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Leiden
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Acculturation, adaptation and multiculturalism among immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education

Geel, M. van

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1. General introduction

Introduction

The chapters in this book deal with the adaptation of immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education in the Netherlands. The concept of adaptation refers to how well persons are doing. It is a multifaceted phenomenon. Ward (1996) distinguishes two kinds of adaptation: *psychological* and *sociocultural*. *Psychological adaptation* refers to characteristics that are internal to the individual: good mental health (i.e., few *psychological problems* of anxiety, depression and psychosomatic symptoms); and a high sense of well-being (i.e., *self-esteem and life satisfaction*). *Sociocultural adaptation* refers to the quality of the relationships between individuals and their sociocultural contexts. It is mostly examined in terms of persons' attitudes toward and success in school or work, and lack of problem behaviors in their community, in short social adjustment. In this thesis adaptation is primarily considered as an outcome of acculturation processes. Acculturation has been defined as those phenomena that result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936).

In the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century many (mainly North-American scholars) were rather pessimistic about acculturation and the outcomes. They no longer believed in the notion that time could wash away all stain and pain as for example argued by Gordon (1964). Instead, Berry, Kim, Minde and Mok (1987) argued that the processes of immigration and acculturation were inherently stressful. Aronowitz (1984) provided a review of literature and concluded that immigrant children were vulnerable in terms of adaptation because of acculturation conflicts with their parents. In general, on the basis of the studies and writings from the seventies and eighties one would expect that immigrant adolescents would experience more behavioral and psychological problems, perform worse in school, and experience lower self-esteem.

We propose that present-day immigrant adolescents in the Netherlands also have to cope with acculturation stress. Moreover, these adolescents live under relatively poor socio-economic conditions (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008) and growing up under poor socio-economic conditions has been found to lead to poor adaptation among children (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; McLoyd, 1998). The specific group that we focus on, immigrant students in junior vocational high schools, may fare even worse because they lack perspective needed to change their socioeconomic situation. In short, based on the findings from mainly North-American studies in the latter decades of the 20th century and given their socioeconomic situation we might expect immigrant adolescents to experience adaptation problems in the Netherlands.

Despite the fact that immigrants often live under poor socio-economic conditions, later studies indicate that migration does not necessarily result in poor adaptation outcomes. Thus theories are needed to explain variability in adaptation outcomes among immigrant adolescents.

Berry (1997) stresses the importance of individual and group factors in explaining adaptation outcomes among immigrants. More recently, the notion that the context in which immigrants live and operate plays an important role in explaining adaptation outcomes has gained ground (Birman, Trickett, & Buchanan, 2005; Vedder, 2004).

The main questions that will be addressed in this thesis concern the adaptation of immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education in the Netherlands. The focus of the thesis is on describing the pattern of adaptation for these adolescents, as well as on conditions that are conducive to immigrant adolescents' adaptation. We use psychological problems, self-esteem and behavioral problems as indicators of immigrant adolescents' adaptation. We hope to increase our understanding of immigrant adolescents who live in relatively poor socio-economic circumstances as well as to validate and further refine theoretical frameworks, explaining the effects of immigration on adolescents. In the remainder of this chapter the theories that will be used throughout this book will be introduced, but first we devote our attention to the context in which the immigrant adolescents in this study experience their acculturation process.

Junior vocational education

The Dutch educational system, at least at the secondary level, is a highly diversified and selective system of hierarchically ordered school types or educational tracks. Three main tracks of secondary education are distinguished, namely the VMBO, the HAVO and the VWO. The VMBO, or junior vocational high school is the lowest educational track, provided that students do not repeat grades, it takes four years to complete. The VMBO itself has a hierarchical structure in that it distinguishes four streams or sections that vary in the extent to which they academically challenge the students. The VMBO prepares students for intermediate vocational education, but it does not qualify them for a profession. The intermediate vocational training that follows after the VMBO can prepare students for a wide array of professions, including nursing, plumbing, carpentry and bookkeeping. The specific VMBO track completed by the students and their achievements in the track are decisive for their eligibility for the type and level of training they can apply for in subsequent intermediate vocational education. Only the highest level of the VMBO grants a student permission to continue studies in the second of the three broad school types or tracks which is referred to as the HAVO, or school of higher general secondary education. HAVO is a five year track and prepares students for higher vocational education or the VWO, pre-university education. VWO is a six year track preparing students for university. Which school type students attend following primary school is largely determined by their earlier school performance, and particularly by the results on a national test at the end of the final grade in primary school. Eligibility to a school type or track is defined in terms of score ranges on this test; low scoring children may attend a VMBO only.

