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Accounting for educational expectations and achievement among native and migrant students in Qatar

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ABSTRACT

The study draws on the theory of ‘migrant optimism’ and anticipated discrimination to examine whether a gap in educational expectations and achievement exists between immigrant and native students in Qatar and explores whether the impact of educational expectations on educational achievement is contingent upon the migratory status of students (migrant or native students). It utilizes data on students aged 15–16 obtained from the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The results show that migrant students have higher educational expectations and achievement than Qatari students, while female students in all groups enjoy better performance and hold higher educational expectations. The results also show that the gender gap among Qatari students is bigger than the gender gap among migrant students. Educational expectations have a significant and positive impact on achievement among Qatari and migrant students alike. These results and their theoretical implications are further discussed in the paper.

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Qatar; education expectations; migrant optimism; PISA; achievement

Introduction

Sociologists, especially those interested in educational and social (in)equality, have extensively studied the gap in educational achievement between immigrant and native pupils. Across Western Europe, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, immigrant students usually underperform in comparison to natives (Bahena, 2020; Birkelund, 2020; Makarova & Birman, 2015; Schnepf, 2007). And yet, immigrant students, relative to their socioeconomic status and school performance, have higher educational expectations than their native counterparts, that is, they expect to continue postsecondary education and are more likely to do so (Birkelund, 2020; Gil-Hernández & Gracia, 2018; Heath & Brinbaum, 2014; Tjaden & Hunkler, 2017). This suggests that the dynamics of

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the relationship between educational expectations and achievement differ for immigrant and native pupils, and that there is inconsistency between the educational expectations and academic achievements of immigrant students. However, we know little whether these trends will hold in non-Western countries.

Most studies exploring the achievement gap between native and immigrant students, and the relationship between educational expectations and school achievement have been conducted in Europe, North America and Australasia. This is mostly because these regions constitute the core immigrant-receiving centers of the world. However, as new emerging economies join the race in attracting skilled and unskilled migrants (Ewers et al., 2022), it is important to understand how the educational patterns of migrant students in these countries compare with that of native counterparts. Qatar is also an emerging economy where migrants in fact make up roughly 90% of the total population (Snoj, 2019), making Qatar represent a different and unique migration scenario to that of other Western countries. Yet, very little research has examined educational outcomes for natives and migrant students in Qatar (Areepattamannil et al., 2015; Lee, 2016; Nasser & McInerney, 2016).

Understandably, much of the theorization seeking to explain the inconsistency between immigrant students' educational expectations and their lower achievement levels has developed based on studies conducted in the West. However, we believe that by including the Qatari context, we will be able to expand scientific understanding about immigration and educational outcomes. A different context can provide new indicators which ask for the reconsideration of previous explanations. By putting more emphasis on the role of context, this study contributes to the current debate on whether the relationship between expectations and achievement and the differences between immigrants and native students, are consistent over time and space, or whether these are dependent on other external conditions of the migration context. Furthermore, given the lack of research on these topics in Qatar, this study also provides scientific knowledge that can help improve the educational system in Qatar and be instrumental in future education policy initiatives.

The study aims are as follows: first, we want to explore whether a gap in expectations and a gap in achievement exists between immigrant and native pupils in Qatar. Second, we want to investigate the impact of expectations on educational achievement for immigrant and native pupils in Qatar. The next part of this paper reviews relevant literature on the relationship between educational expectations and achievement, and on educational gaps between immigrant and native students. The paper then moves to describing the data and outlines the methods. This is followed by a presentation of results and a discussion of main findings.

The role of expectations in determining educational achievement

Exploring the determinants of educational achievement represents a recurrent theme in the literature of sociology of education. As education is considered one of the most important vehicles for upward social mobility, understating the factors that contribute the most to educational achievement is crucial. Numerous studies emphasize the key role educational expectations play in predicting students' achievement, relative to other significant factors such as educational aspirations, student motivation and parental educational background (Bozick et al., 2010; Froiland & Worrell, 2017; Harrison & Waller, 2018; Jacob & Wilder, 2010; Ou & Reynolds, 2008).

