



The academic progress of Hispanic immigrants[☆]

Marie C. Hull

University of North Carolina – Greensboro and IZA



ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 August 2015
 Revised 9 February 2017
 Accepted 13 February 2017
 Available online 23 February 2017

JEL Classification:

J24
 I24
 J15

Keywords:

Human capital
 Achievement gap
 Hispanic immigrants

ABSTRACT

Past research has shown that Hispanic students make test score gains relative to whites as they age through school; however, this finding stands in contrast to the experience of blacks, who show little change in their relative position over the same time frame. Distinguishing Hispanic students by immigrant generation, I find that the children of immigrants (first- and second-generation Hispanics) drive the improvement in Hispanic test scores. Later-generation Hispanics consistently perform slightly below whites, perhaps due to negative selection into ethnic identification. Thus, previous estimates vastly understate the progress of first- and second-generation Hispanic immigrants. From a negative gap in 3rd grade, these students surpass socioeconomically similar whites in math and reading by middle school and end 8th grade as much as a quarter of a standard deviation ahead. Assimilation alone cannot explain this progress; a potential explanation is that immigrant parents create a home environment that fosters achievement.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

At 16.3% of the population, Hispanics are now the largest and fastest growing minority in the United States, yet they have lower levels of human capital than whites by several measures.¹ Furthermore, due to high fertility rates and high rates of migration into the country, Hispanics are disproportionately young, implying that a high proportion are currently receiving their education in our nation's schools. Given that they will be a key part of our future workforce, ensuring that Hispanic youth leave school with the skills to succeed has never been more important, yet Hispanic-white differences in human capital are almost always discussed as an afterthought to black-white differences in research on racial and ethnic inequality.

In recent work, Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2009) document that of the three largest racial/ethnic groups (white, black, and

Hispanic), Hispanic students are the only one that change their relative position in test scores over time. They score about 0.1 standard deviations below observably similar whites in 3rd grade, equal them in 5th, and outscore them by 0.1 standard deviations in 8th. In contrast, black students' covariate-adjusted reading gap stands at a constant -0.5 standard deviations; their math gap is similar in size, though it does narrow about a tenth of a standard deviation between 3rd and 8th grades. Since IQ is relatively stable by age 10, changes in underlying cognitive ability cannot explain the rise in Hispanic achievement over this time period, leaving noncognitive inputs and environmental factors as potential explanations (Cunha, Heckman, Lochner, & Masterov, 2006).

What, or rather, who, accounts for the relative gains in Hispanic test scores? Most papers that note an upward trend in Hispanic test scores attribute it to the assimilation of immigrant Hispanics over the sample period.² But in reality, only 13% of the school-aged Hispanic population are immigrants, 42% have immigrant parents but were born in the U.S., and the remaining 45% come from families that have been in the U.S. for generations (Ruggles et al., 2010). Any measurement of human capital accumulation for Hispanics is a weighted average of these three groups. Moreover, any representation of how Hispanic students fare as they age blends together

[☆] I would like to thank Peter Arcidiacono, Hugh Macartney, Arnaud Maurel, Seth Sanders, session participants at the 2016 Western Economic Association International Annual Conference, and several anonymous referees for helpful comments. I am also grateful to the North Carolina Research Data Center and the North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics for access to the data.

E-mail address: mchull2@uncg.edu

¹ According to the definition used in the 2010 Census, "Hispanic or Latino" refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. There is some variation in this definition by source and over time.

² In this paper, "assimilation" takes on two slightly different meanings. Here, and through most of the paper, I refer to the cultural process of assimilation, whereby immigrants adopt the native language and customs. Assimilation in test scores, like assimilation in wages, occurs when immigrant and native test scores are indistinguishable.

both the intercepts and slopes of each of these groups. In this light, lumping all Hispanics together or referring to all Hispanics as immigrants may be misleading. Although assimilation, whether it be through language acquisition or the adoption of native customs, might explain convergence in Hispanic test scores, it does not explain why Hispanic students outscore their native peers.

Recognizing the important role of generational status, I decompose the Hispanic-white test score gap across grades. To estimate these gaps, I make use of a rich, administrative data set from North Carolina public schools that contains reading and math scores, as well as socioeconomic background information, for several cohorts of students as they progress from 3rd to 8th grade. Information on immigrant generation for students born in-state comes from matched birth records, and I use a finite mixture distribution to model test score production for unmatched students. Longitudinal data is critical in this type of study so as not to confuse changes in cohort quality with the speed of assimilation, a point first made by [Borjas \(1985\)](#).

