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Leiden  
The Netherlands

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

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### **Citation**

Geel, M. van. (2009, December 9). *Acculturation, adaptation and multiculturalism among immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/14496>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

## 2. The adaptation of immigrant and national students in the Netherlands: an immigrant paradox?

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*This chapter addresses the possible existence of an immigrant paradox in a sample of immigrant adolescents attending junior vocational education. First generation immigrants show a more positive pattern of adaptation than nationals despite poorer economic conditions. Second generation immigrants regress to the nationals in terms of adaptation. This counterintuitive finding has been labeled 'the immigrant paradox'. Using the theory of segmented assimilation it is argued that an immigrant paradox is likely to occur when chances for economic mobility are suboptimal, as is the case for immigrant adolescents attending junior vocational education. A sample of 152 first generation immigrant adolescents, 285 second generation immigrant adolescents, and 406 nationals self-report about socio-economic status, psychological problems, behavioral problems and self-esteem. Results indicate support for an immigrant paradox indicating that increased assimilation does not necessarily lead to increased well being.*

## Introduction

Over the past decades many countries in the western world have received a steady influx of immigrants. In most of these countries immigrants now make up a sizeable portion of the total population. Immigration has been argued to be an inherently stressful process (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). Migration may be stressful due to the loss of friends and family left behind, the burden of learning a new language and new cultural ways, finding new jobs and creating a new social network as well as being confronted with experiences of discrimination. Aronowitz (1984) argued that migration might lead to psychological and behavioral problems and that identity crises experienced by immigrant children, as well as acculturation conflicts with parents explained the poorer adaptation of immigrant children.

However, more recent studies have come to portray a more positive aspect of immigrant adolescents. Fuligni (1998) argues that immigrant children are doing remarkably well in terms of school achievement and psychological adaptation when compared to their national contemporaries. Such success is attributed to immigrants' sense of obligation to their families and their dedication towards school work. Because immigrant adolescents feel indebted to their parents who made many personal sacrifices to come to the new country, and because they feel a good education will allow them to help their parents in the future, immigrant adolescents show a remarkable motivation to do well in school (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Because of their strong sense of family obligations, immigrant adolescents are unlikely to do things that would ruin their family's reputation, such as engaging in delinquency. Indeed, there is now a plethora of studies indicating that immigrant adolescents do not fare worse than national adolescents and may even do better in terms of adaptation (eg., Harker, 2001).

In a study conducted among 20,000 immigrant adolescents in the United States first and second generation immigrant adolescents were found to be less likely to engage in delinquent and violent acts, to use drugs or alcohol, or to be in poor health than national adolescents (Harris, 2000). The pattern of lower substance abuse for immigrant adolescents relative to nationals has been found in additional studies (Blake, Ledskey, Goodenow, & O'Donnell, 2001; Brindis, Wolfe, McCarter, Ball, & Starbuck-Morales, 1995; Vega, Gil, & Zimmerman, 1993). Also, the school adaptation of immigrant adolescents in the United States has been found to be superior to that of nationals, with immigrant adolescents spending more time on school work and receiving better results than nationals (Fuligni, 1997; Kao & Tienda, 1995). Similar results have been reported for psychological well-being. Immigrant adolescents in the United States have been found to score lower on self-reported measures of psychosomatic symptoms and psychological distress than nationals (Steinberg, 1996), and have been found to have self-esteem equal to that of national adolescents (Kao, 1999). The positive adaptation outcomes among immigrant adolescents are even more remarkable when their disadvantaged position is taken into account. Children from immigrant families are more likely to live in poverty in overcrowded houses, and may have parents who are less fluent in the

national language. Furthermore, immigrant children have to deal with experiences of discrimination and often have poor chances for improvement of their economic situation (Beiser, Hou, Hyman, & Tousignant, 2002; Hernandez & Darke, 1999; Zhou, 1997b). It is curious then, that immigrant children perform better than their national peers in terms of adaptation, as low socio-economic status has been reported to have a negative impact on child development (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; McLoyd, 1998).

