

## **Language of Instruction and Ethnic Disparities in School Success**

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Mahsa Bakhshaei, Theophano Georgiou and Marie Mc Andrew

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#### Article abstract

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# LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN SCHOOL SUCCESS

MAHSA BAKHSHAEI *McGill University & University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)*

THEOPHANO GEORGIU *McGill University*

MARIE Mc ANDREW *Université de Montréal*

**ABSTRACT.** In Quebec's French-language secondary schools, youth originating from South Asia have the highest dropout rate among all immigrant-origin students, whereas in the English sector, their coethnic peers have a more positive academic profile than third-plus-generation students. Using quantitative data, this paper aims to understand the difference in school performance between these two groups. Firstly, we examine their performance through three indicators: school delay, graduation, and dropout rates. Secondly, we contrast their profile through nine characteristics. Finally, we discuss the influence of each group's characteristics on graduation. The results reveal that the difference in performance is largely due to the characteristics of the French-sector students. The English-sector students' success is not significantly related to having English as mother tongue or as language spoken at home.

## LA LANGUE D'ENSEIGNEMENT ET LES ÉCARTS DE RÉUSSITE SCOLAIRE AU SEIN DES GROUPES ETHNIQUES

**RÉSUMÉ.** Au Québec, dans les écoles secondaires de langue française, les jeunes d'origine sud-asiatique ont le taux de décrochage le plus élevé parmi les élèves issus de l'immigration, alors que dans le secteur anglais, leurs compatriotes ont un profil académique plus positif que les élèves de troisième génération et plus. En utilisant des données quantitatives, cet article vise à comprendre la différence de performance scolaire entre ces deux groupes. Tout d'abord, nous examinons la performance à travers trois indicateurs : le retard scolaire, l'obtention du diplôme et le taux de décrochage. Nous comparons ensuite le profil de chaque groupe selon neuf caractéristiques. Enfin, nous discutons de l'influence des caractéristiques de chaque groupe sur l'obtention du diplôme. Selon les résultats, la différence de performance est due en grande partie aux caractéristiques des élèves du secteur français. La réussite des élèves au secteur anglais n'a pas été significativement liée au fait d'avoir l'anglais comme langue maternelle ou comme langue d'usage à la maison.

More than ever before, the ongoing evolution of humankind has increased population movements across borders and continents, impacting countries worldwide. With a foreign-born population of nearly 6.8 million in 2011 (representing 20.6% of its total population – the highest proportion among G8 countries), Canada is no exception to this notable global movement of people (Statistics Canada, 2011). In the same year, the francophone province of Quebec was home to 14.4% of all Canadian immigrants. Approximately one million foreign-born people lived in Quebec, representing 12.6% of the province's total population – an increase of nearly 13% from 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Today, roughly a quarter of the province's schoolchildren under the age of 18 are either immigrants themselves (first generation) or the children of at least one immigrant parent (second generation, Bakhshaei, 2014). Being language-based, Quebec's education system has both a French and English sector. French being the province's official language, the majority of students in the public education system are required, as prescribed by the Charter of the French language (Gouvernement du Québec, 1977), to attend the French sector until the end of their secondary school. There are only three situations established by law that allow a student (except for aboriginal youth) to study in the English sector: 1. when the student or one of their siblings or parents has received the major part of their education in English in Canada, 2. the presence of a serious learning difficulty or family or humanitarian situation, which renders the use of English helpful, and 3. a temporary stay in the province. As a result, nearly 90% of immigrant-origin students (first and second generations) in Quebec are currently enrolled in the French sector. In some of Montreal's public French-language schools, the number of immigrant-origin students is greater than 70%. While these students originate from around the world, most of the first generation students during the 2011-2012 school year came from Africa (particularly from the Maghreb), Asia (particularly from East Asia), and America (particularly from South America and the Caribbean, Bakhshaei, 2014).

With regard to their school performance, immigrant-origin students do not, in general, face a high risk of failure in the Quebec education system. This generally positive finding, however, masks a number of significant variations among different subgroups of students. Taking a closer look, we see, for instance, that these students perform differently based on their region of origin (Mc Andrew et al., 2015). The identification of elements explaining differences in school performance among youth of diverse immigrant origins has therefore become an important objective for the Government of Quebec whose "Policy on Educational Integration and Intercultural Education" (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec [MEQ], 1998) aims to guarantee all students, regardless of their ethnocultural origin, equal opportunities to succeed in their academic pursuits. Providing adequate support for immigrant-origin students to succeed

academically is seen by policymakers and practitioners alike as the key not only for the successful integration of migrant families but also for the prosperity of a society in which immigration is commonplace and diversity is widespread (Council of Ministers of Education, 2012; Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport [MELS], 2009).

In light of this, in the past ten years, the Quebec department of education established a research program to study the demographic, linguistic, socio-economic, ethnocultural, and schooling characteristics of students from diverse ethnic groups. Its ultimate objective was to identify underlying problems hindering the socio-educational experiences of different subgroups of these students (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2012). According to this program's most recent study on the educational achievement of immigrant-origin students (Mc Andrew, Ledent, & Murdoch, 2011), in French-language secondary schools, students originating from South Asia (mainly from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh) had the lowest graduation rate among all students (see Table 1).<sup>1</sup> They also displayed the highest dropout rate even after taking into account the significant rate of their departure from the province before graduation, as well as their considerable rate of enrolment in the adult education sector in Quebec. On the contrary, the numerically smaller group of students of the same ethnic background attending the English sector (36.7% vs. 63.3%) achieved positive academic results and presented an even better graduation rate than the third-plus-generation youth (the children of domestic-born parents).

