

# Academic Achievement among Québec Secondary School Students of Immigrant Origin Profile of Students of South Asian Origin in the Québec English School Sector

## Key words

Academic achievement • South Asia • Immigration • Secondary education

## Summary

The following is a brief profile of the educational paths of Québec secondary school students of South Asian origin 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 a favourable 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.

Immigrants from South Asia accounted for 4.7% of all immigrants admitted to Québec between 2007 and 2011, in contrast to 7.9% of all those admitted between 2002 and 2006 (MICC, 2012). However, people of South Asian origin currently represent the largest visible minority in Canada, outstripping the number of Chinese immigrants for the first time in 2006. Moreover, these figures could more than double between 2006 and 2031 (Statistics Canada, 2010). A majority of

these students (63.3%) attend schools in the French sector, while 36.7% 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 East Asian students in the English sector, 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, 576, or 8.2%, were from South Asia. Of these, 41.3% came from India, 31.1% from Bangladesh and Pakistan, and 27.3% from another country in the area. Of the students in this community, 24% claimed English as their mother tongue, and 17.9% of the speakers of other languages spoke Urdu, while 20.7% spoke Tamil.

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

57.6% of English-speaking Québec secondary school students of South Asian origin are second-generation immigrants, which is a lower proportion than that of all their immigrant peers together (73%). Most of them have, however, attended elementary school in Québec, and in

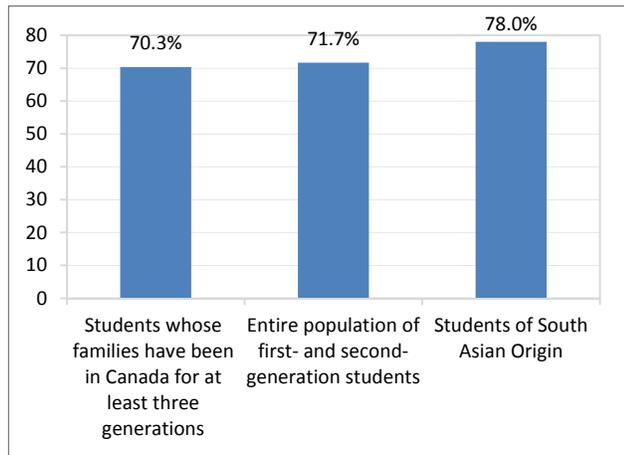
slightly higher numbers than the entire population of their immigrant peers. Also, English was less frequently their mother tongue or the language commonly used at home (46.7%), in contrast to the experience of those of their peers who were also immigrants. Boys are overrepresented than girls in this group. Families from the South Asia 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. For the most part, students of South Asian origin began secondary school at the normal age, but not as often as their peers in the two control groups. They attended private school to the same degree as the entire set of first- and second-generation students, but to a lesser degree than third-generation students. To conclude, they were clearly more concentrated on the Island of Montreal than the students in the control groups.

These characteristics indicate that students of South Asian origin exhibit a somewhat disjointed profile, yet one that is more or less advantageous, compared with that of the entire population of immigrant students combined, or third-generation students whose families have been in Canada for at least three generations (both parents born in Canada), according to the selected indicator. However, this observation can be refined by distinguishing these students on the basis of their linguistic characteristics, country of origin, and generational status. For example, students from India have an advantageous profile, in contrast to their peers from Bangladesh and Pakistan, who are distinguished by characteristics that are, overall, less positive.

The academic paths of these students are, however, much more positive than their lukewarm characteristics might lead one to suspect. First of all, their secondary school graduation rate is clearly higher than that of first- and second-generation students, as well as of students whose families have been in Canada for at least three generations (both parents born in Canada), regardless of the time frame used. Their net dropout rate is clearly lower than that of the

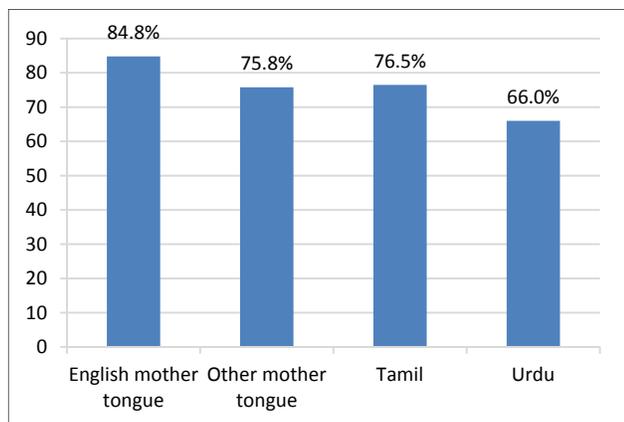
two control groups. Keep in mind, however, that this indicator may be influenced by the different rates at which various groups leave Québec.

