

## EDUCATION

### Immigration and careers

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The question of how immigrants adapt to life in their new country has been much studied, but the role of language in shaping life paths has not been fully understood.

New research by Marcos A. Rangel, of Duke University, and Ying Shi, of Stanford University, addresses this gap by asking how the pattern of skills that immigrant children acquire early in life affects their long-term career trajectories. Using surveys of immigrants to the United States, the authors find that the age at which children arrive and the linguistic distance of their mother tongue from English influence the courses they take in high school and the programs of study they pursue in higher education. Children who arrive later and from countries with languages dissimilar to English have a comparative disadvantage in language-intensive fields of study, but a comparative advantage in science and math-related fields. Children with this advantage in non-language skills are more likely to specialize in science, technology, engineering and mathematics later in their academic careers, as they pursue opportunities that reinforce their early strengths.

This finding sheds light on both the experiences of young immigrants and the process through which childhood skills and educational opportunities shape lifelong career choices.

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