

Immigrant children in schools have a near-zero effect on the educational achievement of native born children

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In a time of austerity and rising unemployment across Europe, immigration has become an increasingly hot topic. One concern, frequently brought up by the media is that the presence of immigrant children in schools may reduce the educational outcomes of native children. Using data from the Netherlands, [Asako Ohinata](#) and [Jan C. van Ours](#) have taken an in-depth look at whether or not this is actually the case. They find that, after controlling for differences within schools, that the educational achievement of native children is almost completely unaffected by the presence of immigrant children.



The large inflow of immigrants to Europe in past decades has drastically changed the population composition of the continent. This has also led to a change in the makeup of the school student population. For example, the UK media have been [reporting](#) how teachers are under strain as they cope with the influx of immigrants moving into UK. These reports often highlight the possibility that the existence of immigrant students may pose a negative educational influence on native students. Despite the interest in the general public, evidence on this issue is still limited.

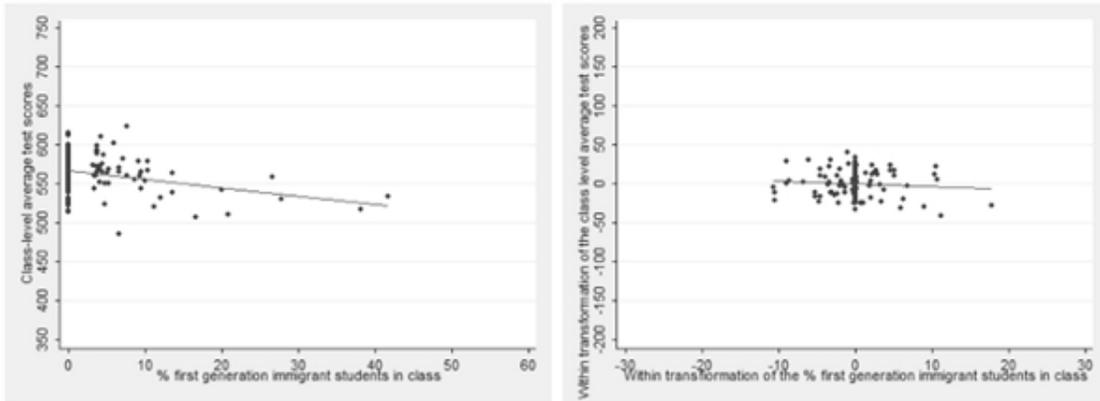


In our research, we have looked at whether the presence of immigrant children in the classroom affects the educational attainment of native Dutch children in that classroom, and found that there is very little evidence that this is the case. The Dutch experience is an interesting case study, since immigrant students in the Netherlands generally come from families with lower education. This is a feature shared by immigrants in most European countries and as a result, our work is relevant to a wider European audience. Studying immigrant spillover effects is helpful when exploring policy implications on how to allocate immigrant students to minimize negative impacts or maximize positive impacts of immigrant children on the educational attainment of native children. Similarly, results may highlight the potential importance of providing additional resources to schools or classes with large numbers of immigrant children.

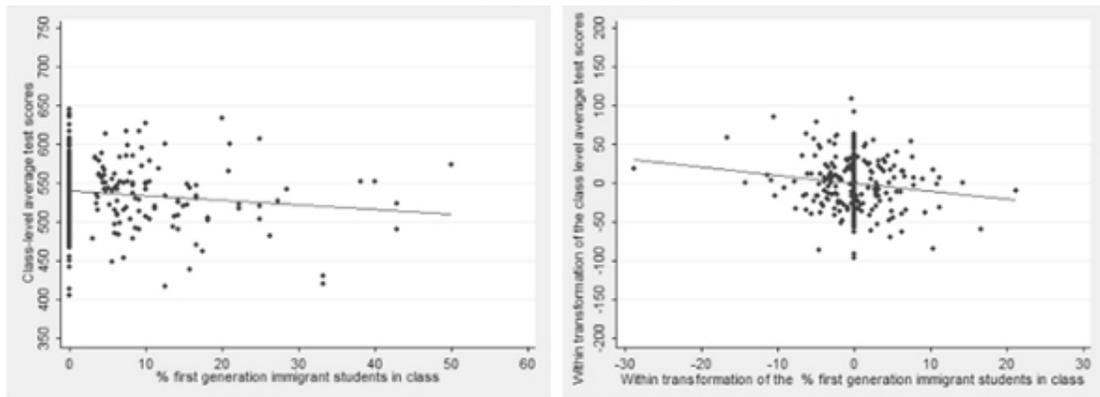
Our empirical analysis is based on two datasets with test results on reading, math, and science abilities of children in the Netherlands. To investigate whether there is a relationship between the share of immigrant children in a classroom and the educational attainment of Dutch children, the graphs on the left in Figure 1 each presents a scatter plot of reading, science, and mathematics test scores against the percentages of immigrant students in each class. Clearly for each of the educational skills, there is a negative correlation with the share of immigrant children. However, this negative correlation may be driven by selective choice. It could be that parents of children with higher educational skills have their children going to schools with a low percentage of immigrants.

