

DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS HIGHER EDUCATION AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: THE CASE OF SABRAS (ISRAELI-BORN) AND FSU IMMIGRANTS IN ISRAEL

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Abstract

Between the years 1990 and 2007 about one million immigrants entered Israel from the FSU (former Soviet Union). They constitute roughly 20% of the Jewish households in the country. Israel benefited greatly from the high human capital of this mass migration: 38.8% of the immigrants had higher education, in contrast to 27.8% of the indigenous Jewish population. Taking into consideration the cultural background of FSU immigrants, this study explores whether the elite-traditional influences their offspring who graduate from high schools in Israel. This study is based on a survey of a sample of 80 high school students – 40 FSU immigrants and 40 Sabras (Israeli born). Contrary to the hypothesis, findings indicate no significant difference in attitudes towards higher education between the two groups

Key words: *Israel as migration country, FSU migration, higher education expansion in Israel, habitus and educational inspirations, socially constructed roles.*

Theoretical Background

Israel as an Immigrant Society

Israel is a small country that was, from the outset, established with a unique ethno-national base. For many years, waves of immigrants created the demographic foundation for Jewish existence in the British Mandate Palestine (*Eretz Israel*), and subsequently, in the state of Israel, established in 1948. On December 31, 2012, the country's population was 7,981,000, of which 6,015,000 (75.4%) were Jews, 1,648,000 (20.6%) were Arabs, and 319,000 were of other ethnic origins (CBS, 2012). These population statistics do not include foreign workers who live in Israel, a group that is estimated at 203,000 as at end 2011 (CBS, 2012).

At independence in 1948, Israel's population was a mere 806,000, of which 650,000 were Jews (CBS, 2011). In 1948, only 35% of the population were Israeli born, yet today, over 70% of the Jewish population in Israel are Sabras, i.e., Israeli-born. More than half of this group are at least second-generation Sabras as well. Immigration accounts for approximately 40% of the population growth since 1948 (CBS, 2009). From 1948 to end 2012, 3.2 million people immigrated to Israel; 41% arrived after 1990 (CBS, 2012). The sources of immigration to Israel were numerous and diverse in terms of socio-cultural features. These features also varied over time. During the British Mandate period, between 1919 and 1948, 89.6% of all immigrants came from Europe or the Americas (primarily from Europe), and only 10.4% came from Africa or Asia (CBS, 2012b, Table 4.2). Between 1948 and 2011, 69% of all the immigrants were from Europe and the Americas while 30.9% came from Asia and Africa. More specifically, immigra-

tion between 1952 and 1954 was profoundly from Asia and Africa (76.4% of all immigrants in that period), which is also true of the period between 1955 and 1957 (68.3% of all the immigrants in that period), and the period between 1961-1964 (59.4%).

The 65 years since the founding of the state can also be divided according to the rate of immigration. In some periods, such as the periods between 1948 and 1951, immigration was intense, with over 687.5 thousand people immigrants, who doubled the local population. This is also true of the period from 1961 to 1964, when 228.8 thousand immigrants came to Israel; and from 1990 to 1994, when 609.3 thousand immigrants came. Between 1995 and 1999, 347 thousand immigrants came to Israel. In contrast, there were significant periods in which the number of immigrants was limited, and remained approximately 15,000 per year or less.

