

The impact of perseverance and passion for long term goals (GRIT) on educational achievements of migrant children: Evidence from Tatarstan, Russia



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ABSTRACT

This article empirically studies the impact of perseverance and passion for long term goals (GRIT) on educational achievements. Specifically, the study compares GRIT levels between migrants and native school students, and tests the role of GRIT in explaining school achievements of migrants. Based on regression analysis and using a sample of 2,003 ninth graders, including 178 migrants from the Republic of Tatarstan, Russia, the results did not suggest an educational gap between native students and first generation migrants, ethnic Tatar migrants, and those from Central Asia. In addition, GRIT has significant effects in explaining the educational achievements of these migrant groups. On the contrary, the findings suggest that native students outperform their ethnic Russian migrant peers.

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El impacto de la perseverancia y pasión por las metas de largo plazo (GRIT) en los éxitos educativos de niños migrantes: evidencia desde Tartaristán, Rusia

RESUMEN

Empíricamente se estudia el impacto de la perseverancia y pasión por las metas de largo plazo (GRIT) sobre los éxitos educativos. Específicamente, se comparan los niveles de GRIT entre escolares migrantes y nativos y se analiza el papel que juega GRIT en la explicación de los éxitos escolares de los migrantes. Con base en el análisis de regresión y una muestra de 2.003 escolares en el noveno grado, de los cuales 178 son migrantes en la República de Tartaristán, Rusia, los resultados no sugieren la existencia de una brecha educativa entre los estudiantes nativos y los migrantes de primera generación migrantes tártaros y con aquellos provenientes de Asia Central. Además, GRIT tiene efectos significativos para explicar los éxitos educativos de estos grupos de migrantes. Por el contrario, los hallazgos sugieren que los estudiantes nativos superan a sus compañeros migrantes rusos.

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As a result of the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the ending of the communism system in Central and Eastern Europe, many of the inhabitants of this area decided to migrate in search of better life conditions. Since then,

the economic conditions of Russia have been fluctuating, but the Russian economy outperforms many economies in this region. Because of this, partially, Russia has been attracting millions of international migrants. From 2003 to 2007 the net migration flow to Russia was around 2.3 million and from 2008 to 2012 it was around 1.1 million as a five-year average (World Development Indicators, World Bank). Thus, the migration flow to Russia has been decreasing, yet Russia accepted the third largest number of international migrants in the world, around 11.6 million in 2015. Roughly 50% of these migrants are ethnic Russians or Slavic people, and the majority of these migrants are from the Commonwealth of

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Independent States (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division, 2016). For instance, 3 million migrants from Ukraine and 3 million from Kazakhstan were estimated in 2015.

Many of these migrants arrived with their children, and the Federal Migration Service estimated 70 thousand migrant children in Moscow alone (Zayonchkovskaya, Florinskaya, Poletaev, & Doronina, 2014). These children have to endure discrimination, intolerance, racism, and in many cases they have poor skills in the Russian language. However, the empirical evidence suggests that they are able to achieve high educational outcomes, and compared to native school students they do not perform poorly at school, once such variables are controlled for socioeconomic status, social capital, and cultural capital (Alexandrov, Baranova, & Ivaniushina, 2012; Kamaev & Tovar-García, 2016; Tovar-García, in press).

In the USA, a few empirical studies suggest that migrant children outperform their native peers (Hao & Woo, 2012; Kao, 2004; Kao & Tienda, 1995). Migrants are optimistic and strongly believe that the host country will allow them to achieve better life conditions, and this optimism is transmitted to their children, and as a result they will study hard and will be able to reach success in school (Kao, 2004; Kao & Tienda, 1995). In the literature, this result is known as the immigrant paradox hypothesis. Nevertheless, around the world, most of the empirical results support the downward assimilation hypothesis, which states that migrant children can achieve only low educational outcomes, such as low school grades, high school drop-out rates, and low rates of school enrolment. Migrant children have poor family resources, low levels of economic, social and cultural capital, and consequently, they perform poorly at school (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010; Tovar-García, in press; Vaquera & Kao, 2012).