First generation immigrants seem to be better off than the second generation immigrants in terms of adaptation. The more 'assimilated' second generation has been argued to gradually lose the advantages of the first generation of immigrant adolescents in terms of adaptation. The pattern in which first generation immigrants are psychologically better adapted than the second generation has been reported by Harker (2001) for a sample of immigrants in the United States, and by Beiser, Hou, Hyman, and Tousignant (2002) for a sample of immigrant adolescents in Canada. The term immigrant paradox has been used earlier to describe the finding that immigrant adolescents are as well or even better adapted than national adolescents despite lower socioeconomic status (Garcia-Coll, 2005; Hayes-Bautista, 2004;), Sam, Vedder, Liebkind, Neto and Virta (2008) identified three criteria for defining the immigrant paradox: Immigrant adolescents have to score higher on measures of adaptation than national adolescents, the first generation of immigrants needs to 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. Contrary to expectation, using these criteria, Sam et al. only found mixed support for the immigrant paradox in a sample of immigrants from five European countries. Compared to national and second generation immigrant adolescents, the first generation immigrant adolescents were shown to have a better sociocultural adaptation and a poorer psychological adaptation.

### *Segmented assimilation*

Fuligni (1998) discusses the immigrant paradox and offers the dedication of immigrant adolescents to their education as a possible explanation for these findings. Immigrant families tend to value education highly (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1992; Suarez Orozco & Suarez Orozco, 1995) and adolescents who put effort into their studies tend to have better psychological well-being and are less likely to show behavioral problems (Steinberg, 1996). This explanation can be put into the broader framework of segmented assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993). The theory of segmented assimilation aims to explain differences in adaptation outcomes among immigrant adolescents referring to the differences in acculturation trajectories they follow. In order to understand the outcomes of acculturation it is important to consider the contexts or settings in which immigrants are assimilating: Assimilating into the upper segments of society may have beneficial effects for immigrants in terms of adaptation. Immigrants will have many opportunities for upward economic mobility and favorable development. However most immigrants will experience poverty and live in poor neighborhoods (Hernandez & Darke, 1999). In terms of adaptation, assimilating into the lower

segments of society can lead to the poor adaptation outcomes related to low socio-economic status. However, immigrant families have an alternative to assimilation into the lower segments. They may assimilate into school culture and at the same time maintain strong ties with their ethnic culture, guaranteeing future help from the ethnic community and sticking to values (eg., family obligations) that may help them to succeed despite an unfavorable environment. This diversified or selective pattern of acculturation adapted to particular setting is part of segmented assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 1994; Zhou, 1997a, 1997b). For the first generation immigrants it seems easier to realize such a selective pattern of acculturation than for second generation immigrants. Second generation immigrants are more strongly affected by national peers and the broader national context, which results in a broader and stronger assimilation into those segments of society that are characterized by less social participation, lower wages and lower health. It is not surprising then that the first generation shows better adaptation outcomes than the second generation. The second generation is already more assimilated in a suboptimal environment and thus regressing towards the national population.

#### *The current study*

In this study the adaptation of immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education in the Netherlands is addressed. As in many countries immigrants in the Netherlands often experience less optimal economic circumstances than nationals: 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). Education should be an important tool for immigrants to improve their socio-economic situation. Unfortunately, however, in the Netherlands there is an overrepresentation of immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education, the lowest educational track at secondary level in the Netherlands. In junior vocational education there is generally a relatively high drop out of students and dropping out of school in the Netherlands is associated with delinquency and unemployment (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2007; Scientific Advisory Board for Government Policy, 2009). For the immigrant adolescents the situation is more 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, immigrant adolescents receive lower grades and drop out of junior vocational education more often (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008). In short, immigrant adolescents in junior vocational high schools in the Netherlands are at risk for assimilating into the lower segments of Dutch society. Particularly to them a selective acculturation trajectory or immigrant paradox would be important. An earlier study on the immigrant paradox involving immigrant adolescents in the Netherlands was not really conclusive (Berry et al, 2006), but then only 43% of the participants were enrolled in junior vocational high schools. The other adolescents were all enrolled in higher educational tracks. We hypothesize that the poor chances for economic mobility and the comparatively suboptimal

economic conditions make immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education a likely group to show an adaptation pattern similar to an immigrant paradox. Because first generation immigrant adolescents are less assimilated into unfavorable conditions, they are expected to show a better adaptation than second generation immigrant adolescents and national adolescents, while the more assimilated second generation adolescents should show a better or a similar level of adaptation to the national adolescents.

