



NATIONAL CENTER ON
IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION POLICY

THE SKILLS OF IMMIGRANTS: WHAT PIAAC TELLS US

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Today's Presentation

- “ PIAAC and its importance for policy
- “ Why focus on immigrant adults?
- “ Research questions
- “ Key findings
- “ Research needs & policy implications



Large Share of Total and Low-Skilled Adult Populations

Immigrant population

- “ From 9.6m in 1970 to 41.3m in 2013
- “ 1 in 8 U.S. residents; 1 in 6 workers
- “ Overrepresented among low-skilled* adults:
 - 15% PIAAC sample
 - 33% of adults with low English literacy
 - 24% with low numeracy in English

* Low skills = Below level 2



What Is PIAAC?

- “ 24 OECD countries, 166,000 respondents
- “ 5,000 in the U.S.; 15% 1st generation; 9% 2nd generation
- “ Adults (ages 16-65)
- “ Background survey (U.S.): English and Spanish
- “ Skills *directly* assessed (only in English):
Literacy*, numeracy, computer use skills

*Reading components: Literacy skills of adults at the lower end of the literacy spectrum.



U.S. Skill Results

- “ U.S. average scores on literacy and numeracy are lower than OECD averages (even when immigrants scores are taken out)
- “ Average score on *numeracy*:
 - Ages 16-65 . Above only Italy and Spain
 - Ages 16-34 . Lowest score of all countries
- “ No improvement over time on literacy (1994-2012) and decline on numeracy (2003-2012)
- “ U.S.: largest gap between the average scores of the 90th and 10th percentiles



Skills and Inequality

We broadly know about the U.S. population:

- “ Higher skills, higher rates of employment
- “ Within every level of education, those with higher literacy and especially numeracy skills earn more
- “ High school vs. college graduates: A growing gap in the median annual household earnings (1979-2012)
- “ Skills directly related to health in the U.S.
- “ People with better skills are in jobs that offer upskilling: Skills beget skills.

