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The role of parental involvement in academic achievement trajectories of elementary school children with Southeast Asian and Taiwanese mothers

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ABSTRACT

Drawing upon Coleman's concepts of social capital, which emphasized the potential roles of resources inside and outside the family in affecting children's academic performance, this study explores the parental involvement gap between children of Southeast Asian mothers and children of Taiwanese mothers, and analyzes to what extent parental involvement is associated with trajectories of achievement in elementary school. The sample comprised 8810 fourth to sixth graders.

Results: showed that new immigrant children experienced less parental involvement than did native children. The hierarchical linear model revealed that four of the five parental involvement factors related to initial achievement, the only exception being intergenerational closure. The immigrant-native gap in initial achievement can be partially explained by parental involvement, while discrepancies in the growth rates of academic achievement were not observed between the two groups. Furthermore, a negative and long-lasting effect of parental expectation on achievement was found in Confucian culture, which is characterized by an emphasis on the importance of education and the higher academic standards set by Chinese parents.

1. Introduction

Academic achievement gaps between immigrant and native children have been an issue of concern among educational researchers and policymakers (Levin & Shohamy, 2008; Kao, 1995; Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Kieffer, 2011). Most studies conducted within Western countries have indicated that both family backgrounds and parental involvement can partly explain academic gaps in reading or in math scores among children from immigrant and non-immigrant families (Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Yan & Lin, 2005), but that the effect of parental involvement on the growth rate of reading and math among immigrants is insignificant (Jeong & Acock, 2014). The growing independence of respondents in middle and late adolescence from their parents may explain the non-significant result. Given that children are more influenced by their parents at the elementary school stage, the association of parental involvement with initial performance and academic growth rate may be manifested in elementary school. Parental involvement is treated as a form of social capital by which parents can affect their children's educational outcomes (Dufur et al., 2013; Jeong & Acock, 2014; Lee & Bowen, 2006), but little is known about how parental involvement factors influence the trajectories of achievement differences between immigrant and native children during early adolescence.

A local study finds that native students outperform new immigrant students (atypical second-generation students with mothers

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from Southeast Asia and native fathers are different from typical native-born students with both parents born abroad) in test scores at fourth and sixth grade, particularly in Chinese and in math subjects, and hypothesizes that academic gaps may be attributed to the lower levels of involvement of immigrant parents (Lin & Liu, 2014). Although research shows that the low levels of education and limited language abilities of immigrant parents hinder them from being involved in their children's schooling (Fleischmann & Haas, 2016; Turney & Kao, 2009), Lin and Lu (2014) did not utilize the panel data to test this hypothesis empirically. It remains unknown whether differences in parental involvement between atypically immigrant and native students occur and are linked to academic gaps. Understanding the effects of particular dimensions of parental involvement may contribute to the reduction of the immigrant-native gap in terms of academic achievement.

Taiwan, a country that practices Confucianism, presents an interesting profile for analyzing the issue on educational inequality. Firstly, marriage-based migration is not uncommon in Taiwan. For most of the lower socioeconomic status males in Taiwan, seeking for brides overseas can simultaneously conquer problems of domestic marriage squeeze and caring for elders (Bélanger, Lee, & Wang, 2010). Many foreign spouses from Southeast Asian countries live in Pingtung County which has a large proportion of male employees in the agricultural sector. Agriculture provides employment opportunities for foreign spouses with low levels of education. Next, the proportion of new immigrant children in elementary school has expanded by 10% in 10 years and was above 12% in 2013. Approximately 61% of these children originate from Southeast Asian families and 36% of them from mainland China (MOE, 2014). Research reveals that the Chinese and math scores of children whose mothers are from mainland China are similar to those of native children (Lin & Lu, 2014; Wang & Tsai, 2008). Thus, this study does not include non-disadvantaged children with mothers from mainland China, but instead analyzes the local-born children of the largest marriage-based immigrant groups.

Additionally, new immigrant children can be viewed as second-generation children because of their foreign-born mother, (e.g., Cohen & Haberland, 2003; Lin & Liu, 2014). They differ from typical second-generation immigrant children in that their fathers are native-born Taiwanese. However, the poor academic performance of these atypical second-generation children is similar to that of typical second-generation children (Muenier, 2011). Current research relating to atypical second-generation children is rare. Finally, the impact of parental involvement on the levels and rate of growth of achievement may be different in Confucian contexts, due to the context-dependent traits of social capital (Fasang, Mangino, & Bruckner, 2014). The stress that Chinese culture places on the importance of academic achievement and collectivism apparently differs from Western culture (Chen, 1988). More importantly, social capital sometimes has positive effects but sometimes also has negative impacts (Portes, 1998). For example, social capital as a source of social control has positive impacts by promoting compliance, whereas higher levels of social control may reduce individuals' autonomy and push them to escape from the extant environment, as described by Portes (1998). The mixed effects of parental involvement warrant further exploration. Likewise, it is necessary to explore how parental involvement relates to achievement trajectories outside the context of extant Western research, after considering family backgrounds.

1.1. Theoretical background

Social capital is a theoretically multidimensional concept. This study adopts Coleman's concepts of social capital because his individual-oriented approaches have been frequently utilized in the field of education and his research interests lie in the role that social capital plays in academic performance (Coleman, 1988). He proposes two dimensions of social capital: social capital in the family and outside the family, and indicates that the two types of social capital reduce the dropout rate in high schools by virtue of obligations, expectations, flow of information and informal sanctions embedded in relationships among the actors. The lack of social capital reduces the possibility that parents transmit their human capital and skills to their children.

Subsequent scholars define social capital according to Coleman's theoretical roots and focus on parental involvement such as home-based and school-based involvement, because parental involvement signifies purposeful investment in children. After reviewing the literature relating to social capital, it is clear that home-based involvement usually includes parent-child discussion (Jeong & Acock, 2014; Kao, 1995; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Yan & Lin, 2005), parental expectation (Jeong & Acock, 2014; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Yan & Lin, 2005) and family rules (Kao, 1995; Yan & Lin, 2005). Two common components are presented when researchers conceptualize school-based involvement, i.e., intergenerational closure and participation in school-based activities (Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Yan & Lin, 2005). As compared with home-based involvement, school-based involvement focusses on parents' relations with school as well as with the parents of their children's friends. Intergenerational closure, originating from Coleman's concepts, refers to a type of social network where parents have contact with the parents of their children's friends. Parents can gather information and set expectations and norms for their children through the parents of their children's friends, even when their children are not willing to disclose academic scores to their parents. Once this network of closure is established, it provides information and norms which are available to each parent in educating their children. Simply put, parents in this social network will monitor academic performance not only for their own children but also for the children of others (Coleman, 1988). Participation in school-based activities includes attending open house or school events, which increases interactions between parents and teachers (Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Turney & Kao, 2009). The five dimensions of parental involvement can transmit necessary information, expectations and norms to children, which may facilitate educational outcomes, but they are rarely explored simultaneously in the extant literature.

1.2. Immigrant differences in parental involvement

The extent of parental involvement varies across different immigrant groups. In the Netherlands, immigrant parents are as much involved in parent-child discussion as the average Dutch family (Cabus & Ariës, 2017). Mexican immigrant parents have lower

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