In the Netherlands there is an overrepresentation of immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education. Moreover, relatively high rates of students drop out of this school type (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Dropping out of school in the Netherlands increases the risk of

delinquency and unemployment of youths (Scientific Advisory Board for Government Policy, 2009). For immigrant adolescents the situation is especially troublesome, not only is there a low representation of immigrant adolescents in the higher educational tracks, in junior vocational education immigrant adolescents perform worse than their national peers attending the same school. Compared to their national peers they receive lower grades and drop out of junior vocational education more often. The poor performance of immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education has been attributed to a relatively low socio-economic status and poor Dutch language skills (Herweijer, 2009). There are no empirical studies about the acculturation preferences and experiences of immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education in the Netherlands, and about how these acculturation preferences and experiences relate to the students' adaptation. The Netherlands participated in the International Comparative Study of EthnoCultural Youth (ICSEY; Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006) with 43.3% of the immigrant adolescents enrolled in junior vocational education (the other participants were all enrolled in higher educational tracks). In the ICSEY study, the subsample of immigrant youth in junior vocational education was not compared to the immigrant youth in the higher educational tracks, nor were separate analyses ran for the subsample in junior vocational education. The challenges of acculturation may be particularly difficult for immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education, as statistics suggest that, compared to the national adolescents, immigrant adolescents have trouble succeeding in education. And even when successful, junior vocational education offers relatively poor chances for upward mobility when compared to higher academic tracks. In the following sections theories are presented to help explain patterns of acculturation and adaptation among immigrant adolescents.

Immigrant paradox

In many countries immigrants live under poorer socioeconomic conditions than the national population and lack the opportunities to improve their economic position (Hernandez & Darke, 1999; Zhou, 1997a, b). This trend is also seen in the Netherlands: regardless of cultural group or ethnicity, immigrants are more likely to be unemployed, earn lower wages and have a higher chance of receiving welfare than Dutch nationals (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008). One might expect immigrant adolescents to have poor patterns of adaptation, as a poor socio-economic status is considered risky for children's development (cf., Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; McLoyd, 1998). Surprisingly, however, ample research has found that immigrant adolescents perform as well as, or even better than their national contemporaries in terms of some areas of adaptation. Immigrant adolescents in the United States perform better in terms of school, mental health, behavioral and physical problems, and are less likely to engage in risky behavior like drug abuse when compared with national adolescents (Blake, Ledsky, Goodenow, & O'Donnell, 2001; Fuligni, 1997; Harris, 2000; Steinberg, 1996). Furthermore, first generation immigrants have been found to adapt better than second generation immigrants, who regress to the mean of the nationals (Beiser, Hou, Hyman,

& Tousignant 2002; Harker, 2001). This suggests that further assimilation into the national society does not promote better adaptation outcomes.

The finding that immigrants perform better than nationals in terms of adaptation, even though their socio-economic situation is less favorable has been labeled ‘immigrant paradox’ (Hayes-Bautista, 2004; Garcia-Coll, 2005). Sam, Vedder, Liebkind, Neto, and Virta (2008) identified three criteria for defining the immigrant paradox: Immigrant adolescents score higher on measures of adaptation than national adolescents, the first generation of immigrants show a better adaptation than the second generation of immigrants, and over time the adaptation of immigrant adolescents declines or converges towards the level of adaptation of the national adolescents. Using these criteria they were only able to find mixed support for an immigrant paradox across five European countries. Lower educated adolescents were underrepresented in their study. In the second chapter of this book we shall address the question whether and to what extent the adaptation of immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education in the Netherlands resembles an immigrant paradox.

