

Differing Contributing Factors to Educational Successes of  
Former Yugoslavian Refugees and Natives in the Netherlands; a  
Qualitative Analysis

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## Abstract

This study investigated the academic success of former Yugoslavian refugee students in the Netherlands and compared the contributing factors to their native counterparts. Instead of giving a negative character to the educational performances of migrant students, we should regard having a migration background as a benefit that allows immigrant students to achieve higher education. Also, if we can identify how contributing factors of educational successes differ between a migrant group and natives, it can cater towards the needs of students with a migration background. This study aimed at answering the following research question: *how do factors that contribute to educational successes of ex-Yugoslavian refugees differ from those of natives in the Netherlands?* A qualitative research approach is obtained to gain an in-depth understanding of how those contributing factors differ. The results showed that the Dutch natives attributed their educational successes mainly to their intelligence and talents, as well as to their parents who did not put any pressure on their school performances. Whereas former Yugoslavian refugees considered their independence and having siblings as major contributing factors to their academic success.

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# 1. Introduction

The Dutch population has never been as diverse as it is today. In 2021, almost 25 percent of the Dutch population had a migration background. This number includes both first-generation (foreign-born people), and second-generation immigrants (people with at least one foreign-born parent) (CBS, 2021b). This increasing diversity necessitates a better understanding of the impacts of a migration background on educational attainments (Kao and Thompson, 2003, Kao and Tienda, 1995, Louie, 2012, Meijnen et al., 2001).

Research established that migrant students, both first and second generation, have significantly lower school performances than their native counterparts (Buchmann and Parrado, 2006, Christensen, 2004, Entorf and Minoiu, 2004, ORTÍZ, 2003, Schleicher, 2006, OECD, 2011). This immigrant-native educational gap also holds in the Netherlands. Evidence suggests that non-western migrants have lower educational attainments than their native counterparts (CBS, 2021a). Unfortunately, research about educational success stories of students with a migration background is limited. Furthermore, scholastic performances of immigrant students are often put in a bad light. Academia and media rarely focus on educational advancements of migrant students, as a result, the image of the successes of migrant students as a group takes on a negative character (Meijnen et al., 2001). This makes it important to focus on research about their educational success stories to clear out the negative character that is often given to the educational performances of migrant students. Therefore, this research aims to study the educational successes of a specific group of students with a migration background.

In this pattern, one group stands out in the Netherlands. “Ex-Yugoslavs are a success story” was the title of a news article written by Bolwijn and de Mooij (2015). The educational efficacy of former Yugoslavians has been identified as one of the reasons for their prosperity in the Netherlands. Compared to other migrant groups, ex-Yugoslavians have the highest educational attainment (Bolwijn and de Mooij, 2015, Hessels, 2005).

This study examines the contributing factors of educational successes of former Yugoslavian refugees and compares them to the contributing factors of natives in the Netherlands. Hessels (2005) showed that many former Yugoslavians came to the Netherlands during the Yugoslavian wars that broke out in the early 1990s. Additionally, individuals who came to the Netherlands during the Yugoslavian wars generally have a higher level of education (Hessels, 2005). Hence, this study specifically focuses on the 1.5 generation of former Yugoslavian refugees. More precisely, people from former Yugoslavia who came to the Netherlands as refugees before or during their early teenage years, and were born in their home country, are of interest for this study (Berestein Rojas, 2011). The 1.5 generation has completed most of their education in the Netherlands which allows them to be compared to their native counterparts, who are also a population of interest for this study. Van der Veen (2001) showed that factors contributing to scholastic performances of natives differ from migrants. Therefore, this study compares contributing factors of the educational successes of former Yugoslavian refugees to those of natives in the Netherlands. To explore how the contributing factors differ between the groups, three forms of capital that were proposed by Bourdieu (1984) will be used; economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Research done by Pinxten and Lievens (2014) considered these types of capital as a possible resource for obtaining and sustaining a healthy lifestyle. Instead, this study will consider those three forms of capital as potential resources for obtaining higher education.

This type of research could assist in the identification of prospective intervention targets. Furthermore, knowledge that could be obtained from this study could enable educators and policymakers to establish policies that could cater students with a migration background better. Additional help that may be obtained as a result of this research could improve the performance of migrant students. This study also serves to paint a brighter picture of the school attainments of students with a migration background.

