

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND EXPECTATIONS:  
COMPARISON STUDY BETWEEN IMMIGRANT AND AMERICAN-BORN  
PARENTS**

**Abstract**

Parental involvement and expectations in the education of their children were compared between two groups of parents: American-born parents and immigrant parents. A total of 22 parents of 5<sup>th</sup> graders from two different private schools were involved. One of the schools was located in northeast Plano and the other one was in southeast Addison in Texas. We tried to choose our participants from the same/similar socioeconomic level. The income level of our participants ranged from \$50,000 to \$120,000. Most of our subjects had at least a four year college degree. Around 45.8 % of the subjects had higher education degrees.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, significant research has been done to understand the contextual factors influencing children's school achievement. Parent, teacher, school, and peer factors are identified as the most important factors in success of children (Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg 2001; Ritblat, Beatty, Cronan & Ochoa, 2002). Research supports that strong parent involvement in education is one of the essential factors for cognitive, social-emotional development and so success of children in education (Ritblat et al., 2002).

As the education is one of the most important factors in economic well-being of individuals in today's society, most parents pay close attention to their children's education. However, the level of parental involvement depends on various factors including culture, socio-economic, and personal experience of parents in life. American society is ideal for a comparative study on the effects of parental involvement in their children's success at school (Fuligni, 1997). This is so because the society is composed of individuals and families with a diverse set of cultural and socio-economical backgrounds.

This study classifies the society as American-born and immigrants and compares the effect/role of the American-born parents and the immigrant parents on the success of their children at school. Even though both immigrant parents and American-born parents share many of the same basic goals for their children, such as being well-adjusted, productive and economically self-sufficient in maturity, immigrant parents are different from American-born ones in that their beliefs, values, and experiences originated in the family's original cultural background (Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2002). The purpose of this study is to compare the differences in parental involvement and expectation between the

immigrant parents and the American-born parents on the education of their children. Specifically, this study will use the parents of 5<sup>th</sup> graders because it is at this time that students and their parents begin the transition from elementary to middle school. This study specifically focuses on immigrant parents who came to the United States either to work with their highly educated background or to pursue their education and then decided to stay and live in here. Many immigrants coming to the United States for their education see the education as the only opportunity for their children's success in the future. This is because these immigrant parents have made a major investment to get to their positions compared to the American-born parents (Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2002). First, they immigrated to a foreign country, which is a major investment by itself, and then spent significant effort to become successful in their educational and then professional lives. Even though the American-born parents go through a similar process during their educational and professional lives, they are likely to have the advantage and comfort of being in their home country, having a better understanding of how the system works and what the expectations are and how to meet them in an efficient and effective way, and so forth. In order to observe the differences in parental involvement between the immigrant parents and the American-born parents on the education of their children, this study will include a survey study in two private schools in Plano and Addison in Texas area.

This research is significant in the following way because it will show the difference in parental educational involvement and expectation between American-born and immigrants. Since the parental involvement is an important factor in children success. Lack of this involvement will put the children in a disadvantage position

compare to their peers. This disadvantage should be compensated with extra counseling at schools. In this research we groups students in two categories and compare the level of parental involvement. The result of this study can be used to focus counseling activities according to parental involvement level of the student in equal socioeconomic status of two groups.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Research identifies a number of factors that affect the success of immigrant parents' children including family background, parental involvement/encouragement, family obligation, peer support, students' own attitudes and behaviors as being effective on the success of the children in school (Fuligni, 1997). This study mainly focuses on the effect of family background and socioeconomic status on the success of the children in school.

The Family School Relationships Model is used to show what features of the family enhance the school success of the students. According to this model, family has the most immediate connection to school success and has the greatest influence (Ryan & Adams, 1998). Nevertheless, there is a difference between the immigrant families and American-born families in their perceptions of the value of schooling. Immigrant parents place a greater emphasis upon educational success regardless of their country of origin compared to American-born parents even with the same ethnic and socioeconomic background (Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2002). One of the reasons is that the act of immigration influences parental goals and behaviors toward their children by supplying the need to make them do well in school (Fuligni, 1997). Socioeconomic status of some immigrant families plays an important role in the academic performance of their children.