The literature also points towards several factors that mediate the relationship between student expectations and achievement. In addition, many studies have found evidence supporting the positive impact of parental expectations and parental support on children's educational expectations (Almroth et al., 2020; Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017; Nygård, 2017). In their study on adolescents' educational expectations in Sweden, Almroth et al. (2020) found that high parental expectations were instrumental in raising children's educational expectations, and parental support in schoolwork helped children resolve doubts about their expectations.

Studies have also examined the impact of parental socioeconomic background, student ethnicity and migration status, and whether or not these factors impact the development of students' educational expectations. This is where a clear difference is evident between native and immigrant students in Western countries. Research shows that native, white students from working-class backgrounds are more likely to hold lower educational expectations than students from middle- or upper-class backgrounds (Lazarus & Khattab, 2018). Immigrant students however do not seem to follow this pattern. Numerous studies corroborate that regardless of parental educational and/or occupational status, migrant children in many Western countries hold higher educational aspirations and expectations than their native counterparts (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017; Friberg, 2019; Gil-Hernández & Gracia, 2018; Nygård, 2017). That is, unlike many natives from poorer backgrounds, immigrant children from disadvantaged backgrounds hope to participate in tertiary education. Yet, another study examining the role of socioeconomic disparities among ethnic-minority children in Germany found that, immigrant students only aim for higher academic goals when compared with lower status native students. As immigrant students' socioeconomic status rises, they and native students with similar backgrounds start making similar educational choices (Dollmann, 2017).

Differences between immigrant and native students in expectations and achievement

Scholars have long explored the gap between immigrant and native students in terms of both educational expectations and achievement using different theoretical approaches and measurements. One of these theoretical explanations- commonly referred to as ‘migrant optimism’- attributes the higher educational expectations of immigrants to their positive outlook in host country and their perception of being unique in terms of their migrant situation (Kao & Tienda, 1995). The theory proposes that, immigrant parents strongly believe in the role of education for social mobility, and having come through hardship and sacrifices, they now expect and inspire their children to work up the socioeconomic ladder through maximum use of educational opportunities (Hadjar & Scharf, 2019; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Kirui & Kao, 2018).

A number of studies have found evidence for immigrant optimism. Kirui and Kao (2018), using national longitudinal data on students who enrolled in college in 2004 in the United States, showed that students with at least one immigrant parent have higher rates of college completion, resilience, and achievement, when compared to students with no immigrant parents. They also found that students’ achievement levels were associated with high expectations. Other research argues that the higher levels of commitment towards educational institutions, found among first and second-generation immigrant students, which seems to be lacking among native and third-generation immigrant-origin students, is evidence for immigrant optimism and the importance immigrant students give to education for upward social mobility (Bondy et al., 2017; Friberg, 2019; Hadjar & Scharf, 2019).

Other alternative theorizations on immigrant students’ high educational goals emphasize job penalties specific to immigrant children. Scholars argue that immigrant children opt for higher education in order to resist labour market setbacks by making themselves more qualified and employable than their white, middle/working-class counterparts (Li, 2018). Higher education is also at times a more viable option for immigrant students when posed with the risk of unemployment or underemployment (Lessard-Phillips et al., 2018). Empirical evidence for these propositions however is mixed as some studies found no evidence in support for anticipated job discrimination (Fernandes & Bance, 2015; Tjaden & Hunkler, 2017).

It may also well be that immigrant optimism is contextual – that is, it works within certain conditions. Substantial differences in levels of school achievement and aspirations among diverse immigrant groups, and at times the lack of any immigrant advantage found in some limited studies (Mantovani, Gasperoni, Albertini et al., 2018; Salikutluk, 2016), challenges the universal application of this theory. For example, Mantovani, Gasperoni,

Albertini et al. (2018) found higher college aspirations and achievement among Italian-origin students and skepticism towards education among migrant students in Italy. Salikutluk (2016) notes that native German students have lower academic aspirations than Turkish-origin students, but similar aspiration levels to students from the Former Soviet Union who are studying in Germany. Such findings call for a further evaluation of the contexts within which immigrant optimism and ethnicity may be functioning.

