

Academic Achievement among Québec Secondary School Students of Immigrant Origin Profile of Students of East Asian Origin in the Québec English School Sector

Key words

Academic achievement • East Asia • Immigration • Secondary education

Summary

The following is a brief profile of the educational paths of Québec secondary school students of East Asian origin enrolled in the English school sector. This study is based on data from a more extensive research project that involved a systematic follow-up of cohorts of Québec immigrant students throughout secondary school. The cohorts in question entered secondary school in 1998-1999 and 1999-2000. The final comprehensive report, entitled *La réussite scolaire des jeunes québécois issus de l'immigration au secondaire* (Mc Andrew, Ledent, Murdoch & Ait-Saïd, 2011), was submitted to MELS in August 2010.

That study looked at students by region of origin, linguistic characteristics and generational status. Various other student characteristics were covered: these ranged from socio-demographic and cultural characteristics to characteristics associated with schooling processes and the nature of the educational institutions attended. The outcome indicators were graduation and dropout rates, the choice of electives, results in different subjects and cumulative academic delays by Secondary III.

Overall, the profile showed young people's progress in a favourable light, regardless of the indicator selected.

Context

In Québec, academic achievement has become a central concern due to poor academic results, which is a widespread problem in our schools. This concern pertains as well to students of immigrant origin because they make up an increasingly large proportion of our school population. In their case, however, a second issue comes to the fore, namely, their integration into Québec society as actors in its future development. This point has been made already in many government documents.

Immigrants from East Asia accounted for 7.4% of all immigrants admitted to Québec between 2007 and 2011, in contrast to 9.7% of all those admitted between 2002 and 2006 (MICC, 2007, 2012). This represents a drop of slightly more than two percentage points. Note, however, that people of Chinese origin currently represent the second largest visible minority in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2010). The vast majority of students of East Asian origin (87.1%) attend

schools in the French sector, while 12.9% go to English schools. The data presented here therefore cover a sub-population that can have specific characteristics.

Methodology

Using the same methodology as that used in *La réussite scolaire des jeunes québécois issus de l'immigration au secondaire*, this purely descriptive analysis will make it possible to identify the factors that affect the academic achievement of East Asian students in the English sector, as was done in the case of the other groups of students looked at in this series of studies (seven in the French sector and three in the English sector).

The educational paths of these students were studied by distinguishing the sub-groups by generational status, by various linguistic characteristics and by country of origin, as well as by taking into account the specific features of each region and the size of the population concerned.

Within the cohorts studied, of the 7,020 students of immigrant origin who were attending school in the English sector, 384, or 5.5%, were from East Asia. Half of these students were from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao (29.9%), or from mainland China (21.6%). The rest came from other countries in the region. A small proportion of these students (14.1%) were English speakers. A large majority (56.5%) of speakers of other languages spoke Chinese, while 17.2% stated that their mother tongue was Korean.

With regard to the definition of the variables used in the study as well as the identification of some of their limitations, the reader can refer to the general study.

Highlights

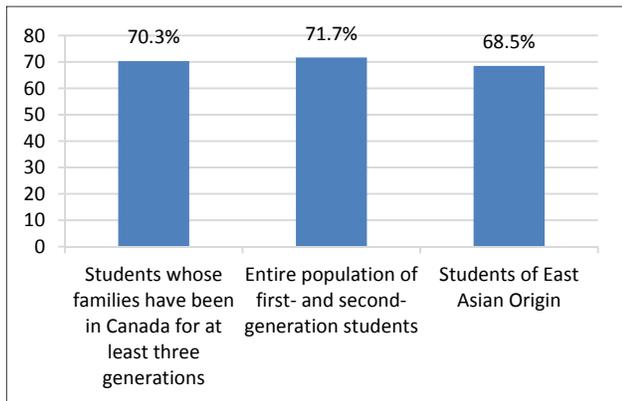
English-speaking secondary school students of East Asian origin were primarily first-generation immigrants (64.6%) - clearly a proportion lower than that of the group of immigrant students taken as a whole (73%). Most of them have, however, attended elementary school in Qué-

bec. Also, English was less frequently their mother tongue or the language commonly used at home (25.8%), in contrast to the experience of those of their peers who were also immigrants. Boys are overrepresented in this group. The socioeconomic profile of their families is particularly favourable. Indeed, they are less represented in the weakest indicators than their peers in the two control groups and slightly more in evidence in the strongest indicator. For the most part, students of East Asian origin entered secondary school at the normal age, but less often than their peers in the two control groups. However, a much higher proportion of these students attend private school. Finally, the majority of them reside on the Island of Montréal, but to a lesser degree than the set of immigrant students taken as a whole.

These characteristics indicate that students of East Asian origin are rather in an advantageous position compared with the set of immigrant students taken as whole. And this holds even when the former are compared with students whose families have been in Canada for at least three generations (both parents born in Canada). However, distinguishing students of East Asian origin by their linguistic characteristics and generational status allows for a more nuanced picture. For example, Chinese-speaking students have a more favourable profile than those of their peers who declare Korean as their mother tongue.

