



Immigrant students' attitudes and dispositions

This chapter compares differences in selected indicators on students' attitudes and dispositions between immigrant and non-immigrant students. It examines how a range of aspects, including parental and teacher support, school climate, and co-operation at school, are related to those attitudes and dispositions.

Although immigrant students exhibit remarkable strengths, including strong family ties, a fundamental belief in the importance of education and optimism about the future, they often face a number of obstacles in their path towards success at school (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes and Milburn, 2009^[1]). These include poverty, unwelcoming host communities and discrimination, all of which have the potential to undermine their adjustment, well-being, self-esteem and engagement at school (Verkuyten, 1998^[2]; O'Donnell, Schwab-Stone and Muyeed, 2002^[3]; Williams, Neighbors and Jackson, 2003^[4]). The capacity of immigrant students to overcome these challenges and to be resilient in the face of adversity should not only be judged by their academic success but also by their attitudes and dispositions towards school (OECD, 2018^[5]).

This chapter builds on the preceding one with the aim of exploring immigrant students' attitudes and dispositions. The chapter compares differences between immigrant and non-immigrant students in selected indicators of students' attitudes and dispositions. It also examines how a range of aspects, including parental and teacher support, school climate, and co-operation at school, are related to immigrant students' attitudes and dispositions.

What the data tell us

- When comparing non-immigrant and immigrant students of similar socio-economic status and who perform at similar levels of proficiency in reading, immigrant students were more likely than non-immigrant students to feel they are competent in reading. This was observed in 18 countries and economies out of the 43 countries and economies where at least 5% of students had an immigrant background. Highest differences were observed in Denmark, Finland, Hong Kong (China), the Netherlands and Sweden. The reverse was observed only in eight countries and economies.
- The results show that, in 21 out of the 43 countries and economies where a substantial proportion of students had an immigrant background, immigrant students were more likely to report a goal-oriented attitude than their non-immigrant peers.
- Students who receive more parental support exhibited better attitudes and predispositions towards learning. Across all countries with a substantial proportion of immigrant students, the associations between parents' support and the index of learning goals were positive, significant and relatively strong. Similar results were found amongst students without an immigrant background.
- On average across OECD countries, immigrant students who speak the language of instruction at home reported that they feel they are competent in reading and have little difficulty in reading, compared with immigrant students who mainly speak another language at home.

THE ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS WITH AN IMMIGRANT BACKGROUND

One of the most important ingredients of success, both in school and beyond, is the motivation to achieve (OECD, 2013^[6]). In many cases, students with less ability but more determination are better able to pursue and achieve their goals than students with more ability but who are unable to set objectives for themselves (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002^[7]; Duckworth et al., 2011^[8]). As PISA evidence has shown, immigrant students tend to have greater motivation to achieve than their non-immigrant peers (OECD, 2019^[9]).

This section examines four indicators of attitudes related to immigrant students' motivation and engagement at school. They include students' perception of their own competence in reading, their perception of difficulty in reading, whether they persevere to master tasks, and whether they set goals for themselves. As in the preceding chapter, results are presented and discussed only for those countries and economies where, in 2018, at least 5% of students had an immigrant background. Results for all other countries and economies can be found in Annex B1.