The research question that will be answered in this study is as follows: *How do factors that contribute to educational successes of former Yugoslavian refugees differ from those of natives in the Netherlands?*

To broaden our understanding of how foreign-born differ from their native-born counterparts, a qualitative study will be conducted. For this study, a comparative case study methodology is obtained since former Yugoslavian refugees are compared to their native counterparts. Taylor (2016) considers a case study perfect for extensive small-scale research. Comparing the groups allows to get an in-depth understanding of how contributing factors differ between them. This research specifically focuses on the 1.5 generation of former Yugoslavian refugees and natives in the Netherlands. Hence, qualitative interviews were conducted with both ex-Yugoslavians and Dutch natives.

This study started by offering an introduction to the research and provided background information on the subject that will be discussed. Subsequently, it will be explained how contributing factors, which are structured along economic capital, cultural capital and social capital (Bourdieu, 1984), could promote the educational successes of former Yugoslavian refugees and Dutch natives. This section also features the expectations set for this study. This will be followed by a chapter on methodology. Next, the results section wherein the findings are analysed will be presented. Lastly, this study closes with a concluding section where conclusions and recommendations on further research are included.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Theory of Capital

This paper adopted three notions of capital that were introduced by Bourdieu (1984) to study how contributing factors of educational successes of ex-Yugoslavian differ from their native counterparts. Bourdieu (1984) suggested in his Theory of Capital that individuals from various social positions vary in their possession of three types of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Each of these types of capital will be used as a potential resource for obtaining tertiary education.

#### 2.1.1. Economic Capital

Economic capital refers to material assets that are ‘immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p.242). Thus, it reflects a person’s or family’s financial resources. Blanden and Gregg (2004) noted that high family income allows parents to make direct investments for their children, such as fee money and higher education maintenance. At early ages, children seem to get educational benefits from income through the combination of education and consumption. For instance, the establishment of a good home climate via books, toys, and outings. In this case, books and toys are purchased for both current use and educational purposes. Similarly, housing preferences, which is influenced by school quality, offers advantages (Blanden and Gregg, 2004). Previous research clearly indicated that property values are positively linked to school quality (Seo and Simons, 2009).

However, families with a migration background tend to encounter more economic hardships than natives. This puts increased pressure on those parents to provide basic needs, such as school supplies, for their children (Lopez et al., 2001). Furthermore, material protection and higher-quality educational opportunities are harder to provide for economically disadvantaged families (Fan, 2014). Parental engagement in their children’s education could also contribute to school successes. Parents with higher income are more likely to be involved than parents with lower earning (Baker and Stevenson, 1986, Crosnoe, 2001, Desimone, 1999, Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987, Lareau, 2000).

### 2.1.2. Cultural Capital

As stated by Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital is cultural knowledge functioning as a recourse that assists us in managing culture and altering our perceptions and opportunities. Both material and symbolic elements are incorporated by cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Furthermore, Bourdieu (1986) argues that cultural capital can be divided into three types; embodied state, objectified state, and institutionalised state.

#### 2.1.2.1. Embodied State

People's values, skills, knowledge, and tastes are referred to as their embodied state of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) argues that it could be seen as a type of intelligence that is located within us. It also applies to information that we seek on our own (Bourdieu, 1986). Educational advanced foreign-born youth are often characterized by their independence. Due to their parents unfamiliarity with Dutch school matters and educational system, they frequently had to deal with it themselves (Ledoux, 1996, Ledoux et al., 1997). Another often stated trait of academically accomplished migrants is their potential to persevere after hardships. When others questioned their skills, they were determined to prove them wrong (Achor and Morales, 1990, Luykx, 1988, Merens and Veenman, 1992, Muskal and Chairez, 1990). Also, migrant students tend to value educational success more than natives (Fuligni, 1997, Fuligni, 1998). This was sparked by the belief that their parents had strong expectations for their children's educational success. They believed that average grades would dissatisfy their parents (Fuligni, 1997). Furthermore, language is another essential factor in exploring variations in educational performances. Azzolini et al. (2012) suggested that higher scores are obtained by students who speak the language of the host country at home.

#### 2.1.2.2. Objectified state

Cultural capital in the objectified state refers to material belongings with cultural meaning and are materially transmissible (Bourdieu, 1986). Research by Gandara (1995) suggests that immigrant students attributed their academic success to seeing parents reading books.