The acculturation of immigrant adolescents

Immigrants experience acculturation as the consequence of contacts with different cultures and cultural groups. For both first and second generation immigrant adolescents the home situation will provide a link with the ethnic culture while contacts outside the home situation likely provide a link with the national culture. In older literature, acculturation is described as a linear process: As time passes immigrants lose more of their ethnic culture and ultimately become members of the host society (Gordon, 1964). However, this model fails to explain why certain ethnic groups never lose particular parts of their ethnic culture, for example the Turks in Western Europe, who hold on to their ethnic language as the preferred language at home (Extra & Yagmur, 2009) or the African Americans who cherish their African American identities and traditions, even after centuries in the United States (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Gans (1992) argued that the linear approach could never explain such phenomena and instead argued for a bumpy line approach with no predictable end to the acculturation process.

Although the bumpy line approach arguably gives a better representation of the acculturation process it fails to explain how the acculturation process relates to the adaptation of immigrants. A theory that links acculturation to adaptation is the theory of segmented assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 1994; Zhou, 1997a). These scholars distinguish three main trajectories of acculturation and propose that, in order to understand the outcomes of acculturation, it is important to consider the contexts or settings into which immigrants are assimilating. The classical path of linear assimilation (eg., Gordon, 1964) is related to success for those immigrants who arrive in the middle or upper classes of society. They will assimilate into favorable conditions with many opportunities for favorable development. However most immigrants will experience poverty and live in poor neighborhoods, thus assimilating into the lower segments of society (Hernandez & Darke, 1999). Immigrant adolescents in the lower segments of society face a socio-

economic setback and have poor chances for upward mobility (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Furthermore, they have to deal with experiences of discrimination and prejudice (Berry et al., 2006). This is associated with the adaptation into youth subcultures oppositional to the national culture. Peer pressure and poor prospects for improvement of their socio-economic status may explain the poor adaptation of immigrant adolescents in these subcultures. However, immigrant families can promote a successful adaptation among immigrant adolescents when facing poor socio-economic conditions.

The immigrant families that follow a trajectory of selective assimilation may be successful under poor socio-economic conditions if they encourage their children to assimilate only to those aspects or parts of the new society that will help them to succeed, like school culture and national language proficiency, but in all other aspects these families endeavor to transmit their ethnic culture to their children. Especially important to immigrant adolescents' success are the strong bonds within the ethnic community and the strong sense of family obligations (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997a, b).

Perhaps the most well-known theory of acculturation is Berry's bidimensional model of acculturation (1997, 2005). The bidimensional model of acculturation explicitly takes personal choice about the acculturation process into account. Cultural maintenance and adaptation to the host culture are treated as separate uncorrelated dimensions, that is, an immigrants' choice for cultural maintenance and the choice for adaptation to the host society are completely independent. According to this model, immigrants have to answer two questions in order to decide their acculturation strategy: "Do I want to maintain my heritage culture?" and "Do I want to adapt to the majority culture?" Assuming that these questions can only be answered by yes or no, the answers to these questions lead to four different acculturation preferences. Immigrants who wish to adapt to the majority culture and maintain ties with their own culture prefer integration. Immigrants who want to adapt to the majority culture and discard their own culture prefer assimilation or a national orientation. Immigrants who wish to maintain their own culture and refrain from adapting to the majority culture prefer separation or an ethnic orientation. Finally, immigrants who want to neither adapt to the majority culture nor maintain their own culture prefer marginalization or are simply diffuse. The bidimensional model of acculturation has been used in many studies concerning the acculturation and adaptation of immigrants and often integration was found to be the most beneficial acculturation strategy in terms of well-being (e.g., Berry, 1997; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Neto, 2002).