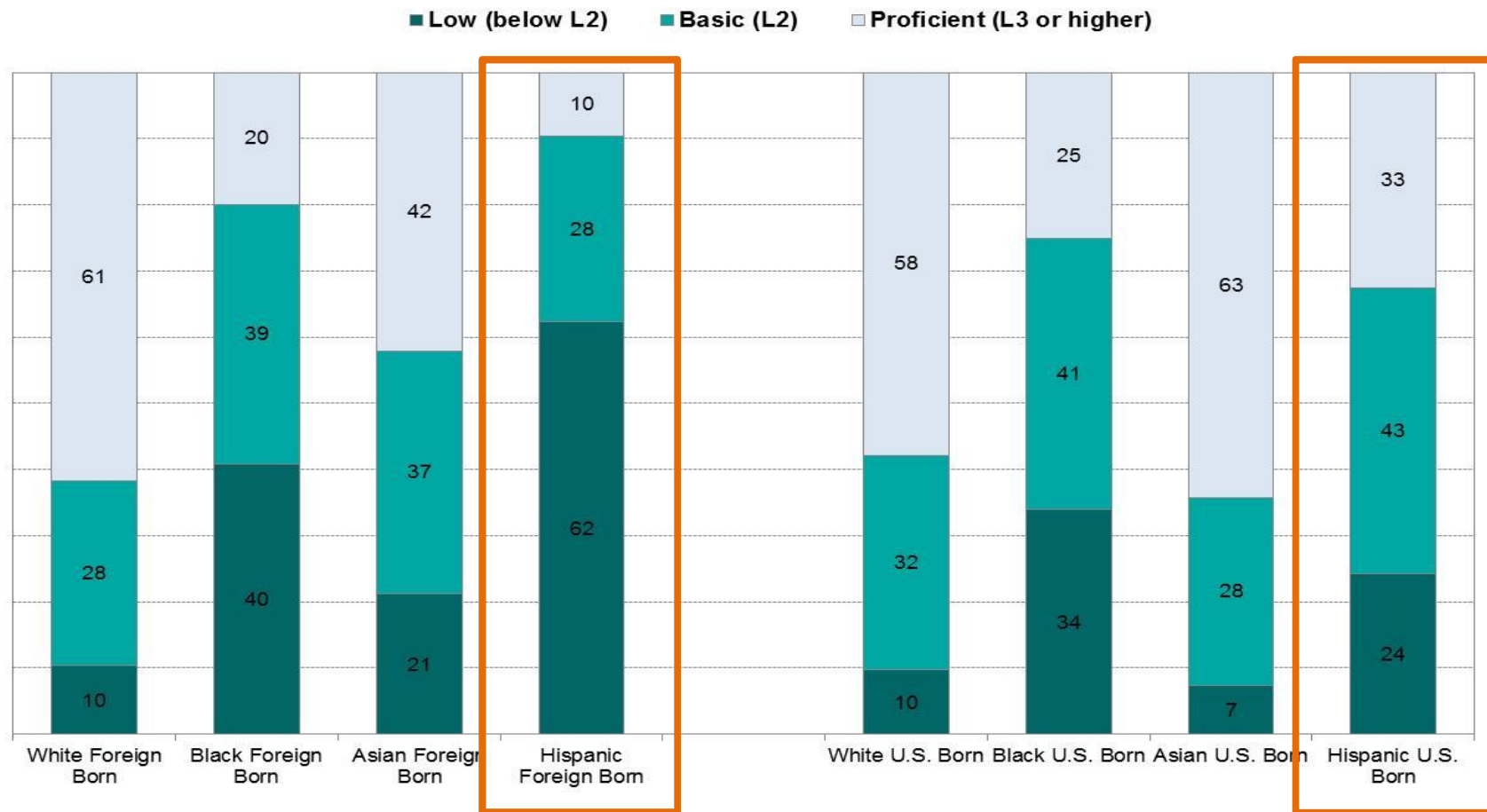


Research Questions

- “ How do the skills of immigrants compare to those of native born?
- “ How do skill levels change across generations?
- “ Are low overall U.S. scores attributable to immigrants?
- “ How do immigrants' skills vary by place of education?
- “ How are labor market access and incomes related to skill levels, and how do they differ by nativity?

