

EDUCATION AND MIGRANTS: A VIEW FROM THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

Several factors contribute to the effective integration of migrants into the United States of America (U.S.), and among these is education. Educated migrants find transition to the U.S. infinitely more effective than those without education. While English language competence is essential, literacy in one's native language increases the likelihood of acquiring English language literacy.

Equal access to public education is the right of every child in the U.S., regardless of citizenship or migration status. Under law, all children between age six and sixteen years are required to be enrolled in school. College education, on the other hand, is accessible only to those with citizenship or legal visa or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) status. This paper explores the educational level of immigrants in the U.S. and discusses the governmental and nongovernmental resources that can be utilized to increase the likelihood of successful functioning in the country.

KEY WORDS

International migrations, Immigration legislation, Education, Language learning, United States.



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EDUCAÇÃO E MIGRANTES: UMA VISÃO A PARTIR DOS ESTADOS UNIDOS DA AMÉRICA

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RESUMO

Vários fatores contribuem para a efetiva integração dos migrantes nos Estados Unidos da América (EUA), e entre eles está a educação. Os imigrantes com uma formação vivem a mudança para os EUA de forma infinitamente mais eficaz do que aqueles sem formação. Se a competência em língua inglesa é essencial, a literacia na língua nativa aumenta a probabilidade de adquirir uma literacia em língua inglesa.

O acesso igualitário à educação pública é um direito de cada criança nos Estados Unidos, independentemente da sua nacionalidade ou do seu estatuto de imigrante. Segundo a lei, todas as crianças entre os seis e os dezasseis anos de idade são obrigadas a ser matriculadas na escola. O ensino superior, por outro lado, é acessível apenas para aqueles com a nacionalidade americana ou um visto válido, ou ainda com o estatuto de *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA)*. Este artigo explora o nível educacional dos imigrantes nos Estados Unidos e discute os recursos governamentais e não-governamentais que podem ser utilizados para aumentar a probabilidade de ser bem sucedido neste país.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Migrações internacionais, Legislação sobre imigração, Educação, Aprendizagem da língua, Estados Unidos da América.



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INTRODUCTION

Known as a “Land of Milk and Honey,” where economic prospects for immigrants are plentiful, and many can improve the quality of life for themselves and their families (McKenzie, Gibson, & Stillman, 2013), the United States of America (U.S.) continues to draw immigrants from around the globe. Nevertheless, closely linked to migrant success is education, both educational level and English language literacy. Immigration policies have been based on the country’s labor force needs, family reunification, and humanitarian outreach, therefore, the educational level of immigrants as well as their English language competence vary substantially, having implications for adaptation, integration, and progress. U.S. immigrant policies, policies that focus on the integration and inclusion of immigrants, may have been based in a traditional motto of the nation found emblazoned on its Great Seal, *E Pluribus Unum*, meaning “out of many, one,” nevertheless, when integration is elusive, the “many” may well remain “the many.”

Globally, education may be perceived to be the great equalizer, and in the U.S. can well be the key factor that allows, or impedes, immigrants’ social and economic mobility. It is recognized as being a significant predictor of health and healthy outcomes (White 2012), being inversely correlated with economic inequality (Ireland, 2016), and leading to increased social cohesion that provides an economic edge for society (OECD, 2012). Literacy allows individuals access to knowledge and opens to them a world of opportunities by enabling them to be lifelong learners (Segal, Mayadas & Elliott, 2010).

In addition to opening professional doors, education garners respect, leading to greater acceptance by native born populations. All immigrants, regardless of visa status, leave much of value in their homelands in the hopes of availing themselves of increased opportunities and enhancing the quality of their lives and those of their offspring. Despite such sacrifice, however, when immigrants lack host country language ability or were not literate in their own homeland, the likelihood of success decreases and limits the extent to which they are able to improve their lives. Education has been found, over and over again, to be both a predictor and a measure of socioeconomic success (Capps et al, 2015). It is essential that educational opportunities be made available to all, regardless of age, to ensure societal development.

Only when a nation truly perceives education as essential to build its own social capital, will all its members receive access. It must view education as being intrinsic to social justice, equity and egalitarianism and recognize the potential and the value of all human beings (Zajda, Majhanovich & Rust, 2006). It is telling that, although the U.S. is a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), a multilateral treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, it has not yet, in 2017, ratified the Covenant which, among other rights, requires a nation to commit to granting its residents



the right to education and the right to an adequate standard of living. Specifically, it proposes universally free education at the primary level and, subsequently, moving toward free education at the secondary and higher levels. In addition, the U.S. has neither signed nor ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (OHCHR, 2017).