Israel's Russian Immigration

Israel's immigration from Russia since the founding of the State occurred in two main waves of immigration. In the first decades after 1948, Soviet Jews were not permitted to leave the USSR and the number of immigrants from the USSR during this period was consequently small. Between 1948 and 1969, fewer than 20,000 immigrants came from Russia (Sikron, 2012). In the late 1960s, the USSR eased its emigration policy in response to American pressure and permitted 235,000 Jews to leave the country. Close to 150,000 immigrated to Israel, while the remainder immigrated to the USA. Israel's largest wave of immigration from the USSR commenced in 1989. That year, 72,000 Jews left the Soviet Union, although only 13,000 reached Israel (the remainder emigrated to the USA). In the 1990s and 2000s, Germany became a destination for the Jewish emigrés from the former Soviet Union (FSU). Between 1989 and 2006, 1.6 million Jews left the FSU: Of these, 979,000 (61%) immigrated to Israel, 325,000 (20%) emigrated to the USA, 219,000 (14%) emigrated to Germany, and the remainder emigrated to other countries. Between 1990 and 2010, 988,000 Jews from FSU immigrated to Israel: 804,000 (81.4%) from European territories and 184,000 (18.6%) from Asian territories (Sikron, 2012). This has been the largest wave of immigration ever to reach Israel since the country's independence in 1948. FSU immigrants account for 92% of all immigrants to Israel in the last two decades. Today, FSU immigrants are the second-largest ethnic Jewish sector in Israel, after Sabras.

Beyond their numerical contribution to Israel's population, FSU immigrants made a notable contribution to Israel's human capital, first and foremost reflected in the educational level of the immigrants. Statistics show that 48.9% of all new immigrants age 15 and over between 1990 and 2001 had post-secondary education. Between 2002 and 2007, this percent rose slightly (49.7%; Sikron, 2012). See Table 1 for a comprehensive view.

Table 1. Distribution of FSU immigrants age 15 and over by years of education, 1990-2007.

Year of immigration	2001-1990	2001-1990
Education (in years)		
8-0	10.5%	4.7%
12-9	40.5%	45.5%
15-13	38.3%	36.0%
+16	10.6	13.7%
Total immigrants for the	738,000	54,000

Source: Sikron, 2012, 28

A review of the situation in 2009 indicates that FSU immigrants accounted for a share of all college graduates in Israel that far exceeded their share of the general population: 38.8%

of all FSU immigrants had an academic degree. In Israel's Jewish population, only 27.8% had an academic degree; In Israel's non-Jewish population, 25.4% had an academic degree (Sikron, 2012).

FSU immigrants' contribution to Israel's human capital is also reflected in the fact that between 1989 and 2007, 16,076 scientists immigrated to Israel from FSU (Davidovitch et al., 2012, p. 176). Between 1989 and 1991, the first three years of the large wave of immigration from FSU, 6,000 scientists immigrated. In 1991, there were a total of 8,000 scientists in Israel who were either sabras or else old-timers who immigrated to the country many years earlier (Geva-May, 2000). These figures speak for themselves, and shed light on the enormous contribution of the FSU immigrants to Israel's human capital.

Furthermore, FSU immigrants are extremely proud of their Russian culture and have even adopted a patronizing attitude toward the host culture in Israel. A survey among FSU immigrants shows that 58.4% believe that Israel's culture should be much more Western than it currently is, while 64.2% wished that Israelis had the culture of the FSU immigrants (Leshem, 2012). Moreover, a survey conducted in 1998 among eight focus groups of FSU immigrants (Alias et al., 2000) indicated that their most prevalent stereotype of veteran Israelis is that most have a low level of culture, poor education, and narrow horizons. Most of the new immigrants are also critical of the "sloppy" and "popular" conduct of veteran Israelis, mentioning their wrinkled clothes, unraveling buttons, etc. In response to the question of how they view Israeli society, focus group members were divided between comments such as "there is no culture in Israel" and the use of labels such as "oriental" and "provincial" to describe Israeli culture. Another study (Haas, 1999) presented similar findings, indicating that FSU immigrants are condescending toward Israeli culture. According to 75%, Israeli culture is similar to oriental culture. Only 9% of the respondents considered Israeli culture to be western. Needless to say, education plays a major role in the Russian culture that FSU immigrants brought with them to Israel (Hanley et al., 1995; Rivera, 2000; White & Kryshtanovskaya, 1998).

The Effect of Parental Aspirations on Offspring's Educational Aspirations

The link between educational aspirations of parents and their children is explained by socially constructed roles. Role theory suggests that beliefs and aspirations are derived from expectations held by groups that expect certain behaviors of its individual members.

In so far as immigration is concerned, studies note that while many immigrant students invest time and energy in studying, what drives these efforts is a constellation of parental as well as peer values that place great importance on the role of education (Biddle, 1979; Dubow et al., 2009; Fuligni, 1997). Bourdieu's theory is very important in this respect.

Bourdieu uses the term '*habitus*' to illuminate a sense of national culture that encourages educational aspirations. Bourdieu defined *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990, 13) as the "*system of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment or as classificatory principles as well as being the organizing principles of action.*" One's *habitus* is the product of one's individual history but also of the collective history of family and class (Bourdieu, 1990, 91). In other words, one's *habitus* is a set of expectations and understandings individually operationalized. It is based on the collection of experiences one encounters and it shapes one's sense of what might be called 'the rules of the game'.

Bourdieu also stated that *habitus* is a "generative schema", consisting of various systems of durable, transposable dispositions that are implicated in the reproduction of social order (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 85). This was interpreted by Sulkunen (1982) to mean that the "*habitus of a group or class defines a symbolic order within which it conducts its practices – in everyday life as well as in the feast*" (p. 108). Baker and Brown (2008) explained that a social group gains cultural capital through the practice of a particular kind of *habitus*. They expand Bourdieu's concept and introduce the concept of *aspirational habitus* in order to explain how the sense in students' families that education was valuable culminated in their going to the university. *Aspi-*

rational habitus according to Baker and Brown is more than just aspiration; educational values are embedded and remembered as being held by people in the wider community preparing the young generation for university. The family's dominance as "meaningful others" in conveying to students aspirations to embrace higher education has been repeatedly studied and proven (Hauser & Sewell, 1995; Kerckhoff & Campbell, 1977).

The Expansion of Higher Education

Until the end of World War II, higher education functioned as an incubator for cultivating elites (Morrison, 1998), thereby reflecting and reproducing existing social structures (Havighurst, 1989). However, the second half of the twentieth century was a period of rapid expansion of the higher education system (Trow, 1972). Bachelor degrees became the accepted norm in the West, replacing the high school diplomas of the first half of the century (Allen & Allen, 2003). As mentioned by Gibbons (1998) this was preceded or accompanied by a huge increase of young people from both middle as well lower-middle and working class origins, enabled or encouraged to remain in secondary school. Differentiation and diversity became important themes in the post-WWII development of higher education systems – expanding the range of choices available for potential students (Meek et al., 1996; Shattock, 1996; Stadtman, 1980; Trow, 1974, 1999). Participation in higher education became a major target of national higher education policies as governments developed various strategies to increase participation rates (Huisman et al., 2000).

Israel was also affected by these significant global social changes toward increased equality and democratization of higher education (Yaoz & Iram, 1987) that opened the university gates to populations whose members were not previously potential patrons of university programs. This pressure increased due to the need for specialization. In Israel, the new demand for higher education was supplied by colleges and universities alike, both of which expanded access to new population groups and disciplines. Universities also sponsored young academic institutions and colleges by granting them affiliate status and assisted them in their development by conferring what candidates perceived as "academic legitimacy." In this manner, universities sought to respond to the contemporary need to expand access to higher education, without detracting from the elite status of the universities themselves. Colleges became a new type of higher education institution, distinct from universities.

The accelerated process of academization of the regional colleges in the 1990s was also a response to social-national policy. One of the goals of the Israeli College Association, established in 1989, was to develop academic study tracks to satisfy the urgent need for tens of thousands of potential students.

In the last two decades Israel's higher education system has experienced a period of accelerated expansion. During the 1989/90 academic year, 88.8 thousand students attended 21 institutions that were certified to award academic degrees. During the 2011/12 academic year, 306.6 thousand students attended 70 certified institutions (CBS, 2013b). During this period, the student population grew at an annual rate of 5.8% on average. In the 1990s, several universities (Ben Gurion, Bar Ilan and Haifa) doubled their student bodies (CBS, 2002). Of the students who attended higher education institutions in Israel in 2011/12, 75% were undergraduate students, 20.4% were graduate students, and 4.1% were doctoral students. The remainder studied in diploma programs.

Methodology of Research

In view of the dramatic expansion of Israel's higher education system in the last 20 years and the significant weight of FSU immigrants in the general population, as well as the fact that this group's Russian culture attributes considerable significance to education, the author decided to examine whether there are differences in the attitudes of young Israeli-born and FSU immigrants high school students toward higher education.

The Study Population

The study population is based on a convenience sample of 40 male and 40 female students who attend a comprehensive high school, some of whom attend the Matriculation track, while others attend the school's vocational track. Their ages range from 17 to 19 (57.5% of the sample are 17 years old, 37.5% are 18 years old, and 5% are 19 years old). One half of the respondents are Sabras (Israeli born) while one half are FSU immigrants who immigrated between 1994 and 2000.

Study Design

Questionnaires were distributed to the respondents during three visits made to the comprehensive high school they attended, during recess. Students in 11th and 12th grade were invited to complete the questionnaires. The research assistant waited until the students had completed the questionnaires, and collected them. Data analysis was later performed using SPSS software.

The Research Question¹

The primary research question was whether there would be a difference between the aspirations for higher education of FSU immigrants compared to the aspirations of high school students who were born in Israel. The study premise was that the aspirations for higher education of FSU immigrants would be stronger than those of Israeli-born high school students.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire completed by participants comprises two sections: The first section was a quasi-business card, and included questions that provided information on the respondent's gender, age, country of birth, parental income, etc. The main section of the questionnaire, comprising 25 items divided into two sections, focused on participants' attitudes toward higher education.

The first section of the attitude questionnaire contained 13 items that were formulated as statements designed to tap into students' basic attitudes toward higher education. Participants rated their responses on a Likert scale from 1 (*absolutely disagree*) to 5 (*absolutely agree*). Sample items include:

- I am certain that I will want to continue my studies in the future.
- I will go to university even if I don't succeed in high school.
- I think that success in academic studies will allow me to get any job that I choose in the future.

Cronbach's alpha, reflecting the internal consistency of the items in this section of the questionnaire, after two items were eliminated, was 0.74.

The second section of the attitude questionnaire included 12 items on the participants' future feelings and conduct at university. Participants rated their responses on a Likert scale from 1 (*absolutely disagree*) to 5 (*absolutely agree*). Sample items include:

Compared to high school, as a university student I will be –

- More attentive
- Work harder
- Under greater pressure

Cronbach's alpha, reflecting the internal consistency of the items in this section was 0.89.

Results of Research

The answer to the research question was negative: the attitudes of Israeli-born and FSU immigrant high school students were not statistically different, in direct contrast to the hypothesis based on the assumption that as a result of Russian immigrants' pride in their culture, and their contempt for Israeli culture, and the significant weight that the Russian immigrant attributes to education, the aspirations for higher education of FSU immigrants would be significantly greater than the aspirations for higher education of their Israeli counterparts. The weighted average score of Israelis was 4.0560 while the weighted average score of FSU immigrants was 3.9080. The most frequent group among the Israelis was the group whose weighted score was 4.28. 15% of the respondents were in this group. Only 25% of the Israeli respondents obtained a weighted score that was less than 4 (see Figure 1).

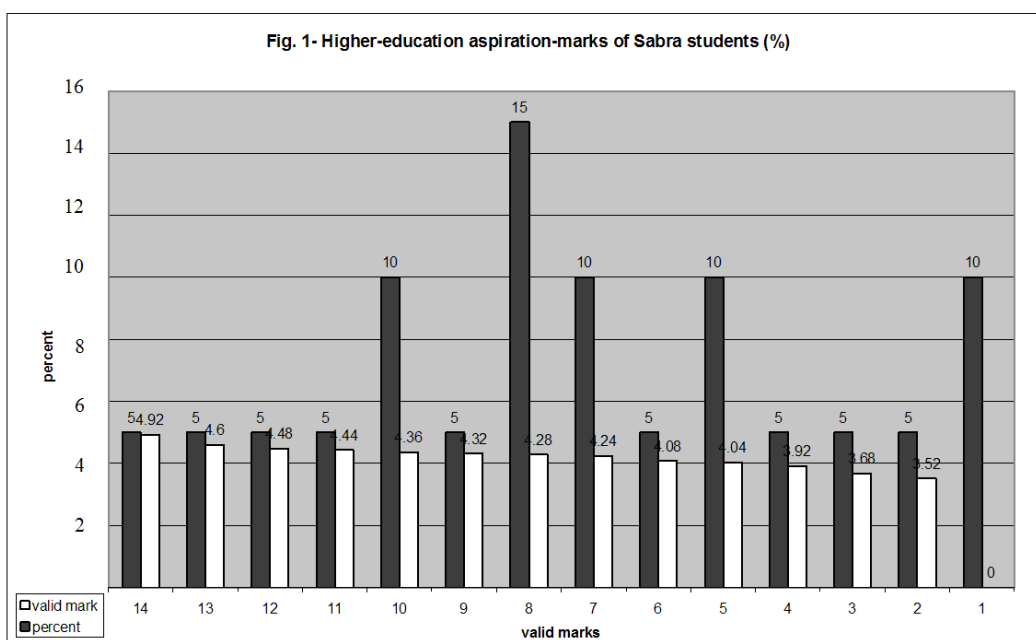


Figure 1: Higher education aspiration marks of Sabra students (%).

In other words, this group's aspirations for higher education were very high. Among the FSU immigrants, the most frequent groups were the group whose weighted score was 4.08 and the group whose weighted score was 4. Ten percent of the respondents were in each of these groups. Forty percent of the FSU respondents obtained a weighted score that was less than 4 (see Figure 2).

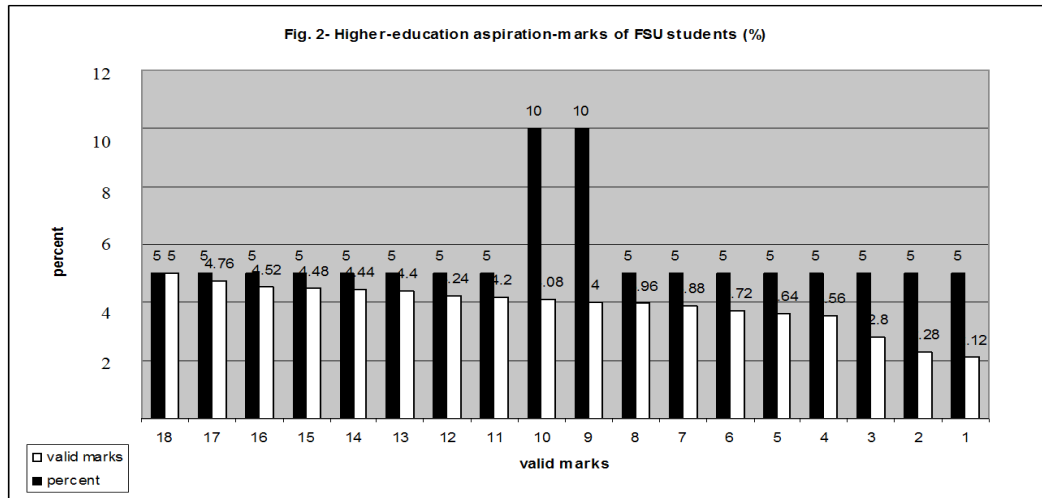


Figure 2: Higher education aspiration marks of FSU students (%).

This group also demonstrated high aspirations for higher education, but less so than the aspirations of the Israeli respondents, in contrast to our prediction.

Table 2. Aspirations for higher education among Israeli-born and FSU immigrant high school students.

Strength of aspirations	Country of origin	Frequency	%
2.80 or lower	FSU immigrants	6	15
	Israeli-born	4	10
2.81-3.96	FSU immigrants	10	25
	Israeli-born	6	15
3.97-4.43	FSU immigrants	14	35
	Israeli-born	22	55
4.44-5	FSU immigrants	10	25
	Israeli-born	8	20

T-tests were conducted to examine whether the differences in the weighted scores of the two groups were statistically significant. Findings indicate that the differences are not statistically significant. That is, there is no statistical difference between the aspirations for higher education of Israeli-born high school students and FSU immigrant high school students.