**TABLE 1. Graduation from secondary school: Ranking order of geographical subgroups of immigrant-origin students, Quebec (1998 and 1999 cohorts)**

French sector	English sector
East Asia	East Asia
Eastern Europe	South Asia
North Africa and Middle East	North Africa and Middle East
Southeast Asia	Southeast Asia
3 <sup>rd</sup> -plus-generation students	Central and South America
Central and South America	Eastern Europe
Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa	Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa
South Asia	3 <sup>rd</sup> -plus-generation students

The present paper aims to understand the reasons for this noteworthy difference in school performance of the South Asian youth in the French and English sectors. As some educational scholars have suggested (Chow, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 1998), careful comparative study of the elements influencing the academic success of an immigrant group performing differently in two comparable contexts can lead to fostering the educational achievement of the low performance group, and of all other “at-risk” student

groups. That being said, the objective of this paper is not to recommend concrete solutions for the problems of South Asian adolescents in the French sector. Rather, our aim is to provide empirical knowledge on the characteristics and school performance of these adolescents in both sectors.

Today, South Asians<sup>2</sup> are the largest visible minority group in Canada. Six percent of the estimated 1,567,400 individuals who identified as South Asian in the 2011 Canadian Census live in Quebec (Statistics Canada, 2011). Statistics Canada predicted in 2010 that in Quebec, this group could more than double by 2031. Nonetheless, the profile of Quebec's South Asian community is unique when compared with other ethnic groups in the province, as this group is encountering particular challenges in its integration. For example, while the province's top three visible minority groups (i.e., the Black, Arab, and Latin American groups) declare having a good knowledge of French, half of the South Asians do not (Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Diversité, et de l'Inclusion [MIDI], 2014). Moreover, this group generally exhibits lower participation and employment rates (60.3% and 51.9%, respectively) than those observed in the Quebec population (64.6% and 59.9%, respectively) as well as a higher unemployment rate (13.8% vs. 7.2%).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in Montreal, among other immigrant groups, South Asians are the most residentially segregated, which also reflects their particular difficulties in linguistic and economic integration (Apparicio, Leloup & Rivet, 2006; Rose, Germain & Ferreira, 2006). Meanwhile, some surveys have reported that they face some discrimination related to their skin color or accent, some of which are shared with other ethnic groups and contexts, while others seem to be heightened by the specific nature of Quebec society (Mc Andrew & Bakhshaei, 2012; Jedwab, 2010; Jolicœur et Associés, 2005).

In spite of this vulnerable profile, the South Asian population has received limited attention from researchers and decision makers compared with other ethnic groups struggling with issues of immigration and integration. Addressing the low academic performance of this community's youth in francophone secondary schools is key to ensuring its healthy development and long-term integration within society.

In the following pages, we first present a literature review on the factors influencing educational achievement among immigrant-origin youth. This will provide the reader with the necessary framework for understanding the significance of the study. In the next section, we present a detailed methodology of the project. The core of our article is then devoted to the presentation and discussion of our results. In the first two sub-sections, we compare various indicators of school performance and characteristics of students originating from South Asia in both sectors (target group), with the situation of immigrant-origin (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation) and native (3<sup>rd</sup>-plus generation) students in their respective sector (control groups). The data presented here are descriptive in nature.

The third and last sub-section is devoted to the presentation of a regression analysis, aimed at defining the influence of each group's characteristics on its graduation rate. Finally, in our concluding remarks, we discuss the significance of our findings, specifically with regard to the different school success of students originating from South Asia in the French and English sectors in Quebec, and more generally, with regard to a better understanding of the factors influencing the educational experience of immigrant-origin students.

#### **FACTORS INFLUENCING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AMONG IMMIGRANT-ORIGIN CHILDREN**

To date, one may find various theoretical explanations for differences in educational achievement among immigrant-origin children. Among the most developed is socioeconomic theory, which stresses the close interrelationship between the family's socioeconomic status (SES) and children's academic achievement. While there may be disagreement regarding the conceptual meaning of SES, there appears to be agreement regarding its tripartite nature comprising the parents' level of education, their occupation, and income (Gottfried, 1985; Hauser, 1994; Mueller & Parcel, 1981). According to this theory, the academic success of immigrant-origin youth can vary according to their family's SES, and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are generally less successful than those of higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Sirin, 2005; White, 1982).

The level of impact of the SES of immigrant-origin students' families could be moderated by experiences and characteristics existing prior to or arising following migration. These may include experiencing war, living in a refugee camp, temporary parental unemployment, positive or conflictual relationship between the family or immigrant community and host society, as well as the student's age and level of entry in the host society's school system (Fakeye & Yemi, 2009; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Vallet & Caillé, 1996). Parents' and children's linguistic characteristics may also moderate the influence of the family's socioeconomic condition. Parents' knowledge of the host language is not only important for their integration within the new society, but also beneficial for their children's achievement in school as it facilitates their involvement in their children's education. For immigrant children, mastering the language of schooling is a long process that is affected by such factors as age upon arrival and prior exposure (Collier, 1989; Cummins, 2000).

Moreover, some studies have shown that similarity and compatibility of family and community socio-cultural characteristics (such as values and expectations) with those of the host school can positively affect immigrant students' school success, and even modulate the impact of a weak SES or of a lack of proficiency in the language of instruction (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1991; Gibson, 1988; Zhou et Kim, 2006). The impact of a low SES could also be

avoided when the immigrant family's migration project is structured proactively around the hope of achieving a certain level of social mobility (Bergeron & Potter, 2006; Kanouté, Vatz-Laaroussi, Rachédi & Tchimou-Doffouchi, 2008).

Other studies have insisted on the importance of systemic factors. This school of thought is interested, among other things, in policies and programs regarding the welcoming and integration of immigrant-origin students (e.g., language acquisition programs, revision and adaptation of school books), as well as in the impact of certain school characteristics (e.g., private or public school, immigrant student concentration) and teachers' attitudes and expectations on these students' success (Gillborn & Gipps, 1996; Johnson & Acera, 1999).

