Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Education–Occupation Mismatch Status Among Immigrants in South Africa and the United States

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Abstract In this study, a comparative–international approach is used to examine race–ethnic disparities in education–occupation mismatch status among immigrants. Using data from the USA and South Africa, this study finds that immigrants are most likely to be undereducated, or have less schooling for their jobs, when their racial characteristics are similar to those of the local racial majority. Black immigrants in South Africa and White immigrants in the USA are the most likely to be undereducated. Having racial characteristics similar to those of the local racial majority is associated with a lower likelihood of overeducation among immigrants.

Résumé Dans cette étude, une approche comparative internationale est utilisée pour examiner les disparités sur les plans de la race et de l’ethnicité dans le statut de non-concordance entre la formation et la profession chez les immigrants. Utilisant des données des États-Unis et de l’Afrique du Sud, cette étude conclut que les immigrants sont plus susceptibles d’être sous-scolarisés ou d’avoir fait moins d’études pour leur emploi, lorsque leurs caractéristiques raciales sont similaires à celles de la majorité raciale locale. Les immigrants de race noire en Afrique du Sud et les immigrants blancs aux États-Unis sont les plus susceptibles d’être sous-éduqués. Le fait de partager les mêmes caractéristiques raciales que la majorité raciale locale est associé à une plus faible probabilité de sur-éducation chez les immigrants.

Keywords Race · Immigration · Education · Africa · Occupation · United States

Mots-clés race · immigration · éducation · Afrique · profession · États-Unis

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Introduction

With a fair amount of consistency, race, ethnicity, and country of origin have been shown to be important determinants of immigrants' economic incorporation in their host societies (Djamba 1999; Dodoo 1997; Haberfeld 1993; Reitz and Sklar 1997). Previous research on the association between race and immigrants' employment outcomes has, however, been based on studies in the USA or other western societies. In these contexts, several studies show striking patterns of labor market disadvantage among immigrants with racial characteristics similar to those of local minority groups. Dodoo and Takyi (2002), for example, report that the annual income of White African immigrants is about 80% higher than that for Black Africans who live in the USA. Similarly, Phillips and Massey (1999) find that immigrants with minority racial characteristics tend to have worse labor force outcomes than their coworkers who are members of the majority population. In general, this labor force advantage of immigrants with racial characteristics similar to those of their local racial majority populations has been confirmed in several other studies (e.g., Schoeni 1997; De Jong and Madamba 2001).

Growing interest in racial disparities in immigrants' economic incorporation is also associated with concerns about the ways in which structural factors affect their occupational integration into their host societies. Alongside these concerns are emerging issues associated with the extent to which the skills of highly educated immigrants are underutilized as a result of their employment in low-level occupations. In many western societies, for example, a significant number of immigrant cab drivers possess higher educational qualifications, while other highly educated immigrants are known to work in other unskilled sectors of the economy (Williams and Balaz 2005; Hathiyan 2007). Yet, based on what we know about the human capital profile of specific immigrant groups, the suboptimal nature of their labor market outcomes is generally counterintuitive. A good example of this is associated with the outcomes of African immigrants in the USA. The fact that they have levels of education that are among the highest in the USA is now well documented (Butcher 1994; Dodoo 1997; Djamba 1999; Johnson and Staples 2005). Yet, research shows that their income levels are lower than those of their European and other non-African immigrant counterparts (Dodoo 1997; Poston 1994; Schoeni 1997). Despite progress in research on immigrant labor force outcomes, prior studies have also given limited attention to the examination of the association between immigrants' racial identity and their labor market outcomes using comparative international perspectives based on social contexts that are racially dissimilar. Consequently, the question of how race and ethnicity affect the labor force outcomes of immigrants in countries with different racial contexts has not been extensively examined despite the fact that such comparisons can help us understand how structural forces operate in different social contexts.

In this study, therefore, the question of how the racial and ethnic characteristics of immigrants affect their labor force outcomes is examined in the two racially differentiated contexts represented by the USA and South Africa. Since within-race differences in the employment outcomes of immigrants and natives have been examined for both countries (e.g., Butcher 1994; Dodoo 1999; Zuberi

and Sibanda 2004), the study focuses on racial differences within the immigrant populations in these respective contexts. In pursuing this objective, the study uses education–occupation mismatches to examine the association between race/ethnicity and employment outcomes in both countries. Two specific objectives are pursued in the analysis. First, the study will examine the extent to which immigrants’ racial and ethnic disparities in South Africa and the USA are explained by immigrants’ social and demographic attributes. Second, it assesses the implied impacts of duration of residence on race–ethnic disparities in education–occupation mismatches. In other words, it investigates the extent to which immigrants from specific racial groups become more or less mismatched with increasing accumulation of country-specific capital and whether this association is conditional on the racial contexts of societies.

