

Academic Achievement among Québec Secondary School Students of Immigrant Origin

Profile of Students from the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa in the Québec English School Sector

Key words

Academic achievement • Caribbean • Sub-Saharan Africa • Immigration • Secondary education

Summary

The following is a brief profile of the educational paths of Québec secondary school students from the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa enrolled in the English school sector. This study is based on data from a more extensive research project that involved a systematic follow-up of cohorts of Québec immigrant students throughout secondary school. The cohorts in question entered secondary school in 1998-1999 and 1999-2000. The final comprehensive report, entitled *La réussite scolaire des jeunes québécois issus de l'immigration au secondaire* (Mc Andrew, Ledent, Murdoch & Ait-Saïd, 2011), was submitted to MELS in August 2010.

That study looked at students by region of origin, linguistic characteristics and generational status. Various other student characteristics were covered: these ranged from socio-demographic and cultural characteristics to characteristics associated with schooling processes and the nature of the educational institutions attended. The outcome indicators were graduation and dropout rates, the choice of electives, results in different subjects and cumulative academic delays by Secondary III.

Overall, the profile showed young people's progress in an unfavourable light, regardless of the indicator selected.

Context

In Québec, academic achievement has become a central concern due to poor academic results, which is a widespread problem in our schools. This concern pertains as well to students of immigrant origin because they make up an increasingly large proportion of our school population. In their case, however, a second issue comes to the fore, namely, their integration into Québec society as actors in its future development. This point has been made already in many government documents.

People from the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 19.5% of the immigrants admitted to Québec between 2007 and 2011, in contrast to 13.2% between 2002 and 2006 (MICC, 2012). This represents an increase of slightly more than six percentage points. The black community is currently the largest visible minority in Québec, and the third largest in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2010). The vast majority of these students (87.4%) attend schools

in the French sector, while 12.6% go to English schools. The data presented here therefore cover a sub-population that can have specific characteristics.

Methodology

Using the same methodology as that used in *La réussite scolaire des jeunes québécois issus de l'immigration au secondaire*, this purely descriptive analysis will make it possible to identify the factors that affect the academic achievement of students from the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa, as was done in the case of the other groups of students looked at in this series of studies (seven in the French sector and three in the English sector).

The educational paths of these students were studied by distinguishing the sub-groups by generational status, by various linguistic characteristics and by country of origin, as well as by taking into account the specific features of each region and the size of the population concerned.

Within the cohorts studied, of the 7,020 students of immigrant origin who were attending school in the English sector, 698, or 9.9%, were from the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa. Of these, 78% came from the Caribbean and 22% from Africa; 83.8% of them declared English as their mother tongue. Among speakers of another language, the proportion of students whose mother tongue was not English was higher among Sub-Saharan students than it was among Caribbean students.

With regard to the definition of the variables used in the study as well as the identification of some of their limitations, the reader can refer to the general study.

Highlights

English-speaking Québec secondary school students from the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa were more likely to be second-generation immigrants (81.2%) - compared with the immigrant student population as a whole (73%); which explains why a greater percentage

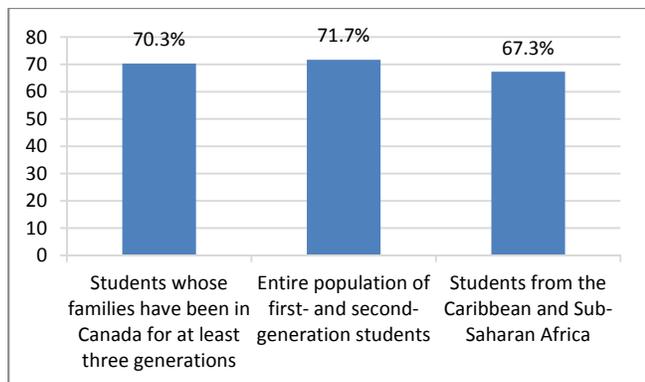
of the former attended elementary school in Québec. More of them also claimed English as their mother tongue or as the language commonly used (89.1%), compared with their immigrant student peers. Girls were overrepresented in this group. Families from the West Indies and Sub-Saharan Africa were almost equally represented in the three socioeconomic categories defined by the study and were, therefore, in a generally less favourable position than those in the two control groups. Most students from the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa began secondary school at the normal age, but much less frequently than their peers in the two control groups. They were also less likely to attend private school, especially when compared with the entire population of immigrant students. To conclude, they were more overrepresented on the Island of Montréal than the students in the control groups.