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Research indicates that students from immigrant parents having high educational levels and occupational status are much more successful than students from immigrant parents having lower socioeconomic status (Fuligni, 1997). In other words, there is a variability among immigrant parents upon the importance of studying and doing well in school due to the socioeconomic background of the parents themselves. Parents, having a high socioeconomic status, come to United States to seek greater professional opportunity. They attain higher earnings, become employed in higher level jobs and know to recognize the child's own academic achievement. Therefore, the economic and educational standing of these families has a powerful impact on their children's success in school.

In addition to the differences among immigrant families with different socioeconomic backgrounds, research indicates that there are differences in achievement of children from immigrant and American-born parents in academic success (Fuligni, 1997; Mau, 1997). "Students from immigrant families receive higher grades than those with native-born parents in both their mathematics and English courses" (Fuligni, 1997, p. 360). One of the reasons for this difference is that immigrant parents believe that education is the most important way for their children to improve their status in life. Many of these parents encourage their children to try and overcome the difficulties they may face in school and benefit from the educational opportunities in the United States which, in their perception, is superior to those available in their home countries (Fuligni, 1997). Another reason for this difference is related to a common belief among many families. Many people believe that innate ability is an important factor for the success of the children in school. In a recent comparative study between American-born parents and

Asian immigrant parents, it is found that this believe is more common in American-born parents (Elliott & Bempechat, 2002). On the other hand, Asian immigrant parents believe in the importance of the effort invested in education for school achievement (Elliot & Bempechat, 2002). As a result, children from these immigrant families spend more time doing their homework at home and spend less time on extracurricular activities whereas American students spend more time on extracurricular activities and do their homework at school (Mau, 1997). Overall, the encouragement and aspirations of immigrant parents are important ways that can influence their children's education (Fuligni, 1997).

Research states that parental involvement in education is strongly related to cognitive and social-emotional development, attendance and success in school, and positive attitudes toward education in children (Ritblatt et al., 2002). Parental involvement which provides encouragement, support, and direct instruction at home as well as maintains good communications with school improves students' school achievement (Mau, 1997). In addition, research shows that a family's socioeconomic level affects parent involvement in education (Ritblatt et al., 2002). For example, parents with low socioeconomic status involve in education less than parents with higher socioeconomic status (Reagor & Rehm, 1995).

There are some ethical differences in the issue of family obligation, although adolescents from immigrant and American-born families share many of the same ideas regarding their familial duties (Fuligni, 2001). For example, Asian and Latin American students are more likely to believe that they should assist, support, and respect the family and take into account the wishes of the family when making decisions about their own

lives (Fuligni, 2001). In particular, Asian and Latin American families often immigrate to the United States with the goal of providing their children with better opportunities such as pursuing education. Students from these immigrant families tend to place more value on the importance of education and going to colleges for their higher education than their equally achieving European and American peers (Fuligni, 2001). This is mainly because they view school success as one of the most important ways that they can support and honor their families. In summary, familial duty and obligation are the factors that effect the students' motivation toward schooling.

The role of peers in the academic achievement of children and adolescents has been indicated in Viadero (2003) and Hoover (2003). Peer support may especially be important for students from immigrant families. This is because their families are often unfamiliar with the educational system in United States (Fuligni, 1997). The other reason might be that their parents are not comfortable with speaking English. So, students from these immigrant families obtain encouragement and support for their educational achievements from their friends. They study together and help each other with various school works.

Students' own attitudes and behaviors regarding education are other factors that affect the success in school. Regardless of ethnic background, students from immigrant families put a strong focus on education that is supported by their parents and peers. These students give a higher value to educational success; spend more time and effort on academic endeavors than their American-born peers (Fuligni, 1997).