Contextual Issues

Broad similarities in the patterns of racial disadvantage in South Africa and the USA have been identified in a number of previous studies (e.g., Frederickson 1995; Marx 1998; Olzak and Olivier 1998; Hamilton et al. 2001). Indeed, the fact that both societies are highly racialized, yet have different racial population distributions, has been a source of intellectual intrigue. Even with their respective majority Black and White populations (79.2% and 75.1% based on their respective 2001 and 2000 census estimates), Black populations in South Africa and the USA have historically experienced systematic patterns of social disadvantage. However, although the relative social disadvantage of Blacks and other minorities is still a feature of both societies, the dynamics of race and inequality in both contexts are increasingly becoming less similar. In particular, new dissimilarities have emerged since the end of the Apartheid era that ushered in a period of significant sociopolitical transformation in the South African society. One example in these transformations is the fact that South Africa now has growing Black elite whose members are found in the upper echelons of the public and private sectors of the country’s economy (Seidman 1999; Iheduru 2004). Thus, unlike their counterparts in the USA, South African Blacks now form both the political and numerical majority within their own society.

The implications of these dissimilarities in racial contexts for disparities in immigrant labor force outcomes in South Africa and the USA have received limited attention in the literature. What we do know, however, is that despite recent socioeconomic and political changes in South Africa, inequalities conditional on race are still found within the broader South African society, as is also true of contemporary USA. Treiman et al. (1996), for example, report higher levels of occupational status and incomes among Whites compared to other racial groups in South Africa. Likewise, the White socioeconomic advantage has also been observed in other studies examining the dynamics of South African labor market outcomes (Schultz and Mwabu 1998; Mwabu and Schultz 2000; Sherer 2000; Leibbrandt and Woolard 2001; Kingdon and Knight 2004). As in South Africa, many US studies underscore the fact that the labor market advantage of US Whites and the disadvantage of Blacks still persist in contemporary times (e.g., D’Amico and Maxwell 1995; Smith 1997; Western and Pettit 2000; Reid 2001; Grodsky and Pager 2001).

In the context of international migration flows, South Africa and the USA have stronger similarities in terms of the role they play in attracting large numbers of immigrants. The central role played by the USA in the Northern American migration system and in global migration patterns has been discussed in other studies (e.g., Massey et al. 1998). Similarly, although South Africa has attracted international migrants to the country for more than a century (Lucas 1987), the country continues to play a crucial role in international migration within sub-Saharan Africa while also remaining an attractive destination to immigrants from other world regions (Agadjanian 2008; Adepoju 2003; Zuberi and Sibanda 2004). Even more important is the fact that both countries are among the major destinations for highly educated migrants or migrants involved in brain-drain migration (Agadjanian 2008; Carrington and Detragiache 1999; Adepoju 2003). In general, therefore, the combination of the significance of migration in both countries and the unique disparities in their racial contexts underscores the importance of South Africa and the USA for providing comparative insights on the impacts of race and ethnicity on the labor force outcomes of immigrants.

Conceptual Background

Scholars have long demonstrated that although aggregate disparities in labor force indicators are instructive, they may mask critical differences in the likelihood of underemployment and the underutilization of education in the labor force (Boyd and Thomas 2001; Alba-Ramirez 1993). With regard to immigrants, prior research on the underutilization of their human capital endowments has mainly been concerned about “brain waste,” i.e., the likelihood that the skills of highly educated migrants are being underutilized in labor markets abroad (Matto et al. 2007). While studies examining the prevalence of this phenomenon have produce mixed results (Morrison and Lichter 1988; Aponte 1995; Boyd and Thomas 2001), race and ethnic identity have been identified as important determinants of the extent to which highly educated immigrants are likely to obtain employment in skilled occupations abroad. In Australia, for example, Kler (2006) reports that unlike other immigrants, Asians who were overeducated for their current jobs did not receive any wage returns to their surplus education. Similarly, Matto et al. (2007) report that educated immigrants from the Middle East and Africa in the USA have less favorable occupational outcomes than their European and Western Hemisphere counterparts.

Research on immigrant labor force outcomes in the USA has also shown that English language ability varies across immigrant ethnic groups. Immigrants from South Asia and most African countries, for example, have higher levels of English language proficiency, while those from East Asian countries have lower proficiency levels (Chiswick and Miller 1998). In the context of disparities in employment indicators, language proficiency is important because of its positive association with labor force attainment reported in several studies (Kossoudji 1988; Shields and Price 2002). In fact, according to Fry and Lowell (2003), the US economy neither places value on foreign language proficiency nor creates

incentives that promote its acquisition. Consistent with this perspective, other studies indicate that immigrants who are more proficient in the language spoken at their destination countries generally have better socioeconomic outcomes (e.g., Chiswick and Miller 2002).