## Method

### *Subjects*

Participants were students from twelve schools in the highly urbanized western part of the Netherlands. Subjects were drawn from all four grades of junior vocational education. A total of 54 classes participated in this study. The sample consisted of 152 first generation immigrant adolescents, 285 second generation immigrant adolescents, and 406 host national adolescents. A first generation adolescent is born abroad and has two parents born abroad, a second generation immigrant is born in the Netherlands but has at least one parent born in a non-western country and a national adolescent is born in the Netherlands and has both parents born in the Netherlands. Only non-western immigrants were included in the analyses. The first generation sample consisted of 81 boys and 71 girls, the second generation sample consisted of 133 boys and 152 girls, the native national sample consisted of 216 boys and 190 girls. The ages in the sample ranged from 12 to 19. The mean age of the first generation was 14.32 ( $SD = 1.244$ ), the mean age of the second generation was 13.98 ( $SD = 1.198$ ) and the mean age of the national adolescents was 14.14 ( $SD = .1045$ ). The immigrant adolescents mainly came from Turkey (27.7 percent), Surinam (14.6 percent) Morocco (18.5 percent) and the Antilles (12.6 percent). Of the immigrant adolescents 26.5 percent had a different non-western origin, such as Pakistani, Filipino, or Somali.

### *Procedure*

Sixty-nine vocational schools in the Netherlands were invited to participate in a survey about multiculturalism and problem behavior. Schools were first contacted via telephone. When schools showed an interest in the research an appointment was made to explain the research in more detail. This led to twelve schools participating in the study. Prior to the research the teachers were informed about the goal of the research and letters of informed consent were sent to the students' parents. Strict anonymity was promised to the schools, the teachers and the students. The questionnaires were administered in the classroom during school hours under the supervision of a teacher and a researcher. Prior to the admission of the questionnaires the teachers received instructions about administering the questionnaire.

### *Instruments*

A survey consisting of several scales was administered to the students. The survey began with questions about demographics namely age, gender, the birthplace of both parents of the respondent, the birthplace of the respondent and the respondents' religion. Socio economic status was measured with the Family Affluence Scale (Curry, Elton, Todd, & Platt, 1997). A sample item of this scale is 'How many computers does your family own.' Since the scale has different response categories for the separate items Cronbach's alpha could not be computed. The Family Affluence Scale has been found to be a valid indicator of adolescents' socio-economic status (Boyce, Torsheim, Currie, & Zambon, 2006). We also used the Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem inventory. It consists of ten items which are answered on a five point scale ranging from 'completely disagree' to 'completely agree'. A sample item is 'On the whole I am satisfied with myself.' The psychological problems scale was taken from the ICSEY-study (Berry, et al., 2006) and consisted of 15 items answered on a five-point scale ranging from 'never' up to 'very often.' A sample item is 'I feel restless.' The behavioral problems questionnaire was an adaptation of Olweus' antisocial behavior scale (Bendixen & Olweus, 1999; Olweus, 1989, 1994). The original scale has been shown to have satisfactory psychometric properties. The scale consisted of ten items. The items were scored on a five point scale ranging from 'never' up to more than 3 times during the past 12 months. A sample item of this questionnaire is: 'had a serious fight with a teacher'.

As can be seen in Table 1, all scales had satisfactory to good reliability.

Table 1

*The cronbachs alfas of the scales used in this study for the first generation immigrants the second generation immigrants and the nationals.*

	First generation	Second generation	Nationals
Psychological problems	.88	.91	.86
Self-esteem	.73	.80	.88
Behavioral problems	.83	.83	.82

### Results

Because age and gender have been found to be closely related to self-esteem, psychological problems and behavioral problems, it was necessary to examine whether there was an equal distribution of gender and age between the first generation, the second generation, and the national adolescents to prevent any attribution errors. A chi square test indicated that boys and girls were evenly distributed among the three groups ( $\chi^2(2, N = 844) = 0.215, p > .05$ ). An ANOVA indicated that there were statistically significant age differences,  $F(2, 838) = 4.387, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$ . The first generation immigrants ( $M=14.32, SD= 1.244$ ) were the oldest, followed by the nationals ( $M = 14.14, SD = 1.045$ ) and the second generation immigrants were the youngest ( $M = 13.99, SD = 1.198$ ).

