

Do Migrant Students Affect Performance of Natives?

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Extended Abstract

As immigration rates continue to rise, the integration of migrant children into the education system becomes a crucial concern, with implications for the performance and spillover effects on native students. This paper investigates the impact of migrant peers on the academic performance of native students within the context of the Dutch education system. The effect of migrant peers on natives is theoretically ambiguous. On one hand, a low level of assimilation of students with migration background may reduce the resources spent on students without migration background (Fix and Zimmerman, 1993). On the other hand, some groups of migrant students may enhance the performance and behavior of native students through their study attitudes, for instance, hard work and resilience (Hunt, 2016).

Identifying the causal effect of immigrant peers is empirically complicated because immigrant peers are not randomly distributed across classes and schools. For example, parents with high socioeconomic status may select neighborhoods with fewer migrants or schools with a smaller share of immigrants. Previous studies (Karsten et al., 2003; Ladd et al., 2010) provided evidence that parents of native students in the Netherlands are more likely to choose schools with a small number of migrant students. Therefore, the naïve OLS estimated effects of peers may also capture the non-random selection of students into the groups and are likely to be biased. Previous studies (for instance, Hoxby, 2000; Brenøe & Zölitz, 2020; Ruijs, 2017, Bossavie, 2020) that attempted to address the endogenous sorting of students into schools rely mostly on the within-

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school across-cohort variation in the percentage of peers. The main identification assumption for this empirical strategy is that year-to-year variation in the percentage of migrant peers is exogenous to factors influencing student performance, conditional on school-fixed effects and cohort-fixed effects. While this empirical strategy solves the time-invariant sorting of students into schools, the remaining concern is that peer effects can be confounded by unobservable factors correlated with school-specific time trends in school composition. In the secondary school setting, we follow previous studies on peer effects (Ruijs, 2017; Lavy, Silva, & Weinhardt, 2012⁶) and exploit within-student across-subject variation in the share of peers with different migration backgrounds to identify the impact of peers on the performance of native students. Using a student fixed effects model, we compare the performance on standardized end-test exams scores across subjects with different exposure of peers with a migration background. We use administrative data on all Dutch students leaving primary and secondary education over the period 2010-2018 from the Dutch National Cohort on Education to investigate the impact of immigrant peers on the performance of native students.

The preliminary findings indicate that the exposure to a larger share of the 1st generation non-Western migrant peers slightly decrease the performance of natives. The effect is more pronounced in urban than non-urban schools. Heterogeneity analysis shows that the effect is more considerable for girls and students of low-educated parents; there is no difference between students from top and bottom income quantile. In general, our findings are consistent with the recent findings of Bossavie (2020) and Ohinata & Van Ours (2013)⁷ on the limited and insignificant negative effects of migrant peers on the performance of native students. While both papers found insignificant small effects, the heterogeneity analysis showed that the impact of migrant peers becomes negative and significant in the case of specific groups of migrant peers. For instance, Bossavie (2020) reported significant negative effects of 1st gen. non-Western migrant peers who stayed in the country for a short period and did not have exposure to the Dutch language on the performance of native students in Dutch primary schools. Similarly, we find that only non-Western immigrants of the 1st generation negatively affect the performance of native students, while other

⁶ In contrast to Lavy, Silva, & Weinhardt (2012), we use the within-student variation in the share of peers across all subjects, not only mandatory subjects, as there is no within-student variation in the share of migrant peers across mandatory subjects in our case.

⁷ However, Ohinata and Van Ours (2013) find that Dutch native students are more likely to be bullied if they study with more immigrant students in the same class.

groups of peers do not affect native student performance. The 1st generation immigrant students are more likely to have worse language command and less likely to be familiar with culture than the 2nd generation of migrant students who were born in the Netherlands, which may explain the negative effects of the 1st generation of non-western immigrants.