Duration of residence also determines the extent to which immigrants' skills will be underutilized in the labor markets of their host countries. Specifically, increased duration of residence is associated with the acquisition and accumulation of destination country capital that positively affect labor force outcomes. As such, longer duration of residence has been found to be associated with higher levels of labor force attainment and greater occupational mobility among immigrants in previous studies (Maani 1994; Chiswick et al. 2005). At the same time, the effect of duration of residence is generally not homogenous among all immigrants groups. Specifically, a few studies have shown that the extent to which labor force outcomes improve with increasing duration of residence varies among immigrants from different ethnic groups. For example, Le Grand and Szulkin (2002) indicate that as duration of residence increases, European and other immigrants from the West are more likely to have better employment outcomes compared to their counterparts from Africa and Asia

Theoretical Perspectives

Two related theoretical perspectives are used in this study to account for racial and ethnic differences in mismatch status among immigrants. The first comes from queuing theory (Lieberson 1980) which has been used by various scholars, (e.g., Model 1997; Tolnay 2001) to examine racial differences in immigrant labor force outcomes. According to the theory, immigrants seeking employment form a figurative line or queue and their exact position in the line depends on the extent to which employers consider them to be desirable. Potential employers then hire employees from this figurative line with the order of selecting new employees being positively associated with the order of esteem employers give to members of each group. Queuing theory, therefore, predicts that other things being equal, immigrants with characteristics similar to those of groups given less esteem in their host society will also be less likely to be offered employment in occupations for which they have the appropriate schooling requirements. In contrast, their more esteemed counterparts will find it easier to secure jobs that match their own levels of schooling.

Recent policy developments in post-Apartheid South Africa have significant implications for understanding the relationship between race and the institutionalization of employer preferences. Race-based preferences are now enshrined in the government's Black Economic Empowerment policy that specifically requires South African employers to give more employment preferences to Blacks rather than non-Blacks as part of an effort to correct the racial injustices of the Apartheid era (Southall 2007; Iheduru 2004). Ironically, because of the successes of this Affirmative Action policy in increasing the social mobility of Black South Africans, Chinese South Africans in early 2008 successfully lobbied to be officially reclassified as "Blacks" in order for them to qualify for the benefits associated with these new empowerment policies

(Canaves 2008).¹ Unlike South Africa, however, US racial preferences for White workers are currently not institutionalized. Yet, many studies (e.g., Stewart and Perlow 2001) confirm that having racial minority characteristics considerably limits the likelihood of being hired by US employers. Given these contextual differences, therefore, queuing theory will predict contrasting occupational outcomes for Black immigrants in the USA and in South Africa. In particular, because the relative “preference” for Black workers is expected to be higher in South Africa than in the USA, Black immigrants are expected to have more favorable employment outcomes in the former than in the latter.

Segmented assimilation theory also argues that immigrants will experience disparate patterns of incorporation into their host societies as they assimilate since structural forces affect the social mobility of immigrants differently (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997a, b). In particular, with greater exposure to the host society, or increasing duration of residence, structural barriers such as race and skin color would mediate the type and number of possibilities offered to immigrants from various groups. For example, occupational barriers in the USA, such as discriminatory hiring practices, are more likely to be experienced by Blacks compared to non-Blacks (Reskin et al. 1999). Within the US context, therefore, these barriers will be more likely to constrain the occupational mobility of Black and other non-White immigrants relative to their White counterparts.

Despite extensive research on racial differences in immigrant labor force outcomes, few studies have used segmented assimilation theory to explain the relative labor market disadvantage of Black immigrants. Zavodny (2003), for example, uses the theory to explain the significant wage disadvantage of Black Cubans relative to their White counterparts and the inability of the former to catch up with the latter over time. Similarly, in their analysis of differences in earnings assimilation, Daneshvary and Schwer (1994) found an earning disadvantage among Black immigrants relative to their non-Black counterparts that was not explained by differences in other individual-level attributes. Surprisingly, however, there are no previous studies examining the predictions of segmented assimilation theory within the South African context. Nevertheless, given the differences in racial contexts between South Africa and the USA, the theory would suggest that structural factors will be more likely to constrain the socioeconomic mobility of White immigrants in South Africa than in the USA. As such, White immigrants are expected to be more likely to have favorable occupational outcomes than their non-White counterparts at least in the US context than in South Africa.