METHOD

Participants

Participants for this study were the families of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students from two private schools. All 24 participating parents are from mid-income families (\$50,001-\$80,000) to upper income families (more than \$120,000) in two different private schools, an urban area in the northeast of Plano, and an urban area in the southeast of Addison in Texas. Table 1 provides the gender, education level and family income for two groups of parents respectively:

**Table 1: Parent Characteristics**

| <b>5th Grader Parents</b> | <b>n</b> | <b>American-born Parents<br/>% of sample</b> | <b>n</b> | <b>Immigrant Parents<br/>% of sample</b> |
|---------------------------|----------|--|----------|--|
| <b>Gender</b>             |          |  |          |  |
| Female                    | 8        | 66.60  | 6        | 50.00                                    |
| Male                      | 4        | 33.30  | 6        | 50.00                                    |
| <b>Education</b>          |          |  |          |  |
| High school               | 1        | 8.30   |          |  |
| 2-year college            | 2        | 16.66  |          |  |
| BA/ BS degree             | 8        | 66.66  | 2        | 16.66                                    |
| MA degree                 | 1        | 8.30   | 2        | 16.66                                    |
| PhD                       |          |  | 8        | 66.00                                    |
| NA                        |          |  |          |  |
| <b>Family income</b>      |          |  |          |  |
| Up to \$50,000            |          |  |          |  |
| \$ 50,0001-\$80,000       | 8        | 66.66  | 3        | 25.00                                    |
| \$80,001- \$120,000       | 2        | 16.66  | 5        | 41.66                                    |
| \$120,000 and up          | 2        | 16.66  | 2        | 16.66                                    |
| No response               |          |  | 2        | 16.66                                    |



### Instruments

A questionnaire was prepared and either given or mailed to participating parents. In the first part of the questionnaire, demographic questions were asked, including: gender, nationality, family income, level of education for both parents. Parents' socioeconomic status was based on the participating parent's education and the family income. Parental education was ranged from 1 (did not finish high school) to 7 (Non-applicable/NA). Income level ranged from 1 (less than \$50,000) to 4 (more than \$120,000).

Parental educational involvement was measured according to statements: I feel the need to remind my child about his/her homework. I feel the need to check my child's homework. I feel the need to help my child with his/ her homework. A 5-point response scale was used as quantitative values to measure their responses (5=always, 4=often, 3=sometimes, 2=rarely, 1=never) (Gay& Airasian, 2000).

Parental educational expectations were measured according to statements: It is important that: my child is doing well in school, getting good grades, going to college after high school, getting an A on almost every test, being one of the best students in his/her class and going to the best college after high school. A 5-point response scale was used (1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=undecided, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree). Moreover, a question was asked to learn parental expectation: Do you think your child is learning enough in school? Responses and coding were yes (1), no (0). The last question in the questionnaire was also related with parental expectation. Parents were asked to rank the following from the most important (1) to the least important (3): I would like my child to participate in more extracurricular activities in: Sports, Academics, Art.