One element of the immigrant paradox is that immigrants perform better on measures of adaptation despite lower socioeconomic status. The mean scores and standard deviations of the variables self-esteem, psychological problems, behavioral problems and, socioeconomic status are reported in Table 2. To test whether there were differences in socioeconomic status between first generation immigrants, second generation immigrants, and host national adolescents on SES an ANOVA was conducted. There was a mean difference in socioeconomic status ( $F(2, 841) = 51.721, p < .05, \eta^2 = .11$ ). Bonferonni adjusted t-tests indicated that nationals scored higher on socio-economic status than the immigrants. The means and standard deviations for socio-economic status are included in Table 2.

To test for differences between the first generation, the second generation and the nationals on self-esteem, psychological problems, and behavioral problems a MANOVA was conducted. The MANOVA revealed that group distinction was a statistically significant predictor of adaptation outcomes (Wilks' lambda  $F(6, 1668) = 2.894, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$ ). Follow-up univariate ANOVAs revealed significant effects of self-esteem ( $F(2, 836) = 5.844, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$ ) and psychological problems ( $F(2, 836) = 5.190, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$ ), but not behavioral problems ( $F(2, 836) = .700, p > .05, \eta^2 = .00$ ). The effect sizes revealed small effects. The mean scores in Table 2 on the variables psychological problems and self-esteem show a pattern similar to an immigrant paradox. The mean score of the first generation immigrant adolescents shows the best adaptation, while the second generation falls in-between the first generation and the nationals.

To test the convergence hypothesis, an additional series of t-tests with Bonferroni adjustments was conducted to compare the first generation immigrant adolescents, the second generation immigrant adolescents and the nationals with regards to self-esteem, psychological problems, and behavioral problems. For both the self-esteem and psychological problem scales the first generation immigrant adolescents scored significantly higher than the nationals, while the second generation immigrant adolescents did not score significantly higher than the nationals.

Table 2

*Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for the variables socioeconomic status, self-esteem psychological problems and behavioral problems.*

	SES	Self-esteem	Psych. problems	Behavioral problems
First generation	2.37 (.50)	4.04 (.58)	1.92 (.67)	1.87 (.79)
Second generation	2,38 (.47)	3.84 (.63)	2.13 (.70)	1.77 (.68)
Nationals	2.73 (.41)	3.66 (.79)	2.29 (.74)	1.80 (.74)
First generation Muslims	2.31 (.49)	4.04 (.58)	1.92 (.67)	1.87 (.79)
Second generation Muslims	2.41 (.45)	3.84 (.63)	2.13 (.70)	1.77 (.68)

This pattern supports the existence of an immigrant paradox for the variables self-esteem and psychological problems. In general these findings support the immigrant paradox for measures of self-esteem and psychological problems. With regards to behavioral problems, Bonferroni adjusted t-tests reported no statistical significant difference between the first and second generation immigrant adolescents and the nationals. The results of these pairwise comparisons are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

*The p-values of the Bonferroni adjusted t-tests comparing the first, the second generation and the nationals on the variables psychological problems, self-esteem and behavioral problems.*

	Compared with	Psychological problems	Self-esteem	Behavioral problems
First generation	second generation	.579	.135	.743
	nationals	.008**	.002**	1.000
Second generation	nationals	.135	.369	1.000

\*\* = significant at the .01 level.

The initial sample of immigrant adolescents was culturally heterogeneous. To test whether the immigrant paradox could also be found in a more culturally homogeneous population, a subsample of immigrant adolescents with an Islamic religious background was drawn from the initial sample. This resulted in a subsample of 73 first generation Muslim adolescents and 175 second generation Muslim adolescents. The means and standard deviations of the socio-economic status, psychological problems, behavioral problems and self-esteem scales for this subsample are provided in Table 2. A MANOVA revealed that the same pattern existed in the Muslim subsample as in the larger immigrant sample. There was a marginal multivariate effect of generational status on adaptation outcomes (Wilks' lambda ( $F(6, 1298) = 1.918, p < .10, \eta^2 = .00$ )). A further investigation of the univariate ANOVAs indicated that there were significant effects of generational status on self-esteem ( $F(2, 651) = 3.872, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$ ) and on psychological problems ( $F(2, 651) = 5.026, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$ ), but not on behavioral problems ( $F(2, 651) = .074, p > .05, \eta^2 = .00$ ). Again effects were small. To test the convergence hypothesis, an additional series of t-tests with Bonferonni adjustments was conducted to compare the first generation Muslim immigrant adolescents, the second generation Muslim immigrant adolescents, and the nationals with regards to self-esteem psychological problems and behavioral problems. There were no significant differences with regards to behavioral problems. The results of these pairwise comparisons are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

*The p-values of the Bonferroni adjusted t -tests comparing the first, the second generation Muslim subsamples and the nationals on the variables psychological problems, self-esteem and behavioral problems.*

	Compared with	Psychological problems	Self-esteem	Behavioral problems
First generation	second generation	1.000	1.000	1.000
	nationals	.032*	.112	1.000
Second generation	nationals	.074	.175	1.000

\* = significant at the .05 level.