Data and Methods

Recent census data on individuals between ages 25 and 65 from a 5% sample of the 2000 US census and a 10% sample of the 2001 South African census (available in the Integrated Public Use Microdata Samples) are the main data sources used in this study. Both datasets contain information on individual-level demographic covariates such as age and sex, as well as information on the respondents’ socioeconomic characteristics

¹ Since these changes were made in 2008, they are not reflected in the racial categories used in the empirical analyses done in this study which are based on data from the 2001 South African census.

such as their levels of educational attainment. Information on race is also available in both the South African and US census data. For comparison purposes, the study focuses on the outcomes of immigrants from three racial groups: Blacks, Whites, and Asians.² Within each racial group, a distinction is made between immigrants from different ethnicities/regions of origin in order to capture broad pan-ethnic differences within each race. Among Blacks, for example, the main race–ethnic groups identified are African, Caribbean (non-Hispanic), Hispanic-Black, and “Other” Blacks. The latter are mainly from Europe and South America. For Whites, the study distinguishes between European, Hispanic, and ‘Other’ Whites, and for Asians, it differentiates between East Asians and “Other” Asians. To account for the impacts of duration of residence on immigrants’ mismatch status, the study distinguishes between recent immigrants (i.e., those who arrived within the previous 5 years) and long-term immigrants (i.e., those who immigrated to the respective countries more than 5 years prior to each census). The 5-year cutoff points are also used because the South African 2001 census data only make it possible to identify immigrants who arrived in the previous 0–5 years and those who did not.

Analytically, the study focuses on estimating the mismatch between educational attainment and occupational status (Rubb 2003; Chiswick et al. 2005; Quinn and Rubb 2005) as the key strategy for studying the relationship between the human capital endowments of immigrants and the extent to which these endowments are utilized in the labor market. Following conventional mismatch definitions, immigrants are considered to be mismatched if they have either more (i.e., overeducated) or less (i.e. undereducated) education than is required by their current occupations. Because these definitions may implicitly reify occupational-specific schooling requirements, they are only used here as proxies that reflect whether immigrants are respectively overqualified or underqualified for their current jobs.

Three approaches are normally used in the estimation of education–occupation mismatches. They include expert job assessments (Vaisey 2006), worker self-assessments (Duncan and Hoffman 1981), and realized matching procedures (Chiswick et al. 2005; Rubb 2003). With regard to realized matching procedures, mismatch status is normally determined using estimates of the mean plus one standard deviation of educational attainment (Verdugo and Verdugo 1989), or the modal level of schooling within occupation group, to identify correct matches (i.e., *required* levels of education). Individuals with more or less than the required schooling are considered to be either over- or undereducated, respectively (Cohn et al. 2000). Sensitivity tests have shown, however, that the results obtained from both realized matching procedures are essentially the same (Chiswick et al. 2005).³ Other

² Since US census information on Asian racial characteristics contain categories indentifying individuals who are either “Chinese,” “Japanese,” “Korean,” or “Asian,” these racial groups are combined into a broader Asian category.

³ US census data are not appropriate for the use of realized matching methods using *mean* years of schooling but are more appropriate for *modal* matching procedures. This is because at the lower schooling levels, educational attainment levels are combined into two nominal categories, i.e., grades 1 to 4 and grades 5 to 8. This also limits our ability to conduct sensitivity tests that compare the results from both modal and mean matching methods. However, to facilitate the comparison between the USA and South Africa, the equivalent grades in the South African data are also combined into nominal categories.

studies (e.g., Cohn and Khan 1995), however, argue that more precise estimates of labor force outcomes are obtained using modal matching procedures.

Census data on years of educational attainment and occupational status allow us to employ realized mismatching procedure using data for all individuals, regardless of sex or foreign-born status, who are between the ages 25 and 65. Respondents with no occupation information are excluded from the analysis. In general, the occupation-specific *required* level of schooling is defined as the modal year of schooling observed among the members employed in an occupation or, more precisely, within each sub-occupational group available in both censuses. Overeducated individuals are those with *more* than the required level of schooling in each occupation, and undereducated individuals as those with *less* than the required schooling levels. These three mismatch status groups are generated separately for South Africa and the USA. Dummy variables created for each matching status also make it possible to analyze education–occupation mismatches using multiple regression methods.⁴ Furthermore, because data on wages are unavailable in the South African data, the study does not examine disparities in the effects of mismatch status on wages in both countries. Instead, multinomial regression models are used to estimate the association between overeducation or undereducation, vs. required education, and a variety of covariates. Empirically, and consistent with Chiswick and Miller (2009), mismatch status can be estimated using the following empirical model:

$$Y_{ij}|X_i = \frac{e^{\beta_{jxi}}}{\sum_{j=1}^3 e^{\beta_{jxi}}} \quad (1)$$

where Y_{ij} estimates the likelihood that worker i is employed in j th mismatch status group. Accordingly, j takes the value of 1 if individuals are overeducated for their jobs, 2 if they are undereducated, and 3 if they have the required education. Y_{ij} is also dependent on a vector of covariates represented by X_i that include, among other things, immigrants' age and sex, their duration of residence, and their English language proficiency.