#### 2.1.2.3. Institutionalised state

The institutionalised state implies symbols of competence such as academic qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986). Parental education is a strong predictor of academic success (Kao and Thompson, 2003). Meijnen and Rupp (2001) demonstrated that having highly educated parents does not only promote the educational successes of native-born, but also influences educational attainment of immigrants. However, in the lowest education levels, migrant parents are overrepresented (OECD and Union, 2015). Meijnen and Rupp (2001) noted that some immigrant parents have less knowledge about the Dutch educational system due to their lower educational attainments. The more knowledge parents have about education, the more capable they are of helping their children with homework and school choices. This could mean that natives can get more support from their parents because their parents are often higher educated (Meijnen and Rupp, 2001). As mentioned earlier, parental involvement could be influential to children's academic success. Parental involvement is also greater for highly educated parents (Baker and Stevenson, 1986, Crosnoe, 2001, Desimone, 1999, Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987, Lareau, 2000).

### 2.1.3. Social capital

Social capital, according to Bourdieu (1986), is a recourse based on networks that are present in relationships and accumulates among individuals. He identifies social capital as 'the

aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.247).

Several studies strongly claim that families do matter regarding educational success. Louie (2012) argues that both parents and children adopted a "immigrant optimism" which implies that one should take advantage of the given opportunities. Furthermore, compared to native-born parents, immigrant parents develop and hold higher education aspirations for their children and they regularly reinforce those expectations (Raleigh and Kao, 2010). The reason immigrant parents often state for these aspirations is that they want their children to do better in school than they did and that their children have been given opportunities they did not receive (Hermans, 1995, Ledoux, 1996, Pels, 1991). Maintaining college ambitions acts as a leading indicator for immigrant parents, reflecting whether or not their children's future will be successful. These expectations are essential since (sociological) studies established that parents' educational aspirations impact their children's attainment levels (Blau and Duncan, 1967, Morgan, 1998, Sewell and Hauser, 1972). Also, parental involvement in their kids' education is frequently viewed as a form of social capital (Lee, 1993, McNeal Jr, 1999, Yan and Lin, 2005). Due to cultural differences, immigrant parents could have little participation. Parents with a migration background could also be unaware that they are supposed to be engaged in their children's education (Carreón et al., 2005). Previous research suggested that immigrant parents were not as likely as native parents to be involved in their children's schooling (Kao, 2004, Nord and Griffin, 1999, Turney and Kao, 2009).

Additionally, having siblings positively impacts levels of educational attainment of children with a migration background (Meijnen and Rupp, 2001). Having siblings does not contribute to the educational successes of natives according to Meijnen and Rupp (2001). Immigrant children often supported their younger siblings to a significant extent (Lindo, 1996, Meijnen and Rupp, 2001). This was supported by Caplan et al. (1991) who noted that for both older and younger siblings, this was an effective way to study school materials.

## 2.2. Conceptual framework

Figure 1 displays the conceptual framework for this study. This research aims to show how having a migrant background contributes to educational success and how those contributing factors differ between Dutch natives and former Yugoslavian refugees in the Netherlands. Three forms of capital; economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital, that were described by Bourdieu (1984) will be used to generate a deeper understanding of how the contributing factors differ between the two groups.

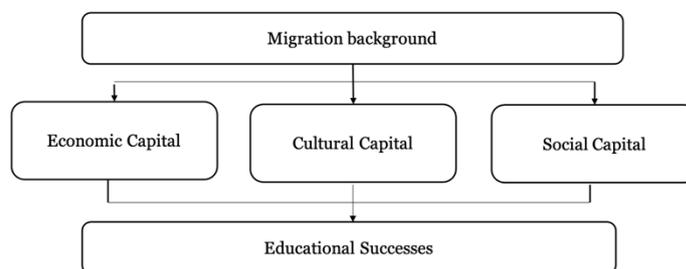


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

## 2.3. Expectations

To be able to get an in-depth understanding of how contributing factors of educational successes differ between Dutch natives and former Yugoslavian refugees in the Netherlands, a qualitative study approach has been adopted. Therefore, it was expected that:

- Since immigrant families have a lower income on average, Dutch natives are more likely to have educational benefits that are connected to a high family income.
- Migrant parents are generally lower educated, thus, Dutch natives will attribute their educational success to their highly educated parents.
- In comparison to Dutch natives, ex-Yugoslavian refugees will be characterised by their independence which promoted their educational performances.
- Parents of former-Yugoslavian refugees emphasize aspirations they place on their children because they want their children to make use of the opportunities they did not receive.
- Ex-Yugoslavian refugees attribute their high educational attainment to having siblings.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Method

To gain in-depth knowledge about “*How do factors that contribute to educational successes of ex-Yugoslavian refugees differ from those of natives in the Netherlands?*”, a qualitative research method was adopted. Whilst most research on the educational attainment of migrant students was quantitative, few studies qualitatively investigated this topic. This qualitative study, through a comparative case study approach, provided an in-depth understanding of the individual (Creswell, 2014). Thus, allowed for a thorough exploration of how economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital contributed to educational successes. This also offered the ability to explore how contributing factors differed between former Yugoslavian refugees and natives.

#### 3.2. Data collection

Primary data was obtained through semi-structured interviews to assess perceptions, meanings, and experiences of the interviewees. Semi-structured interviews enabled participants to respond with open-ended answers. Also, the interview guide (Appendix 1) was created to address the three types of capital presented by Bourdieu (1984) to obtain a detailed comprehension of how economic capital, cultural capital and social capital contributed to educational successes. Indicators defining the existence of these factors were included as well to ask detailed questions. Next to that, probing questions were included to get clarification and more information on certain topics. The interview guide was tested prior to the interviews and was subsequently used during the interviews. Nevertheless, it is important to note that questions were adjusted as more knowledge was gained about the topic.

Interviewees were fully informed about the interview in advance through an information sheet. At the start of the interview, the researcher introduced herself and the research purpose. The rights of the participants and ethical considerations were also addressed in advance. This was followed by an explanation of how the collected data would be used. The middle section contained the interview questions that were asked. Finally, the interview concluded with a summary of the interview and a repetition of the agreements that were established with the respondents at the start. Furthermore, the interviews were audio-recorded with an iPhone recording app, not only to be able to transcribe them afterwards, but also to concentrate entirely on the conversation as suggested by Valentine (2005).

Both ex-Yugoslavian refugees and Dutch individuals were interviewed to be able to contrast their answers. People who have completed (most of) their education in the Netherlands, and have educational success, which is defined in my research as people who are taking or already finished higher education, were interviewed. Additional inclusion criteria for former Yugoslavian participants are: 1. being born in former Yugoslavia, and 2. having arrived in the Netherlands as a refugee before or during their early teens. Next to that, being born in

the Netherlands and both parents being born in the Netherlands are inclusion criteria for the native Dutch participants.

For this research, interviews with two Dutch natives and two ex-Yugoslavian refugees were conducted. For both groups one female and one male were interviewed, and the interviewees were aged between 22 and 26 years old. Moreover, the duration of the interviews was 35 minutes on average. To recruit participants, purposeful sampling was used to meet the earlier mentioned criteria. This allowed for a detailed understanding of the researched phenomenon. Interviewees were gathered within the social network of the researcher. Also, when scheduling interviews, the researcher was as accommodating as possible. Since this interview involved participants sharing personal information, the researcher assured that the interview was conducted in a place where the participant felt comfortable and safe. Moreover, three interviews were conducted online by using Microsoft Teams and Google Meet. It was preferable that both the interviewer and interviewee were in a private and quiet enclosed room during the interview to maintain a private, professional and concentrated environment.

Furthermore, the collected data was stored in a structured computer database which is only accessible by the researcher. To avoid confusion of audio and transcription files, they were labelled clearly. Poor database maintenance is also prevented at all costs since this could make information inaccessible.

### 3.3. Data analysis

The semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded after the interviewee consented. The data analysis technique began with the researcher transcribing the interview. This transcription was subsequently analysed by using the programme Atlas.ti. The researcher read the transcript multiple times and actively looked for reoccurring themes. Clifford et al. (2016) suggested that coding assists in the establishment of relevant categories, patterns, and connections of the findings. Primary data was collected for the specific purpose of this study. This allowed to specifically address and ask focused questions to gather data about how economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital contributed to educational successes. Finally, answers between the groups were contrasted.