This paper provides an overview of the educational profile of the immigrant population in the U.S. and discusses the governmental and nongovernmental resources that can be utilized to ensure successful functioning in the country. Further, it discusses the “immigrant paradox” and concerns of “brain waste” and credential transfer, phenomena that underutilize immigrant resources, frequently resulting in immigrant marginalization.

IMMIGRATION LEGISLATION IN THE U.S.

IMMIGRATION POLICY

While *immigration policy* establishes the parameters of which individuals are allowed into a country and the circumstances under which they may enter, it also identifies who should be prevented from coming. The type of visa under which an individual enters the country can sometimes be correlated with the individual’s literacy or level of education. There are three general streams for authorized permanent entry into the U.S. as individuals may enter (a) for reasons of family reunification, (b) to fill labor force needs, and (c) for humanitarian reasons.

In the U.S., there is frequent and continuing debate about the merits of admitting large numbers of immigrants annually although, over fifty years ago on October 3, 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act¹ put into law the categories and limits of annual admissions. In large part, in compliance with the 1965 act, despite ongoing attempts at immigration reform, the categories of immigrants and immigrant limits have stayed consistent for over these five decades. They are as follow (U.S. Department of State, 2017a):

Family Sponsored Immigrants (226,000 annual quota)

In reality, annual entrants under this quota has usually been 480,000

1. Unmarried adult children of citizens (23,400)
2. Spouses and unmarried children of permanent residents (114,200)
3. Married children of citizens (23,400)
4. Adult siblings of citizens (65,000)

Employment-Based Immigrants (140,000 annual quota)

1. Priority workers: 28.6% of (40,040)
2. Members of professions holding advanced degrees (40,040)
3. Skilled workers, professionals, and other workers (40,040)

¹ <https://www.uscis.gov/ilink/docView/SLB/HTML/SLB/0-0-0-1/0-0-0-29/0-0-0-914.html>



4. Special immigrants (9,940)
5. Employment creators or “investors” (9,940)

Diversity (55,000 annually, effective 1995)

Another large group of entrants are refugees. In the U.S., in 1980, the Refugee Act removed refugees as a preference category from the immigrant visa allocations and identified them as a unique population requiring special humanitarian consideration. Beginning with this Act, each year the sitting president and the U.S. Congress have determined the annual ceiling and country distributions based on the worldwide political and social climate. Ceiling numbers have ranged since then from about 50,000 to the 110,000 level determined by President Barak Obama for the 2016 fiscal year. This number dropped to 45,000 in October 2017 under the current president, Donald Trump, the lowest since Ronald Reagan in 1986 set the number at 67,000; Trump’s senior staff had been advocating to set the limit at 15,000 (Davis & Jordan, 2017).

Unlike immigration policy, *immigrant policy* focuses on immigrant integration, permitting immigrants to utilize resources based on specific stipulations. Integration allows for the inclusion and the affording of economic opportunities for newcomers and their families and requires that the U.S. make available the mechanisms for growth and progress. Although the concept of immigrant integration, itself, is elusive and somewhat esoteric, in general, it presupposes that immigrants will so adapt to their host country that they add to its social capital and that the host country will provide opportunities through which immigrants can be successful in their integration efforts.

Until 1996, when President Bill Clinton passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWROA), also known as the Welfare Reform Act, access to several public programs was available to all newcomers. In fact, the greatest impact of this Act was felt by immigrants, as Welfare moved from being an entitlement program, accessible to all in need, to requiring certain eligibility requirements to avail of these resources. Since, 1996, immigrants who are “qualified” are only those who are authorized and have been in the country for a minimum of five years on an immigrant visa status; the “unqualified” are authorized immigrants but who have been in the U.S. for under five years as permanent residents, students, business people or tourists, or those who are unauthorized. Currently, although only qualified immigrants have access to social welfare, public health insurance, Social Security, and other governmental programs, all children, regardless of immigrant status or length of time in the U.S., are eligible for free public education through their high school years.

Focus on immigrant integration has changed over the years, moving away from concepts of assimilation or even the “melting pot.” It is clear that with increasing diversity and the nation’s greater societal acceptance, integration is more about adaptation than relinquishing salient elements of one’s roots. The focus now is on social and economic integration and usually involves the following five elements (Ray, 2002):

- ***Linguistic Integration***, i.e. competency in a new language, language used in the home.
- ***Labor Market Integration***: i.e. education level, labor force participation, socio-professional mobility.