Findings

Summary characteristics of the immigrant populations in the USA and South Africa are presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. White immigrants account for almost 60% of the US sample, with the majority of them being immigrants of Hispanic origin. Since the immigration of Black populations to the USA is relatively recent (Logan and Deanne 2003; Kent 2007), the smaller contribution of Black immigrants to the US sample is not surprising. South Africa's immigrant population (Table 2) clearly has a racial distribution different from that of the USA. Although the immigration of Black Africans to South Africa was significantly restricted for most of the previous century, there has been a resurgence of African immigration to the country in the past 15 years (Adepoju 2003). Recent trends in African migration to

⁴ As a result of the issues described in footnote 3, the dummy variable approach rather than the years of overeducation approach is more appropriate for analyses using US census data.

Table 1 Summary statistics of the characteristics of immigrants in the USA

	Blacks	Asians	Whites
Age (mean)	41.5*	41.8*	42.5
Males (%)	48.0*	46.7*	50.1
Duration of residence (5)			
0–5 years	16.8*	18.7*	18.0
More than 5 years	83.4*	81.4*	82.1
Ethnicity (%)			
Black African	22.7	—	—
Black Caribbean	55.9	—	—
Hispanic Black	10.4	—	—
Other Black	11.0	—	—
European White	—	—	31.4
Hispanic White	—	—	50.2
Other White	—	—	18.4
East Asian	—	36.0	—
Other Asian	—	64.0	—
Grad. and professional degree holders (%)	8.4*	18.3*	10.8
Naturalized citizens (%)	48.2*	53.7*	42.9
Education–occupation matches (%)			
Undereducated	37.9*	26.8*	45.7
Has required education	32.7*	31.9*	27.6
Overeducated	29.4*	41.2*	26.7
<i>N</i>	73,502	239,701	441,430

* $p < 0.05$ (significantly different from White immigrants)

South Africa therefore appear to account for the greater percentage of Black than non-Black immigrants in the South African sample.

In terms of educational attainment, immigrants in both countries are similar in two ways. First, in both South Africa and the USA, Asian immigrants are more likely to have graduate-level educational credentials. Second, Black immigrants in both countries are the least likely to possess such credentials. These broad racial disparities in education, however, conceal important variations in educational attainment among specific immigrant subpopulations. Additional analysis of the US data revealed, for example, that among Black immigrants, the percentage of immigrants with graduate and professional degrees was highest among immigrants from Africa (19.3%), but considerably lower among immigrants from the Caribbean (6.9%).

With regard to citizenship status, relatively fewer Black than non-Black immigrants in the USA and South Africa are citizens of their respective host countries. The reverse is true for Asian immigrants. Legal citizenship status among immigrants is important because in the absence of other indicators of legal immigration status, citizenship status can be used as a proxy indicator to account

Table 2 Summary statistics of the characteristics of immigrants in South Africa

	Blacks	Asians	White
Age (mean)	37.3*	39.6*	44.8
Males (%)	84.9*	76.0*	58.4
Duration of residence			
0–5 years (%)	31.7	44.0*	32.6
More than 5 years (%)	68.3*	56.0*	67.4
Ethnicity (%)			
Black African	98.5	—	—
Other Black	1.5	—	—
European White	—	—	51.8
Other White	—	—	48.3
East Asian	—	18.5	—
Other Asian	—	81.5	—
Graduate degree holders (%)	1.3*	12.5*	7.2
Naturalized citizens (%)	42.0*	59.2*	74.8
Education–occupation matches (%)			
Undereducated	44.9*	21.7*	16.2
Has required education	20.1*	34.7*	39.1
Overeducated	35.0*	43.6	44.7
<i>N</i>	19,120	1,124	15,926

* $p < 0.05$ (significantly different from White immigrants)

for disparities in the employment experiences of legal and illegal immigrants. Furthermore, legal citizenship can potentially affect mismatch status because of its association with the likelihood of employment in public sector jobs. Within the USA, for example, native-born Blacks employed in professional occupations are more likely to work in public than private sector jobs (Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Musick et al. 2000; Kaufman 2002) because of the greater enforcement of equal opportunity laws in the former than the latter. Consequently, Black immigrants who are also citizens may have a greater tendency to work in public sector professional jobs than non-Blacks, and this can potentially lower their average levels of undereducation relative to those of other immigrants.

Estimates of the percentage of immigrants in each education–occupation matching status presented in the bottom panels of Tables 1 and 2 provide preliminary confirmation for the hypothesis that race has a differential association with mismatch status among immigrants in countries with different racial contexts. In the USA (Table 1) where the White population is the numerical majority, White immigrants are considerably more likely than other immigrants to be undereducated (i.e., have less schooling than required) for their jobs. Likewise, among the immigrant population in South Africa (Table 2), Blacks, not Whites, are the most likely to be undereducated. White immigrants in South Africa, on the other hand, are the least likely to be undereducated for their jobs. In short, at least with regard to receiving “excess” rewards to education, i.e., being undereducated, having racial character-

istics similar to those of the majority population appears to confer advantages to immigrants in South Africa and the USA.