Students' perception of their own competence and of reading difficulties

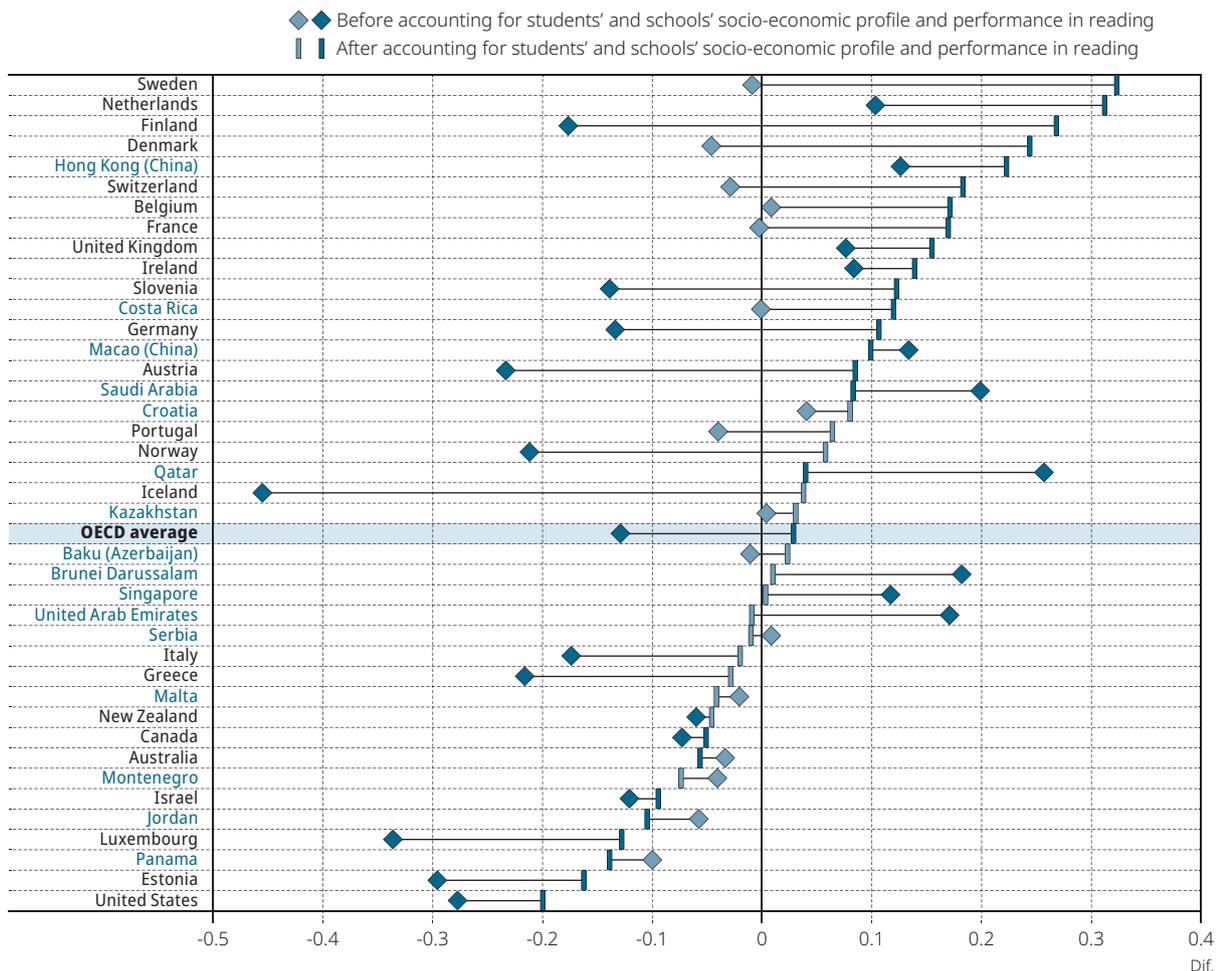
PISA 2018 asked students to describe their competence in reading and whether they encountered difficulties in learning how to read (see *PISA 2018 Results [Volume III]: What School Life Means for Students' Lives* (OECD, 2019^[10]), and Chapter 8 in this volume, for more details). Students were asked whether they agree ("strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", "strongly disagree") with six statements: "I am a good reader"; "I am able to understand difficult texts"; "I read fluently"; "I have always had difficulty with reading"; "I have to read a text several times before completely understanding it"; and "I find it difficult to answer questions about a text". Students' responses were used to construct two indices: the index of perception of competence in reading and the index of perceived difficulty in reading. Positive values in the indices indicate greater perception of competence/difficulty.