- **Civic/Political Integration:** i.e. participation in political parties and neighborhood associations, voting behavior.
- **Educational Integration:** i.e. school performance, interaction with students of host country, parent-teacher communication.
- **Residential Integration:** i.e. degree of residential concentration/segregation, homeownership rates, discrimination in rental markets.

Refugee policy is particularly unique, in that because of, or despite, its humanitarian aim, the goal is to make refugees self-sufficient in the shortest time possible. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) of the U.S. Department of State works with local affiliates to provide airport reception to newly arriving refugees and to help them access housing and other available resources. Unlike most other immigrant groups, refugees receive governmental assistance immediately upon arrival in the country. For up to eight months, ORR provides short-term cash assistance, medical assistance, case management, English language classes, and employment services. Additional support is also available following the first eight months in the U.S. Such support includes services such as micro-enterprise guidance, counseling for survivors of torture, and community self-help programs (ORR, 2015).

What is less known is that refugees enter the U.S. with a cash handicap: They are responsible for their air fare to the U.S. and, although the Department of State provides them with an interest-free loan, they begin their residence in the U.S. in substantial debt, often in the amount of \$1,200 per person. With families coming in groups of four or more, this burden can be significant. Before coming to the U.S., refugees must agree to repay the loan within 42 months (Westcott, 2015). Furthermore, as the majority of refugees arrive with low human capital for adaptation to the U.S., most find low paying jobs with little room for progress. For refugee adults, the combination of the requirements of loan repayment, demands of enrollment in English language programs to maintain eligibility for supportive programs and services, and the push to self-sufficiency (or getting a job) often limits economic mobility.

Both governmental and non-governmental programs/nonprofit organizations at the local level provide opportunities for immigrant (and refugee) integration. These programs may include English language classes, efforts to enhance labor-market integration, social and cultural education programs, and vocational and career counseling. However, an increasingly evident phenomenon in the U.S. is what is now known as the “brain waste.” The U.S. is wary of the rigor and quality of professional credentials acquired abroad, and it is extremely difficult to get recognition for these foreign credentials. Many professionals who migrate under the family reunification program find that their academic and professional qualifications do not transfer to the U.S. Consequently, several find themselves employed in nonprofessional occupations, and while their income may be greater in the U.S. than in the homeland, their professional skills are not utilized. The Migration Policy Institute has conducted an extensive project to identify the squandering of professional talent and has proposed recommendations to address this waste (McHugh & Morawski, 2017). It waits to be seen if these recommendations are utilized by policy makers.



IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

The U.S. is seen as a “land of immigrants,” having been populated by immigrant groups beginning with the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492. The knowledge of the size of indigenous population of North America at that time is inaccurate, although historians have indicated ranges of as low as about two million (Daniels, 1992) to as high as over 100 million (Taylor & Foner, 2002; Ubelaker, 1976), but it is clear from census figures that this population has declined substantially, to about 5.4 million in 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Thus, the remainder of the population (317.7 million), can be described as being composed of immigrants or their progeny.

Furthermore, as the U.S. continues to attract the largest number of immigrants from around the world, it is currently a land of great ethnic diversity, a diversity that is evident both in its native born population (albeit of immigrant ancestors) as well as in its foreign-born groups. Entry into the U.S. is through three visa channels, with each identifying and, often circumscribing, the profile of the migrant. Those arriving through authorized work visas can usually ease into the economy. However, although many may have a level of education that permits them to well integrate in the U.S. society and be socially and economically mobile, a significant number enters as laborers, with little education or opportunity for upward mobility. The two other major authorized migration channels are through the family reunification visa and entry under refugee status; neither of these has expectations of a particular educational level or professional experience associated with it.

In 2015, there were over 43.3 million foreign born individuals in the U.S., constituting 13.5% of the population and representing 149 countries. In 2015 itself, 1.38 million of the foreign-born either moved to the U.S. or readjusted their visa status; visa adjustment may involve a change from refugee or student status to that of immigrant. The largest numbers of immigrants in 2015 were from India (179,880), China (143,200), Mexico (139,400), the Philippines (47,500), and Canada (46,800). Until 2013, Mexico was the top origin for recent authorized entrants, but since then, India and China have surpassed it (Zong & Batalova, 2017).

In 2016, 84,995 refugees were admitted to the U.S., and since 1980, with the enactment of the Refugee Act, over three million refugees have been resettled in the country. Although refugees did enter the U.S. for several decades prior to the 1980 Refugee Act, following it, there was increased focus on the most vulnerable humanitarian situations and reliance on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to make recommendations. With this, the diversity of the national origins, native languages, and levels of education of the refugee population has changed dramatically (Fix, Hooper & Zong, 2016). Although large numbers of refugees do enter the U.S. annually, the U.S. does not host the largest number of refugees; in fact, in 2016, as in most previous years, the U.S. was not even among the top ten countries that hosted refugees (UNHCR, 2017).