Comparative patterns of overeducation in both South Africa and the USA presented in Tables 1 and 2 also point to an association between racial similarities and overeducation. In South Africa, for example, the prevalence of overeducation is lowest among Black compared to White and Asian immigrants, while in the USA, the lowest prevalence of overeducation is clearly found among Whites. At the same time, Tables 1 and 2 also show that in both the USA and South Africa, the prevalence of overeducation among Asians is relatively high. This Asian overeducation disadvantage is somewhat inconsistent with the predictions of queuing theory and is likely to be explained by their higher average levels of education reported in both Tables 1 and 2. Thus, it is anticipated that when levels of education are controlled, the Asian overeducation disadvantage will disappear.

The question of whether racial differences in mismatch status are explained by differences in other individual-level covariates is examined in the multinomial regression analyses presented below. These analyses also give specific attention to the impacts of ethnic identity in explaining racial disparities in mismatch status. In doing so, the study tests the consistency of findings presented in previous studies that show significant African immigrant disadvantages in labor force outcomes in other western societies. In addition, the analysis also examines the combined effects of race/ethnicity and duration of residence by interacting immigrants' duration of residence status and their specific race–ethnic identity.

Among Black immigrants' in the USA, education–occupation mismatches are clearly conditional on both race and ethnicity. Controlling only for race–ethnic identity (Table 3, model 1), Africans are the only Black immigrant group more likely to be overeducated than undereducated for their jobs compared to having the required education. In contrast, Caribbean, Hispanic, and “Other” Black immigrants are more likely to be undereducated even when compared to immigrants from the other racial/ethnic groups, except Hispanic Whites. Consistent with the results in Table 1, the relative likelihood of overeducation in model 1 is highest among Asian immigrants, especially those from East Asia.

For most immigrants, employment in occupations for which they are overeducated appears to be a temporary phenomenon. In other words, with increasing duration of residence, the extent to which immigrants are employed in occupations for which they are overqualified generally decreases. This finding is reasonably consistent with those reported in other previous studies. Chiswick et al. (2003), for example, suggest that the relatively low occupational status of immigrants after their arrival in their host societies is only a temporary strategy used by immigrants to enter the labor market while they acquire more country-specific capital. Model 1, however, indicates that the acquisition of country-specific capital has no effect on decreasing the comparative likelihood of overeducation among African Blacks, but has the strongest negative association with overeducation among European Whites. In other words, European Whites appear to be among the most likely immigrants to move from jobs for which they are overqualified to those for which they are not with increasing residence in the USA. In terms of undereducation, model 1 shows that the advantage observed among White immigrants in Table 1 is mainly driven by the labor force outcomes of Hispanic Whites.

Table 3 Results from multinomial regression models analyzing mismatch status among immigrants in the USA

Race-ethnicity and duration of residence	Undereducation vs. required education		Overeducation vs. required education	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Black African				
Recent	-0.046	-0.125**	0.072*	0.185***
Long-term	-0.238***	-0.046	0.119***	0.160***
Black Caribbean				
Recent	0.458***	0.434***	-0.613***	-0.388***
Long-term	0.299***	0.474***	-0.496***	-0.348***
Black Hispanics				
Recent	0.888***	0.537***	-0.383***	-0.277**
Long-term	0.754***	0.626***	-0.361***	-0.227*
Other Black				
Recent	0.306***	0.401***	-0.330***	-0.228*
Long-term	0.058*	0.353***	-0.418***	-0.312***
European White				
Recent	-0.352***	-0.537***	0.055**	-0.110***
Long-term	0.023*	0.078***	-0.185***	-0.239***
Hispanic White				
Recent	1.166***	0.798***	-0.265***	-0.202***
Long-term	1.188***	0.978***	-0.471***	-0.354***
Other White				
Recent	-0.147***	-0.211***	-0.105***	-0.148***
Long-term	-0.058***	0.093***	-0.064***	-0.132***
East Asian				
Recent	-0.229***	-0.601***	0.301***	0.141***
Long-term	-0.117***	-0.281***	0.090***	-0.055***
Other Asian				
Recent	-0.133***	-0.321***	0.144***	0.067
Long-term (reference)	(0.000)	(0.00)	(0.000)	(0.00)
Age		0.019***		0.005***
Males		-0.068***		0.002
Proficient in English		-0.803***		-0.056***
Grad./Prof. degree		-2.357***		1.681***
Naturalized citizen		-0.407***		0.002
Constant	-0.109***	-0.148*	0.19***	-0.271*
N	754,633	754,633	754,633	754,633
Log likelihood	-782,060	-711,098	-782,060	-711,098
Prob. > χ^2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pseudo- R^2	0.054	0.137	0.054	0.137