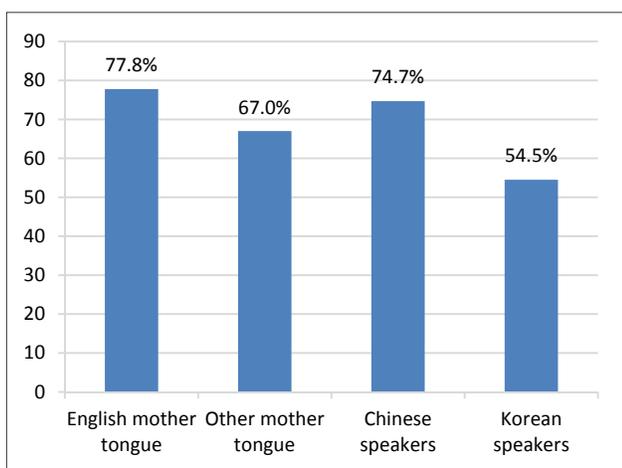
These positive characteristics do not appear to be fully reflected in the academic progress of students of East Asian origin. Indeed, a significant number of them graduate seven years after entering secondary school - which is slightly below the performance of the two control groups. We should say in passing that their net dropout rates are much lower. Keep in mind, however, that this indicator may be influenced by the different rates at which various groups leave Québec.

Graduation rates seven years after the start of secondary school, by ethnocultural characteristics



With regard to linguistic characteristics, students of East Asian origin whose mother tongue is English have a more favourable profile than those with another mother tongue. Within the latter group, the inter-group differences are very pronounced. Indeed, students whose mother tongue is Chinese graduate at much higher rates than their Korean-speaking peers, regardless of the time frame used. As might be expected, dropping out of school is essentially more common among students with a different mother tongue, especially among Korean speakers.

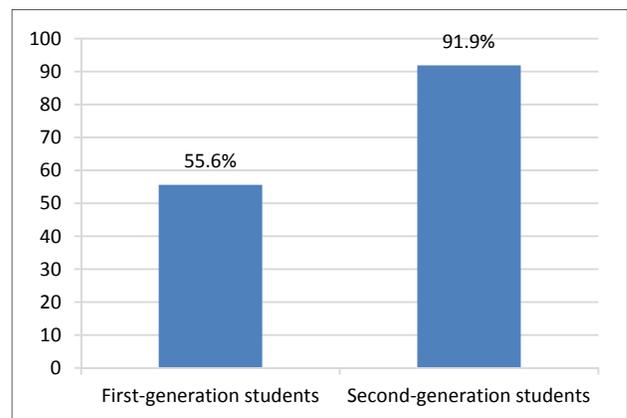
Graduation rates seven years after the start of secondary school, by mother tongue



Turning to the impact of generational status, second-generation students have a markedly more favourable profile. Not only do they

graduate at much higher rates than first-generation students, regardless of the time frame used, but their net dropout rate is less than half of the rate presented by their first-generation peers.

Graduation rates seven years after the start of secondary school, by generational status



The favourable profile of these students also comes through in other indicators. These students opt more frequently to take the Math 536 course and their success rates in it are higher than those of their peers in the two control groups. They are much less frequently identified as students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning disabilities and have lower rates of academic delay in secondary school than all first- and second-generation students combined.

These success rates are explained partially by the generally advantageous socioeconomic status of the families in this community, particularly those that have Chinese speakers and second-generation students. We still need to have a better understanding of why, despite this positive profile, their graduation rate seven years after enrolling in secondary school is lower than those of the control groups.

Linguistic factors probably play a role here. Indeed, for students from this community, the use of English as the mother tongue or as the language most commonly spoken at home is not as frequent as we find in students from other immigrant communities. Still, within this group, students whose mother tongue is English have

higher success rates than speakers of other languages.

The impact of scholastic variables is difficult to evaluate due to its complexity. On the one hand, given that very many East Asian students attend private school or public schools located in affluent areas, one might expect to see them achieve higher success rates. On the other hand, the fact that very few of them have attended elementary school in Québec probably represents an obstacle, but one that the vast majority of them manage to overcome.

Contribution to policies and programs

Through this descriptive profile, research is helping to bring about a better understanding of the educational paths of Québec secondary school students of East Asian origin enrolled in the English school sector, and is contributing ideas beneficial to a community whose educational situation is considered problematic. Based on the research results, we recommend:

- that additional analyses be carried out so that we can have a better understanding of the socio-academic profile of students of East Asian origin in the English sector;
- that qualitative research on the academic success and school retention of these young people be conducted so that we can obtain a better grasp of their characteristics, particularly with regard to the impact of other factors that were not measured in this study, such as the sociocultural capital of the parents, the promotion of education within the families, and the strategies implemented within the community;
- that more studies be conducted to identify the factors that shape the impact of the socioeconomic status of these students' families on their academic progress and performance.

Project

La réussite scolaire des jeunes Québécois issus de l'immigration au secondaire

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Grant organization

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