According to State Department Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS) data, 84,994 refugees were admitted to the United States in FY 2016, a 22% increase compared to the 69,933 admitted in 2015. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Syria, Myanmar (also known as Burma), Iraq, and Somalia were the primary countries of nationality, accounting for 71% (60,204) of all refugees admitted in 2016 and along with substantial entrants also from Bhutan, Iran, Afghanistan, Ukraine, they made up 91% (77,000) of all refugee arrivals in 2016.



A more elusive number is that associated with the unauthorized immigrant population, however, this was estimated in 2012 to be 11.4 million (Zong & Batalova, 2017), or about 25% of the total foreign born population. Most were from Mexico and Central America with their estimates being about 7.9 million (71%). About 1.5 million (13%) were from Asia, 673,000 (6%) from South America, and the remainder was from Europe, Canada, Africa and Caribbean (MPI, 2015).

EDUCATION LEVELS OF IMMIGRANTS

If, in fact, education is a key variable in the economic and social mobility of individuals (Batalova, Fix & Bachmeier, 2016), it is essential to identify whether and how immigrants fare in relationship to the native born population based on educational level and to determine if there are differences between those of various national origins. Furthermore, it also appears that integration will require that, in addition to literacy and education, migrants have the ability to communicate in the language of the host country, so in the U.S., English language proficiency is essential.

Table 1 presents a picture of educational level of the foreign born, while Table 2 compares the education of the unauthorized population with that of all foreign and U.S. born groups.

Table 1
Educational attainment, by nativity and region of birth: 2015

	Less than 9th grade	9th to 12th grade	High school graduate	Two-year Degree/Some college	Bachelor's degree	Advanced degree	Total
All U.S. born	4,871,630	11,905,002	51,168,801	55,732,549	34,794,590	20,418,357	178,890,929
All U.S. Born Percent distribution	2.7%	6.7%	28.6%	31.2%	19.5%	11.4%	100.0%
All foreign born	7,072,777	3,928,678	8,427,764	7,048,542	6,428,275	4,733,707	37,639,743
Mexico	3,857,108	1,900,601	2,523,314	1,265,062	471,111	160,880	10,178,076
South and East Asia	945,342	580,613	1,622,568	1,762,514	2,892,502	2,266,482	10,070,021
Europe/Canada	325,746	273,118	1,178,188	1,255,211	1,114,730	1,119,586	5,266,579
Caribbean	516,993	414,582	1,101,684	895,820	499,782	248,125	3,676,986
Central America	984,802	427,517	735,469	467,858	197,978	72,392	2,886,016
South America	226,763	178,956	681,643	644,941	500,957	291,948	2,525,208
Middle East	113,038	73,119	272,539	305,878	389,787	316,668	1,471,029
Sub-Saharan Africa	92,733	65,674	266,013	396,714	320,357	223,963	1,365,454
All other	10,252	14,498	46,346	54,544	41,071	33,663	200,374
All foreign born Percent Distribution	18.8%	10.4%	22.4%	18.7%	17.1%	12.6%	100.0%
Total	11,944,407	15,833,680	59,596,565	62,781,091	41,222,865	25,152,064	216,530,672

Note: Universe: 2015 resident population ages 25 and older.

Source: Statistical Portrait of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States, 2015

PEW RESEARCH CENTER <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/05/03/statistical-portrait-of-the-foreign-born-population-in-the-united-states-2015/>



Overall, the foreign born, age 25 years or more, are more likely (29.2%) than the U.S. born (9.4%) to have failed to complete high school (Table 1). On the other hand, at the other end of the education scale, the completion of higher education, with advanced degrees was fairly consistent across both native and foreign born individuals.

When education levels of unauthorized immigrants are assessed separately (Table 2), it is apparent that their educational attainment is significantly lower than that of the native born population. It is also clear that since data on unauthorized immigrants are integrated into the information on all immigrants, they lower the overall educational attainment profile of the foreign born.