Despite its widespread use, the bidimensional model of acculturation has also been criticized. Rudmin (2003) stated that the use of typologies leads to an excessive focus on personality variables to explain the acculturation of immigrants, whereas contextual variables may be equally or even more important to understand the acculturation process. Furthermore, Rudmin argues that the bidimensional model is plagued by a logical fault as two dimensions should lead to sixteen instead of four possible acculturation strategies. This argument is expanded by examples of

acculturation strategies that are not captured by the fourfold model. As the bidimensional model of acculturation reduces the acculturation process into four typologies it is deemed by Rudmin to be overly simplistic and useless in the study of acculturation.

Because of its success in explaining adaptation outcomes, and its emphasis on personal choice, the bidimensional model of acculturation is used in this study. However, by no means does the bidimensional model of acculturation completely describe the acculturation process of immigrant adolescents, nor was it intended to do so. To acquire a more complete understanding of the acculturation and adaptation of immigrant adolescents we shall also focus on variables derived from the theory of segmented assimilation, as well as variables referring to specific aspects of the acculturation process.

Perhaps the acculturation variable most strongly related to the adaptation of immigrants is perceived discrimination. Many studies link perceived discrimination to unfavorable adaptation outcomes. Because direct instances of discrimination may be hard to pinpoint or remember, many scholars prefer to assess how discriminated a person feels. This particular scope or aspect of discrimination has been labelled 'perceived discrimination'. In many studies perceived discrimination has been found related to behavioural and psychological problems in immigrant adolescents (Berry et al., 2006; Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001; Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Solheim, 2004; Paradies, 2006; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003).

National and ethnic friendships and national and ethnic language proficiency will also be included in the design. The theory of segmented assimilation highlights ethnic networks and national language proficiency as important aspects in explaining the success of selective assimilation. There are not many empirical studies that relate ethnic or national friendships and national or ethnic language proficiency to adaptation. However, ethnic language proficiency has been found exert a positive influence on school adaptation and life satisfaction, and is related to fewer behavioral problems (Vedder & Virta, 2005). National language proficiency has been found to be related to fewer school problems (Gil & Vega, 1996), psychological problems (Birman, Trickett, & Vinokurov, 2002; Vedder, 2005) and behavioral problems (Vega, Khoury, Gil, Zimmerman, & Wahrheit, 1995). It has been found that immigrants who frequently have positive contact with nationals experience less psychological problems (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Jaakkola, & Reuter, 2006).

Finally, we shall use family obligations in order to explain adaptation among immigrants. As many non-western immigrants come from collectivistic cultures they often have a strong sense of family obligations (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Vedder, Berry, Sabatier, & Sam, 2009). In the theory of segmented assimilation a strong sense of family obligations is a key factor in the success of selective assimilation. Many researchers argue that it is through strong bonds within the family that adolescents form attitudes that help them to achieve their success (Fuligni, 1998; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Immigrant adolescents who feel indebted and

responsible to their families will avoid behavior that brings shame to their families and will work hard in school to ensure a positive future for their families.

By using elements from the bidimensional model of acculturation, as well as elements from the theory of segmented assimilation, we aim to provide an adequate description of immigrant adolescents' acculturation and its relation to their adaptation. The acculturation of immigrant adolescents and its relation to their adaptation is addressed in chapters three and four. Chapter three uses a wide array of variables but has a strong focus on the bidimensional model of acculturation. The theoretical framework of chapter four is based on the theory of segmented assimilation, and focuses on how family obligations and school adaptation predict immigrant adolescents' adaptation.

