



The Impact of Parents' Education on Intercultural Preparedness

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ABSTRACT

We developed a survey to assess the impact of parents' levels of education on college students' ethnocentrism and intercultural competence. Results showed that when fathers' (but not mothers') levels of education were high, students showed greater intercultural preparedness. The findings have important implications for diversity issues on campus and for students who may study abroad.

INTRODUCTION

Parents' level of education may have an impact on children. For example, Davis-Kean (2005) has shown that higher levels of parents' education and income are associated with higher levels of academic achievement for children. Similarly, Hahs-Vaughn (2004) found that less educated parents provided less academic support for first generation college students.

However, less is known about how parents' education affects children's attitudes toward other cultures. Though parents' social status appears to impact adolescents' and young adults' ethnocentric attitudes (Vollebergh et al., 2001), the existence of any parallel impact on the attitudes and skills necessary for successful intercultural encounters (i.e., intercultural competence) is not well established.

Thus, the goal of this study was to examine the link between parents' education level, ethnocentrism, and intercultural competence.

METHOD

College students at UWSP ($N = 146$, 105 females and 41 males) completed an intercultural preparedness survey as an introductory psychology course requirement. Most of the participants were freshman ($n = 103$, 71.5%) and traditional students aged between 18 and 21 years old ($n = 137$, 94.5%).

The survey included 24 ethnocentrism items (adapted from Neulip & McCroskey, 1997), each utilizing a 5-point Likert-type scale (ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree"). A preliminary factor analysis revealed two different components:

- Outgroup Derogation (e.g., "Most other countries are backward compared to my country.")
- Ingroup Favoritism (e.g., "My country should be the role model for other countries.")

The survey also included 16 intercultural competence (ICC) items, each utilizing a 7-point Likert-type scale (ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree"). A preliminary factor analysis revealed four components (as expected):

- Awareness (e.g., "I am aware of the many differences across languages and cultures.")
- Attitudes (e.g., "I am willing to reflect on my own values, beliefs, preferences, and habits.")
- Skills (e.g., "I am able to maintain flexibility when interacting with people of different cultures.")
- Knowledge (e.g., "I have knowledge of the basic elements and important effects of culture.")

Finally, students completed a brief demographic questionnaire where they indicated their parents' education levels (among other things).

RESULTS

Multivariate ANOVAs showed that fathers' education was significantly associated with ethnocentrism, $F(4,284) = 2.751, p = .029, \eta^2 = .037$ (see Table 1), but that mothers' education was not, $F(4,284) = .813, p = .518, \eta^2 = .011$.

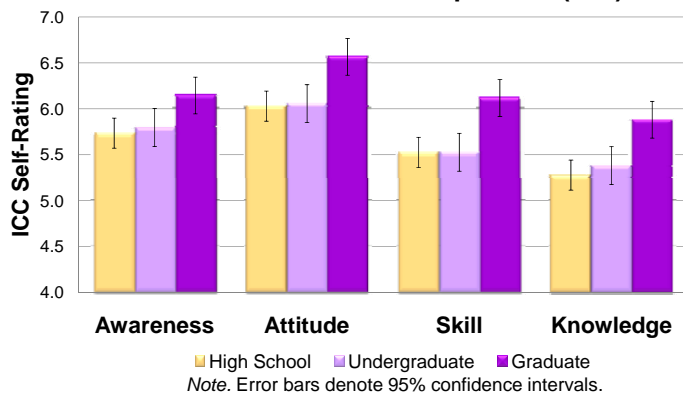
Table 1: Impact of Fathers' Education Levels on Students' Ethnocentrism Ratings

Fathers' Education Levels	In-Group Favoritism	Out-Group Derogation
1. High School ($n = 75$)	2.72 (.50)	1.86 (.45)
2. Undergraduate ($n = 53$)	2.77 (.62)	1.76 (.49)
3. Graduate ($n = 19$)	2.69 (.70)	1.48 (.57)
$F(2,143)$.20	4.63
p	.82	.01
η^2	<.01	.06
Comparisons	----	1,2 > 3

Note. All means (and standard deviations) are on a 5-point scale. Comparisons used Fisher's Least Significant Differences.

Multivariate ANOVAs showed that fathers' education was significantly associated with ICC ratings, $F(8,280) = 3.106, p = .017, \eta^2 = .081$ (see Figure 1), but that mothers' education was not, $F(8,280) = 1.013, p = .426, \eta^2 = .028$.

Figure 1: Impact of Fathers' Education Level on Students' Intercultural Competence (ICC)



DISCUSSION

In general, higher levels of father's education were associated with lower levels of the outgroup derogation aspect of ethnocentrism and with higher levels of the attitudes, skills, and knowledge components of intercultural competence. In contrast, mothers' education was unrelated to all aspects of ethnocentrism and intercultural competence.

These results imply that fathers may be particularly important role models in the formulation of intercultural attitudes and values. This may parallel the work of Davis-Kean (2005) and others showing the importance of fathers' contributions toward children's academic achievement.

These findings have important implications for diversity issues on campus and for students who may study abroad. Campuses need to understand, and build upon, students' individual backgrounds in order to educate them about cultural differences.

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