The school success of immigrant-origin students is also influenced by certain demographic characteristics, such as place of birth and gender. However, the findings of numerous studies on the impact of student birthplace on school success have yet to yield conclusive results (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008; Vallet & Caillé, 1996). While there is some consensus as to the positive effect of being born in the host society, it is not systematic. This can be explained, on the one hand, by the fact that some first-generation students seem to enter the host society school, having benefitted from good quality education or high academic expectations in the school system of their country of origin, and on the other, by the demotivation that certain second-generation students experience, particularly when their parents' migration project seems to have failed (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Additionally, for first-generation students, the conditions and motives of their family's migration project can induce major differences in their relation to school, which can modulate the impact of their birthplace (Kanouté et al., 2008).

With regard to gender, several studies in different societies have shown that within the total population, girls display better academic results than boys, regardless of social class (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2014; Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 1999; Jacob, 2002; Machin & McNally, 2005). Similarly, in several immigrant-receiving societies, gender appears to be a significant force in shaping school success among the total population of immigrant-origin students (once again with female students surpassing their male counterparts), as well as within different ethnic groups of such students (Garnett, 2008; Mc Andrew, Ledent, Sweet, & Garnett, 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004).

The main study from which our data originated (Mc Andrew et al., 2011) touched on these theoretical explanations to varying degrees, albeit in a non-systematic manner. It must be noted, though, that the variables we used were not exclusively selected on the basis of their theoretical relevance, but also linked to the content of the available data banks. As such, our strength lies in demographic, linguistic, and to some extent, socioeconomic, schooling process, and school characteristics variables. Our capacity to grasp socio-cultural

characteristics, however, was limited. Indeed, relevant factors such as family practices and values, and positive or conflictual relations with schooling could not be accessed through the adopted methodology. With regard to systemic factors, we use a rather extensive set of indicators, such as the distinction between public and private school sector and immigrant student concentrations in schools. Although we cannot identify the practices or attitudes that could explain the differences in results encountered between the two groups, the extent of our research endeavor greatly contributes to shedding light on the academic performance of secondary school students originating from South Asia in Quebec, and provides insights on the factors affecting it.

## METHODOLOGY

As suggested above, this paper presents the results of a specific data analysis emerging from a wider research project investigating the educational achievement of immigrant-origin students in Quebec (Mc Andrew et al., 2011). The aim of this project was to conduct a systematic follow-up, from secondary 1 to the beginning of college, of two cohorts of Quebec immigrant-origin students: those entering secondary 1 in 1998-1999 and in 1999-2000. The data were extracted from province-wide data banks provided by the Quebec Department of Education in 2009. The final report distinguished these students, among other variables, according to their enrolment in the French or English sector, as well as according to seven major regions of origin: East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, North Africa and the Middle East, the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, and Central and South America.<sup>4</sup> Among the 31,119 first and second generation students targeted in this project, respectively 995 and 576 students in the French and English sectors originated from South Asia and were the subject of a deeper analysis in two separate reports (Bakhshaei, 2011; Georgiou, 2011). This paper is essentially a comparison of the results of these two ministerial reports.

The indicators used to determine the students' school performance focus on their schooling progress and graduation rate, which are determined through three variables:

- 1) *Additional delay accumulated two years after entry into secondary school:* For this variable, for reasons of convenience, the analysis is limited to only those students who had already entered the Quebec school system in secondary 1. The delay of these students is determined based on their presence or absence in secondary 3. More precisely, the students are divided in three groups: those who, after two years, 1. did not accumulate any delay and were in secondary 3 or higher, 2. had a delay and were either in secondary 1 or in secondary 2, and 3. were no longer in the database.



- 2) *Graduation rate according to different time frames*: For this variable, given that we did not want to overlook the experience of students who entered the Quebec education system in midcourse of their secondary school studies (i.e., having started their secondary studies before migrating to Quebec), both cohorts are considered. Once again, the students are divided in three groups: 1. students who graduated on time, 2. students who graduated one year later than expected, and 3. students who graduated two years later than expected. Graduation on time is defined as graduating five years after entering the Quebec secondary school – for those students who were already present in secondary 1 – and respectively 4 years, 3 years, 2 years, and 1 year after entry for those who entered the Quebec secondary school in secondary 2, 3, 4, and 5.
- 3) *Graduation at a later stage and net dropout rate*: Regarding this variable, to obtain the most accurate estimation possible, certain important realities regarding the immigrant-origin students are taken into account, namely that some of them: 1. graduate over a much wider time frame, 2. leave Quebec and graduate in other provinces, or 3. continue their secondary schooling in the adult education sector even well past their twenties. In this case then, given the method used to evaluate the rate of departure from the province, the analysis is limited to those students who entered the Quebec school system either in elementary or secondary 1 (Mc Andrew et al., 2011).

With regard to student characteristics, we had access to nine of them in administrative data banks. We grouped these into five categories:

- 1) *Demographic characteristics*: Gender (boy or girl); and place of birth (born in or outside of Canada).
- 2) *Linguistic characteristics*: Based on mother tongue and the language used at home (i.e., students whose mother tongue is the language of instruction; students who have another mother tongue but who use the language of instruction at home; and students whose mother tongue and language used at home differ from the language of instruction).<sup>5</sup>
- 3) *Socioeconomic characteristics*: Given the lack of individual information on the parents' level of education, employment status, and average income in governmental data banks, it was necessary to develop – for the main study (Mc Andrew et al., 2011) but also for the ones deriving from it, such as the one presented here – a proxy based on the students' zip code. This proxy was inspired by the index used by the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur to identify “at-risk schools” that receive special support. The index, known in administrative jargon as IMSE (*indice de milieu socioéconomique*), is composed of two variables: 1. the proportion of families in the School Board planning units (corresponding grossly to the census enumeration areas) in which the mother has a level of educa-

tion under secondary 3 (representing two thirds of the index's weight) and 2. the proportion of households in such units in which the head(s) of the family is(are) unemployed (representing one third of the index's weight). In Mc Andrew et al. (2011), instead of calculating the index for schools, the authors used the same criteria to classify families according to their socioeconomic status on a scale ranging from 1 to 10, where 1 is considered as least disadvantaged and 10 as the most disadvantaged. In this study, this index has three levels: weak (8-10), medium (4-7) and high (1-3). Nevertheless, one must keep in mind that this classification reflects a probability of being poor or well-off according to area of residence and not parents' actual status.