Scholars have also examined the achievement gap between different ethnic groups or immigrants and natives. While on the whole native students outperform immigrants (Bahena, 2020; Birkelund, 2020; Makarova & Birman, 2015), there are some exceptions to the case. One such study compared second-generation immigrants and natives in Italy, investigating the role of the following factors: economic resources, cultural-capital, pupils' aspirations and the dynamics of ethnic school separation. They found that the background of second-generation immigrants, including social and cultural factors, were important obstacles for their educational achievement both in Italy and Germany, however, no negative effects of background on educational achievement were reported in France (Bondy et al., 2017). Research in the United States also shows that immigrant students of Asian heritage, such as Indians and Chinese are outperforming their white American peers (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017; Lee & Zhou, 2015; Pong & Zeiser, 2012). Some of the differences in achievement in favour of immigrants suggest that paying attention to the local migration context is important in understanding the relationship between migration, ethnicity and educational outcomes. For example, some previous studies have attributed the ethnic gap in school performance (or the gap between natives and migrants in various societies) to the difference in effort and engagement in various learning activities outside of school (Peng & Wright, 1994). These activities can take different formats including leisure reading for enjoyment (Mol & Jolles, 2014) and participating in homework clubs (Shah et al., 2010). These studies (e.g. Shah et al., 2010) have pointed out that migrants and minority ethnic groups are likely to employ different strategies and engage in various extracurricular activities outside of school in order for them to succeed in education and life more generally.

The Qatari context

Qatar is a high-income rentier state, which means that it has a different social contract when compared with other liberal democracies where many of the studies on this topic were conducted. Scholars contend that as part of the rentier contract, citizens in Qatar expect generous economic returns from the country's oil profits in return for political loyalty (Beblawi &

Luciani, 1987). These returns tend to come through guaranteed public sector employment (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987). As a result, some argue that there is a sense of economic entitlement in the labour market which might discourage some Qatari students from continuing post-secondary education (Al-Misnad, 2012). Consequently, perhaps one of the most notable issues in Qatar is that there is great variation in the perceived future opportunities of immigrants and natives. Natives believe that their future employment is guaranteed and supported by the government, while immigrant students know that both as immigrants, and often coming from less developed countries, their future opportunities depend heavily on their educational success. For example, immigrants in Qatar arrived primarily from other Arab countries in the Middle Eastern and North Africa, as well as from Western countries (Europe and the US) and South Asian countries such as Indian and Pakistan (Snoj, 2019). This might contribute to explaining why migrant students in Qatar outperform Qataris (Cheema, 2014).

Like in many countries, studies have reported a gender gap in favour of females in relation to school performance (Cheema, 2014), university attending (Al-Misnad, 2012), valuing education (Lee, 2016) holding higher educational expectations (Sellami, 2019). For example, Young (2016) has shown that there are almost twice as many female Qatari students in universities than there are male students. Even after controlling for parental education and student grades, female Qatari students are more likely to hold higher educational expectations of going to university than male Qatari students (Sellami, 2019), and female Qatari students prefer employment in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) professions, while Qatari boys prefer public sector employment (Sellami et al., 2017).

The Qatari school system consists of public and private sectors. In the public sectors, which is fully funded by the state, there were over 200 schools in the academic year 2019/2020, catering for more than 124,600 students of Qatari and non-Qatari backgrounds. Within the private sector, there are two types of private schools: international schools and community-based schools offering the national curricula of specific countries. In total, there were more than 330 schools in the academic year 2019/2020 serving nearly 211,000 students.¹ Most private schools are well known and established international schools that have been selected and invited by the Qatari Ministry of Education to open branches in Qatar (Sawalhi & Tamimi, 2021). Previous studies have pointed out that academically, private schools outperform public schools (Cheema, 2015). To preserve their high reputation, they apply high admission standards and charge high tuition fees. The majority of students attending private international schools are the children of middle class and professional expatriates. Private community schools are run by embassies and mostly use the language of their country.