### 3.4. Methodological reflections

This research studied differences in educational achievements between former Yugoslavian refugees and natives in the Netherlands. However, initially this research had a slightly different focus. It was interested in how lower educational achievements of ex-Yugoslavian students were caused, instead of focussing on academically successful students. The reason for this change of focus was that as I studied the subject more closely, the focus of the research appeared to be mainly on the lower performance of migrant students. Instead, I chose to contribute to adding knowledge on the educational advancement of those students. This was also done to acknowledge having a migration background as an advantage that could assist in acquiring higher education.

Furthermore, this study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic which resulted in several difficulties regarding data collection. Firstly, approaching possible participants was harder since on-site recruiting was not possible due to the posed restrictions and safety reasons. This also could have led to exclusion of potential interviewees because they were not reachable. Especially recruiting former Yugoslavians that met the inclusion criteria was a challenge. Eventually, around ten former Yugoslavians were approached of which two were able to participate in this research. Moreover, interviews were mainly conducted online which also posed challenges, such as data loss due to technological failure. Good interview preparation was obtained to minimize this possibility. Before the interview, internet connection, audio and webcam quality were checked.

Interviews were conducted in Dutch since all participants were most comfortable with speaking this language. This also allowed them to express their feelings better. Transcriptions of the interviews were therefore also in Dutch and the obtained quotes had to be translated

into English. During this translation, the meaning of the quotes could have changed a little. For readability purposes, minor adjustments were made as well.

Finally, the researcher was a former Yugoslavian child refugee herself, which could have imposed some subjectivity in the study. Attempts to prevent this were taken by maintaining the positionality of objectivity and curiosity.

### 3.5. Ethical considerations

Consent, confidentiality, cultural understanding, result interpretation, and participant feedback were continuously considered ahead of and throughout the investigation. Participants were informed, through an information sheet, about the content of the study and were always allowed to ask questions. The interviewee was made aware that the interview could be stopped at all times. A consent form assured the participant's privacy and anonymity and asked for their recording permission. This consent form restricts the use of gathered data for non-scientific purposes as well. Also, to ensure high accuracy of the findings, the interview included open questions and avoided leading questions to the interviewees. Data was anonymized to the greatest extent possible by using pseudonyms in the publication of this study. Finally, the interview involved participants talking about personal things, therefore, the researcher assured a comfortable and empathic atmosphere.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Economic capital

As noted earlier, children could obtain educational benefits from parental income through outings. These trips could fit the purpose of education (Blanden and Gregg, 2004). The importance of those outings for educational attainment was acknowledged by a Dutch respondent during the interview:

*"My grandmother always helped me with broadening my knowledge of the things I liked. Often, this involved going to the zoo together, because I liked that.... As a little kid, that did help me a lot. My interests were stimulated."* – Jasper (Dutch native)

This points out that such trips allowed Jasper to broaden his knowledge and stimulated his interests which promoted his educational successes.

Also, another Dutch interviewee reported that due to her high family income, money was no issue regarding college fee. This helped her to achieve a higher level of education, as money was nothing she had to worry about nor prevented her from going to university. Rather, the choice of study was something to ponder on:

*"No, money was not an issue. It was more like, what study am I going to do? Then I just did it."* – Julia (Dutch native)

This finding was also reported by Blanden and Gregg (2004), which found that a higher family income made it possible to provide their children fee money that could contribute to achieving higher education.

Overall, economic resources seemed to contribute more to the Dutch native interviewees. The former Yugoslavian interviewees did not consider family income as a contributing factor to their school performances. A possible explanation for this might be the acknowledgement of the economic hardships that were encountered by the ex-Yugoslavian

parents. This aligns with previous findings suggesting that families with a migrant background tend to have lower incomes than native families (Lopez et al., 2001).