However, it is unclear why students should obtain better educational outcomes due to optimism. In the psychological literature, other aspects explain educational achievements, for instance, motivation, obedience, and self-regulation (Robbins et al., 2004; Tovar-García, 2012). Specifically, the empirical results suggest that the most relevant psychological explanatory variable is perseverance and passion for long-term goals, usually known as GRIT (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Therefore, this research is motivated by the following questions: do migrant schoolchildren have higher levels of GRIT than their native peers? And is this a key variable in explaining migrants' school success?

In Russia, previous studies focused on the impact of family background (including cultural and social capital) on educational outcomes, where students with high levels of family resources obtain better results (Roshchina, 2010; Tovar-García, 2013, 2014). GRIT has been used as a predictor, but mainly it was a control variable in regression analysis, where the results showed the positive effects of GRIT on educational outcomes (Tovar-García, 2013, 2014). Previous studies on educational outcomes of migrants in Russia, and around the world, did not consider the role of GRIT (Kamaev & Tovar-García, 2016; Tovar-García, in press). Therefore, this article focuses on the relationship between GRIT and educational achievements of migrant children using a sample of 2,003 ninth graders in the year 2010 from Tatarstan, 178 of them being migrants. The core data are taken from Tovar-García (2014), who detected a gender gap in that school girls outperform boys, and also that Tatar students outperform their Russian peers.

Determinants of Educational Outcomes

Tovar-García (2012) highlights the need for a multidisciplinary approach in the study of the determinants of educational outcomes, and identified six major approaches from the economics of education, the sociology of education, educational research, and

educational psychology. Economists pay particular attention to the human capital theory, where individuals decide the amount of education they want to achieve considering future returns in the labor market. Sociologists underline the role of socioeconomic status (usually operationalized with parental education, professional status, and family income), the role of social capital (networks, contacts, friends, etc. in the society and in the family), and the role of cultural capital (operationalized with indicators of high-brow culture). Educational research emphasizes the importance of educational resources, such as school characteristics and the quality of teachers and students.

Psychologists argue that non-cognitive skills play a major role in shaping educational outcomes, particularly when cognitive skills seem to lose explanatory power. However, in the past, the contributions from educational psychology were ignored by other social scientists and only recently the literature has stressed the role of psychological variables and the need for establishing connections between the psychological approach and the above mentioned approaches (Farkas, 2003; Robbins et al., 2004; Tovar-García, 2012).

In many cases the empirical evidence suggests that intelligence, cognitive skills, or other socioeconomic factors are unable to predict educational outcomes, because for academic success it is necessary to know the correct behavior (Tovar-García, 2012). Thus, psychologists explain educational outcomes using different indicators about students' skills, habits, and manners, such as diligence, discipline, attendance, participation, sociability, enthusiasm, self-confidence, impetuosity, and disruptiveness (Farkas, 2003). Many studies showed that motivation and educational expectation are among the most relevant predictors of educational outcomes (Robbins et al., 2004). In addition to students' behavior, parents' behavior and the transmission of proper conduct are also relevant. Parents should not only provide their children with economic resources, but also motivate their children, encourage high educational expectations, and teach the correct behavior.

Therefore, different psychological variables affect educational outcomes, yet the most recent theoretical discussions and empirical results claim that students' perseverance and passion for long term goals (GRIT) is the most important psychological predictor. Intelligence explains most of the variation in each successful outcome, but GRIT does not correlate with intelligence and explains a significant proportion of these outcomes (Duckworth et al., 2007). For successful outcomes in the educational system it is necessary to wait many years, in other words, education is a long-term goal and requires perseverance and passion, for example, to achieving the higher education.

Migrants' Educational Achievements: The Role of GRIT

All theories mentioned above also apply to migrant children, yet their effects on educational outcomes are not totally clear for them. The downward assimilation hypothesis asserts that children of migrants have low levels of socioeconomic status, social, and cultural capital. In other words, their parents have low levels of education, low professional status, low family income, few networks and contacts, and low levels of high-brow culture. These children usually attend low quality schools with few financial resources and poor quality staff. In addition, migrant children endure intolerance, discrimination, racism, stress, and are often not fluent in the dominant language of the host country. Consequently, migrant children cannot achieve high educational outcomes, as most of the empirical literature suggests (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010; Tovar-García, in press; Vaquera & Kao, 2012).

However, migration can be selective, that is, in some cases migrants actually have a high socioeconomic status, a high-brow culture, they already know the language of the host country, and so on. Empirical studies also demonstrate that the typical

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