Research comparing natives and migrant students in Qatar found that migrant students value education more than Qatari students, with Qatari boys showing the least amount of inclination towards education (Lee, 2016). However, this study also reported that regardless of gender and ethnicity, overall, 78% of students had a positive regard for learning. Other research reports that when compared to Qatari students, migrant students have more interest in science and believe that studying science is useful for the future (Said et al., 2016).

Based on these observations in the literature and in Qatar, we derive the following hypotheses:

- (1) There is a statistically significant gap in educational expectations and achievement in favour of migrant students.
- (2) There is a statistically significant gap in educational expectations and achievement in favour of female students.
- (3) The influence of educational expectations on achievement is higher for migrant students in contrast to natives.

Data and methods

This study was conducted using data from the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The PISA is an international study which collects educational data and examines students' academic performance. In 2018, the study was administered in 79 countries. The PISA data contains individual responses from students, parents, teachers, and school principals. In our study we look solely at PISA 2018 data for Qatar. The sample consists of 13,828 students (age range: 15.25 to 16.25, mean = 15.7, SD = 0.29) from 188 schools. The PISA assesses students on three main subjects which are reading, mathematics and science, however, each time one subject is chosen as the main domain for assessment and the other two function as minor domains. In 2018, reading was the main assessment and it was computer administered in most countries. Hence in our analysis we will be using reading scores as a measure of student academic achievement. Also note that, Pearson correlation coefficients for the three subject scores range between 0.801 and 0.836 ($p < 0.001$), which means that all the subject scores are highly correlated and can be used interchangeably to reflect student achievement.

Furthermore, due to the complex sampling approach used in PISA, the analysis of all models in Table 3 applies the multilevel technique in SPSS that takes into account the school as a second level (random effect) in order to neutralise any autocorrelation bias between students attending the same school (Hox, 2002). While in Models 2–5 we applied multilevel linear regression, in Model 1 a multilevel logistic regression was used (the procedure GENLINUX in SPSS).

Variables

Table 1 below presents descriptive statistics for all the variables used in this study. The dependent variables are educational expectations and reading scores:

Educational expectations: This is a binary variable which measures students' expectations of going to university. It uses data from the question: 'Do you expect to complete ISCED level 5A or 6' which refer to university-level degree and graduate education. We grouped as 'high expectations' (coded 1) those students who expect to complete this level of education, and those students who do not were grouped as having 'low expectations' (coded 0). This variable will first be used as a dependent variable to explore how it is affected by other factors and whether there is gap in expectations between native and immigrant students. It will then be used again as an independent variable to understand how it affects students' reading achievement. **Table 1** shows that 71.5% of students have high educational expectations, while 28.5% have low educational expectations.

Reading achievement: PISA data contains 10 variables related to students' reading assessment (plausible values for reading literacy). All the ten are highly correlated with one another (Pearson's $R > 0.94$). We ran the regression model with 5 different plausible values for reading literacy, and the coefficients were very similar to each other in each model. Hence, we decided to use first plausible value for reading literacy. Higher scores indicate higher levels of reading achievement. Within a range of 118 to 796, the mean score was about 408, with a standard deviation of 109 points.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for all variables.