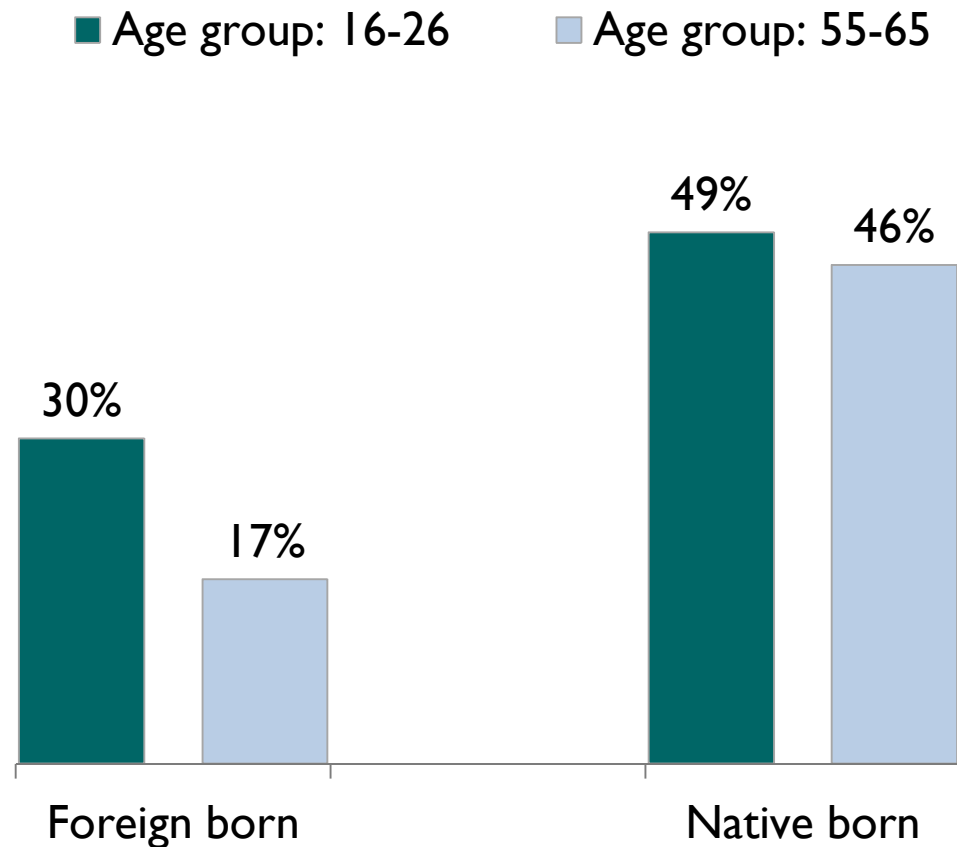
Skill Gaps Vary By Race and Ethnicity

Percentage of Adults at Each Proficiency Level in English Literacy



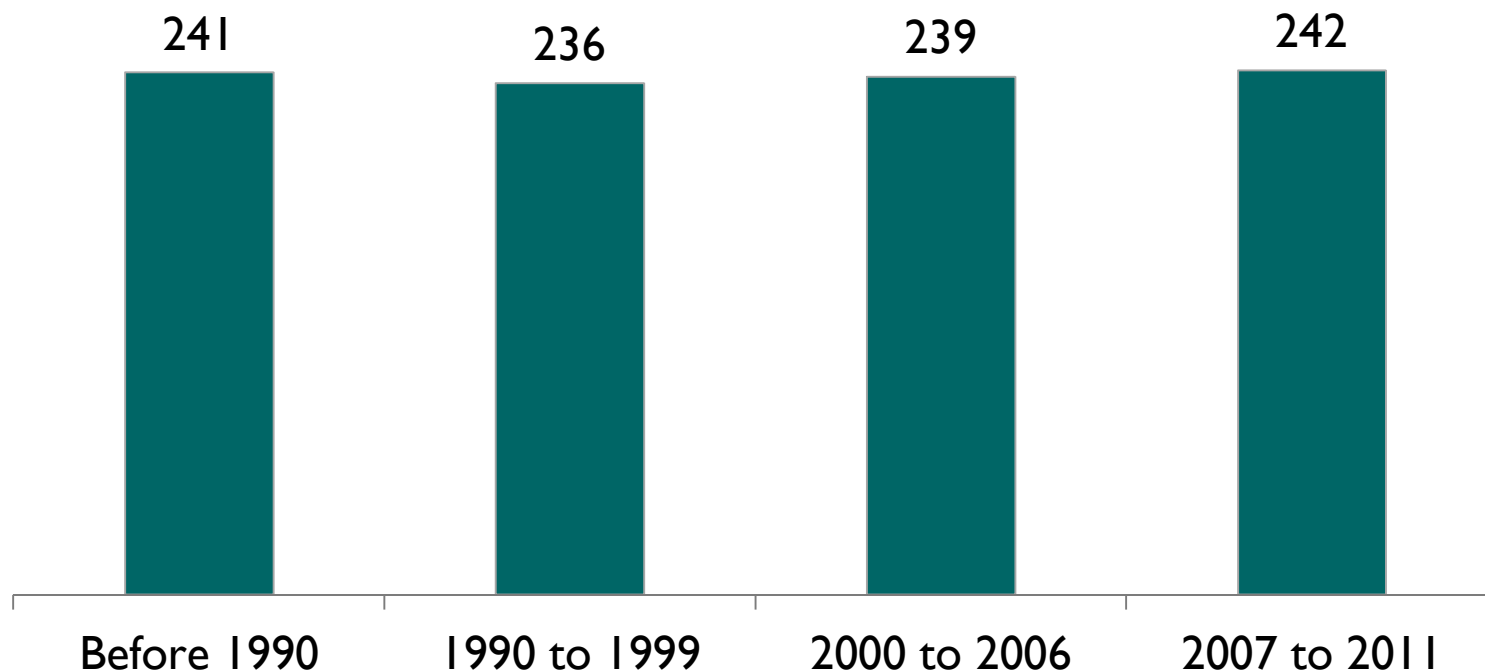
Younger Immigrants Had Stronger Skills than Older Immigrants