To the best of my knowledge, no other paper has pinned down trends in test score gaps by immigrant generation with the level of precision found here. The contribution of this paper is threefold: First, I confirm that newly arrived Hispanic immigrants are responsible for the downward trend in Hispanic scores found with repeated cross sections. Previous work could not rule out the possibility that all Hispanic students are more sensitive to moves. Second, I find that later-generation Hispanics, like blacks, consistently score below socioeconomically similar whites. This finding is consistent with negative selection into ethnic identification for later generations ([Duncan & Trejo, 2011](#)). In other words, later-generation Hispanic students are less likely to identify as Hispanic if their families are successful. If the Trejo critique holds, this result is less troubling: An accurate measure of ethnic background would put them on par with whites.³ Most importantly, I show that the children of immigrants drive the growth in Hispanic test scores and that the speed of convergence for immigrant Hispanics is quite rapid. First-generation Hispanics that arrive by 3rd grade equal similar whites within a few years. The second generation makes similarly impressive gains to finish 8th grade 0.11 standard deviations ahead of whites in reading and 0.24 standard deviations ahead in math. Lumping all Hispanic students together understates the considerable progress of these immigrant students. While [Borjas \(1985\)](#) found assimilation in wages to be quite slow, my analysis shows that young immigrants, as well as the children of immigrants, catch up to native whites within a few years.

Two features of my results indicate that cultural assimilation is not the only force at work in the growth in Hispanic test scores. First, second-generation students make the same gains in math and close to the same gains in reading as the first generation. Though there is likely some room for the language skills of these second-generation students to catch up with whites, especially if Spanish is spoken in the home, they still have more years of U.S. experience overall. Second, the test scores of whites and immigrant Hispanics more than converge—second-generation Hispanics perform significantly better than whites in reading and math in 8th grade, the first generation for math only. If Hispanic immigrants adopting native customs was the sole factor behind the growth in Hispanic test scores, we would expect the growth to taper off as Hispanic scores approached average white scores.

Achievement test scores are determined by cognitive inputs, noncognitive inputs, and environmental factors. In terms of the rise in Hispanic immigrant achievement found here, [Cunha et al. \(2006\)](#) rule out changes in IQ after age 10, and controls for school quality rule out the school environment. Thus, noncognitive skills (e.g., motivation and self-discipline) and the home environment must drive the test score gains for children of immigrants. Although I do not have direct evidence, an explanation that is consistent with my findings is that immigrant parents create a home environment that values and fosters achievement. This environment gives their children a boost beyond any effects of assimilation. In any case, Hispanic immigrant students fare quite well under the current system, even better than previously suggested. While these students are at a severe socioeconomic disadvantage, their home environment and noncognitive abilities combine to lift them up above the achievement of similar whites.

In the following section, I provide an overview of previous work on the Hispanic-white achievement gap and the role of generational status in educational outcomes for immigrants. In [Section 3](#), I describe the data sets used in this paper, which motivate the development of my econometric framework in [Section 4](#). I report results in [Section 5](#), detailing trends in raw and adjusted Hispanic-white test score gaps by immigrant generation as students move through school. [Section 6](#) concludes.

2. Related empirical work

Despite the fact that Hispanics recently overtook blacks as the largest minority group, the Hispanic-white test score gap is almost always discussed as an afterthought to the black-white gap in papers on minority achievement. Outside of sample size concerns when Hispanics were a smaller part of the population, this feature of the literature on racial/ethnic inequality partly came about because of the difficulty in analyzing Hispanic-white differences due to heterogeneity among Hispanics. As they emerge as an important demographic group in their own right, researchers have begun to tackle the particular issues that Hispanics face.

Past studies usually estimate the raw Hispanic-white test score gap as smaller than the black-white gap but vary in how much smaller. For example, [Phillips and Chin \(2004\)](#) place it at 78% of the size of the black-white gap in math in 4th grade and 84% in reading using National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data. With a more recent wave of the same data set, [Reardon and Galindo \(2009\)](#) estimate the size of the Hispanic-white achievement gaps in reading and math to be about three quarters of a standard deviation in 4th and 8th grade. Unfortunately, the NAEP is more useful for studying trends across time than how Hispanic-white differences evolve as students progress through school since the data set contains a limited number of grades and samples repeated cross sections.

The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Class (ECLS-K) provides estimates on achievement gaps for some of the youngest ages. With this data, [Fryer and Levitt \(2004, 2006\)](#) and [Reardon and Galindo \(2009\)](#) estimate Hispanic-white differences to bounce between -0.3 and -0.5 standard deviations in reading, with no clear trend. In math, they find that the raw gap in the fall of Kindergarten is around -0.8 standard deviations but shrinks to -0.5 standard deviations by the spring of 5th grade. However, language proficiency rules for administering assessments call into question the validity of these results. The main issue is that students were not given the reading test if they were not proficient in oral English, resulting in missing reading scores for 29% of all Hispanic students and 77% of first-generation Hispanics in early waves of the survey. Rules for the math assessments make the

³ Given work by [Duncan and Trejo \(2011\)](#), among others, negative selection into ethnic identification is the leading explanation for the gap for later-generation Hispanics that is presented here. However, each wave of Hispanic immigrants comes to the U.S. for different reasons and has different experiences after arrival. Thus, we might expect the test score gap for later-generation Hispanics to fade over time if more recent waves of Hispanic immigrants are different.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4938346>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4938346>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)