	Percentage	Mean	Std Deviation	Min	Max	N
Dependent Variables						
Educational expectations						
High	71.5					9732
Low	28.5					3879
Reading achievement		408.27	109.37	118.04	796.49	13,828
Independent Variables						
Sex						
Female	50.3					6954
Male	49.7					6874
Ethnicity						
Qatari	43.3					5656
First generation	39.7					5191
Second generation	16.9					2213
ESCS		0.28	0.84	-4.38	3.34	13,450
Parents' emotional support		-0.02	1.06	-2.44	1.03	11,855
Home educational resources		-0.32	1.23	-4.51	1.21	13,281
Daily reading for enjoyment						
Not reading	27.1					
Up to 1 hour	49.4					
Between 1 and 2 hours	14.0					
More than 2 hours	9.5					

Here are the independent variables included in the model:

Gender: The first variable included into the analysis is gender, coded as 1 = female and 0 = male. 50.3% of the students included in the sample are females, while 49.7% are recorded as males.

Ethnicity: Using responses from the PISA immigration index, students were divided into three groups: (1) Qatari (those students who had at least one parent born in Qatar), (2) first-generation (these are migrant students who were born outside of Qatar and whose parents were also born in another country) (3) second-generation (migrant students born in Qatar but whose parent(s) were born in another country). Cases with missing responses for either the student or for both parents were assigned missing values. There are 43.3% Qatari students, 39.7% first-generation students, and 16.9% second-generation students. The data provide only partial details about the specific countries from which non-Qatari students have come from, especially first-generation. Around 19% of all first-generation students came from Egypt, approximately 6% from Jordan, 4% from Yemen and 1.6% from Palestine. However, the country of the majority of first-generation students is unknown.

Economic, social and cultural status (ESCS): The PISA dataset contains an ESCS measure which is a composite score built by the indicators: parental education, highest parental occupation, and home possessions which serves as a proxy for family wealth. Together these three components reflect socioeconomic status.

Parents' emotional support perceived by students: This is a derived variable contained in the PISA dataset based on a three-item scale which asked students about the emotional support they receive from their parents. Students can answer using a four-point Likert scale: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree'. It included items on whether parents are interested in school activities, support the students' educational efforts and achievements, support students when they are facing difficulties at school and encourage them to be confident. The 2015 PISA technical report states that the Cronbach's alpha for this scale in Qatar was 0.78. Higher scores on this scale mean that students perceive more support from their parents.

Home educational resources: This is also a derived variable in the PISA dataset. It is a continuous measure for educational resources available at home for students. Students were asked about seven items such as a desk, a quiet space, a computer and books. In 2015, for Qatar, PISA reports the Cronbach's alpha to be 0.69. Higher scores mean that more resources are available at home. We conducted a Pearson correlation test between this variable and ESCS to check for multicollinearity which gave a value of 0.56 ($p < 0.001$), which means that both these variables are not highly correlated and measure different concepts.

Time spent daily reading for enjoyment: This variable was used as a closest proxy measuring students’ effort outside of school lessons. It was derived from the question in the PISA data about the amount of time students spend reading for enjoyment on daily basis ‘About how much time do you usually spend reading for enjoyment?’ The original question had 5 possible answers: I do not read for enjoyment, 30 minutes or less a day, more than 30 minutes to less than 60 minutes a day, 1 to 2 hours a day, and more than 2 hours a day. The variable was recoded into 4 categories by merging category 2 and 3 together. The variable was used as a dummy with the last category used as the base.

Results

We start by presenting results from key bivariate analyses performed to understand the relationships between ethnicity, educational expectations and reading achievement. We first examined the association between ethnicity and educational expectations. Crosstabulation results in Table 2 show that migrant students have a clear advantage over Qatari students. While 66% of Qatari students have high expectations, the proportion of high expecting students among first- and second-generation migrant students are about 79% and 75% respectively. The chi-square test revealed a statistically significant result, χ^2 (2, $N= 13,054$) = 240.6, $p < 0.001$.

Next, we conducted a one-way ANOVA to compare the effect of ethnicity on reading achievement. There were significant mean differences in reading scores between the three groups of students at the $p < 0.001$ level for the three conditions, [$F(2, 13,057) = 982.4, p = 0.000$]. The mean reading score was highest for first generation migrant students ($M = 455.2, SD = 107.4$), then came the mean score for second generation students ($M = 423.2, SD = 96.20$), and the lowest mean score was that of Qatari students ($M = 369.9, SD = 96.1$).