In 15 countries, including Austria, Estonia, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway and the United States, students without an immigrant background were more likely than their immigrant schoolmates to perceive that they are competent in reading. The reverse was observed in Brunei Darussalam, Hong Kong (China), Ireland, Macao (China), the Netherlands, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom, where students with an immigrant background were more likely than their non-immigrant peers to perceive that they are competent in reading. Differences between the two groups of students were particularly large in Brunei Darussalam, Qatar and Saudi Arabia (Table II.B1.10.1).

When students' and schools' socio-economic profile and students' performance in reading were accounted for, some of those differences changed, depending on how attitudes, immigrant background and socio-economic status were related to one another. In countries where immigrant students were more disadvantaged than students without an immigrant background, immigrant students at first appeared to be less confident in their reading ability than non-immigrant students. However, once socio-economic status and performance were accounted for, immigrant students appeared more confident of their reading ability than their non-immigrant peers. In other words, when comparing non-immigrant and immigrant students of similar socio-economic status and who perform at similar levels of proficiency in reading, immigrant students were more likely than non-immigrant students to feel they are competent in reading. This was observed in 18 countries and economies, including Denmark, Finland, Hong Kong (China), the Netherlands and Sweden. The reverse was observed in eight countries and economies. Figure II.10.1 shows the difference between immigrant and non-immigrant students in their perception of competence in reading before and after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile and students' performance in reading.

Figure II.10.1 **Perception of competence in reading**

Difference between immigrant and non-immigrant students before and after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile, and students' performance in reading



Notes: Statistically significant changes in the index are shown in a darker tone (see Annex A3).

Countries where less than 5% of students had an immigrant background are not represented in the figure.

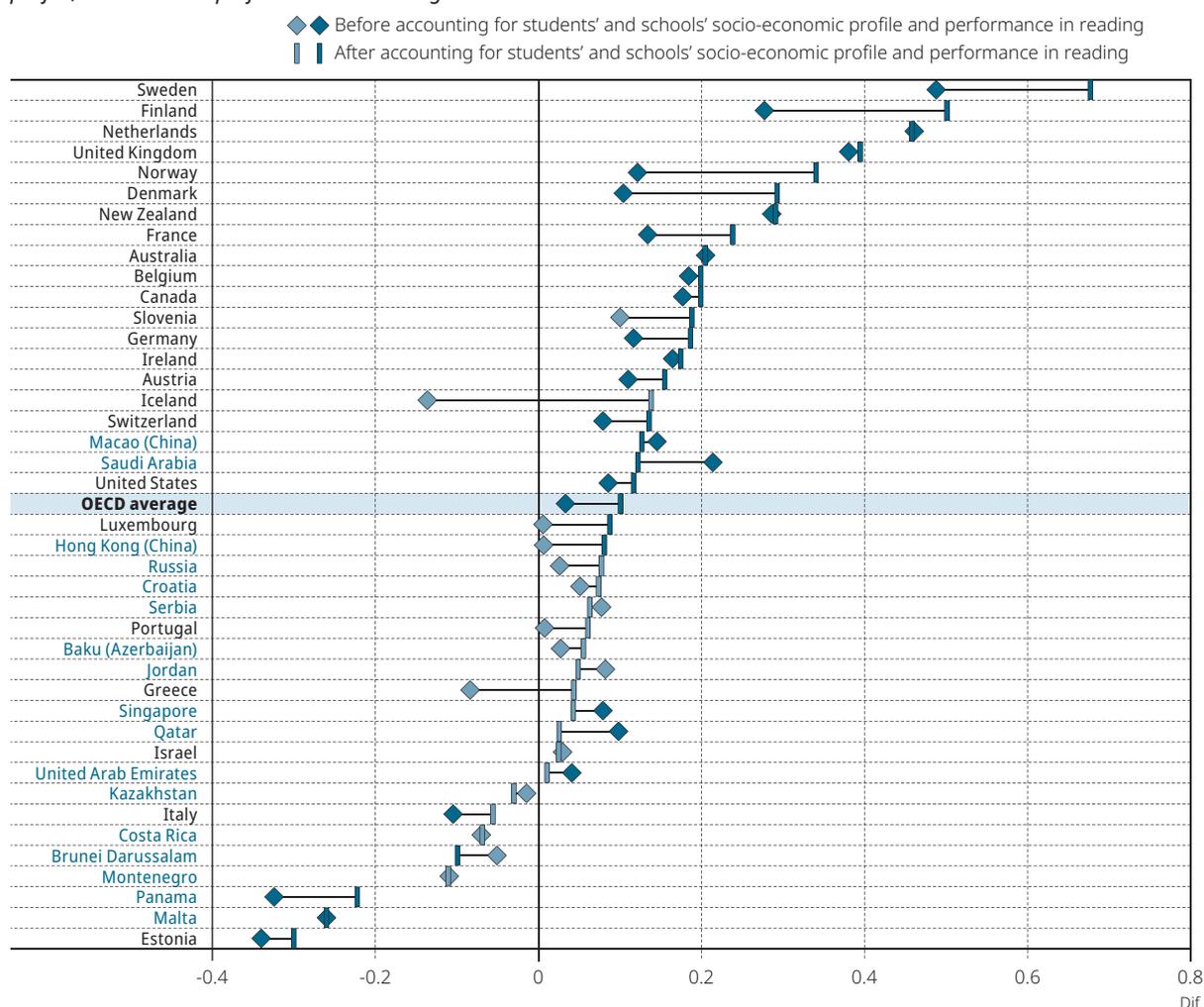
Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the difference, after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile and students' performance in reading.

Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Table II.B1.10.2.

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Figure II.10.2 **Index of learning goals**

Difference between immigrant and non-immigrant students before and after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile, and students' performance in reading



Notes: Statistically significant changes in the index are shown in a darker tone (see Annex A3).

Countries where less than 5% of students had an immigrant background are not represented in the figure.

Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the difference, after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile and students' performance in reading.

Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Table II.B1.10.2.

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When it comes to perceptions of difficulty in reading, immigrant students in 21 countries and economies were more likely than non-immigrant students to report difficulty in reading. The differences were particularly large in Finland, Greece, Iceland, Italy and Luxembourg. The reverse was observed only in Brunei Darussalam, Hong Kong (China), Macao (China), Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (Table II.B1.10.1).

After accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile and students' performance in reading, differences shrank but remained statistically significant for some countries, but not on average across OECD countries. In this context, immigrant students in Australia, Canada, Greece, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, New Zealand and the United States were more likely than their non-immigrant peers to report that they have difficulty in reading. By contrast, after accounting for these factors, immigrant students in Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, Denmark, Hong Kong (China), Ireland, the Netherlands, Qatar, Sweden, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom were less likely than non-immigrant students to report having difficulty in reading (Table II.B1.10.2).

Goal orientation and work mastery

Goal orientation is a key ingredient of academic success. Students who are able to set clear and achievable goals are likely to reach those goals by investing effort, even if they are facing difficulty. PISA 2018 asked students to respond to three statements about their academic goals: "My goal is to learn as much as possible"; "My goal is to completely master the material presented

in my classes"; "My goal is to understand the content of my classes as thoroughly as possible". Students' responses ("not at all true of me", "slightly true of me", "moderately true of me", "very true of me", "extremely true of me") were combined to construct the index of learning goals. Higher values in the index indicate greater goal orientation; for a full description of this index, see *PISA 2018 Results [Volume III]: What School Life Means for Students' Lives* (OECD, 2019_[10]).