Table 2
Educational attainment of Unauthorized Immigrants: 2015

<i>Grade attained</i>	Unauthorized Immigrants		All Foreign Born*		Native Born	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>		<i>Percentage</i>		<i>Percentage</i>
Total population age 25+ years	8,489,000	100	37,639,743	100	178,890,929	100
0 – 5 th grade	1,146,000	13	7,072,777	18.8	4,871,630	2.7
6 th – 8 th grade	1,676,000	20				
9 th – 12 th grade	1,441,000	17	3,928,678	10.4	11,905,002	6.7
High school diploma/GED	2,094,000	25	8,427,764	22.4	51,168,801	28.6
Some college, associate's degree	1,029,100	12	7,048,542	18.7	55,732,549	31.2
Bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree	1,103,000	13	11,161,982	29.7	55,212,947	30.1

* Foreign Born numbers include those estimated for unauthorized immigrants.

Source: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/US>

English language proficiency

A major ingredient in socioeconomic mobility in the U.S. is English language proficiency (Batalova & Zong, 2016), and with about half of the foreign born being less than proficient (López & Radford, 2017), their progress is limited. Table 3 provides a picture of self-reports of English language proficiency among the foreign born.



Table 3
Top 10 Languages Other Than English Spoken at Home (2015)

Rank	Language	Total	Bilingual (%)	Low English Proficiency (%)
	TOTAL	64,716,000	60.0	40.0
1	Spanish	40,046,000	59.0	41.0
2	Chinese	3,334,000	44.3	55.7
3	Tagalog	1,737,000	67.6	32.4
4	Vietnamese	1,468,000	41.1	58.9
5	French	1,266,000	79.9	20.1
6	Arabic	1,157,000	62.8	37.2
7	Korean	1,109,000	46.8	53.2
8	German	933,000	85.1	14.9
9	Russian	905,000	56.0	44.0
10	French Creole	863,000	58.8	41.2

Source: Batalova & Zong, 2016 (<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/language-diversity-and-english-proficiency-united-states>)

Findings reveal that compared to their English-proficient counterparts, those with low levels of English language competence were more likely to work in lower paying and higher risk occupations (Table 4). They are also more likely to live in poverty than their English proficient counterparts at a rate of 23% versus 13% (López & Radford, 2017).

Table 4
Occupational Differences between English Proficient and Low English Proficient Workers

Occupations	Gender	Low English Proficiency	English Proficient
Construction, maintenance, natural resources	Males	30%	15%
Service occupations	Males	23%	14%
Production, transportation, material-moving	Males	24%	18%
Service	Females	44%	20%
Production, transportation, material-moving	Females	16%	5%

Source: López & Radford, 2017 (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/05/03/statistical-portrait-of-the-foreign-born-population-in-the-united-states-2015/>)

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE U.S

EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

The U.S. has compulsory education laws that require that all children must be enrolled in private or public school, or participate in certified home schooling, between the ages of six and sixteen. These laws were put into effect in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries,



not only to ensure literacy in the population but to discourage the widespread and growing problem of child labor. Child labor laws were instituted to prevent children from working long hours and in hazardous conditions, and are still applicable. Currently, the Federal government's involvement in education policies is relatively limited as states determine their own policies and provide funding for public education. The Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution turned responsibility for education policy to individual states that design their respective curricula, standards, and other expectations (U.S. Department of Education, 2017a).

In 2013 and 2014, about 87% of all school aged children attended publicly funded institutions that receive governmental money, 10% were enrolled in private institutions, which receive no direct public funds but support themselves through student tuition, foundation money, and private donations, etc. (CAPE, 2015), and the remainder, 3%, were home schooled (Smith, 2013). Despite the nation's ambivalence toward immigrants, its education laws are clear: All children are entitled to public elementary and secondary education, regardless of their immigration status or that of their parents (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Several existing resources in the U.S. Department of Education (2014) are designed to assist vulnerable children, and while some are specifically for immigrant children and youth, others were put in place for the general population but immigrant children are also entitled to avail of them. These are as follows:

- **Services for Educationally Disadvantaged Children:** to raise the achievement of children who attend high-poverty schools.
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act:** Once a child is found to have a disability the child may receive funded special education.
- **English Language Acquisition Programs:** States are required to set aside up to 15 percent of certain funds for schools that have experienced a significant increase in immigrant students.
- **McKinney-Vento Act:** The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act may be used for unaccompanied minors.
- **Migrant Education Programs:** These funds are awarded to States for children who are migratory agricultural workers. Some immigrant children may qualify as eligible migratory children.
- **National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition:** This Clearinghouse provides non-monetary assistance and can serve recent immigrant arrivals and English language learners.