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



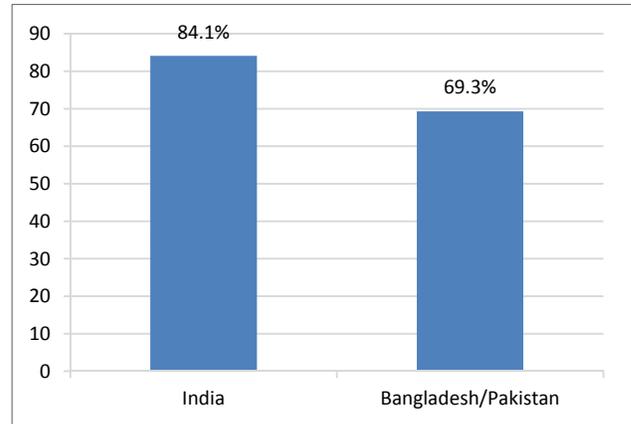
With regard to linguistic characteristics, students who declare English as their mother tongue graduate at higher rates than native speakers of other languages. Among the latter, Tamil speakers have a clearly more advantageous profile, while that of students whose mother tongue is Urdu is much less favourable. Data pertaining to the link between linguistic characteristics and net dropout rates present a much less clear picture.

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



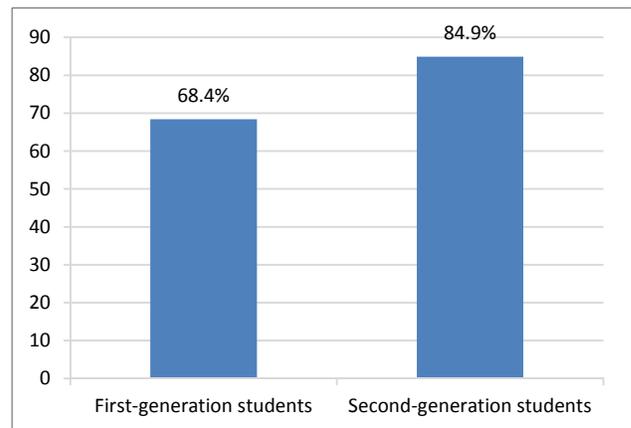
With respect to country of origin, students from India have a better profile than students from Bangladesh and Pakistan. Indeed, Indian students not only have higher graduation rates than their peers from Bangladesh and Pakistan, regardless of the time frame selected, but, in addition, their dropout rates are lower.

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



It has generally been observed that second-generation students of South Asian origin have higher graduation rates than their first-generation peers (a more than 15-point gap). Moreover, second-generation students drop out much less frequently.

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



The favourable academic paths of these students are also shown by other indicators. For example, many of them opt to take the most

demanding mathematics course (Mathematics 536) and get better marks in the course than the control groups. Also, fewer of them are identified as students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning disabilities.

Socioeconomic factors probably account to a great degree for the overall favourable profile of these students, many of whom are close to the average of the entire student population in the two control groups. This impact is confirmed also by the higher graduation rates of immigrant students from India, students who declare English as their mother tongue and second-generation students. However, it does little to explain the high graduation rates among Tamil speakers, who generally have a less advantageous socioeconomic profile than that of other groups, for example, Urdu speakers, whose graduation rates are lower.

It is also possible that other factors related to pre-emigration experiences, cultural capital, family strategies and community organization play a role here.

Also keep in mind that the generally less positive linguistic characteristics of these students do not seem to negatively affect their academic progress. These paradoxical results can probably be explained by their attendance in very high numbers at private and public schools in affluent communities. It seems, therefore, that these communities are equipped to provide them with good support in their path through school.

### 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 of South Asian origin 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:

- that additional analyses be carried out so that we can have a better understanding of the socio-academic profile of students of South Asian origin;

- that qualitative research on the academic success and school retention of these young people be continued 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;
- that more studies be conducted to identify the factors that attenuate the impact of the socio-economic status of these students' families on their academic progress and performance.

### Project

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

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