PISA 2018 results show that, in 21 of the 43 countries and economies where, in 2018, more than 5% of students had an immigrant background, immigrant students were more likely to report a goal-oriented attitude than their non-immigrant peers. Differences were especially large in Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom, exceeding 0.3 of a point in the index of learning goals. The reverse was observed in only five countries (Table II.B1.10.1). On average across OECD countries, the difference in goal orientation between immigrant and non-immigrant students was small, but statistically significant. On average, immigrant students were more likely to report goal-oriented attitudes than their non-immigrant schoolmates, even after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile and students' performance in reading (Figure II.10.2).

To determine the extent of students' motivation to master tasks, PISA asked students whether they agree or disagree ("strongly disagree", "disagree", "agree", "strongly agree") with four statements about work mastery, including: "I find satisfaction in working as hard as I can"; and "Once I start a task, I persist until it is finished" (for more details about how the index of motivation to master tasks was constructed, see *PISA 2018 Results [Volume III]: What School Life Means for Students' Lives* (OECD, 2019_[10])). This construct is likely to be correlated with goal orientation. Students who set and pursue their goals are likely to work hard to achieve them. Hence, immigrant and non-immigrant students' responses to the task-mastery statements were similar to their responses to the goal-orientation statements, although differences between the two groups were smaller in the set of responses to the statements about work mastery (Tables II.B1.10.1 and II.B1.10.2).

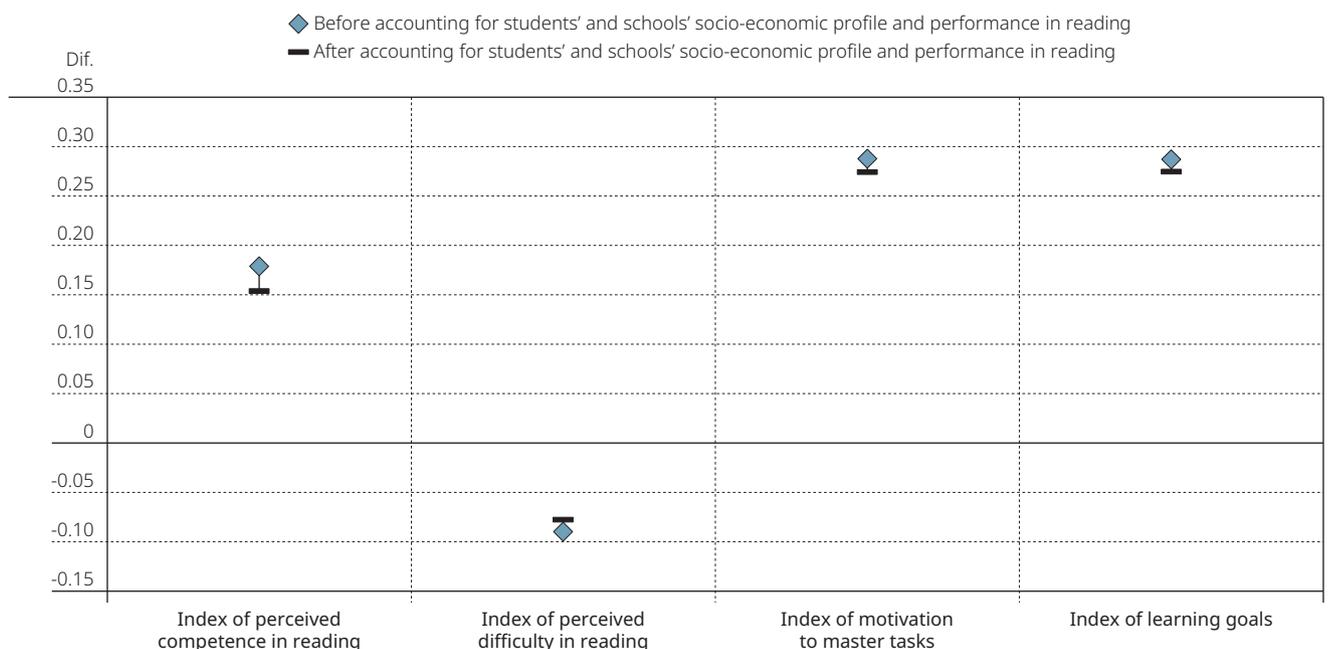
In summary, even though immigrant students may lag behind their non-immigrant peers in performance, in many countries, they showed more positive attitudes and dispositions towards learning, after accounting for their socio-economic status and academic achievement. Immigrant students' positive attitudes could be interpreted as a reflection of their optimism about their future prospects and of their willingness – and proven ability – to overcome the odds against them.