Percentage of Adults Who Scored “Proficient” on English Literacy



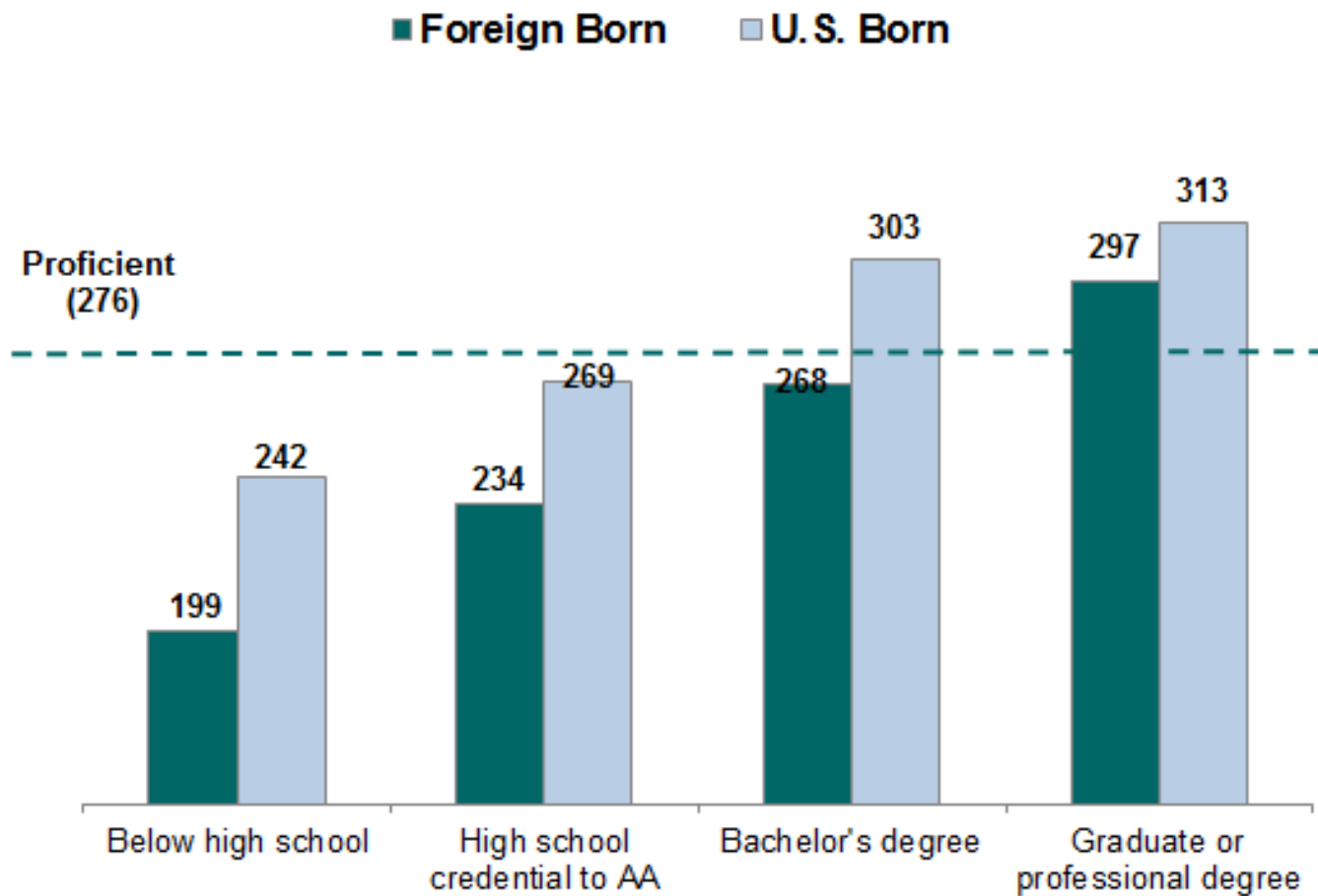
Recent Immigrants' Skills Were Similar to Those of Earlier Arrivals