- 4) *Characteristics of the schooling process*: Level of entry into the Quebec school system (students who entered in elementary school, in secondary 1, or during secondary school); and age when entering secondary school (students who entered at a normal age, with one year of delay, or with two or more years of delay).
- 5) *Characteristics of schools attended*: Enrolment in the public or private sector; distribution of students according to the proportion of immigrant-origin students in the schools attended (schools where the proportion of these students is 0-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, or more than 76%); and distribution of students according to the SES of the public school attended (IMSE deciles 8, 9, 10 vs. deciles 1 to 7, Mc Andrew et al., 2011).<sup>6</sup>

With respect to the multivariate regression analysis, we must note that it focuses on one dependent variable, graduation rate seven years after entering secondary 1, and is limited to the students already present in the database in secondary 1. The independent variables are closely linked to the characteristics created for the descriptive analysis, although certain minor adaptations are made. A principal difference in this regard is the additional accumulated delay in secondary 3, considered in the descriptive analysis as a performance indicator, but treated here as an independent variable, that is, as a factor influencing the dependent variable, graduation. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, given the choice of target group, here the level of entry in the school system is a binary variable, since students arriving in midcourse of their secondary school studies are not considered.

As certain independent variables are divided into yes/no categories and are not continuous, we used a simple logistic regression model to conduct our analysis using the statistical software SAS. We followed the same approach for both sectors, presenting the degree of significance and extent of impact of each variable considered (Mc Andrew et al., 2011).

## RESULTS

*School performance*

*Additional delay accumulated two years after entry into the secondary school.* As shown in Table 2, regarding the additional delay accumulated two years after entering the secondary school, the situation of the English sector students originating from South Asia is more favorable than that of their French sector coethnic peers. In the French sector, one out of three students originating from South Asia accumulated an additional delay two years after entering secondary school, while this was the case for nearly one out of five students in the control groups of this sector. Their rate of absence from the Quebec school system is also much higher (25.2% vs. 7.5% and 1.3%), although this may be due to their departure from Quebec. In the French sector, therefore, fewer students originating from South Asia avoid accumulating any additional delay (44.2% vs. 72.2% and 79.9%) compared to the control groups.

TABLE 2. *Additional delay accumulated two years after entry into secondary school*

Student group	Delayed	Absent	No delay
French sector			
Target group	30.6	25.2	44.2
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generations	20.3	7.5	72.2
3 <sup>rd</sup> -plus generation	18.8	1.3	79.9
English sector			
Target group	3.7	5.7	90.6
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generations	5.9	6.4	87.7
3 <sup>rd</sup> -plus generation	9.8	4.6	85.6

In the English sector, the situation is reversed with nine out of 10 students originating from South Asia not accumulating any additional delay two years after entering secondary school. This finding indicates that these students have a similar, even slightly better, school trajectory than that of the two control groups in their sector.

*Graduation rate according to different time frames.* As shown in Table 3, students originating from South Asia in the French sector have a much lower graduation rate than the two control groups, regardless of the time frame. For instance, almost 60% of all students of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation and 70% of those of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation graduated two years later than expected, while this is the case of only 40% of students originating from South Asia.

In the English sector, the situation is reversed and the target group has a slightly better graduation rate than the two control groups, regardless of the time frame. For instance, compared to the two control groups, the students

originating from South Asia have a particularly positive profile regarding their graduation rate one year later than expected (76.4% vs. 69.5% and 68.0%).

TABLE 3. Graduation rate according to different time frames

Student group	Delayed	Absent	No delay
French sector			
Target group	23.5	33.5	39.9
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generations	46.5	56.5	61.1
3 <sup>rd</sup> -plus generation	57.0	65.5	69.5
English sector			
Target group	68.4	76.4	78.0
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generations	62.6	69.5	71.7
3 <sup>rd</sup> -plus generation	61.3	68.0	70.3

**Graduation at a later stage and net dropout rate.** The preceding analyses could lead us to believe that the dropout rate of the students originating from South Asia in the French sector is much higher than that of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation or 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation students in this sector. However, as we mentioned in the methodology section, in order to estimate the most accurate dropout rate possible, our analysis overlooks three important realities associated with the immigrant-origin students targeted in this study, namely their graduation over a much wider time frame (two, three, and four years after the expected time), their departure from Quebec before age 15, and the fact that some of them were still present in the adult education sector five years after the expected time. This is illustrated in Table 4, which, as opposed to the previous analyses, is limited to the 1998-1999 cohort to enable us to assess the situation within the widest time frame possible.

After accounting for these three factors, their net dropout rate, while still higher, is closer to those of the control groups (28.7% vs. 21.7% and 20.8%). As such, part of the less favorable graduation profile of the students originating from South Asia in the French sector is related to the fact that they are first-generation immigrants and anglophile, two characteristics that strongly influence their departure from the province of Quebec before graduation from secondary school.

In the English sector, when taking into account the three aforementioned factors, the students originating from South Asia have a lower net dropout rate than the two control groups (9.3% vs. 13.5% and 19.2%). A comparison of the net dropout rates in both sectors reveals that in the French sector, students originating from South Asia drop out of school almost three times more often than their English sector counterparts (28.7% vs. 9.3%).

TABLE 4. *Graduation at a later stage and net dropout rate*

Student group	Grad. 2 years later	Grad. 3 & 4 years later	Gross dropout rate	Depart. before age 15	Adult Ed. 5 years later	Net dropout rate
French sector						
Target group	46.1	3.6	50.3	15.2	6.4	28.7
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generations	63.7	3.4	32.9	5.3	5.9	21.7
3 <sup>rd</sup> -plus generation	69.1	4.5	26.4	0.8	4.8	20.8
English sector						
Target group	79.6	1.7*	18.7	8.1	1.3*	9.3
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generations	74.8	1.5	23.7	7.4	2.8	13.5
3 <sup>rd</sup> -plus generation	71.4	2.2	26.4	4.6	2.6	19.2

NOTE. \*Total number of students less than 10.

