

Immigrant parent's early educational investment in their children: Does migration selectivity matter?

There are studies that document how children of immigrants show better educational, behavioral, and health outcomes compared to children of non-immigrants, despite immigrant children's greater socioeconomic disadvantage background (Coll & Marks, 2012). This is known as the immigrant paradox. Some scholars attribute the relative success of children of immigrants relative to children of non-immigrant parents as a result of a positive selection of immigrant parents in the United States (Feliciano, 2005; Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017). They show that immigrants in the United States are a positively selected population compared to those left behind in the home country. In other words, immigrant population in the United States are more educated compared to the general population from their home country. Therefore, when studying intergenerational educational mobility in immigrant families, parents' educational "contextual attainment" need to be considered (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017). For example, an immigrant completing a secondary education in a country where the majority of the population completes only primary education can be thought of as having a high contextual level of education attainment.

Despite the positive selection, immigrants have lower socioeconomic status (SES) than the non-immigrant population because immigrants' education and skills obtained from the home country often does not transfer to the host country (Bonikowska, 2007). In addition, although immigrants might come from a higher SES from their home country, the absolute value of education or skills that they earned from their home country may not be considered high SES in the U.S. context.

Despite these limitations that immigrants face, literatures suggest that immigrant parents still offer an environment for their children that is influenced by their higher contextual level of educational attainment, which is why children of immigrants fare better in school compared to children of non-immigrants with similar SES. Understanding that the reason behind the immigrant paradox or the immigrant advantage may be due to migration selectivity is useful. However, this literature does not take into account how immigrant families actually navigate their new country, which is important because immigrant parents still struggle despite the supposed advantages they bring.

There is discrepancy in immigrant parents' perceived socioeconomic status between home country and host country and how this lead to their children's educational investment decision is less known. The goal of this study is to examine how immigrant parents' educational investment to their children compare to those of non-immigrant parents with similar socioeconomic background. In order to better understand how immigrant parents make decisions about their children's early educational investment, the following research questions are asked:

- 1) How do parental investments in early childhood vary among immigrant and non-immigrant families?
- 2) How do parenting investments vary within the immigrant population by different socioeconomic status in absolute and relative terms? Do immigrant parents from higher contextual socioeconomic status invest more in their children compared to immigrant parents from lower contextual socioeconomic status?
- 3) Do varying levels of immigrant parents' educational investments explain differences in school readiness?

This study uses the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) survey data, which is a nationally representative sample of children born in the United States in 2001. Comprised of more than 14,000 children, the same children were followed through kindergarten entry. Major data collection happened across three time periods when the child was: approximately 9 months old, 2 years old, and 4 years old (preschool age).

Parental investments in early childhood can take the form of enrolling a child in preschool but also more broadly includes patterns of parental time use and inputs such as books, good nutrition and health care as well as making use of public and private services. This research will involve making use of parental investment information (e.g. time use, school choice, expenditures on children) in available in the ECLS-B data. After examining patterns of parental investment in the data between immigrant and non-immigrant families, two specific aspects of heterogeneity within the immigrant population will be examined. First, following Feliciano & Lanuza (2017), contextual measure of parental education will be created. Then, whether this new contextual measure explain parental investment decisions better than conventionally-measured parent education will be investigated. The second type of heterogeneity examined is whether these investment decisions, stemming from parent's migration selectivity, lead to different levels of children's school readiness.

The three guiding hypotheses of this study are as followings:

- 1) Immigrant parents from low SES will observe an investment behavior similar to higher SES non-immigrant parents. This is because despite immigrant parents' lower SES, they will depict investment practices in children's education reflective of their home country's SES.
- 2) Among immigrant families that are considered to be in low SES in the U.S. context, immigrant parents with higher contextual SES will invest more in their children's education compared to immigrant parents with lower contextual SES.
- 3) Children of immigrant's school readiness performance will be reflective of parental investments in education.

The role of migration selectivity in immigrant parents' educational investment decisions for their children will help understand how immigrant parents navigate resources in the new country. Moreover, how the different investment behaviors impact children's school readiness will help policy makers and educational practitioners to provide with appropriate interventions to narrow the learning gap.