## 4.2. Cultural capital

### 4.2.1. Embodied state

Both former Yugoslavians reported that due to their parents' lack of knowledge about the Dutch educational system, they became very independent. Not being able to get help everywhere makes one self-sufficient, which was according to the respondents an important factor in becoming very independent. This in turn contributed to achieving higher education. Studies by Ledoux (1996) and Ledoux et al. (1997) also demonstrated this. In comparison to their native counterparts, high performing migrant children are typified by their independence:

*"You become very autodidact when you can't get help everywhere. If you are really on your own, the only way to learn things is by yourself."* – Alex (former Yugoslavian refugee)

*"They learned very different things in school in former Yugoslavia and they were not familiar with this [study matter], so they couldn't help me, and I had to rely mainly on myself."* – Anna (former Yugoslavian refugee)

Contrary to what the Dutch native interviewee reported, former Yugoslavians suggested that their parents put more pressure on them to get higher grades because their parents valued education a lot. This aligns with literature suggesting that in migrant families, education seemed to be valued more than in native families (Fuligni, 1997, Fuligni, 1998). The ex-Yugoslavians indicated that their parents believed that obtaining a university degree would guarantee a bright future:

*"They [parents] put some extra pressure on me to get good grades. If you look at it in that sense, they [parents] helped me a lot."* – Alex (former Yugoslavian refugee)

*"They [parents] just wanted me to do good [in school], so they [parents] had high expectations and put pressure on me to get high grades. They knew that if I got good grades, I could go to university and get a good job."* – Anna (former Yugoslavian refugee)

The former Yugoslavian informants spoke both the host language and mother tongue at home and reflected on it as a contributing factor to their educational success. This finding is partly consistent with findings of Azzolini et al. (2012) which demonstrated that speaking the language of the host country at home allows one to obtain higher school performances. Alex, for instance, stated that this allowed him to gain more social intelligence and to better understand other languages as well. Being exposed to more cultures also allows to be open to learning other things as well, according to the respondent:

*"I think that when one learns an extra language, it opens doors and I think that social intelligence can also lead to success at school.... And when you are open to other cultures, I think you are also opened to learning other things... Because I just wanted to learn and I think that's because I was raised multilingual, I was always eager to learn concerning language, but also with just studying"* – Alex (former Yugoslavian refugee)

Both Dutch interviewees attributed their high school performances to their own skills. When they were asked about contributing factors of their educational success, they mentioned that studying came naturally to them:

*“Yes, it was easy. I never really put much effort into it.” – Julia (Dutch native)*

#### 4.2.2. Objectified state.

Findings by Gandara (1995) suggested that immigrant students attributed their academic success to the books that were read at home by parents. This differs slightly from the finding presented here wherein a former Yugoslavian respondent mentioned that he was stimulated by his parents to read books at a young age to which he attributed his success:

*“They [parents] took me to the library. They [parents] picked up the maximum number of books that I could read... So I always read and it stimulated me.” – Alex (former Yugoslavian)*

#### 4.2.3. Institutionalised state.

Parental education is an essential indicator of academic attainment according to Kao and Thompson (2003). Meijnen and Rupp (2001) suggested that having highly educated parents does not only influence the educational successes of native-born, but also promotes academic successes of immigrants. This was the case for one Dutch native respondent and both former Yugoslavian interviewees, since they had at least one highly educated parent. For Anna, an ex-Yugoslavian participant, having a highly educated parent was a contributing factor to acquire higher education. This was because it was easier to take the step to get into college since she saw it happening in her direct environment:

*“It normalised having good school performances, or something like that. I saw it happening around me, so it's easier to feel like you want to follow that path too. You just see it happening around you, so it becomes kind of normal and not necessarily very special.” – Anna (former Yugoslavian refugee)*

The Dutch respondent stated that having highly educated parents made it easier to get help from them with homework since her parents understood it and thus were able to explain it:

*“When you don't understand it yourself, it is difficult to explain.” – Julia (Dutch native)*

However, both former Yugoslavians were only able to get help on certain subjects from their parents. This was because his parents did not have those classes, such as Dutch classes, at school in their country of origin.

*“With history, I was able to get good help from my dad, and I think that was it. Of course, I couldn't go to my parents with Dutch classes because they literally had to learn the language at an older age.” – Alex (former Yugoslavian refugee)*

*“For example, my parents never had English in school so they couldn't help me with that. And, also for example with Dutch classes, they couldn't help me with that either, because they were also learning [the Dutch language].” – Anna (former Yugoslavian refugee)*

In summary, these results show that the former Yugoslavians attributed their educational success mainly to their independence. For Alex, reading books as a kid was also a major contributing factor to his educational success. The Dutch natives on the other hand, frequently considered their skills and intelligence as a contributing factor to their high educational performances.