### *Student characteristics*

**Demographic characteristics.** *Gender:* In both sectors, there is an underrepresentation of girls within the groups of South Asian-origin students (45.0% vs. 55.0%), whereas the control groups present a more or less equivalent profile, with only a slight overrepresentation of boys.

*Place of birth:* In the French sector, 88.2% of students originating from South Asia were born outside of Canada, whereas this is the case of only 42.4% in the English sector. In the French sector, 52.4% of the target group originates from Bangladesh or Pakistan, 28.5% from India, and 19.1% from other South Asian countries, mainly Sri Lanka. In the English sector, 31.1% of the target group originates from Bangladesh or Pakistan, 41.6% from India, while 27.3% originates from other South Asian countries.

**Linguistic characteristics.** *Mother tongue:* As shown in Table 5, the mother tongue of the majority of students originating from South Asia in both French and English sectors is different from the language of instruction. Nonetheless, there are more speakers of the language of instruction in the English sector than in the French (24% vs. 4%). In this last sector, four mother tongues were most frequently reported among students who did not declare French as their mother tongue. These are, in descending order of importance: Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, and Tamil / Singhalese. In the English sector, these were Tamil / Singhalese and Urdu.

*Language spoken at home:* The language used at home by the majority of students originating from South Asia in both sectors is also different from the language of instruction. However, there are more students in the English sector who speak English at home than there are students in the French sector who speak

French at home (22.7% vs. 2.3%, see Table 5). Indeed, despite the fact that, in the English sector, 76% of South Asian-origin students' mother tongue is not English, nonetheless almost one out of three commonly use it at home.

**TABLE 5. Students of South Asian origin: Distribution according to selected linguistic characteristics**

Students' linguistic characteristics	French sector (%)	English sector (%)
Mother tongue French / English	4.2	24.0
Mother tongue other	95.8	76.0
Language used at home French / English	2.3	22.7
Language used at home other	97.7	53.3

**Socioeconomic characteristics.** *Family socioeconomic environment:* In both sectors, compared to the two control groups, the South Asian-origin students' families are overrepresented within the category of families with weak socioeconomic status and underrepresented in the strong socioeconomic status category. However, looking at each target group individually, the English sector students' families are more or less equally distributed along the three levels of the socioeconomic environment indicator, while in the French sector, the students' families are overrepresented in the weak level for this indicator (see Table 6). This apparent paradox in data is better understood when considering the strong overrepresentation of native and immigrant-origin families who attend the English sector and who are in the socioeconomic environment indicator's highest status bracket (respectively 42.6% and 44.2%).

**TABLE 6. Distribution according to the Family Socioeconomic Environment indicator**

Student group	Strong (%)	Medium (%)	Weak (%)
French sector			
Target group	11.7	21.3	67.0
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generations	26.8	34.3	39.0
3 <sup>rd</sup> -plus generation	28.7	41.9	29.4
English sector			
Target group	31.6	32.7	35.7
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generations	44.2	33.7	22.1
3 <sup>rd</sup> -plus generation	42.6	33.9	23.5

**Characteristics of the schooling process.** *Level of entry into the Quebec school system:* In the French sector, the target group has a less favorable profile regarding its entry into the Quebec school system than the two control groups. Nearly half of the South Asian origin students did not attend primary school in Quebec (of which 30.5% integrated the school system in secondary 1 and 20.5% did so

during secondary school). The situation of their coethnic peers in the English sector is radically different: 85.2% of the students originating from South Asia were already present in primary school, and this, to a greater extent than the combined total of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students (see Table 7).

*Age when entering secondary school:* In the French sector, more than one out of two students originating from South Asia entered secondary school with at least one year of delay, while this is the case for 34.7% of the combined total of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students, and 19.6% of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation students. It must be noted, however, that in all three cases the accumulated delay is mostly of a single year. Compared to the two control groups, the target group has a higher tendency of presenting a delay of two years or more (20.8% vs. 7.6% and 0.9%). The delay at the time of entering secondary school could be linked to the students' attendance of the *classes d'accueil* (welcoming classes)<sup>7</sup> in primary school. However, given that more than half of the students did not attend primary school in Quebec, the impact of pre-migration and migration factors must also be considered. In the English sector, only 22.4% of the students originating from South Asia entered secondary school with at least one year of delay. This percentage is relatively close to the 17.5% of students from the two control groups who present a similar delay. Once again, the accumulated delay in all three cases is mostly of a single year. However, it remains that the target group students have twice as often a delay of two years or more than the control groups (see Table 7).

TABLE 7. *Place of birth, level of entry into the Quebec school system, and age when entering secondary school*

Student group	Born in Canada (%)	Level of entry into the Quebec school system (%)			Age when entering secondary (%)		
		Primary school	Secondary 1	During secondary	On time	1 year delay	2 years+ delay
French sector							
Target group	11.8	49.0	30.5	20.5	44.1	35.1	20.8
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generations	41.4	77.7	9.4	12.9	65.2	27.1	7.6
3 <sup>rd</sup> -plus-generation	100.0	99.4	0.2	0.4	80.4	18.7	0.9
English sector							
Target group	57.6	85.2	3.3	11.5	77.6	19.6	2.8
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generations	73.0	81.5	3.8	14.7	82.4	16.2	1.4
3 <sup>rd</sup> -plus generation	100.0	93.7	1.7	4.5	82.4	16.2	1.3

*Characteristics of schools attended. Enrolment in the public or private sector:* In the French sector, almost all students originating from South Asia attend public schools. This trend can be explained by the fact that most of their families have a disadvantaged socioeconomic status. These students attend public schools much more than those of the two control groups (96.9% vs. 76.5% and 82.2%). In the English sector, the target group students attend private schools more often than those of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation (20.6% vs. 16.3%). Their profile, however, is identical to the average profile of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students, that is, approximately one student out of five is enrolled in a private school.

