Lasting Educational Effects of Language Policy Upon the Asian-American Demographic

Description: This brief addresses the discrepancies in education Asian American families, especially recently immigrated families face as a product of poor language policy regulation. Educational discrepancies, such as a lack of English Language Learning (ELL) resources for young students, outspan the realm of the classroom to also describe gaps in information immigrant families need in order to smoothly transition into American society. As a result of educational gaps, various elements of living, such as voting ability become inadvertently worse.

Key Terms: Asian American, Language policy, Education, Marginalization, Discrepancy

Key Points

1. Language Policy in the US has a great tendency to further the gaps between recent immigrants and the American society; this is especially true within the Asian American community.

2. There are 48 different ethnic groups within the Asian American and Pacific Islander community, thus even the current, broadly targeted, ELL classrooms and language resources do not wholly benefit and reach all Asian Americans in the US. As a result Asian American students, who attend ELL courses, perform, at times, far worse than their native-English speaking counterparts, sometimes by 20-30 points.

3. Over 50% of Asian Americans in the US need assistance to vote. The lack of educational language policy that target communities at large reduce the ability for Asian Americans to vote due to a lack of understanding.

Brief

Contrary to popular assumption, the United States does not have an officially declared language written in federal law (Baucom ACTFL). Language policies are determined on a state level, however English is clearly the most commonly used language amongst the country. The lack of federal language policies may, at a glance, seem helpful, as it would enable states to adjust their policies based on demographics, and the languages spoken in state. Yet instead there are a total lack of policies established in many states, depriving educational and professional resources for the 13.3% of the US
who are foreign-born, and specifically the 26% of people from that group who identify as Asian. This directly affects Asian Americans’ abilities to integrate into American society. Even in states such as California, home to over 30% of the nation’s Asian Americans, language policies are not thorough enough to target the 48 ethnic groups that exist in the Asian American community (CARE APIASF 3).

The term Asian American itself is far too vast to be productive, as there are very little commonalities that thread the 48 ethnic groups, and 100-plus languages and cultures that exist within them individually (White House 2016). This makes Asian Americans extremely hard to target with inexplicit language policies. Also, certain ethnic Asian American groups, such as those of Hmong (26%), Bangladeshi (20%), Pakistani (18%), and South East Asian descent are more likely to face issues of poverty and marginalization in the US, in comparison to South Central and Eastern Asians, such as those of Indian (8%), and Japanese descent (8%). In terms of education, the disparities have reflective outcomes, for example, “40% of Hmong, 38% of Laotian, and 35% of Cambodian populations do not complete high school,” (White House 2016). These staggering high school dropout rates can be attributed to narrow language policies, like ELL (English Language Learning) programs that are mostly geared towards Spanish speakers, because Asian American immigrants are not receiving the necessary language aid they need to succeed in American schools.

As a whole, “Asians make up 13 percent of the limited English proficient, or LEP, population,” (Center for American Progress 2015), and, “nearly one out of four AAPI students is Limited English Proficient and/or lives in a linguistically isolated household where parents have limited English proficiency,” (White House 2016). Additionally,
approximately 55.9% of AAPI college students speak a primary language that is not English, which is the highest rate amongst US college students (CARE APIASF 26). The existing educational language policies in most states result in ELL programs, which are provided to students by assessment when entering school. The existence of these programs are beneficial, however, they are not thorough enough. In many circumstances, the instructors of ELL courses are not fluent in any Asian languages, which make them unqualified to fluidly teach Asian students English, and effectively communicate with the parents of ELL students. For example, in California, “one out of every ten ELL students is Asian American or Pacific Islander, but only 5% of bilingual teachers and 7% of bilingual teaching aids speak an Asian or Pacific Islander language,” (SEARAC 2013). This disparaging fact may also be the reason for some Asian American students performing poorly in both ELL programs, and school entirely. ELL Asian American students’ “school performance is far below that of other students, sometimes [by] 20 to 30 percent points, and usually shows little improvement over many years,” (SEARAC 2013). Ultimately, these statistics show strong neglect of immigrant Asian American students, and inability to compensate the differences between students of difference ethnicities under the AAPI umbrella.

The lack of detailed language policies in education leads to systematic disparities in education and opportunities for the Asian American community. The inequality becomes a barrier for Asian Americans when going to college, and moving into adulthood. Constitutional rights, such as voting ability, become inadvertently barred due to a lack of understanding. Across the US, “more than a third of Asian-American voters aren’t fluent in English, and they don’t share a common language,” (PRI 2014), thus
necessitating some form of voter assistance. In addition to this, “political parties often overlook Asian immigrants due to [the] language and cultural barriers that make them hard to reach,” (Center for American Progress 2015). Voting ability is an element that greatly affects the quality of life in the US, and is essentially being ignored for the Asian American community. Thus calling for language policies to be further instated in the form of community programs and resources as well as in the classroom. It’s important to understand that education is at the root of development, therefore may be the root of the problem, and that the US’s inability to accommodate language policies in education leads to a greater marginalization of the Asian American population. However, it is also the general attitude toward Asian Americans that leads to a lack in aid for them-such as the ideology that they are a model minority. As stated by the Center for American Progress, the model minority stereotype asserts that the majority of Asian immigrants have already achieved the American Dream,” (Center for American Progress 2015), and this is simply not the case.

**Visualizations**

Figure 1. Asian American population growth from 1980-2014
Figure 2. Asian American population concentrations within the US

COUNTIES WITH THE HIGHEST AAPI POPULATION
AMONG PEOPLE REPORTING ONLY ONE RACE, 2000 AND 2010 CENSUS

Legend

=500,000
75,000–499,999
45,000–74,999
30,000–44,999
15,000–29,999

Figure 3. Ethnic subgroups within the Asian American population

TOP AAPI SUBGROUPS
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN OR BIRTH AMONG AAPI COMMUNITY

The AAPI Community Is Rich With Diversity

- Chinese (not Taiwanese)
- Filipino
- Indian
- Vietnamese
- Korean
- Japanese
- Other (including Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, Thai, Laotian, Taiwanese, Bangladeshi, Burmese, Indonesian, Nepalese, Sri Lankan, Malaysian, and Bhutanese)
Figure 4. Poverty rates by Asian American ethnic groups
Figure 5. Voting percentages amongst Asian Americans, and in comparison to other racial and age groups in the US.

Relevant Websites
1. www.apiasf.org
2. www.searac.org
3. www.advancingjustice-la.org
4. https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/aapi
Works Cited