Table 2. Frequency and percentages for educational expectations by ethnicity.

			Qatari	First generation	Second generation	Total
Educational expectations	Low	N	1912	1077	551	3540
		%	33.8	20.8	24.9	27.1
	High	N	3740	4113	1661	9514
		%	66.2	79.2	75.1	72.9
Total		N	5652	5190	2212	13,054
		%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3. Regression models for predicting educational expectations (Logistic) and achievement (Linear multilevel).

	Model 1 Logit Educational expectations	Model 2 Reading Achievement (All students)		Model 3 Reading Achievement (Qatari students)		Model 4 Reading Achievement (1 st generation students)		Model 5 Reading Achievement (2 nd generation students)	
Parameter	Odds ratios	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	1.01	420.29	4.87	415.48	6.06	465.75	5.80	466.95	7.22
Female (Base = Male)	1.43**	25.87**	2.23	41.64**	4.60	19.68**	2.91	34.19**	4.92
Ethnicity (base = Natives)									
First generation	1.55**	44.02**	2.01						
Second generation	1.35**	36.14**	2.28						
Economic, social and cultural status	1.62**	6.43**	1.19	3.52*	1.63	16.07**	2.21	10.13**	2.74
Parents' emotional support	1.30**	7.91**	0.73	10.43**	1.05	5.64**	1.22	6.00**	1.76
Home educational resources	1.06*	1.30	0.78	0.05	1.12	2.43	1.34	5.04**	1.84
High educational expectations (Base = Low)		37.60**	1.89	34.28**	2.62	40.90**	3.34	39.87**	4.59
Daily reading for enjoyment (Base = More than 2 hours)									
Not reading	0.72**	-29.58**	2.85	-14.22**	4.47	-42.38**	4.52	-34.83**	6.78
Up to 1 hour	0.89	-14.22**	2.63	-9.32*	4.27	-17.73**	4.04	-15.48*	6.08
Between 1 and 2 hours	1.03	-7.32*	3.07	-1.45	5.09	-8.98	4.63	-12.93	7.10
Schwarz's Bayesian Criterion (BIC)		130,833.69		52,891.00		55,061.60		23,013.35	
Residuals	0.991	5992.34**		5347.79**		6469.49**		5857.52**	
Level-2 variance (Schools)		2715.69**		2198.48**		2894.57**		2115.25**	
N	11295	11,295		4601		4712		1982	

* $P < 0.05$ ** $P < 0.01$

An independent samples T-test was performed to compare the reading achievement of students with high and low educational expectations. Students with high educational expectations had significantly higher mean scores ($M = 434.2$, $SD = 103.7$) than students with low educational expectations ($M = 345.4$, $SD = 96.9$), $t(13,609) = -45.92$, $p < 0.001$.

We now present results from 5 regression models in Table 3. The first two models predict factors shaping educational expectations and reading achievement for all students. The last three models determine the impact of educational expectations on reading achievement for the three student groups individually.

Model 1 predicts educational expectations for all students. The model shows that all predictor variables are significant and in the expected direction. Female students are more likely to have higher educational expectations than male students. Migrant students, first- and second-

generation, also have significantly higher educational expectations than Qatari students, even after controlling for gender, socioeconomic status, parents' emotional support as perceived by students, time spent in reading for enjoyment and home educational resources. Model 2 predicts reading achievement for all students. All predictor variables are again significant and in the expected direction, except for home educational resources. Female students outdo male students. There is a significant gap in reading achievement in favour of migrant students (first- and second- generation). We also see that in spite of control variables, high educational expectations still significantly increase reading achievement by 37.6 points.

Models 3, 4, and 5 determine reading achievement for Qatari students, first-generation students, and second-generation students respectively. In all three groups of students, females have significantly higher reading scores than their male peers. However, the gap between female and male Qatari students in reading achievement (41.61) is twice as big as the gap between the two genders for first-generation students (19.68). The gap between the sexes for second-generation students (34.19) is bigger than that of first-generation students, but smaller than that of Qatari students. This could suggest that migrant students born in Qatar are becoming more similar, in terms of gendered patterns of achievement, to Qatari students.

