Does Having Immigrant Parents Affect One’s Use of Academic Resources?

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ABSTRACT

Almost one-third of the U.S. student population consists of students with immigrant families. This study aimed to analyze whether there were differences in how students with immigrant parents and students without immigrant parents navigate the college system. This was done by specifically looking at parental nativity status (within the U.S. or not) and the use of academic resources on campus. It was performed through a convenience sample of a large North Eastern college and yielded a sample of 300 students. The study hypothesized that students who are first-generation-born were less likely to use academic resources. The majority of respondents were Junior class and non-first-generation born. Only 14% of students surveyed considered to have an immigrant parent. The majority of all respondents claimed that they “rarely” or never” used any academic resources on campus. There was no correlation found between having immigrant parents and the usage of academic resources on campus, therefore the null hypothesis was unable to be rejected.
INTRODUCTION

The Migration Policy Institute states that the “U.S. Census Bureau data shows that more than 5.3 million students, or 28 percent of all students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities in 2018, were from immigrant families, up from 20 percent in 2000” (Batalova and Feldblum 2020); with 28% of the current college student population, do students who are first-generation born have different experiences in the U.S. education system than students who are not first-generation born? How many factors such as parents’ education level, foreign universities, socioeconomic status, and culture contribute to students’ educational attainment? Are students who are first-generation born privileged or minoritized by the education system? It is crucial to analyze whether one-third of the college student population can navigate the college system as easily as students who are not first-generation born. By understanding what issues may face this community, programs and systems may be put in place to make the college experience and transition easier for students. Research may also delve into how to make college more accessible for students with immigrant parents and immigrants themselves. This study’s purpose was to specifically look at the correlation between parental nativity status and usage of academic resources on a large North East college campus. The data may demonstrate how students who are first-generation born navigate college differently than other students.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In a study focusing on professional Eastern European immigrant parents, Nesteruk, Marks, and Garrison (2009) found specific emphasis amongst cultures on the importance of education as well as a criticizing of the American educational system for being too “easy” (Nesteruk, Marks, Garrison 2009). This critique was consistent within Asian and Latin cultures as well (Nesteruk, Marks, Garrison 2009). Researchers from this study point to some of the
cultural differences students may encounter in their college experience; differing from universities in other countries that their parents may have attended or the different expectations required from the schools. This data demonstrated how cultural expectations may change how a first-generation born student navigates their school system. If expectations from parents are that the school programs are too easy, there may be a disadvantage to using academic resources on the students.

Researcher Eileen Ariza also emphasized the importance of cultural differences for students. She discussed how in specific cultures, there are different expectations surrounding the school system (Ariza 2000). While Ariza’s study focused more on younger students, her results still provide insight into how culture can affect a student’s educational attainment (Ariza 2000). Some factors that affected this included: language barriers, transportation, parent/teacher relationships, etc. (Ariza 2000). While these studies may not directly analyze educational attainment, they provided context and other explanations of factors that may affect the educational attainment of students who are first-generation-born. Once again, there is a pattern that cultural differences affect a student’s ability to navigate the school system. This data, along with the other studies, supported the hypothesis that students who are first-generation born may have disadvantages in navigating school systems and utilizing academic resources.

METHODS

Hypothesis and Variables

This paper’s research proposal was to examine whether students with immigrant parents use fewer academic resources than students who don’t. The independent variable was whether students have an immigrant parent(s) or not amongst the sample of college students. The dependent variable was the student’s usage of academic resources. The attributes of our
dependent variable include the usage of a teaching assistant or professor’s office hours and the specific studying, writing, tutoring, etc. resources offered on campus. This research hypothesized that students who are first-generation born are less likely to use these resources than students who are not first-generation born. The null hypothesis is that there is no relationship between students having immigrant parents and the level of education they complete. The alternative hypothesis would demonstrate that students who are first-generation born do utilize more academic resources than students without immigrant parents.

Survey Method

The method that this research conducted was a survey. They consisted of a “select the best option” with attributes of parental nativity status and “how often do you use [certain academic resource]” - with attributes of times per semester, or the Likert scale. The survey population was the students of one North East college with about 15,000 students.

Risks and Benefits

The potential risks included awareness of a possible correlation between ethnicity and resource usage for students submitting their survey. Students may come to their conclusions about any correlation between their race/ethnicity and their academic goals, whether positive or negative. Other potential risks were emotional distress over sharing how often one uses academic resources, which also may lead to the “social desirability bias,” where people over-report something because it looks socially desirable. A benefit of this research study was understanding what privileges or disadvantages first-generation born college students have over students who are not. It also looked at what disadvantages students who are first-generation born may face and potentially find solutions to make college integration easier. I believe the potential benefits
outweigh the potential risks because the value of the information is essential to solve any of the distress that may be associated with the survey questions.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

Our survey consisted mostly of Junior respondents, with Seniors close behind, but an overall spread of each class. Out of the total of 300 respondents: 82 students were Seniors, 101 students were Juniors, 60 were Sophomores, and 31 were Freshman.

Independent and Dependent Variable Results

Our independent variable of parental nativity status demonstrated that most students had both parents born in the United States at 80%. Therefore, we have 8% of students with one foreign-born parent and 6% with both parents being foreign-born. This makes 14% of students surveyed considered to have an immigrant parent. This also leaves 6% of survey participants out of our data. This distribution may also affect our results since there are missing participants and a large proportion of students with no immigrant parents.

Our dependent variable of academic resource usage was split into two attributes: Center For Academic Resource (CFAR) usage and usage of professor/teacher assistant office hours. In both distributions, we see that the majority of students “rarely” or “never” use academic resources. In
the “Office Hours” distribution, there are a larger proportion of students who responded “sometimes” at 24%. This demonstrates that there may be some campus culture or accessibility issues around resource usage.

_Crosstabulation Results_

When we cross-tabulated our variables, we found that there was no statistical significance in the correlation between parental nativity and academic resources. We were unable to reject the null at a statistical significance of 90%. Students with one foreign-born parent were twice as likely to use office hours “often” than students with no foreign-born parents. However, students with two foreign-born parents were at 0%. This may be attributed to a low sample population of
both one and two foreign-born parents.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research proposal was to analyze whether or not having an immigrant parent(s) affects a student’s educational attainment. This study specifically explored the correlation between being first-generation born or not and the usage of academic resources at the target college. With this population growing in the United States, it is important to understand the differences between the two groups to promote integration and navigation of school systems. The goals were to find any potential disadvantages or advantages and understand what place they take in a university community and how the integration of students who are first-generation born can increase. These results demonstrated that there were no correlations between our variables. Therefore we did not conclude any correlation between students with immigrant parents and
academic resource usage. This study however was not generalizable to the entire campus or other colleges.

Limitations

There were some limitations to this study. One was a non-representative sample that was obtained using convenience sampling through students on campus. The sample cannot be stated as representative of the college as a whole, therefore cannot be generalized to all colleges. College culture and accessibility may have also affected the responses to our dependent variables, regardless of parental nativity status. This could have been affected by access to a computer to complete the survey or the prioritization of academic resources by the students and the campus. As stated previously, social desirability bias can affect one’s responses if they feel pressured to respond that they use more resources than they really do.

Future Research

Future research could expand the sample population to make these results more generalizable. It could also delve into factors such as cultural expectations, parental education status, and other variables that may affect the experiences of students with immigrant parents. Other potential areas for future research are college application and financial aid navigation, inclusion, college application progress, and navigation programs on college campuses, and analyzing whether these services would benefit students who are first-generation born.
REFERENCES