FACTORS RELATED TO POSITIVE STUDENT ATTITUDES

Positive student attitudes and dispositions are related to many environmental factors. This section explores the association between the attitudes and dispositions of immigrant and non-immigrant students and a range of those factors, including parent and teacher support, language spoken at home, student co-operation and the disciplinary climate at school.

Figure II.10.3 **Immigrant students' attitudes and parents' support**

Change in key indices associated with a one-unit increase in the index of parents' support, OECD average



Note: All changes in the index are statistically significant (see Annex A3).

Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Table II.B1.10.3.

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Parents' emotional support

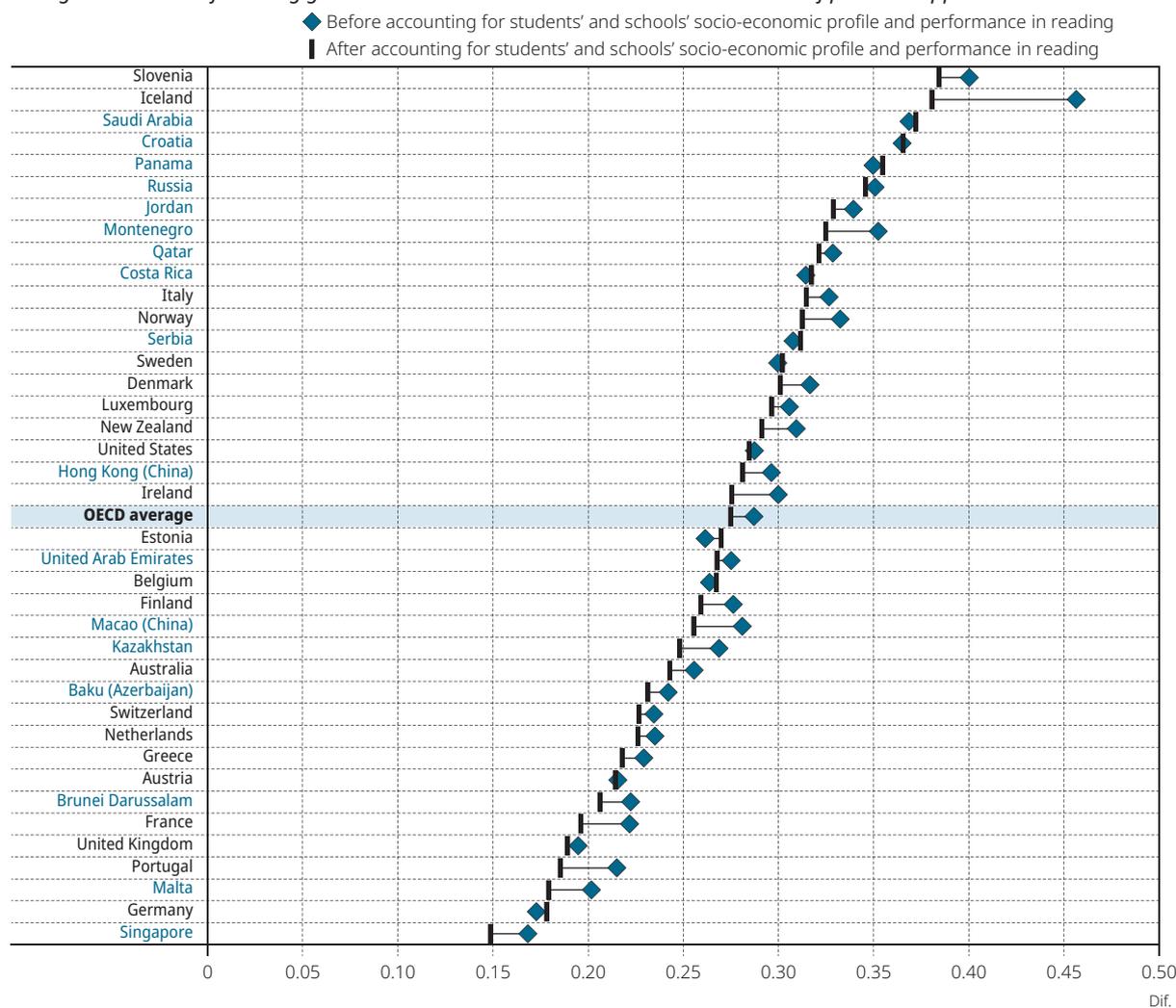
Establishing close relationships amongst immigrant families, and between immigrant families and the host community, may provide a network of support that would benefit immigrant students (Sabatier and Berry, 2008^[11]; Telzer and Fuligni, 2009^[12]; Güngör and Perdu, 2017^[13]). It is widely recognised that parental support, in particular, is of great importance for students. Since many policies have been designed with the aim of enhancing parental involvement in their child's education, it would be useful to examine the possible association between parents' support and students' dispositions and attitudes.