These characteristics indicate that English sector students from the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa had a somewhat advantageous profile, even if some indicators associated with the schooling process or the nature of the schools attended led to a less positive observation. However, this observation can be refined by distinguishing these students on the basis of their linguistic characteristics, country of origin, and generational status. One can see, for example, that students from Sub-Saharan Africa had a higher socioeconomic profile. On the other hand, their profile in relation to generational distribution at the entry level of the school system, and in relation to linguistic characteristics, was generally less positive than that of their Caribbean peers.

Despite the overall favourable characteristics of this group, its academic path appears less positive than might be expected. Students from the Caribbean or Sub-Saharan Africa who enrolled in English sector schools had slightly lower secondary school graduation rates than the entire population of first- and second-generation students, and all students whose families have been in Canada for at least three generations (both parents born in Canada), regardless of

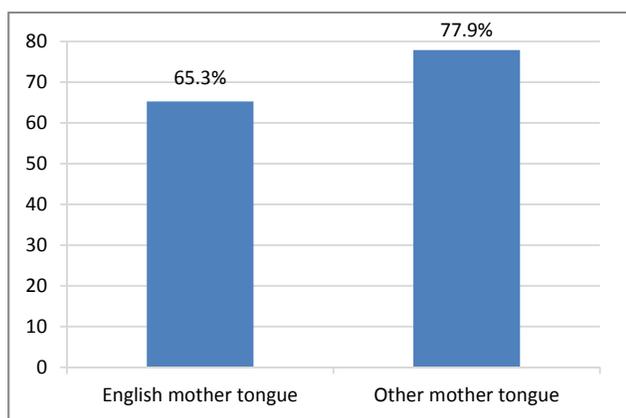
the time frame selected. Moreover, the former had higher dropout rates than the latter.

Graduation rates seven years after the start of secondary school, by ethnocultural characteristics



With regard to linguistic characteristics, students whose mother tongue is not English clearly have higher graduation rates than those of their peers who claim English as their mother tongue, regardless of the time frame selected. Note, however, that the opposite is true of students from Sub-Saharan Africa. Their net dropout rate is identical among the target group, regardless of the linguistic characteristic under consideration. Keep in mind, however, that this indicator may be influenced by the different rates at which various groups leave Québec.

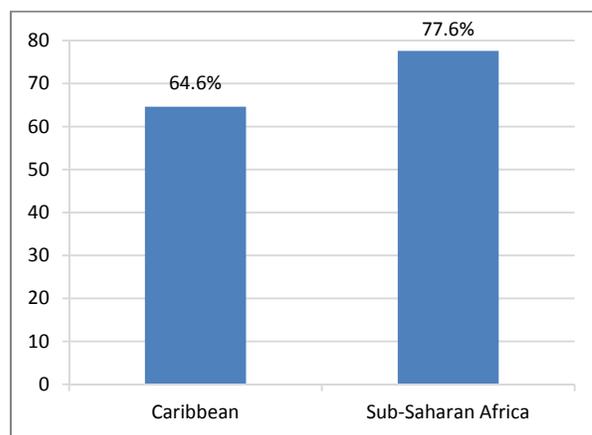
Graduation rates seven years after the start of secondary school, by mother tongue



With respect to region of origin, students from Sub-Saharan Africa had clearly higher graduation rates than their peers from the Caribbean, regardless of time frame. They also had lower

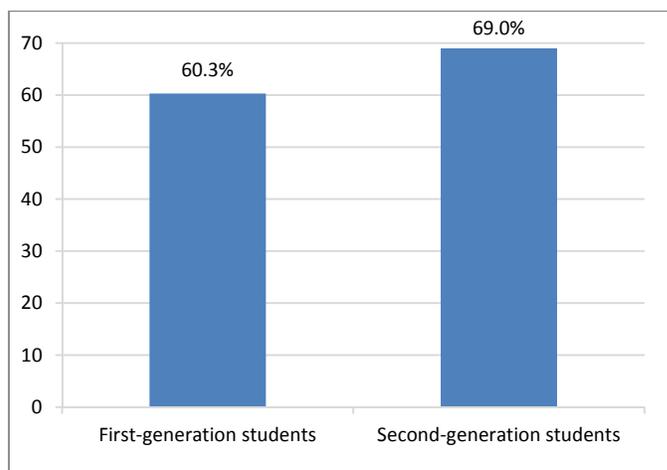
dropout rates, once adjustments were made for the fact that they leave Québec in greater numbers.