*Socioeconomic environment indicator of public schools attended:* In the French sector, compared to the control groups, the students originating from South Asia are overrepresented in public schools located in underprivileged milieus. In fact, 61.9% of these students attend underprivileged schools, while this is the case of only 35.1% of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students, and 25.1% of those of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation. In the English sector, all three comparison groups seem to have a similar overall profile. The students originating from South Asia, however, are slightly overrepresented in public schools located in average or underprivileged milieus (27.2% vs. 22.3% and 21.0%) and underrepresented in public schools located in the most privileged milieus. In this last case, there is an 11 percentage points difference between the target group and the 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation students (34.4 % vs. 45.4%). This difference may be explained in part by the stronger presence of students originating from South Asia in private schools.

*Proportion of first and second generation students in schools attended:* In the French sector, 73.2% of students originating from South Asia enroll in schools where the proportion of immigrant-origin students is more than 50%. This percentage is much higher than that of the combined total of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation (43.2%) and 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation (2.5%) students. Thus, half of the target group students attend highly multiethnic secondary schools. This profile reveals that in the French sector, students of South Asian origin do not have enough contact with 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation students, that is, with peers whose mother tongue is French, something that could have a negative impact on their socio-linguistic integration. Conversely, in the English sector, 55.2% of the target group attends schools where the proportion of students of immigrant origin is less than 50%. In this case, the student body of the schools they attend is predominantly composed of 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation students. An additional 32.3% of the target group is enrolled in schools where the proportion of students of immigrant origin is between 51% and 75%. In this case, the schools they attend obviously have a more multiethnic character. Finally, 12.5% of the target group attends a highly multiethnic secondary school. This is a rather small proportion of students compared to the rest of the target group, which indicates that in the English sector, a significant percentage of students originating from South Asia have the opportunity to come into contact with 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation students through their daily school interactions.



In sum, we see that the students originating from South Asia in the French sector have a particularly vulnerable profile when compared to the 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation students or even to the total population of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students in this sector. In contrast, their coethnic peers in the English sector exhibit a rather different profile, yet one that is more or less favorable compared to that of the entire population of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students or to that of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation. In both sectors, though, this observation can be refined by distinguishing these students on the basis of their country of origin: students from India have, in contrast to those from Bangladesh and Pakistan, a more favorable profile for school performance.

Nevertheless, it is not clear whether all these factors have the same impact and play in the same direction with respect to the school success of the studied population. For this reason, we conducted a regression analysis.

### *The impact of the studied characteristics on graduation rate*

As depicted in Table 8, the regression analysis reveals important differences in both sectors regarding the significance of the impact the students' characteristics have on their graduation rate. Indeed, the graduation rate of South Asian-origin students in francophone schools is significantly associated with their gender, place of birth, mother tongue, language used at home, family socioeconomic status, level of entry into Quebec school system, age when entering secondary school, and proportion of immigrant-origin students in schools attended. In the English sector, the graduation rate of students originating from South Asia is significantly associated with their gender, level of entry into Quebec school system, and age when entering secondary school.

More precisely, the regression analysis confirms that in both sectors, the South Asian-origin girls tend to outperform their male counterparts (in the French sector: odds ratio [OR] = 2.89,  $p < .001$ ; in the English sector: OR = 1.89,  $p < .10$ ), which, given their underrepresentation (in both sectors), may disadvantage the general profile of young Quebecers originating from South Asia. Interestingly, being male could be more disadvantageous among South Asian-origin students in the French sector than in the English sector. Moreover, in the French sector, being born outside of Canada has a negative impact on these students' graduation (OR = 0.39,  $p < .10$ ), while in the English sector, the impact of this variable is non-significant.

Furthermore, while the impact of linguistic variables is non-significant on the graduation rate of South Asian-origin students in the English sector, it is substantial in the French sector. More precisely, revealing different findings from the descriptive data, the regression analysis shows that in the French sector, the graduation rate is positively influenced when French is not the mother tongue nor the language used at home (OR = 7.47,  $p < .05$  when students do not have French as mother tongue, and OR = 8.91,  $p < .001$  when they do not use French at home).

TABLE 8. Graduation seven years after entry into secondary 1: Impact of some characteristics

Variables	French sector (N = 678)		English sector (N = 473)	
	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.
Demographic characteristics				
Girls	2.89	***	1.89	*
Born outside of Canada	0.39	*	0.85	ns
Linguistic characteristics				
L1 <sup>11</sup> ≠ Lang. of instruction	7.47	**	0.98	ns
L1 & Lang. used at home ≠ Lang. of instruction	8.91	***	0.75	ns
Socioeconomic characteristics				
Favorable family socioeconomic status	0.80	ns	1.33	ns
Unfavorable family socioeconomic status	0.42	**	0.64	ns
Characteristics related to schooling process				
Entry in secondary 1	0.39	*	0.24	*
Delay upon arrival in secondary	0.39	***	0.45	**
Additional accumulated delay in secondary 3	0.12	***	0.15	***
Characteristics of schools attended				
Private school	3.89	ns	2.48	ns
Decile 8, 9, 10 school	0.61	ns	0.84	ns
26-50% of student population is immigrant	1.88	ns	2.48	ns
51-75% of student population is immigrant	3.13	*	1.02	ns
76-100% of student population is immigrant	5.42	**	1.40	ns

NOTE. \*\*\*Sig. at  $p < .001$ , \*\*Sig. at  $p < .05$ , \*Sig. at  $p < .10$ , ns: non-significant

Concerning the socioeconomic variable, in the French sector, students of families with low socioeconomic status (67.0%) significantly graduate at a lower rate as compared to those whose families have medium (21.3%) or high socioeconomic status (11.7%) (OR = 0.42,  $p < .05$ ). In the English sector, this variable does not play a significant role in the graduation rate of students originating from South Asia.