Classroom context

In the fifth chapter of this book we divert our attention from acculturation and adaptation to another important aspect of immigration, namely the support for immigration in the classroom environment. With a flow of immigrants that can only be expected to increase in the future (Suarez-Orozco, 2001) it is important to understand how immigrant adolescents are adapting and which factors affect their adaptation. Such understanding might help to ensure a positive development among these adolescents. In order to ensure a positive development among immigrant adolescents, as well as among national adolescents facing ethnic heterogeneity, it is important to ensure that positive contact between nationals and immigrants is experienced. There are theories that suggest that if there are fundamental differences between nationals and immigrants concerning the preferred acculturation strategy conflicting relationships may arise (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997; Piontkowski, Rohmann, & Florack, 2002). These theories suggest that a congruent attitude towards acculturation is necessary in order to ensure harmonious relations between nationals and immigrants, meaning that the attitude preferred by the immigrants is supported or respected by the nationals. Chapter 5 focuses on one particular attitude, multiculturalism. There are various definitions of the term 'multiculturalism'. In this book we use a definition inspired by Parekh (2002) and Berry and Kalin (1995): a notion stressing equal opportunities and minimizing discrimination as well as the conviction that the access to other cultures enriches one's own life. Nationwide, the support for multiculturalism in the Netherlands is fading (Arends-Toth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998), but less is known about the support for multiculturalism amongst youth in junior vocational education. The benefits associated with multiculturalism for immigrants are easy to see, as most immigrant adolescents prefer an acculturation strategy that includes cultural maintenance (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006), which has been shown to be conducive to positive adaptation (Berry, 1997; Neto, 2002; Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Empirical evidence that nationals benefit from holding a multicultural attitude is scarce; however Tatar and Horenczyk (2003) found that when it comes to dealing with ethnic diversity in the classroom, teachers benefit from a multicultural attitude. Those teachers who embraced

multiculturalism more strongly reported fewer feelings of stress as a consequence of ethnic diversity in their classroom. The fifth chapter in this book deals with predictors of multiculturalism among adolescents, both national and immigrant, in junior vocational education.

General method

To gather data questionnaires were used. For the most part questionnaires were used that were validated in previous studies. The questionnaires were administered to students during class under the supervision of a teacher and a research assistant. There were two waves of data collection of which the first took place during the school year 2007-2008 and the second during the school year 2008-2009. Twenty-six classes across four schools participated in the first wave of data collection and 27 classes across eight schools participated in the second wave of data collection. No school that participated in the first wave of data collection participated in the second wave of data collection. All schools were situated in the highly urbanized western part of the Netherlands. The same questionnaires were used to measure adaptation and socio-economic status across both waves of data collection. Thus for the second chapter in this book (concerning immigrant paradox) both waves of the data collection were combined. For the third chapter the first wave of data was used. For the fourth and fifth chapter the second wave of data was used. However, in the fifth chapter three classes were omitted from the data analysis because in these schools many students were absent when the surveys were administered. In the fifth chapter variables at a classroom level are analyzed, and as such (nearly) complete classes are necessary to obtain valid indicators.

Summary and main research questions

Compared to national adolescents in the Netherlands, immigrant adolescents are more often in lower educational tracks, have a lower socio-economic status and have to cope with their minority status. First, we study how these immigrant adolescents fare in terms of adaptation. Do their poor living conditions make for poor adaptation results or is their adaptation best described by an immigrant paradox? This is discussed in the second chapter. In the third and fourth chapters we aim to explain the pattern of adaptation among immigrant adolescents in terms of acculturation. In the third chapter we employ a broad focus using several variables often found to be related to the adaptation of immigrant adolescents. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the acculturation of immigrant adolescents and its relation to their adaptation. Although several variables are used and the segmented assimilation theory (Portes & Zhou, 1993) is discussed, this chapter has a strong focus on the bidimensional model of acculturation (Berry, 1997; 2005). The fourth chapter is also aimed at the explanation of immigrant adolescents' adaptation but has a stronger focus on the theory of segmented assimilation. Using an array of variables and different theoretical frameworks we aim to provide a thorough explanation of immigrant adolescents' adaptation. The last chapter deviates considerably from chapter two through four because the focus shifts away from adaptation. This chapter is based on notions that a successful adaptation and acculturation are dependent on the

environment in which immigrant adolescents are received (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997; Piontkowski, Rohmann, & Florack, 2002). As such in the fifth chapter multiculturalism is argued to be an attitude that helps to create positive interethnic relations. Moreover, predictors for multiculturalism at the individual and classroom level are assessed. The following research questions guide our studies:

1. What characterizes the way immigrant adolescents in the lower educational tracks are adapting?
2. What characterizes the way immigrant adolescents in the lower educational tracks are acculturating?
3. How is the acculturation of immigrant adolescents in the lower educational related to their adaptation?
4. How are classroom and individual level variables related to multiculturalism in junior vocational education?