ESCS has a stronger impact for first-generation students (16.07) than it does for Qatari (3.52) and second-generation students (10.13). Parents' emotional support as perceived by students has a slightly stronger effect for Qatari students than the other two groups. Home educational resources are much more beneficial for migrant students than for Qatari students, particularly for second-generation.

High educational expectations have a slightly higher impact on reading achievement for first and second-generation students than for Qatari students (Qataris = 34.28, first-generation = 40.90, second-generation = 39.87). The difference in the impact of educational expectations on reading achievement was only significant between Qatari and first-generation students. likewise, time spent in reading for enjoyment operates in the expected direction showing that the greater the amount of time spent in reading for enjoyment, the higher the score in reading achievement. The impact of this factor among first-generation and second-generation students was significantly stronger than among Qataris. The differences in the impact of educational expectations and time spent in reading for enjoyment on reading achievement between the three groups (Qataris, first-generation and second-generation students) were checked by running the second model in [Table 3](#) again (twice). In the first time adding an interaction term for Ethnicity

X Time spent reading for enjoyment and in the second time adding Ethnicity X Education Expectations. These results are not presented here but can be made available upon request.

Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this paper was twofold. Firstly, to examine whether a gap in educational expectations and achievement exists between immigrant and native students in Qatar. Secondly, to investigate whether the impact of educational expectations on educational achievement is contingent upon the migratory status of students (migrant or native students). The results suggest that migrant students are significantly more likely to opt for a university education than Qatari students. In that, the educational expectations of migrant students in Qatar are higher than those of Qatari students, which is in line with previous studies and the ‘migrant optimism’ theory (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016; Hadjar & Scharf, 2019; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Kirui & Kao, 2018; Lee, 2016).

The results also suggest that migrant students outperform Qatari students in reading achievement. Given previous studies on Qatar (Cheema, 2014), these results are not surprising, and are in line with previous studies from the USA (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017; Lee & Zhou, 2015; Pong & Zeiser, 2012). It is possible, as argued by previous studies, that Qatari students develop a sense of economic entitlement in relation to employment and securing future jobs. This is likely to demotivate some Qatari students from opting for continuing post-secondary education (Lee, 2016; Stasz et al., 2007), as future employment is guaranteed by the state. This means that for migrant students, they know that future jobs and employment opportunities are not guaranteed by the Qatari or even their own governments. Moreover, given that they don’t have access to citizenship, and many of them coming from less developed countries, they understand that future opportunities depend heavily on their educational success. Another explanation for the gap between Qatari and migrant students is likely to be associated with the increased confidence (optimism) of immigrant students resulting from the combined effect of several factors operating simultaneously (but not examined here), such as: a recognized family tradition of higher education (human capital), observing the achievements of their parents who have successfully moved to Qatar while securing prestigious jobs, and the understanding that, unlike their Qatari counterparts, their future economic and employment opportunities are contingent upon their educational success. Hence, the findings in relation to the gap in educational expectations and achievement between Qatari and migrants lends a strong support to our first hypothesis.

Differences in educational expectations and achievement were also observed within migrant students. First-generation migrant students have a significantly higher level of achievement than second-generation migrant students. Although first-generation students were also slightly more likely to opt for university education than second-generation, the difference was not statistically significant. This suggests that in terms of achievement, there is a clear hierarchy with first-generation on top, followed by second-generation, while Qatari students come last. The same pattern cannot be established in relation to educational expectations. No significant differences between both migrant students were found, suggesting that they have similar educational expectations, and together they have significantly higher expectations than Qatari students. This is an interesting finding and is likely to be associated with the ethnic and national composition of the two groups. In that, the children of other-Arab families and the children of Qatari women who married non-Qatari men comprise the majority of those classified as second-generation migrant students (62% in the PISA sample), while they comprise less than half of those classified as first-generation migrant students (47%). Moreover, the majority of first-generation students study in private international schools (59%), whereas only 41% of second-generation migrant students attend private international schools. These differences are likely to explain the difference in achievement between the two groups.