Figure 1: Relationship between percentage of immigrants in a class and academic achievement of native children

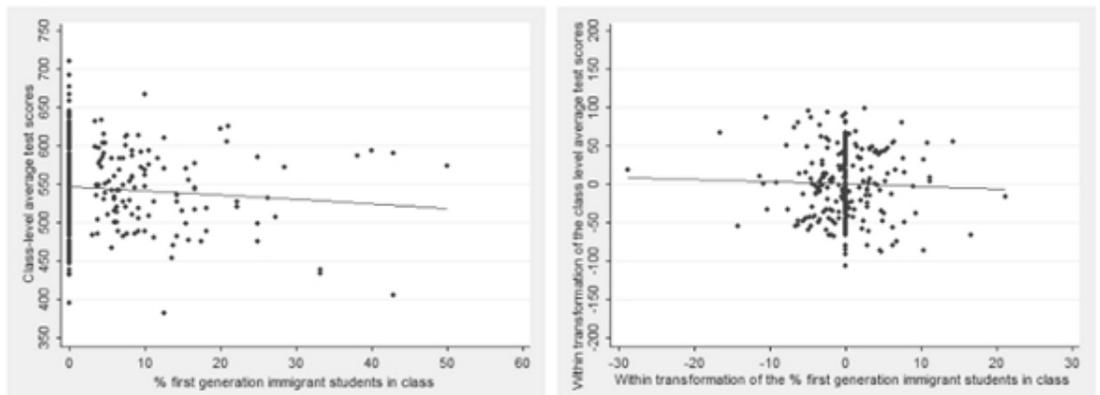
Reading Scores



Science Scores



Math Scores



To account for this, the graphs on the right-hand side of Figure 1 plot the within transformation of the average test scores and the percentage of immigrant students across classes within the same school. Comparing the left and right plots of Figure 1 reveal that the negative spill-over effects of immigrant students is reduced once school differences are taken into account.

When more sophisticated econometric techniques are employed, this results still holds. We have found that the presence of immigrant students in the same learning environment has very limited and insignificant impacts on the Dutch students' academic achievements. For example, a one percentage point increase in the proportion of immigrant students in class reduces the average Dutch students' reading score with 0.21 percent of the standard deviation in reading scores. Similarly, a 1 percentage point increase in the share of immigrant students reduces the science score with 0.40 percent, but increase the math score with 0.74 percent of the standard deviation of the score

distribution. Furthermore, we have found that female students perform better in reading tests and worse in maths and science. The more books children have at home, the better they perform in their tests.

Teachers' teaching experiences seem to matter little although our results suggest that older teachers enhance students' reading scores, but younger teachers seem to be better at teaching maths and science classes. Overall, we do not find strong evidence of negative spill-over effects on the test scores from immigrant children to native Dutch children. In light of these findings, there is no urgent need to redistribute immigrant children more evenly across classrooms, since native students' educational attainment is not affected by the presence of these children.

Readers may also be interested in: Ohinata, O. and J.C. van Ours (2013) How immigrant children affect the academic achievement of native Dutch children, Economic Journal, 23, forthcoming.

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