While these programs are specifically for children and youth, those designed for English language acquisition can, under certain circumstances, be used by adult English language learners. The education of immigrant children is expected in the U.S., and consistent with this belief, schools do not require evidence of immigration status. Unauthorized children are not so identified, however, recent changes in the political landscape under President Donald Trump has increased the likelihood that children who are suspected of having unauthorized parents may be followed home by immigration officers or the police. In 2017, these children experience fear of deportation, or the deportation of their parents, that greatly interferes with their education.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND IMMIGRANT YOUTH

Several Bills that may vary between states identify the type of access immigrants have to higher education. Some aim to improve access, allowing tuition equity, financial assistance, and student loans. Generally, state universities have two tuition tiers: One is for in-state residents, and is relatively affordable, and the other is for out-of-state residents and international students. The latter is significantly higher, sometimes as much a five times as high as the in-state tuition. When tuition equity is offered to immigrant youth who have been attending high school in the state, regardless of immigrant status, they are included in the in-state resident category and may pay in-state tuition.

Since Federal regulations do not permit in-state tuition be offered to U.S. citizens whose residence is outside the state in which they are attending college, there appears to be ambivalence in the population about the equity of allowing unauthorized immigrants this opportunity. However, as they have lived, albeit illegally, in the state, they are technically residents of that state. Between 2001 and 2012, fourteen states passed bills allowing unauthorized immigrants to pay in-state tuition at public universities (Amuedo-Dorantes & Sparber, 2014), and findings indicate that during this time, despite concerns, the enrollment rates of U.S. legal residents and citizens did not decline. Although tuition costs did go up in flagship private colleges and some state schools, there was no change at the community college level.

Over the years, literature has suggested that immigrants have had a better quality of life and experience than native born populations. Perhaps because it is those individuals and families who are stronger, physically, mentally, and emotionally, who have the human capital to make the major move to a new county; this has been termed the “Immigrant Advantage” (Kolker, 2011). Immigrants have been found to, overall, also perform better in the education system, both at the secondary level and in higher education than the native born. This is known as the “Immigrant Paradox,” (Marks, Ejesi & Coll, 2014) as one would expect that adaptation and other stresses would take a toll on the education of children. Perhaps there is an underlying drive among immigrants to make worthwhile the reality that they leave behind many tangible and intangible resources in their respective homelands. As such they may also increase pressures on their immigrant children to achieve high levels of academic success. The academic achievement of the second generation, which has ostensibly sacrificed substantially less, is less clear. Research on the second generation appears to be inconclusive, with some findings indicating that the children of immigrants outperform their counterparts with native-born parents (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016), while others suggest that there is no difference in the academic performance outcomes between the children of immigrants and those of native-born individuals (Liu, 2014).

Perhaps a more realistic, and less simplistic, view is that presented by Núñez (2014) who proposes that success in education is the result of a number of interacting and intersecting factors. She presents a multilevel model of intersectionality that suggests that the permutations of identity, contexts, and college access are likely to be correlated with educational outcomes.



THE DREAM ACT & DACA

In 2010, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act, which had been introduced several times beginning in 2001 (Chishti, Bergeron & McCabe, 2010). This bill aimed to provide a path to legal status for unauthorized youth who arrived in the U.S. before the age of sixteen and who were enrolled in higher education or who served in the U.S. military. This Act never did pass in the Senate, so it did not become law. However, in 2012, President Obama announced the DACA (Deferred Action for Child Arrivals) program that provides these youth temporary legal status for two years, which is also renewable, if they continue to meet expectations of enrollment in higher education, gainful employment, or service in the military (National Immigration Law Center, 2017).

Since 2012, over 800,000 youth have received the two-year reprieve through the DACA program (Capps, Fix & Zong, 2017), and data have revealed that the DACA program has not only had positive outcomes for the youth who have been granted temporary legal status (Center for American Progress, 2016) allowing access to higher education and engagement in occupations that will permit socioeconomic mobility, it has been beneficial to the economy and to American communities (Center for American Progress, 2015). Although the educational attainment of those who applied for the DACA program lags behind that of the general U.S. population, the DACA youth population is about evenly divided among those who are enrolled in high school, those who have completed high school, and those who have some college education; about five percent hold a college or advanced degree (Capps, Fix & Zong, 2017).

In July, 2017, Senate Bills attempted to reintroduce the DREAM Act of 2017 which would provide a path to citizenship for DACA youth and that received bipartisan support (National Immigration Law Center, 2017). However, in September 2017, President Trump called on Congress to end DACA and to pass a replacement for dealing with DACA youth. He indicated that the program will be phased out over six months and will be terminated in March 2018 when several of the 800,000 youth sheltered through the program will be eligible to be deported (Shear & Davis, 2017). Despite several and ongoing protests by the “DREAMERS,” employers, college presidents, and immigration activists, among others, Attorney General Jeff Sessions is stalwartly defending the decision to terminate the program.