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Both the undereducation advantage of Hispanic Whites and the overeducation disadvantage of Black Africans are not explained by differences in other demographic and educational characteristics, citizenship status, and language proficiency. When controls are included to account for these factors in model 2, African Blacks are still more likely to be overeducated than undereducated compared to having the required education. As expected, model 2 reveals that the higher comparative likelihood of overeducation among East Asian immigrants previously observed seems to be mostly driven by differences in other individual-level factors such as educational attainment. Two other differences between East Asian immigrants and African Blacks shown in model 2 are particularly instructive. First, after other controls are added, East Asian immigrants experience a larger relative reduction in their comparative likelihood of overeducation with increasing duration of residence than African Blacks. Second, unlike East Asians (and other immigrants), African Blacks are the only immigrant group that still remain comparatively more overeducated after living in the USA for more than 5 years.

Race–ethnic disparities in education–occupation mismatches in South Africa estimated from multinomial regression models are presented in Table 4. These models use controls that are similar to those used in analyses for the USA.⁵ Previous findings reported in Table 2 revealed that in the South African context, Black immigrants were the most likely to be undereducated. Table 4 clarifies this finding further by highlighting the ethnic dimensions of Black immigrants’ undereducation patterns. In model 1, for example, the Black immigrant undereducation advantage is largely driven by the outcomes of Black Africans. In contrast to their counterparts in the USA (Table 3), Black African immigrants are also more likely to be undereducated than overeducated, compared to having the required education, with increasing duration of residence in South Africa. As with the mismatch patterns observed among White immigrants in the USA (Table 3), the comparative undereducation advantage of Black Africans in South Africa is not explained by differences in attributes such as language proficiency and citizenship status (model 2). Any labor market benefit arising from South Africa’s Affirmative Action policy for Black immigrants is likely to be tied to citizenship status. As such, model 2 also suggests that the undereducation advantage of Black immigrants is robust to institutionalized racial preferences enshrined in South Africa’s Affirmative Action policy.

As expected, model 1 reveals that the comparative likelihood of undereducation vs. required education is considerably lower among White immigrants. Regardless of region of origin and duration of residence in South Africa, White immigrants were also more likely to be overeducated than undereducated. What this finding implies is that differences in racial contexts mediate the extent to which White immigrants receive “extra” rewards to their schooling in terms of their occupational status. These rewards are more likely to be experienced by White immigrants in the US context (Tables 3), but in the South African context where the Black population is the local majority, White immigrants are much less likely to receive such rewards.

⁵ English language ability is used in South Africa because the census indicates that English is the predominant language used in the country. The variable “Higher education” is slightly different from the “Grad/Prof” used in the USA. It includes respondents with either Masters or PhDs (65%) or those with “Honors” degrees (35%). Both categories are separate from the “Bachelor’s” degree category in the South African census data.

Table 4 Results from multinomial regression models analyzing mismatch status among immigrants in South Africa

	Undereducation vs. required education		Overeducation vs. required education	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Black African				
Recent	0.914***	0.510***	0.737***	0.778***
Long-term	1.155***	0.672***	0.475**	0.567***
Other Black				
Recent	-0.410	-0.586*	0.501*	0.438
Long-term	-0.312	-0.467*	0.016	0.044
European White				
Recent	-0.617***	-0.570***	0.438***	0.491***
Long-term	-0.564***	-0.573**	0.075	0.239*
Other White				
Recent	-0.696***	-0.623***	0.279*	0.385***
Long-term	-0.651**	-0.643***	-0.039	0.146*
East Asian				
Recent	-0.069	-0.263	0.806***	0.794**
Long-term	-0.645*	-0.802*	0.174	0.319*
Other Asian				
Recent	-0.487*	-0.608*	0.373*	0.196
Long-term (reference)	(0.000)	(0.00)	(0.000)	(0.00)
Age		0.008***		-0.006**
Males		0.508***		0.207***
Proficient in English		-0.457***		-0.067
Higher education degree		-1.582***		1.552***
Naturalized citizen		-0.185***		-0.215***
Constant	-0.259*	-0.431**	0.00	0.048
N	36,170	36,170	36,170	36,170
Log Likelihood	-35,306	-36,174	-35,306	-36,174
Prob. > χ^2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pseudo- R^2	0.053	0.082	0.053	0.082

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Surprisingly, however, Table 4 further indicates that Black immigrants in South Africa, along with their Asian counterparts, are among the most likely to be overeducated for their current occupations. However, in contrast to the comparable results for the USA (Table 3), the likelihood of overeducation among Black Africans in South Africa decreases with increasing duration of residence (model 1, Table 4). In terms of comparative racial contexts, this finding suggests that while the accumulation of country-specific capital has a limited impact on reducing overeducation among Black Africans in the USA, it has a greater impact on reducing overeducation among Black African immigrants who live in South Africa. Despite these reductions,

however, Black Africans still have a comparatively higher likelihood of overeducation than other immigrants in South Africa after living in the country for more than 5 years.