One of the most interesting findings of this study was in relation to the differences between male and female students in educational expectations and achievement. Females have significantly higher educational expectations and higher achievement than their male peers in all the three groups of Qatari, first-generation and second-generation migrant students, which support our second hypothesis. This trend has also been reported in other countries (Khattab & Modood, 2018; Mantovani, Gasperoni, Albertini et al., 2018; Savas, 2016). However, the more interesting finding in relation to the gender differences is that the gap between female and male Qatari students in reading achievement is much greater than the gender gap among first and second-generation students. It is plausible that Qatari girls understand that they will face greater constraints in entering the labour market, and their future employment opportunities are far more restricted than their male counterparts due to cultural and other social factors (Salem & Yount, 2019). They are expected to have different occupational expectations than those of boys and more likely to opt for jobs that avoid mixing with men. Most of these jobs would require high levels of education and degrees. In other words, they anticipate future disadvantages and structural barriers, which can be resisted and negotiated by making themselves more qualified and employable than their male counterparts. This suggests that anticipation of future discrimination or barriers in the labour market is likely to increase

the motivation of groups and individuals to obtain higher levels of education, as the case with minority and migrants students in the UK (Lessard-Phillips et al., 2018; Li, 2018).

The results in relation to the effect of students' educational expectation on achievement provided further evidence found in previous research about the important positive role of educational expectations as a predictor of achievement (Bozick et al., 2010; Froiland & Worrell, 2017; Harrison & Waller, 2018; Jacob & Wilder, 2010; Ou & Reynolds, 2008). It seems that higher levels of educational expectations are significantly associated with higher achievement. More interestingly, the influence of educational expectations on achievement was significantly stronger among first-generation than among Qatari students, suggesting that the effect of educational expectations on achievement is contingent upon the status of the ethnic or migratory status of the group. This lends support to our third hypothesis.

While all the other predictors in the models; ESCS, parents' emotional support as perceived by students, home educational resources and reading for enjoyment, operate in the expected direction by having a significant positive effect on reading achievement, there is one finding in particular that is worth highlighting here. The results suggest that the impact of home educational resources is much more beneficial for migrant students (particularly second-generation) than for Qatari students. It is possible that Qatari students do not utilise the resources available to them to support their education in the same way or to the same extent as migrant students. The availability of home resources *per se* does not guarantee an unconditional high performance, indeed it is an important factor, but must be utilised to make it beneficial in supporting learning and promoting performance.

Limitations and future research

In general, this study attempted to contribute to the literature on educational expectations and achievement among native and migrant students, while extending the utility of some theoretical perspectives beyond the west. The Qatari context provided us with an exceptional opportunity in this regard, but in the very same time with some challenges. Unlike many migrants in Western countries, which are often characterised with low socio-economic status, most families in our sample are highly educated with a strong middle-class background. Their advantage over native students might not be associated, at least not directly, to their status as migrants *per se* 'migrant optimism' as much as it is might be associated with other factors that have not be directly controlled for in this study, such as the type of school they attend (private vs. public) and the

availability and utilisation of various types of capital. Future studies can expand our understanding further of these issues by including such variables in their analysis.

Moreover, this study has utilised cross-sectional data, which makes it almost impossible to uncover any causal relationship between educational expectations and achievement. It is likely that high achievement leads to high educational expectations in the same way high expectations might result in good academic performance. Longitudinal data could have helped uncovering whether for instance, educational expectations are predictors of achievement or an outcome of it.

Note

1. Ministry of Education and Higher Education: <https://www.edu.gov.qa/en/Pages/AboutMinistry/AboutMinistry.aspx?ItemID=72> (accessed 16 December 2021).

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