PISA 2018 asked students whether they agree ("strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", "strongly disagree") with three statements about their parents' emotional support: "My parents support my educational efforts and achievements"; "My parents support me when I am facing difficulties at school"; and "My parents encourage me to be confident". Students' responses were used to construct the index of parents' emotional support. Positive values in the index indicate greater levels of support.

Figure II.10.3 shows the average association across OECD countries between parents' emotional support and immigrant students' attitudes and dispositions, before and after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile. There was a strong positive association between parental support and the indices of learning goals and motivation to master tasks. More precisely, a one-unit increase in the index of parents' emotional support was associated with a 0.25-point increase in the two indices.

Figure II.10.4 **Parents' support and immigrant students' learning goals**

Change in the index of learning goals associated with a one-unit increase in the index of parents' support



Notes: All changes in the index are statistically significant (see Annex A3).

Countries where less than 5% of students had an immigrant background are not represented in the figure.

Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the difference after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile, and students' performance in reading.

Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Table II.B1.10.3.

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The association between parents' support and students' perceived competence in reading was positive but moderate. A one-unit increase in the index of parents' emotional support was associated with a rise of 0.15 of a point in the index of students' perceived competence. The association between parents' support and perceived difficulty in reading was negative – students who reported low parental support were more likely to perceive themselves as having difficulty in reading – but much weaker, on average across OECD countries (Table II.B1.10.3).

A strong association was observed between the index of parents' emotional support and the index of learning goals, both of which are based on students' responses (Figure II.10.4). This positive association indicates that immigrant students (and students in general) are better able to set and pursue their education goals when their parents support their learning efforts and help them overcome difficulty at school. The association varied between 0.38 of a point in Slovenia and 0.15 of a point in Singapore, and was statistically significant in all countries. In Croatia, Iceland, Panama, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia and Slovenia, the association was strong – exceeding 0.35 of a point.

Interestingly, the differences between immigrant and non-immigrant students in the strength of the association between parents' support and the four student attitudes were small. This suggests that both groups of students would benefit more or less equally from greater parental support.