### 4.3. Social capital

The ex-Yugoslavian interviewees argued that they wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to study. Alex and Anna were made aware by their mothers that they were able to study whereas their mothers were not:

*“My mother said, “I never really had the chance to study.” – Alex (former Yugoslavian refugee)*

*“She would often say, “I wish I could have studied.” – Anna (former Yugoslavian refugee)*

This seems to be consistent with other research by Louie (2012) which found parents and children adopted a “immigrant optimism” which implies that one should take advantage of the opportunities that have been given.

Anna’s motivation for taking the opportunity to study was also related to the feeling that she owed it to the Netherlands because the country gave her a safe home when her country of birth was unsafe:

*“We came here as refugees, and the Netherlands gave us a safe home and very nice home. This [acquiring higher education] is also something I owe to the Netherlands.” – Anna (former Yugoslavian refugee)*

Native-born parents hold fewer educational aspirations for their children (Raleigh and Kao, 2010), which was also found to promote the educational successes of the Dutch natives in this study. They suggested that their parents did not put pressure on their school performances and offered a lot of freedom regarding education:

*“Just don't apply too much pressure and let go, hands-off... Especially the lack of pressure, which I really liked.” – Jasper (Dutch native)*

These expectations are essential since (sociological) studies established that parents' educational aspirations impact their children's attainment levels (Blau and Duncan, 1967, Morgan, 1998, Sewell and Hauser, 1972).

Furthermore, both Dutch native informants frequently mentioned how their parents were involved in their education. One of them mentioned that his mother helped him with making the right decision for his study:

*“Then my mother suggested that I should think back to my childhood... In the end, she [mother] reminded me of this and then I thought, I'll see if there's a study that fits into this.” – Jasper (Dutch native)*

While the ex-Yugoslavians mentioned that their parents were not able to be involved in for example choosing a study programme because they were not familiar with it in the Netherlands. Therefore, Alex’s parents mostly relied on study advice given by teachers and thus still tried to be involved in their kid’s education:

*“And they agreed with that [teacher's study advice], not knowing what it [study advice] meant exactly.... Yes, they were not fully familiar with it [Dutch education system].” – Alex (former Yugoslavian)*

This counteracts previous findings which suggested that immigrant parents could also be unaware that they are supposed to be engaged in their children's education (Carreón et al., 2005). In this case, the parents were aware of it, however, they were not able to help because of their unfamiliarity with the Dutch education system. This is also contrary to research that demonstrated that migrant parents are less likely to be involved in their kid's education (Kao, 2004, Nord and Griffin, 1999, Turney and Kao, 2009).

Having siblings does not contribute to the educational successes of natives (Meijnen and Rupp, 2001), which was also found in this study. However, having siblings influenced the ex-Yugoslavians to achieve higher education. Both Anna and Alex considered their sibling as a role-model. Alex encouraged his brother to go to university, to do this he wanted to set the example by going to college himself:

*“[Name brother] is my role model. [Name of brother] works incredibly hard. I really wanted him to go to university, so I encouraged that a lot. Perhaps even more than my parents.” – Alex (former Yugoslavian refugee)*

Anna looked up to her sister who also finished a bachelor's program which influenced her choice to obtain higher education:

*“She [sister] always studied and worked. I looked up to her [sister]. It was great to have such a role-model around you.” – Anna (former Yugoslavian refugee)*

In conclusion, taking advantage of the opportunities that were given, the “immigrant optimism”, strongly influenced the former Yugoslavians to achieve higher education. The results also suggest that former Yugoslavian parents are not necessarily less involved because they are not aware that they have to be involved, rather they are less involved due to their unfamiliarity with Dutch education. Lastly, having siblings is shown to contribute to achieving high educational attainment for the ex-Yugoslavians. This finding was related to the exemplary function of siblings.

## 5. Conclusions

This study investigated how factors that contribute to educational successes of ex-Yugoslavian refugees differ from those of natives in the Netherlands. This was done by adopting a qualitative study method. Economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital as introduced by Bourdieu (1984), were used to structure this research.

Firstly, this study showed that economic capital did contribute to achieving higher education for the Dutch natives, which aligns with the expectations of native families having a higher income than non-natives (Lopez et al., 2001). Economic capital included family income which made it possible to afford outings that allowed the Dutch native individual to explore interests to which educational success was attributed. Due to high parental income, college fee was no concern which made achieving higher education easier. Blanden and Gregg (2004) suggested that family income can contribute to higher education through being able to afford outings and college fees.

