019. His class helped me better understand the current research done in economics relating to education. He also advised me on my post-graduation plans according to my interest in education policy and research. As part of his class I wrote a research paper on modern day school segregation in the US K-12 system.

3. *Honors Coordinator*: Dr. John Stovall, Assistant Professor in the Economics Department, Family, Home and Social Sciences

Before joining the Economics faculty at BYU in 2015, John Stovall was an assistant professor at the University of Warwick in Coventry, UK. John's research interests lie in microeconomic theory, specifically decision theory and social choice. His research explores the behavioral implications of temptation, as well as the fair allocation of resources. He serves as the Honors Coordinator for the Economics Department.

Project Timeline

January 2020 – Proposal Submitted for Approval

February 2020 – Data Cleaning and Preliminary Analysis

March 2020 – Create Thesis Poster

May 2020 – First Draft of Thesis Completed

June 2020 – Final Draft of Thesis Completed, Schedule Thesis Defense

July 2020 – Thesis Defense

August 2020 – Thesis Publication

Culminating Experience

At the completion of my Honors Thesis I plan to submit it to the *Comparative Education Review* and the *Economics of Education Review*. I will also work with Dr. Baum to find the opportunity to present at relevant comparative education conferences.