ADULT EDUCATION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

The Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) of the U.S. Department of Education (2017b) administers programs to enable adults acquire basic literacy skills, English language proficiency as well as tools for problem solving. Funding is provided to states to deliver programs in the areas of (1) Adult education, (2) literacy, (3) workplace adult education and literacy, (4) family literacy activities, (5) English language acquisition activities, (6) integrated English literacy and civics education, (7) Workforce preparation activities, and (8) integrated education and training.



These programs are available and accessible to those who are authorized to be in the U.S. as well as to the native-born population, and both public and private organizations can make application to secure grants from the DAEL to develop and administer them. While such programs are increasingly available across the nation, several immigrants are not aware of their existence or their rights to utilize them. The U.S. has several opportunities for immigrants and immigrant integration, but because the vast majority of immigrants have no need to come in contact with the social services, they do not know of or avail themselves of the range of services in place to enhance integration.

Other than expectations that refugees enroll in English language classes and move into the workforce, there are no expectations of voluntary migrants and no systematic outreach efforts to offer these and other integration services. Most labor migrants enter the workforce, and if they are skilled and language proficient, they have minimal difficulty integrating into the U.S. society. However, if they enter blue collar jobs and lack English language proficiency, they have little opportunity for upward mobility. They rarely find mentors who can apprise them of programs offered through DAEL or encourage them to enroll in further education. In addition, although refugees are encouraged to further their education and learn the English language, they are also mandated to become self-sufficient in the shortest time possible. For most this is a formidable task, as they navigate a new culture, cope with the traumas that drove them from their homes, and try to function in an unfamiliar language, therefore, once they are employed, they forego additional education opportunities and accessing English language programs.

It is not uncommon in the U.S. for older individuals to turn to education to retool themselves. Many in their adult years seek to change professions or learn new skills and often enroll in community college classes or at universities. Such education is also an option for immigrants, and adult immigrants are beginning to consider returning to further their education.

“BRAIN GAIN” AND “BRAIN WASTE” – EMPLOYMENT FOR THE EDUCATED?

The tables above indicate a diversity of educational achievement and English language proficiency based on the national origins of the immigrant and/or refugee populations. It is telling that, although the overall education level of a large segment of the immigrant population is on a par with that of U.S. born individuals, lack of host country language facility as well as U.S. policies that preclude credential transfer may well result in the “brain waste” evident in the underemployment of qualified immigrants (Table 5).



Table 5
Education, Language, and Underemployment – Refugee Profile

	Percentage Bachelor's Degree+ Age 25+ %	Limited English Proficiency Age 16+ %	Underemployed College Educated Adults Age 25+ %
U.S. Born	29	1	18
All Refugees	28	61	29
Vietnamese	23	69	19
Cuban	18	74	44
Russian	63	44	22
Iraqi	28	63	48
Burmese	20	83	40
All other Foreign Born	28	51	24

Source: Fix, Hooper & Zong, 2017, p. 14.

Two million college educated immigrants are either unable to find employment or are employed in occupations for which they are greatly overqualified. Prior to the economic recession of 2008, approximately a third of immigrants had a college degree, but between 2011 and 2015, 50% of the new entrants came with at least a bachelor's degree (Batalova, Fix & Bachmeier, 2016) indicating a substantial "brain gain" for the U.S. In fact, college educated immigrants are overrepresented when compared to the share of the immigrant population, which is about 14%.

In addition to the difficulty, if not the impossibility of credential transfer, language barriers, limited understanding of the labor market process, and negative perceptions by employers of foreign experience coupled with the lack of sufficient U.S. education programs that can help immigrants develop the skills unique to practice in the U.S. (Batalova, Fix & Bachmeier, 2016) can result in the underemployment of qualified individuals. Furthermore, since there are no educational requirements for those over the age of sixteen, adults seeking to further their education, develop new skills, or acquire English language competence must identify if appropriate resources are available and pay out-of-pocket to utilize them.

Five key factors appear fairly consistently in the underutilization (both unemployment and underemployment) of college educated immigrants, namely, (1) place of education, (2) English language proficiency, (3) citizenship/immigrant status, (4) place of origin and ethnicity, and (5) length of time in the U.S. (Batalova, Fix & Bachmeier, 2016), and, particularly for refugees, national origins seem to indicate adaptation across socioeconomic indicators (Fix, Hooper & Zong, 2017). That English language proficiency, immigration status, and length of time affect employment should not be surprising, however, with the increasing diversity of the immigrant population, that place of origin/ethnicity and place of education are such significant players in immigrant underutilization may speak to additional sociocultural factors that play into employment decisions. Table 6 reveals that, except in the case of Australian and Canadian immigrants, the underutilization percentages are higher for the foreign educated immigrants than for those from the same region who have been educated in the U.S. Nevertheless, given that underutilization rates of U.S. born individuals are 19% and 17% for men and women, respectively, the high rate of underutilization of even the U.S. educated immigrants is troubling. The overall rates of underutilization of foreign educated individuals are disturbingly high, but underutilization based on region of birth is even worse.