Secondly, self-sufficiency was frequently considered as a contributing factor to the educational success of the ex-Yugoslavians. Ledoux (1996) and Ledoux et al. (1997) also demonstrated the typifying independence of high-performing migrant children. The main reason for this independence was the unfamiliarity with the Dutch educational system of the ex-Yugoslavian parents. Not being able to get help from their parents made the ex-

Yugoslavians self-sufficient. The Dutch natives were able to receive more help from their parents which aligns with the expectations as well. Also, it was expected that the Dutch interviewees would attribute their educational success to their parent's high educational attainment, however, this was not the case. Instead, they suggested that their performances and skills mainly were the reason for their academic success.

Thirdly, the 'immigrant optimism' as suggested by Louie (2012) was also obtained by the ex-Yugoslavian refugees. Making the most of the opportunity to study, which was emphasised by their parents, promoted their scholastic performances. Furthermore, having siblings was expected not to be a contributing factor to the educational successes of natives (Meijnen and Rupp, 2001), which was also found in this study. Whereas the ex-Yugoslavian refugees attributed their educational success to having siblings which related to considering them as role-models.

Nonetheless during the investigation, there has been actively looked for possible influences of links outside the family, such as teachers and friends. It appeared to be the case that respondents did not consider those connections as contributing factors. One can speculate that this simply means that family connections, rather than teachers or friends, are of significant importance regarding school performances.

This study provided new clues on how the former Yugoslavian refugees differed from their native-born counterparts regarding educational successes. These findings suggest that more research on how to improve scholastic performance for immigrant or minority youth is needed since their contributing factors of educational success differed from their native counterparts. The results suggest that more research is needed on how the independence of migrant students and their family promote educational attainments. Also, this research indicated the need for schools to focus on and involve family since this has shown to be a major contributing factor to academic successes of former Yugoslavian refugees. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the small scale of the research. It would be preferable to conduct a large-scale qualitative study to completely understand how the contributing factors differ. Finally, instead of perceiving an immigrant status as an obstacle that needs to be resolved, we should regard it as a benefit empowering immigrant students to achieve educational success.

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## Appendix A – Interview guide

### Questions:

1. Could you tell us something about yourself? (Introductory question)
  - Age
  - Origin
  - What kind of family you come from
  - What language you speak at home
  - Educational background (of the interviewee and family)
2. How did it go at primary/middle school?
  - Was it naturally for you to go to havo/vwo/gymnasium? Or was it something new?
  - Or did you really have to struggle for this?
  - Have you had extra support?
3. When did you decide to pursue a high level of education?
4. What are the factors that have made it possible for you to get this far? (Look at contributing factors that need to be covered)
  - Economic capital
  - Cultural capital
  - Social capital
5. How have these factors contributed to your school success? (Look at table for contributing factors that need to be covered)
  - Economic capital
  - Cultural capital
  - Social capital

### Probing questions:

- Could you elaborate on that?
- Could you further explain that?
- Could you give me an example?

Possible contributing factors

<b>ECONOMIC CAPITAL</b>	Immediately and directly convertible into money	
	Financial status of parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Additional study material</li> <li>- Additional paid support</li> <li>- A computer at home</li> <li>- Paying tuition fees</li> </ul>
	Income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tuition fees</li> <li>- Was a (possible) high income a motivating factor?</li> </ul>
<b>CULTURAL CAPITAL</b>	What you have and what you know	
	Embodied (quality of mind and body)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Talent/intelligence</li> <li>- Language</li> <li>- Ability to deal with setbacks</li> </ul>
	Objectified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Having a computer at home</li> <li>- Having many books at home</li> </ul>
	institutionalised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Parental education</li> <li>- A bachelor's degree → symbol of competence</li> <li>- Show that you could finish it (university)</li> </ul>
<b>SOCIAL CAPITAL</b>	What you know depends on your social network	
	Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involvement</li> <li>- Help/support obtained</li> <li>- Help with studying</li> <li>- Help in making study choices</li> <li>- Optimism of parents</li> </ul>
	Siblings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Help/support obtained</li> <li>- Stimulating factor</li> <li>- Help with studying</li> <li>- Role model</li> </ul>
	Friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educational attainment</li> <li>- Social pressure</li> </ul>
	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher affirmations</li> <li>- Teacher advice</li> </ul>