

How is the educational performance of second-generation students changing? Some insights from Italy

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The issue of integration of children of immigrants in the schools of the destination country is a topic of increasing prominence in the international literature. This is even more true in the Italian context in which the amount of children of immigrants who are born in the country and registered to Italian schools is constantly increasing: when considering the entire Italian school system, they exceed 60% of all foreign students. Hence, the study of the different school outcomes by migratory generation should be a prominent tool for designing proper inclusion policies.

In this paper, employing information on proficiency in Italian language from the standardized tests carried out in 2022-2023 by the INVALSI (the acronym standing for: National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System), we focus on differences in performance by gender and migration background of students in grade 10 (corresponding to the second year of upper secondary school in Italy), as registered on a Rasch scale similar to that used in other well-established international learning surveys, such as OECD-PISA.

Our analysis takes also into account the different types of schools attended by students and the availability/accessibility of digital tools. Migratory background distinguishes between national and foreign students as classified into first (foreign-born) and second (Italian-born) generations. The interest towards the effect of using digital devices when studying is furthermore relevant due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and numerous studies have been proposed on this topic. However, still much remains to be explored, and only a few papers have focused on a comparative analysis by migrant generation.

The pattern is different if the availability of at least one device is taken into account, and in particular when considering the presence of the Internet connection at home. In this case, the first-generation students show a statistically different result as compared to both natives and second-generation students, thus suggesting that second generation status actually assimilates the behaviour of the latter to natives. Similar results are obtained with regard to gender: as expected females perform better than males and this can be observed among both natives and second generation, while there seems to be no significant difference by gender in first generation respondents.

It will be of interest to compare the results considering both pre-Covid-19 and post-pandemic school

years in order to assess whether important differences have occurred over time and to evaluate the impact of the pandemic on Italian education, both in terms of performance and in terms of the role-played on digital literacy. Finally, in addition to considering Italian language, it will be of interest to consider the average scores obtained in mathematics.