Average English Literacy Scores by Period of Immigration



Education Matters

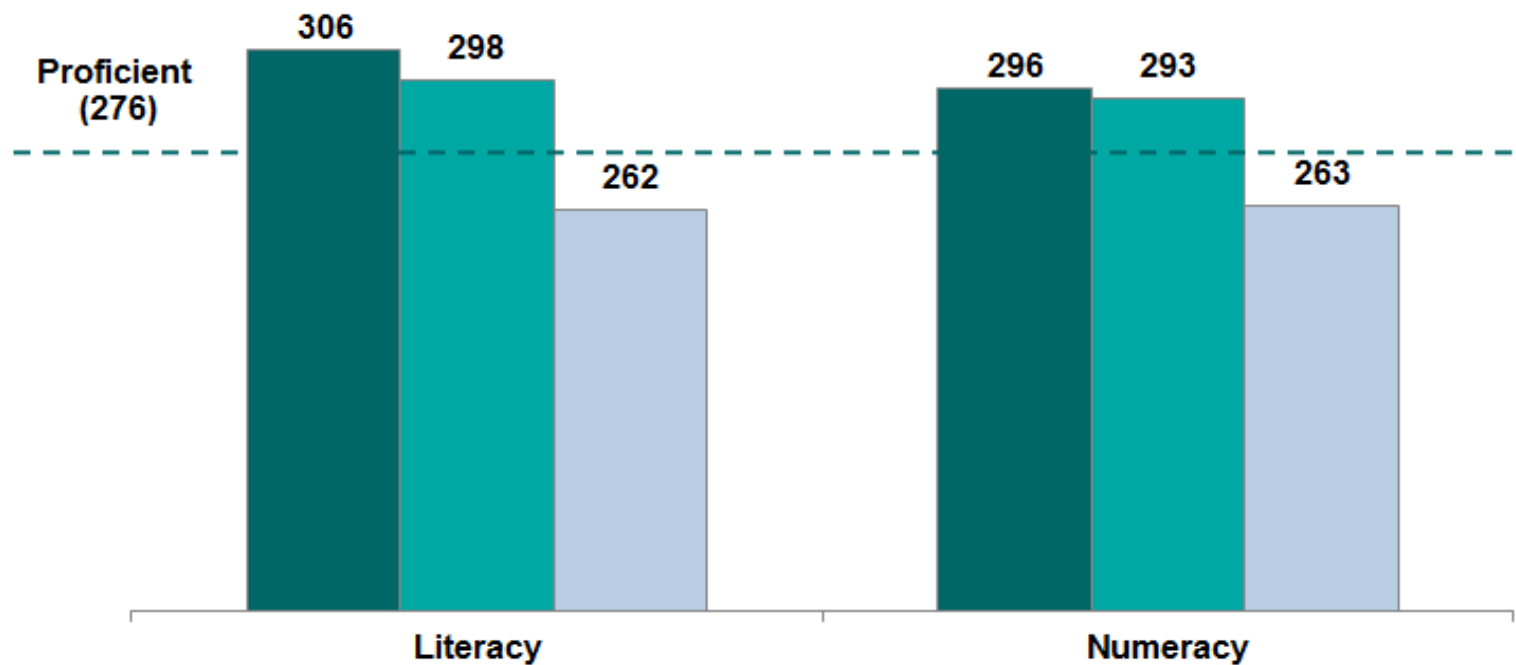
Average English Literacy Scores



Place of Education Matters

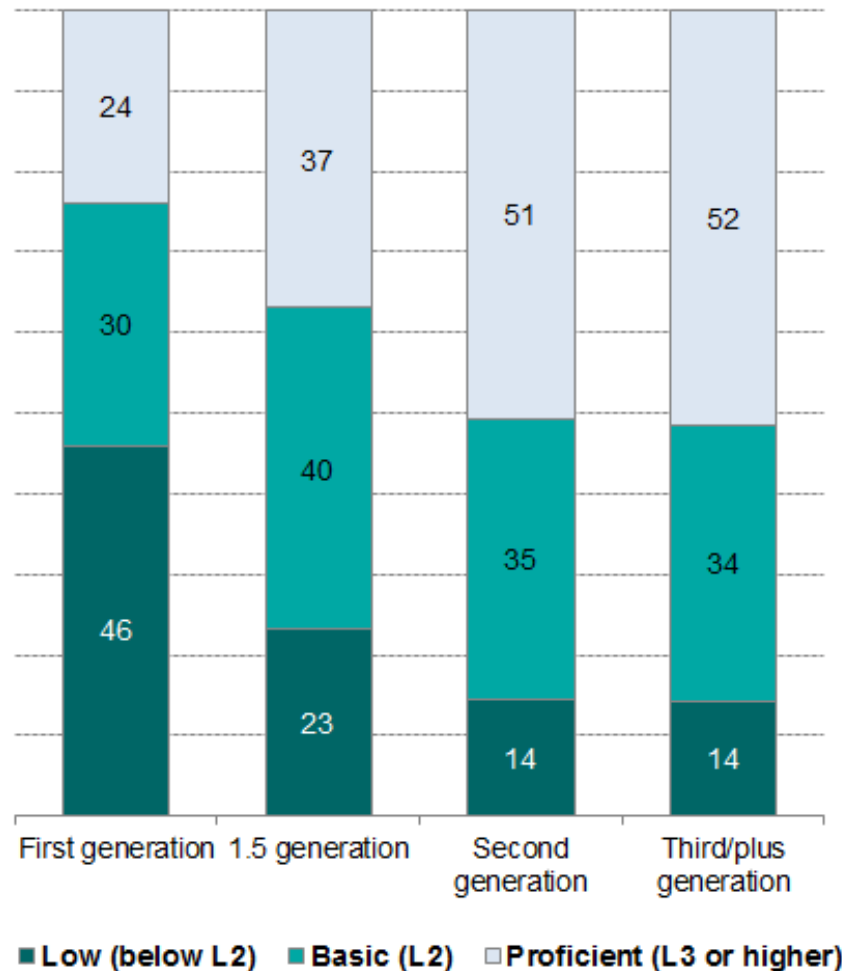
Average Scores of College-Educated Adults, 25 and Older

■ U.S. Born ■ U.S.-Educated Immigrants ■ Foreign-Educated Immigrants



Generational Progress, Albeit to Relatively Low Levels

Percentage of Adults at Each Proficiency Level in English Literacy





Skills and Economic Outcomes

- “ Higher literacy and numeracy meant higher employment for natives but *not* immigrants
- “ Higher literacy and numeracy skills meant higher incomes for *both* immigrants and natives
- “ Immigrants needed higher levels of English competencies to be paid well and on a par with natives



Key Takeaways

- “ Immigrants scores are lower than those of natives
- “ Scores of 2nd and 3^{rd/plus} generations are similar
- “ Immigrants were overrepresented among the low-skilled adults; but depress the U.S. only marginally
- “ Significant differences in literacy and numeracy scores by race/ethnicity and nativity



Key Takeaways Cont'd

- “ Younger immigrants had stronger skills than older immigrants
- “ Little variation in scores by period of arrival
- “ Skills rise with education; place of education matters
- “ Immigrants can find jobs regardless their skill level, but need higher skills to earn on par with natives



Policy Implications

- “ Leverage high levels of immigrant workforce participation in the U.S. to obtain training and improve skills
- “ Provide language support at all educational levels
- “ PIAAC results: Relevant for the White House Task Force on New Americans



Future Research Questions

- “ How do skills of the U.S. second-generation young adults vary by race/ethnicity, gender, parent education, and education?
- “ How do the skills of the second generation compare to those of the first generation in Canada, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States?
- “ Do the members of the second generation in the four study countries also achieve parity with the third generation, as it is the case in the United States?



For More Information

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