

Parental influence on educational attainment much greater than previously thought, new research finds

April 15 2019, by Sheila Kiggins

Governments keen to raise levels of educational attainment need to look at the cultures and attitudes of parents in high-achieving countries, not just national education systems – according to new findings from researchers at the University of Warwick and the Bank of Italy.

The researchers set out to discover what proportion of cross-country differences in educational attainment could be attributed to parental influences beyond their social and [economic status](#)—and discovered it is twice as large as previously understood.

Most of the differences are rooted in cultural factors which shape [parents'](#) attitudes towards their children's education, and not in the educational system parents were exposed to.

Dr. Federico Rossi, Assistant Professor in the Department of Economics at Warwick University and Dr. Marta De Philippis of the Bank of Italy's Department of Economics and Statistics investigated the [school](#) performance of second-generation immigrants – children born and schooled in their parents' adopted country—taking account of known [influences](#) such as parental income, [education level](#) and occupational status.

They found that:

- Students whose parents came from countries which scored highly in the PISA international education tests did better than their peers within the same country or even the same school
- The effect is stronger when parents have little formal education—it cannot be attributed to parents receiving a higher quality of [education](#) in their home country and passing this down to their children
- The effect wears off with time—it is more marked in children of recent immigrants. This suggests that cultural factors which are progressively lost as parents integrate are significant
- Parents from high-achieving PISA countries spend more time with their children

Dr. Rossi commented: "By looking at second-generation immigrants we can get a clearer picture of differences in parental influence between countries.

"Even though I expected parental influence to vary between nationalities, I did not expect it would account for such a significant part of cross-country gaps in PISA performance.

"It seems that most of cross-nationalities differences come from deep cultural factors, not directly influenced by the educational system parents were exposed to.

"This is important for policy-makers who want to raise their students' performance in tests like PISA. Our research suggests that policies which replicate school practices in high-achieving countries without addressing these cultural factors may have smaller than expected effects."

Dr. De Philippis added: "Looking at second generation immigrants is a good way to understand the relative importance of institutions and

parental influence in determining cross country differences in school achievement.

"The debate on 'Tiger mums' in Asian [countries](#) initially inspired us: we started to wonder how much of the cross country difference in school performance is actually due to differences in parents' cultural traits.

"Our results are relevant for [policy-makers](#): not only differences in school quality or in observable parental characteristics, but also deeply-rooted cultural traits, lie behind cross country differences in school performance."

More information: Marta de Philippis et al. Parents, Schools and Human Capital Differences Across Countries, *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2018). [DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.2896780](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2896780)

Provided by University of Warwick

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