

# Immigrants in Italy

## A new phenomenon and some old problems

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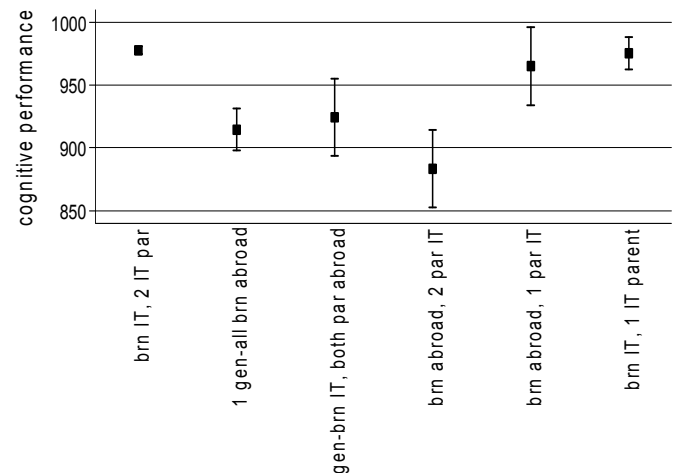
The presence of immigrants is a recent, but very rapidly growing phenomenon in Italy. Along with a more general trend of increasing presence of foreigners, the presence of children with immigration background in Italian schools rose particularly fast over recent years. And although the growth slowed down with the economic crisis the presence of students with migration background (first and second generation) will likely double within the next decade. The presence of foreign students (i.e. non Italian nationals) by 2009 reached 8% in middle schools and 8.3% in elementary schools (starting from 2.5%, resp. 3% in 2002).

This paper has a two fold purpose. It first looks at the differences in **cognitive performance** (test scores) among natives and students with immigration background, distinguishing first, and higher order immigrants. Second, the paper explores to what extent, if at all, the presence of immigrant students in schools has a negative effect on the performance on natives. Empirical analysis is based on Italian Timms data for 8<sup>th</sup> grade (terza media).

### Natives performance: math and science score

Immi1 gen concen. school: mid	-7,072
Immi1 gen concen. school: high	-24,56

*Net of individual and school level characteristics*



*Mean values of math and science scores by type of immigration background. Timms 2003, 2007*

In fact, students with immigration background do perform worse at school, though this disadvantage is not existing for children with one native parent. Results hold also in the multivariate, multi-level model. Immigrants' disadvantage is particularly high when placed in a high immigration concentration context.

How are natives influenced by the presence of immigrants in the cognitive performance? The empirical results reveal in fact a worse performance of natives in schools with high immigrant concentration. This effect, however, is present only for a high concentration, that is more than 10%, of first generation immigrants and is limited in size. This is not due to disciplinary problems or different social composition of these schools, but results hint towards more simple explanations like slowing down of learning due to language problems.



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