Discussion and Conclusions

Previous research on immigrants in the USA and other contexts has shown that variations in immigrants' labor market outcomes are conditional on their racial and ethnic identity (Reitz and Sklar 1997; De Jong and Madamba 2001). In order to better understand the nature of this association, this study has used a comparative international approach to investigate the impacts of race and ethnicity on education–occupation mismatch status among immigrants. Using data from the USA and South Africa, the study has examined the question of how racial and ethnic characteristics affect immigrants' mismatch status in societies with contrasting racial dynamics.

Immigrants with racial characteristics similar to those of local racial majority are more likely to have lower levels of education than their job requires regardless of racial context. Accordingly, Black immigrants were more likely to be employed in jobs for which they have less than the “required” schooling in South Africa, while in the USA, the same undereducation advantage was observed among White immigrants. This study, therefore, argues that the association between race and education–occupation mismatch status is consistent with what the queuing theory would predict about employer “preferences” in different racial contexts. Indeed, in the US context, the evidence for employer preferences for non-Hispanic White workers compared to Black and other non-White workers is now well documented (e.g., Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991). Likewise, in post-Apartheid South Africa, new employment preferences enjoyed by Blacks are now institutionalized in the government's policies used to reverse the effects of historical patterns of discrimination against Blacks. Yet these preferences do not appear to entirely explain the relative successes of Black immigrants in South Africa. More generally, other studies have suggested that there is greater tendency for Blacks to be hired when more Blacks are members of the hiring authorities (Stoll et al. 2003). Therefore, based on the influence of racial preferences, the study's findings suggest that when decisions are made to hire immigrants with less than the required qualifications, the outcomes of these decisions may reflect the existing norms of employer preferences in different racial contexts.

The fact that the addition of controls accounting for other attributes possessed by immigrants, e.g., language proficiency and citizenship status requirements, does not erase the undereducation advantage of White immigrants in the USA and that of Blacks in South Africa is also instructive. First, it suggests that regardless of racial context, immigrants with racial characteristics similar to those of the local majority receive “extra” rewards to their education even when compared with other immigrants with, for example, similar levels of language proficiency, citizenship, or gender. Second, and more importantly, it reinforces the notion that non-human capital characteristics such as race and ethnicity exert a considerable influence on the decisions of employers faced with the task of selecting potential employees among immigrants with similar human capital characteristics.

With regard to overeducation, the findings reveal other important associations in both the USA and South Africa. First, there is some suggestion that having similar racial characteristics as those of the local racial majority may offer some form of overeducation “protection,” especially in the USA where White immigrants have a much lower prevalence of overeducation than other immigrants. Furthermore, Black immigrants in the USA, especially Black Africans, experience considerably high levels of overeducation. As expected, the results show that within the Black immigrant population in the USA, over-education experiences are not homogenous, although the reasons for the intra-racial disparities among Blacks are unclear. Among immigrants in South Africa, the study’s overeducation findings were a little more defined. First, unlike White immigrants in the USA, Black African immigrants in South Africa had some of the highest levels of overeducation. At the same time, consistent with the findings of previous studies, overeducation appears to be a transitory strategy used by Black immigrants in the South African context as they prepare for later social mobility through the accumulation of country-specific capital.

These analyses are not without their limitations. For example, because these data are cross-sectional in nature, the extent to which these results reflect differences in the comprehensive labor market experiences of immigrants between racial contexts cannot be addressed in this study. Indeed, the wages for overeducated immigrants in one context may be higher in real terms than those of all immigrants in another. Similarly, given cross-country differences in occupational classification systems in these data, the findings generally provide insights that are preliminary even though they are still consistent with theoretical expectations. Seemingly, therefore, regardless of objective differences between contexts, both subjective and structural factors *within* contexts seem to play an important role in affecting the returns to schooling among immigrants. Others (e.g., Massey et al. 1998) also argue that the attraction to higher wages, the need to send remittances, and the social disconnection between immigrants and their destination country are in fact significant factors that may motivate immigrants to take low status jobs in their destination countries. Unfortunately, information on these factors is unavailable in the USA and South Africa census data. As more appropriate data become available, questions related to how these factors affect disparities in mismatch status could be more thoroughly examined in future studies.

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