Graduation rates seven years after the start of secondary school, by region of origin



Generally, second-generation students had higher graduation rates than their first-generation peers, regardless of the time frame selected.

Graduation rates seven years after the start of secondary school, by generation



The generally disadvantageous academic paths of these students as well as their polarization, were also shown by other indicators. Thus, students from the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa opted much less often to take the Math 536 course and passed it less frequently than did their peers in the two control groups. Moreover, they were more likely to be identi-

fied as students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning disabilities, and were enrolled in the adult education centre more often (slightly more than one out of every 10 of them received his or her diploma from this sector). However, as with the other indicators, the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan subgroups presented completely different results in this area.

The impact of families' socioeconomic status on students' academic progress is difficult to gauge. Indeed, this factor probably accounts to a large degree for the favourable profile of students from Sub-Saharan Africa and second-generation students. However, the overall low graduation rates of the community, and particularly of the Caribbean community in this sector, is higher than what one might expect on the basis of their socioeconomic profile.

Linguistic characteristics, variables related to schooling procedures and generational status also did not play their expected roles. While all these elements should have favoured the Caribbean students over their Sub-Saharan peers, the latter showed more favourable academic achievement. Factors associated with the families' cultural capital prior to migration, as well as community and family strategies, may partially account for this state of affairs. Systemic factors linked to the representations of the respective communities within the schools they attended could also be at play here.

The impact of the characteristics of the schools these students attended is also complex. In fact, their slightly lower success rates could be connected with the fact that few of them were attending private school. However, this situation pertains more to students from Sub-Saharan Africa than it does to their Caribbean peers, who seem to be less affected by it. Moreover, both groups are strongly represented in public schools in affluent areas.

Contribution to policies and programs

Through this descriptive profile, research is helping to bring about a better understanding of the educational paths of Québec secondary school students from the Caribbean and Sub-

Saharan Africa who are enrolled in the English school sector, and is contributing ideas beneficial to a community whose educational situation is considered problematic. Based on the research results, we recommend:

- conducting additional analyses to arrive at a better understanding of the socio-academic profiles of students from these regions, and to, among other things, determine the pre-migration circumstances, the family and social dynamics, and the systemic factors that affect these students;
- carrying out more studies to identify the factors that shape the impact of the socioeconomic status of these students' families on their academic progress and performance;
- identifying the causes and potentially negative impact of the fact that students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning disabilities are overrepresented in this group and in the group of students who attend school in adult education centres;
- quickly creating additional measures to counter the high net dropout rates that characterize the students in this group;
- conducting qualitative research on the academic success and student retention of these young people, so that we can obtain a better grasp of their characteristics, particularly with regard to the differences observed in relation to the country of origin.

Project

La réussite scolaire des jeunes Québécois issus de l'immigration au secondaire

Research team

- Marie Mc Andrew
Université de Montréal
- Jacques Ledent
INRS-Centre Urbanisation Culture Société
- Jake Murdoch
Université de Montréal

For the profile of this community

- Jacqueline Celemencki
McGill University
- Marie Mc Andrew
Université de Montréal
- Alhassane Balde
Université de Montréal

Grant organization

- Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS)

References

Celemencki, J. (2011). *The Academic Success of Immigrant Origin Students in High School: Portrait of Young Quebecers Originating from the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa, English Sector*. Research report, M. Mc Andrew & A. Balde (eds). Montréal: Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport.

Mc Andrew, M., Ledent, J. & Murdoch, J. (with R. Ait-Saïd) (2011). *La réussite scolaire des jeunes québécois issus de l'immigration au secondaire*. Final report submitted to the ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport. Montréal: Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport.

Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles (2012). *Portrait statistique de l'immigration permanente au Québec selon les catégories d'immigration et quelques composantes: 2002-2006 et 2007-2011*. Gouvernement du Québec.

Statistics Canada (2010). *2006 Census of Population*. Government of Canada.

Summary written by:

- Alhassane Balde
Post-doctoral student at Groupe de recherche Immigration, équité et scolarisation (GRIES) – CEETUM
Université de Montréal
- Marie Mc Andrew
Full professor, Département d'administration et fondements de l'éducation, Faculté des sciences de l'éducation, Université de Montréal

Translated by:

- Direction de la communauté anglophone, Services langagiers, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport