Immigration and educational inequalities in France: statistical evidence and beyond

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Outline

• Introduction: ethnic inequalities in French Republic?
• Data & method: panel and matching techniques
• Results: Asians overachieve & Turks underachieve
• Empirical interpretation: exploring the unmeasured
• Discussion: what next?
Introduction: Ethnic inequalities in French Republic?

- France, a country of immigration:
  - 30% of people in France linked to immigration (Beauchemin et al., 2010)

- France, a (color-)blind ideology

- Lack of relevant data on ethnicity

- Lack of relevant research on ethnic inequalities
Introduction: Ethnic inequalities in French Republic?

- What is known:


  - Second-generation immigrants underachieve in secondary school

  - By and large, ethnic disadvantage disappears when class and educational background are controlled for
Introduction: Ethnic inequalities in French Republic?

- What is unknown:
  - What happens in primary school?
  - What is the situation of small minorities?
  - How to make sense of the residual ‘ethnic’ differences?

- My aim: address these issues empirically
Data & methods: surveys

- **1997-2007 Panel study**
  - From kindergarten (age 5/6) to 10th grade (age 15/16)
  - N=9,641; N minority=1,952

- **TeO survey**
  - 3 generations
  - N= tbc; N minority =tbc
Data & methods: surveys

- 1997-2007 Panel study
  - Primary & secondary school

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- **1997-2007 Panel study**
  - Primary & secondary school

- **TeO survey**
  - Empirical interpretations
Data & methods: measures

Second-generation groups

- Others: 350
- SE Asia: 59
- DOM-TOM: 91
- Sahel: 129
- Southern Europe: 445
- Northern Africa: 965

Source: 1997 Panel study
Data & methods: measures

- **Academic achievement measures:**
  - Standardized test scores at age 6, 11 and 15 (z-scores)

- **Other background variables:**
  - Both parents’ education
  - Occupation of head of household
  - Both parents’ employment status
  - Number of siblings, rank among them
  - Parents’ relationship status
  - Pupil’s gender
Data & methods: exact matching

- **Exact Matching** (Ho *et al*., 2007; Iacus, King & Porro, 2009; see Imbens, 2004, Morgan & Harding, 2006, for reviews)

  - Focus: difference in academic achievement linked to country of birth of parents
  - Groups also differ according to other relevant sociological properties
  - In each ‘group of common origin’, each pupil is matched with children of natives sharing exactly the same *observed* sociological properties
  - Multivariate analysis (including all interactions) on small groups without any statistical modeling.
Results: trajectories of academic (under?)achievement

Academic achievement during compulsory education:
RAW differences between groups

Source: 1997 Panel study, own calculations
Results: trajectories of academic (under?)achievement

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Results: trajectories of academic (under?)achievement

- The least often studied minorities are the most puzzling

- A two-fold result, a double puzzle
  - Turkish second-generation underachievement
  - Southeast Asian second-generation ‘overachievement’
Empirical interpretation: exploring the unmeasured

- Pre-migration socioeconomic characteristics
Empirical interpretation: exploring the unmeasured

Source: Teo survey, own calculations
Empirical interpretation: exploring the unmeasured

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Empirical interpretation: exploring the unmeasured

- Pre-migration socioeconomic characteristics
  - Turkish immigrants from more rural and unskilled backgrounds
  - Southeast Asian immigrants from better off backgrounds
Empirical interpretation: exploring the unmeasured

- Pre-migration socioeconomic characteristics
- Language skills
Empirical interpretation: exploring the unmeasured

Level of difficulties in French

Source: Teo survey, own calculations
Empirical interpretation: exploring the unmeasured

- Pre-migration socioeconomic characteristics
- Language skills
  - Both Turkish and Southeast Asian immigrants have difficulties in French
Empirical interpretation: exploring the unmeasured

- Pre-migration socioeconomic characteristics
- Language skills
- Urban segregation and deprived local schools
  - Turkish immigrants are the most segregated group;
  - Southeast Asians are rather segregated too
Empirical interpretation: exploring the unmeasured

- Pre-migration socioeconomic characteristics
- Language skills
- Urban segregation and deprived local schools
- Length of stay in France
Empirical interpretation: exploring the unmeasured

% of immigrants arrived after 1980

Source: 1997 Panel study, own calculations
Empirical interpretation: exploring the unmeasured

- Pre-migration socioeconomic characteristics
- Language skills
- Urban segregation and deprived local schools
- Length of stay in France
  - Both Turks and Southeast Asians are recent migrants
Discussion: summary

- The groups who differ the most from the majority group are also the smaller and least often studied;

- Class background in France is in general the main factor of the academic underachievement of children of immigrants;

- For children of parents from Turkey (-) and Southeast Asia (++), a ‘residual’ difference still needs to be explained.
The residual underachievement of children of Turkish immigrants seem to be explained by usually unmeasured properties before and after migration.

To be fully explained, the differences recorded [...] would need to be related to both the living and working conditions in France and the differences which, initially, that is to say prior to and independently of emigration, already characterized emigrants or groups of emigrants. (Sayad, 1999, p. 57)
Discussion: summary

**Southeast Asians success:**
- Cannot be only explained by socioeconomic properties;
- Contradicts traditional assimilationist views.
- Seems to correspond to a process of ‘selective assimilation’ (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Immigrants may not necessarily divest themselves of their previous cultural patterns, including their languages, and adopt those of the host society to take full part in it; instead, they may lean on these unique cultural characteristics to facilitate their adaptation. (Bankston & Zhou, 1995, p. 5; see also Zhou & Bankston, 1999; and, e.g. Caplan et al., 1992, Ogbu, 1989, Rumbaut & Ima, 1988, Sung, 1987)
Discussion: what next?

- Explore the role of the educational experience of parents
- Critically discuss the notion of cultural orientation
- Explore the influence of the local context
- Explore the role of school as institution
- Explore school choices and tracking decisions
- ...

Fieldwork to come