With respect to characteristics related to the schooling process, in both sectors, entry into the school system in secondary 1, delayed entry into secondary school, and additional accumulated delay in secondary 3 all have a negative impact on the graduation of students originating from South Asia (respectively in the French sector: OR = 0.39,  $p < .10$ ; OR = 0.39,  $p < .001$ ; OR = 0.12,  $p < .001$  and respectively in the English sector: OR = 0.24,  $p < .10$ ; OR = 0.45,  $p < .05$ ; OR = 0.15,  $p < .01$ ). It is important to mention, though, that for

students of both sectors, the additional accumulated delay in secondary 3 is the most negative factor in their obtainment of a secondary school diploma after seven years of schooling (respectively in the French and English sector:  $OR = 0.12, p < .001$  and  $OR = 0.15, p < .001$ ). In other words, whereas the accumulation of an additional delay in secondary 3 may significantly limit a South Asian-origin student's chances of obtaining a secondary school diploma, such a delay in primary school seems less operative.

Lastly, regarding the school characteristics examined, they are all, once again, non-significant in the English sector. In the French sector, enrolling in a private school and in a disadvantaged public school, as well as in a school where the proportion of students of immigrant origin is 26-50% does not have a significant impact on graduation. However, enrolling in schools where the proportion of students of immigrant origin is more than 51% has a very positive effect on the graduation rate of students originating from South Asia ( $OR = 3.13, p < .10$  when students enroll in schools where the proportion of students of immigrant origin is between 51% and 75%, and  $OR = 5.42, p < .05$  when they enroll in schools where the proportion of students of immigrant origin is more than 75%).

In short, the factors that can impede the graduation rate of the young Quebecers originating from South Asia in the French sector, in descending order of importance, are: having additional accumulated delay in secondary 3, delayed entry into secondary school, entry in the Quebec school system in secondary 1, being born outside of Canada, and coming from a family with a low socioeconomic status. In the English sector, these factors are: having additional accumulated delay in secondary 3, entry in the Quebec school system in secondary 1, delayed entry into secondary school, and being male.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study presents a comparative quantitative analysis of the academic success of students originating from South Asia in French and English secondary schools in Quebec. It aims to provide insight into the reasons why these students have a positive graduation rate in the English sector, while in the French, they represent a vulnerable group when compared with their sector's entire 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation and 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus generation student populations.

Our descriptive data suggest that this difference can be explained by these students' characteristics. In the French sector, students originating from South Asia were more often born outside of Canada (88.2%) than the total population of immigrant-origin students in this sector (58.6%). They also entered the Quebec school system in primary school (49.0%) less often than the combined total of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students (77.7%). As well, the majority of them entered secondary school with a delay (55.9%) and, compared to the control groups (23.5% for immigrant-origin students and 17.8% for 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation

students), were practically absent from private schools (3.1%). Moreover, only a small proportion of them has French as mother tongue or as language used at home (4.0%). Within this target group, there is also an important overrepresentation of boys and concomitant underrepresentation of girls (55.0% vs. 45.0%), which, consistent with national and international research (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2014; Jacob, 2002; Machin & McNally, 2005), could pose a disadvantage to this group's academic success (Bakhshaei & Henderson, 2016). Furthermore, the families of this group have a strongly disadvantaged socioeconomic profile with a marked overrepresentation in the weakest socioeconomic status category (67.0%), a trend that has been found in other studies to pose a potential disadvantage to school success (Sirin, 2005; White, 1982). These characteristics suggest that the students originating from South Asia in the French sector exhibit a somewhat vulnerable profile in their school performance, compared to that of the entire population of immigrant-origin students, or even to those of 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation. The regression analysis confirms that the overrepresentation of boys, of students born outside of Canada, and of families with an unfavorable socioeconomic status on the one hand, and the high rates of entry at the secondary school level and of accumulated delays during secondary school on the other, are the factors that significantly impede the school success of students originating from South Asia in francophone schools.

In the English sector, 57.6% of students originating from South Asia were born in Canada, which is a lower proportion compared to the total number of immigrant-origin students in this sector (73.0%). However, the majority of them (85.2%) have attended primary school in Quebec, slightly surpassing the proportion of their immigrant-origin peers (81.5%), but lagging behind those of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus generation (93.7%). A significant proportion of students originating from South Asia also have English as their mother tongue (24.0%) or language used at home (27%). In this sector, boys are once again overrepresented compared to girls (54.5% vs. 45.5%). Furthermore, the South Asian families in the English sector are almost equally represented in the three socioeconomic categories and are, therefore, in a generally less favorable position than those in the two control groups. Also, the majority of the English sector students originating from South Asia (77.6%) began secondary school at the normal age, although not as often as their peers in the two control groups (82.4% for both groups). They also attended private school to the same degree as the combined total of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students (20.6%), yet less often than those of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus generation (16.3%). These characteristics suggest that the students originating from South Asia in the English sector exhibit a somewhat favorable profile in their school performance, compared to that of the entire population of immigrant-origin students, or even to that of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-plus-generation. Based on the results of our regression analysis, most of these characteristics do not have a significant impact on the graduation rate of the South Asian-origin students in the English sector. This can be

partly attributable to their small sample size ( $n = 473$ ) but also to the positive profile of all sub-groups in this sector, which limits the level of variance to be explained. Our regression analysis can confirm, however, that the factors promoting the graduation of South Asian-origin students in the English sector are attending elementary school in Quebec and entering secondary school at the normal age, without any delay, which characterize most of these students. Interestingly, according to this analysis, the academic success of these students is not significantly related to having English as mother tongue or as the language spoken at home. Nevertheless, this lack of significance may be linked to the small size of our sample and the fact that, according to the 2011 census, 87.3% of Quebecers with a South Asian background knew English while only 52.3% knew French (MIDI, 2014). It is therefore quite possible that parents of students in the English sector spoke the language of instruction.