Table 6
Underemployment, Region of Origin, Place of College Education

	Region Share of Total Immigrants		Share Underutilized (%) by Region of Birth	
	Foreign Educated	U.S. Educated	Foreign Educated	U.S. Educated
Total	3,992,300	3,625,700	29%	21%
Percent	100	100		
East Asia	16	16	20	16
Southeast Asia	13	14	35	20
South Asia	20	17	23	16
Middle East	3	3	28	21
Central America	7	11	51	36
Caribbean	5	9	44	24
South America	8	7	37	25
Canada	3	3	12	15
Australia	1	<1	16	18
European Union	12	11	18	19
Europe (non-EU)	6	4	33	23
Africa	7	5	37	26

Source: Batalova, Fix & Bachmeier, 2016 (<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/untapped-talent-costs-brain-waste-among-highly-skilled-immigrants-united-states>).

Aside from possible perceptions of discrimination against the employment and/or exploitation of the foreign born, the underemployment of educated workers is expensive on both personal and societal levels. Batalova and Fix (2017) calculate that the cost of the “brain waste” is substantial, with \$40 billion in potential wages not accessed by skilled immigrants, and, consequently, over \$10 billion lost in tax payments at the federal, state, and local levels. Skilled immigrants, with bachelor’s degrees, who are employed in positions commensurate with their qualifications, each contribute \$500,000 more in taxes over their lifetimes than they utilize in public benefits, making it essential that the U.S. leverage the resources of immigrants to maximize social and economic opportunities for the country.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

This “land of opportunities” continues to draw immigrants in record numbers and is the largest immigrant hosting country in the world. Nevertheless, it continues to struggle with its attitudes and perceptions of the foreign born. The quote from Emma Lazarus’ famous poem on the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor states:

Give me your tired, your poor,
 Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
 The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me...



However, despite the lovely sentiment, perhaps Ms. Lazarus was ill-informed. The reality is that those who are truly hapless do not have the human capital to make the arduous physical and emotional transition to a new country and culture. Those who do migrate, with or without physical resources, have the fortitude to weather uncertainty and to aim to enhance their lives, not depend on a handout.

This article began with lauding the merits of education, indicating that it can be the “great equalizer,” increasing the individual immigrant’s likelihood of integration and upward mobility. It began with statements that suggest that more education garners greater respect and opens doors to opportunities. While it does open doors, evidence suggests that it does not remove all barriers and much is dependent on the national origins of the immigrant and the source country of the education. Although some xenophobic attitudes and perceptions of U.S. employers, policy makers, and the general public may not be readily evident, they are sometimes reflected in employment practices and in the underutilization of qualified immigrants. There is a general perception by immigrants, as there is among most minorities, that they must be “better” than the native born, Caucasian population, in order to be competitive.

This land of paradoxes still cannot decide whether it “wants” the immigrants that it “needs.” It is not sure if it approves of immigrant offspring who are changing the ethnic profile of the nation. It is unclear how and why it managed to twice elect as its 44th president, Barack Obama, the son of a Black Kenyan man and a Caucasian American woman. The year 2017 has initiated a time of uncertainty for immigrants and other ethnic minorities in the U.S. The changing political climate, increasing conservatism, and the open voicing of long-hidden attitudes of discrimination are polarizing the country as part embraces these changes even as the other abhors them. Despite anti-discriminatory and equal employment laws, it is difficult to refute the evidence provided by reputable research agencies that although education is necessary, it is not a sufficient ingredient for socioeconomic mobility and integration in the U.S.

The U.S, as most developed countries, continues to need immigrants in both its skilled and unskilled labor force, and because the U.S. is still highly attractive, with many freedoms and opportunities not available in other nations, it will continue to attract an ongoing stream of immigrants. Indeed, immigration policy that is several decades old does require an overhaul, but not only in terms of how it will handle unauthorized immigrants. While it is also the responsibility of the immigrant to adapt to the host country, it behooves policy makers who focus on immigration to reassess their views on integration efforts, credential transfer, and other processes to ease transition into the U.S. economy, the society, and its culture.

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