Table 3. Independence Sample test.

Higher education aspirations	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference
Equal variances	0.982	78	0.329	0.14800

As no statistically significant country origin effect was found on aspirations for higher education, we examined whether other variables in the questionnaire had any effect on the respondents' aspirations for higher education. Two variables were examined: parental education and parental income. Statistical tests indicated that neither variable had any effect on respondents' aspirations for higher education.

Discussion

As stated above, FSU immigrants account for the largest origin group in Israel's Jewish population. They came to Israel in two large waves of immigration: 150,000 immigrants arrived in the 1970s, while approximately 1 million FSU immigrants arrived 25 years later. FSU immigrants are not only the largest cultural-ethnic group in Israel, they also constitute a unique group in terms of their high human capital – the rate of university degrees in this population is much higher than in the general population of Israel. Moreover, this group is very proud of its Russian culture, and they have adopted a condescending attitude toward Israeli culture. In the 2009 academic year, FSU immigrants accounted for 54.7% of all the immigrant students in Israel (Davidovitch, 2011, 3), and their academic situation was best of all immigrant groups. In 2008, the achievements of this group in the Matriculation exams were similar to the achievements of their Israeli-born counterparts.

As mentioned above, French sociologist Bourdieu (1970, 1977) coined the term “habitus” to mean a “system of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment... or the organizing principles of action.” (1990, p. 13). This term has long been used to highlight a sense of national culture that encourages aspirations for education. If we adopt the derivative term, “aspirational habitus”, we can expect FSU immigrant families to convey a deep sense of the value of education, and as a result they will do everything to implant aspirations for higher education into their children.

It is interesting to explore why the study findings failed to confirm this hypothesis. One option is that a very high percentage of high school students in Israel have strong aspirations for higher education in any case. According to a study conducted in 2010, 75% of all high school students in Israel have such aspirations (Cohen-Starvechinsky et al., 2010, p. vi). Another possibility is that the participants in this study were all “veteran” immigrants at the time of the study (2010) and all had lived in Israel for at least 10 years (12% had lived in Israel for 14 years and 22.5% had lived in Israel for 15 years). Recall that the respondents were between the ages of 17 and 19 at the time of the survey. Over one third of the respondents had lived in Israel since the age of 3 or 4 and the remainder were between age 7 and 10 when they arrived. As a result, their formative years were spent in Israel. Moreover, a study of new immigrant youth conducted in 2010 indicated that 74% of the immigrant youth consume Israeli culture in Hebrew. Individuals who experience their formative years in Israel, beginning in the pre-elementary school system, can be expected to develop behavioral patterns and aspirations that are similar to those prevalent in the Israeli-born group, since these systems make a significant contribution to the formation of values, behavioral patterns, and self-perception (Richman & Bowen, 1997). Consequently the similarity in aspirations for higher education among the two groups is not surprising.

Conclusions

One of the conclusions related to aspirations for higher education is the connection between parental education and income and offspring's aspirations for higher education. An important and consistent finding in the area of parents' impact on their children's education is that the children of higher social class origins are more likely to have higher education aspirations than children of lower social class children. It is widely agreed that standard demographic and socio-economic factors affect variation in parents' educational aspirations, and thus, by impli-

cation also affect their children's educational aspirations (Eccles & Davies-Kean, 2005; Karagiannaki, 2012; Reed, 2012; Sewell & Shah, 1967, 1968). No such connection was found in the comprehensive high school where our study took place. It is difficult to explain this finding. A possible explanation is perhaps the common denominator of a neighbourhood effect. Since high school enrolment in Israel has been until recently dictated by residence, all the respondents in the current study reside in the same residential environment, which plays an influential role in forming aspirations for higher education. This environmental common denominator may have counterbalanced other effects.

In any case, in this study we found no indications that a habitus effect of Russian culture of origin triggered especially strong aspirations for higher education among the students of FSU extraction.

Notes

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