Moreover, some qualitative studies (Bakhshaei, 2013; Lenoir-Achdjian, 2008) suggested that many South Asian parents would prefer their children to be schooled in English in order to be able to follow their schooling more adequately and to ensure that they can further their studies if the family migrates to other parts of Canada or English-speaking countries. It is likely, though, that first generation families who succeed in circumventing the complex requirements of the Charter of the French language (whose percentage in the English sector, albeit limited, is much higher than a strict application of the criteria mentioned above would predict) have higher social and cultural resources than those who attend French schools with more or less willingness or resistance.

Whatever may be the case, in Quebec's South Asian community, the typical "at-risk" student is male, born outside of Canada, and entering the French sector in secondary 1, or during the course of his secondary school studies. This student's chances of obtaining a secondary school diploma would be even more meager if his family's socioeconomic status was unfavorable and/or if he accumulated an additional delay before secondary 3.

In addition to illustrating the extreme variety of profiles that can be hidden under a common "ethnic tag," these results suggest that the school dropout problem is highly complex, requiring multiple interventions. The significant impact of socioeconomic factors and those related to the schooling process suggest that the risk of dropping out begins accumulating early on in students' school lives. Thus, attempts to fight this problem should begin as soon as immigrant students enter the host society school system. Compensatory educational programs that aim at overcoming shortcomings and deficits, whether of linguistic nature or related to a poor socioeconomic background, such as the current welcoming classes program or supervised after-school study sessions, should be reinforced even though they would not be able to completely equalize students' chances. Other interventions such as the school and various community organizations providing better guidance and information for parents can also help students overcome initial disadvantages arising from accumulated delays upon arrival.

Although this article presents a variety of data, the statistical data do not allow us to look at the family and community socio-cultural capital, at some systemic practices (e.g., immigration and integration policies), at the various forms of discrimination in society and at school, or at the image of the community as projected by the media. The effect of schools, various programs and pedagogical approaches, of teachers and teaching partnerships and of parents and peers should also be examined more closely. A better understanding of their possible effects could be achieved if local and provincial authorities collected more exhaustive and better-targeted data. A qualitative methodology could also enable a more refined understanding of the topic under study by prioritizing the understanding of individuals' subjective experiences in their daily transactions with their environment (see Bakhshaei, 2013; Bakhshaei, Mc Andrew, and Georgiou, 2012).

#### NOTES

1. Tables in this paper are created based on the results of Mc Andrew et al. (2011), Bakhshaei (2011), and Georgiou (2011).
2. In accordance with the definition offered by Statistics Canada, the terms "South Asians," "South Asian community," and "South Asian population" are used in this paper to refer to people who report in the Canadian census an ancestry originating in South Asia.
3. It must be noted, though, that there are differences based on country of origin within this group, and that the Indian community's profile is better than that of the others (MIDI, 2014).
4. These regions were selected based on the characteristics of recent immigration, as well as on the priorities of the Quebec department of education and the education milieus. Moreover, these regions were largely defined based on the classification of Statistics Canada.
5. This data is based on parents' declarations in their children's registration forms and as such, carry certain limitations.
6. Deciles 8, 9, and 10: schools located in underprivileged milieus; deciles 4 to 7: schools located in average milieus; and deciles 1 to 3: schools located in privileged milieus.
7. In Quebec, welcoming and French language-learning support services (*Les services d'accueil et de soutien à l'apprentissage de la langue française, SASAF*) are offered to children whose mother tongue is not French and who do not have sufficient knowledge of this language to follow the regular francophone program. These in-school services are either offered as "closed welcoming classes," where students can attend from 6 to 24 months, or are integrated within regular classes. In Montreal, where the majority of Quebec's immigrants reside, the model of "closed welcoming classes" is dominant (MELS, 2014).

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MAHSA BAKHSHAEI is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with joint affiliation between McGill University and University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Her main research interest is the social and educational development of immigrant-origin students in Canada and in the United States. [mbakhshaei@ucla.edu](mailto:mbakhshaei@ucla.edu)

THEOPHANO GEORGIU is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University. Her research interests focus on issues of identity, heritage, language maintenance, and integration of immigrant-origin students, particularly within the context of ethnic schools. As an elementary school teacher, she has taught in a number of ethnic school contexts in Montreal. [theophano.georgiou@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:theophano.georgiou@mail.mcgill.ca)

MARIE Mc ANDREW is a full professor in the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at the University of Montreal. She is also the director of the Research Group on Immigration, Equity, and Schooling (GRIÉS). She specializes in the education of minorities and intercultural education. [marie.mcandrew@umontreal.ca](mailto:marie.mcandrew@umontreal.ca)

MAHSA BAKHSHAEI est une chercheure postdoctorale avec une double affiliation entre l'Université McGill et l'University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Sa recherche porte principalement sur le développement socio-scolaire des élèves issus de l'immigration au Canada et aux États-Unis. [mbakhshaei@ucla.edu](mailto:mbakhshaei@ucla.edu)

THÉOPHANO GEORGIU est doctorante au Département des Études Intégrées en Science de l'Éducation à l'Université de McGill. Ses intérêts de recherche se concentrent sur les questions de l'identité, l'entretien de la langue d'origine et l'intégration des élèves issus de l'immigration, particulièrement dans le contexte des écoles ethniques. En tant qu'enseignante au primaire, elle a enseigné dans nombreux contextes scolaires ethniques à Montréal. [theophano.georgiou@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:theophano.georgiou@mail.mcgill.ca)

MARIE Mc ANDREW est professeure titulaire au Département d'administration et fondements de l'éducation de l'Université de Montréal. Elle est également la directrice du Groupe de Recherche sur l'Immigration, l'Équité et la Scolarisation (GRIÉS). Elle est spécialisée dans l'éducation des minorités et l'éducation interculturelle. [marie.mcandrew@umontreal.ca](mailto:marie.mcandrew@umontreal.ca)