With regards to psychological problems the first generation Muslim immigrants scored better than the nationals. While the ANOVA revealed significant differences on the variable self-esteem, no significant differences were found with the Bonferonni adjusted t-tests. The pattern of mean scores in Table 2, however, suggests an immigrant paradox for the Muslim subsample on the variables psychological problems and self-esteem.

### Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate whether an immigrant paradox existed in a sample of immigrant adolescents attending junior vocational education in the Netherlands. An immigrant paradox was expected in this sample because the theory of segmented assimilation states that in suboptimal environmental circumstances a lower degree of assimilation is related to more positive adaptation outcomes. To control for cultural heterogeneity in the initial sample a subsample was drawn consisting of immigrant adolescents with an Islamic background. In both the culturally diverse and in the Muslim sample the results were similar: First generation immigrants scored better than national adolescents on the variables self-esteem and psychological problems, but not on behavioral problems. Second generation immigrant adolescents were more similar to nationals in their adaptation outcomes. Immigrant adolescents achieved better adaptation outcomes than their national contemporaries despite lower socio-economic status.

The results reported in this study fit a pattern already found in the United States (Harker, 2001) and Canada (Beiser, Hou, Hyman, & Tousignant, 2002). Why are first generation immigrants relatively successful in their adaptation while second generation immigrants tend to lose their advantage? Strong family bonds and a high motivation to do well in school have been argued to be key factors in immigrant adolescents' remarkable adaptation (Fuligni, 1998; Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). This represents segmented assimilation, or particularly selective acculturation in that a strong identification with or assimilation into the school context is combined with strong family bonds and adherence to corresponding traditional family values (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997a, 1997b). The immigrants report lower socioeconomic status than the nationals while at the same time being better adapted. The second generation, however, is showing a decline in adaptation, because they

assimilate more broadly or more easily into the national context which to them is made up of relatively low poor socio-economic circumstances, lower educational tracks and less optimal health conditions.

In a previous attempt to find an immigrant paradox in Europe (Sam, Vedder, Liebkind, Neto, & Virta, 2008), only marginal support for the immigrant paradox was found. In this study the same questionnaires were used as in the study by Sam et al., and both studies were conducted in the European context, begging the question, what explains the difference? Firstly, this study was aimed particularly at an immigrant adolescent sample with low chances for upward mobility. The suboptimal environment may grant those adolescents who are less assimilated an advantage in terms of adaptation. Furthermore, in the study by Sam et al. a sample was drawn from several European countries. There are substantial differences between multicultural policies between European countries (Banting & Kymlicka, 2004), and the way in which immigrants are received may also play a part in the emergence of an immigrant paradox.

Unfortunately we could only get self reports as indications for the students' adaptation. Several studies suggest that rather strong and systematic differences in adaptation scores emerge depending who is the reporting person (self, parent, teacher or peer) (Achenbach et al., 1990; Stanger & Lewis, 1993; Stevens et al., 2003). It should be noted that up to now, all studies concerning the psychosocial aspect of the immigrant paradox have solely relied on self-reports. Using appraisals of other persons may produce a different pattern.

Although first generation immigrants were found to be better adapted than their national contemporaries the effect sizes were small. This may reflect the fact that we used a group level variable to explain differences in adaptation at the individual level. Normally individual level variables may account for more explained variance in adaptation outcomes. For example, the amount of perceived discrimination an immigrant reports has consistently been found to explain sizeable portions of variance in adaptation outcomes (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001; Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Solheim, 2004; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003; Paradies, 2006; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). Furthermore, the Dutch society, in its present constellation may not allow for bigger differences between groups, for instance, by providing for good health and youth care services to all who live in the country. Nevertheless, even the small effect sizes flag that immigration does not necessarily lead to a poor pattern of adaptation.