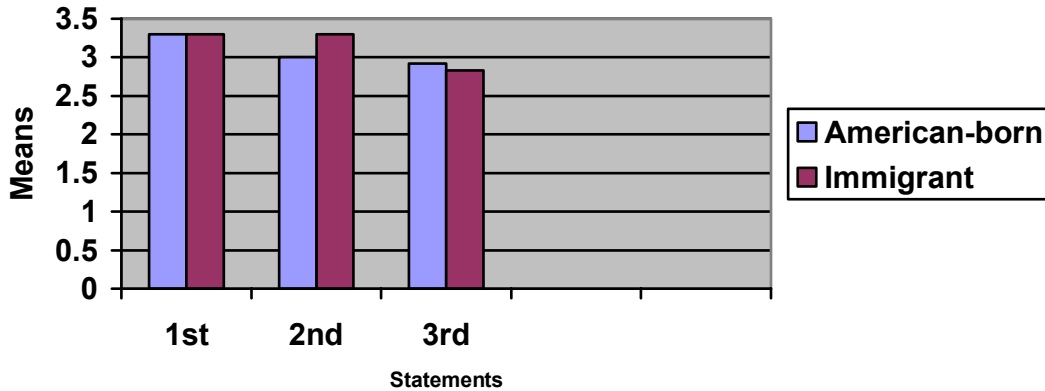
## Results

Sixty-eight questionnaires were sent or given to three different private schools but one of the schools did not participate. Twelve out of twenty four questionnaires from one school and twelve out of twenty questionnaires from other school were returned. Totally, Calculation of twenty-four questionnaires was done after grouping the questionnaires according to parents as American-born or immigrant.

Fifty percent of the participants were American-born and 66.7% of them had Bachelor of Art or Bachelor of Science degree. The rest of the parents (50%) were immigrant and 66% of them had a doctorate degree. Except for one of the participants, all got their master's or doctorate degree in USA.

The following part of the questionnaire was related to parental educational involvement at home. The Figure 1 shows the parental educational involvement. The mean values of the statements were calculated after converting them into numerical values. Both American-born and immigrant parents had the same mean (3.3) for the first statement which is "I feel the need to remind my child about his/her homework". As it is discussed above, 3 means "sometimes" and 4 means "often" in our scale. The second statement was that "I feel the need to check my child's homework". In this one, immigrant parents had the mean of 3.3 and American-born parents had the mean of 3. A last statement was that "I feel the need to help my child with his/her homework". The mean of American-born parents was 2.92 and that of immigrant parents was 2.83.

Figure 1: Parental Educational Involvement



Parental educational expectation was calculated for both groups. Table 2 shows the statements and the mean value of each statement in each group of parents. According to this table, both groups of parents have the same and the smallest value of standard deviation which is 0 for statement 3. This means that there was no variation of the parents' answers; all the answers were the same within the groups.

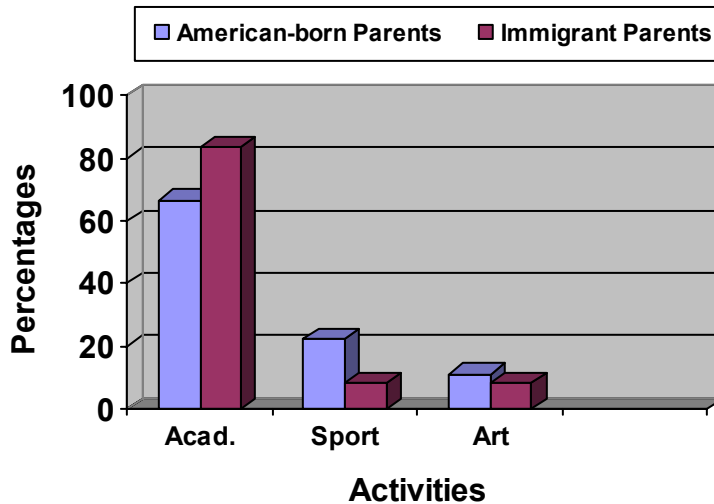
Table 2 Statements and Values for the Parental Educational Expectation for Both Groups

| # | Statements                                      | American-born Parents |       | Immigrant Parents |       |
|---|---|-----------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|
|   |   | Mean                  | Stdev | Mean              | Stdev |
| 1 | Doing well in school                            | 1.16                  | 0.39  | 1.25              | 0.45  |
| 2 | Getting good grades                             | 1.18                  | 0.41  | 1.25              | 0.45  |
| 3 | Going to college after high school              | 1                     | 0     | 1                 | 0     |
| 4 | Getting an A on almost every test               | 2.42                  | 1.38  | 1.75              | 0.75  |
| 5 | Being one of the best students in his/her class | 2.5                   | 1.51  | 1.66              | 0.88  |
| 6 | Going to the best college after high school     | 2.83                  | 1.19  | 1.75              | 0.75  |

The last part in the questionnaire was related to parental educational expectation. The results in Figure 2 show that 66.6% of the American-born parents wanted their kids to participate in the academics extracurricular activities. On the other hand, the percentage of the immigrant parents was 83.33. Both percentages of the sport and art expectations for immigrant parents for extracurricular activities were 8.33. Sport, in the American-

born parents, was ranked as a second extracurricular activity with the percentages of 22.2 and art was 11.1% as a third one.

**Figure 2: The extracurricular activities**



## CONCLUSION

Like many other studies, this study has its own limitations. The number of the participants for this study was smaller than expected. In addition, there was a difference between the educational levels of the parents in two groups. A potential future work in this study can involve a larger set of participants. In this study we targeted upper middle income families. A similar study can be conducted on families with a different income level. Another future direction would be to collect information about the success level of students and study the relation between student success and parental involvement and expectation.

In this study we have compared the parental involvement and expectation levels between American-born and immigrant parents. For this comparison, we prepared a survey with three sections: (1) Demographics, (2) Parental involvement and (3) Parental expectation. According to parental involvement section, there is no significant difference

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in the involvement of parents. On the other hand, we observed some differences on the level of parental expectation between the two groups. The last three statements in this group show the high parental aspiration /expectation. According to statistics for these three statements, immigrant parents have high expectation from their children. This result supports the findings of a previous study which states that parents' expectation for their children's educational success has the strongest relationship with students' academic achievement (Fan& Chen, 2001).

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APPENDIX A

CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL ATTITUDE QUESTIONNAIRE

As a student in a graduate research class, I am interested in this information to study the affect that culture and educational attitude have on the success of children. I have chosen 5<sup>th</sup> grade because it is at this time that students and their parents begin the transition from elementary to middle school.

All information will remain confidential with demographic information used for statistical analysis only.

**Please complete the following:**

Female: \_\_\_\_\_ Male: \_\_\_\_\_

In which country were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

In which country did you go to high school? \_\_\_\_\_

In which country did you go to college? \_\_\_\_\_

Your annual household income is (please check one):

- less than \$50,000     \$50,001- \$80,000     \$80,001- \$120,000     more than \$120,000

Education level (please check one for each parent):

Father

- did not finish high school
- finished high school
- graduated from a 2-year college
- has bachelors degree
- has master degree
- has PhD
- N/A

Mother

- did not finish high school
- finished high school
- graduated from a 2-year college
- has bachelors degree
- has master degree
- has PhD
- N/A



Parental Involvement and Expectations:

Please check the level of the following statements as it applies best to you:

|   |   | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
|---|---|--------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|
| 1 | I feel the need to remind my child about his/her homework |        |       |           |        |       |
| 2 | I feel the need to check my child's homework              |        |       |           |        |       |
| 3 | I feel the need to help my child with his/her homework    |        |       |           |        |       |

Please check the level of the following statements according to appropriateness to you for your child. It is important that my child is:

|   |   | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | Doing well in school                            |                |       |           |          |                   |
| 2 | Getting good grades                             |                |       |           |          |                   |
| 3 | Going to college after high school              |                |       |           |          |                   |
| 4 | Getting an A on almost every test               |                |       |           |          |                   |
| 5 | Being one of the best students in his/her class |                |       |           |          |                   |
| 6 | Going to the best college after high school     |                |       |           |          |                   |

Do you think your child is learning enough in school?    Yes \_\_\_    No \_\_\_

Why?

Please rank the following from the **most** important (1) to the **least** important (3):

I would like my child to participate in more extracurricular activities in

- \_\_\_ Sports
- \_\_\_ Academics
- \_\_\_ Art

Thank you for participating in this survey.

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