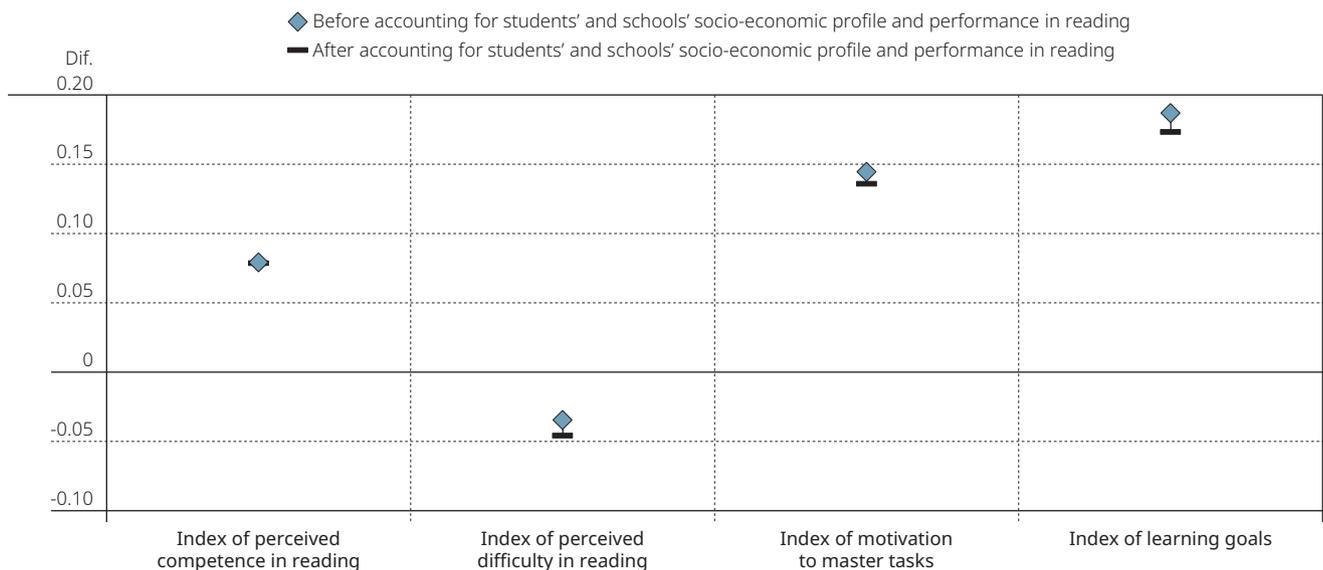
Teacher support

Most education experts agree that teacher support is an important factor affecting students' achievement at school. Students need to feel that their teachers are involved in their education and that they care about their students' well-being (Klem and Connell, 2004^[14]). Existing evidence points to a strong association between teacher support, on the one hand, and engagement at school and academic performance, on the other (Croninger and Lee, 2001^[15]; Roderick and Engel, 2001^[16]). This subsection examines the association between teacher support and students' attitudes. In particular, it focuses on students' motivation to master tasks and on their goal orientation.

Students who participated in PISA 2018 were asked about the frequency ("every lesson", "most lessons", "some lessons", "never or hardly ever") with which the following occur in their language-of-instruction class: "The teacher shows an interest in every student's learning"; "The teacher gives extra help when students need it"; "The teacher helps students with their learning"; and "The teacher continues teaching until the students understand". Students' responses were used to construct the index of teacher support. Positive values in the index indicate greater levels of support. This index is also examined in *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives* (OECD, 2019^[10]).

Figure II.10.5 **Immigrant students' attitudes and teacher support**

Change in key indices associated with a one-unit increase in the index of teacher support, OECD average



Note: All changes in the index are statistically significant (see Annex A3).

Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Table II.B1.10.5.

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Figure II.10.5 presents the association between teacher support and four key student attitudes and dispositions across OECD countries. Teacher support was positively and significantly associated with immigrant students' perceptions of competence in reading, their motivation to master tasks and their ability to set and pursue their learning goals; it was negatively associated

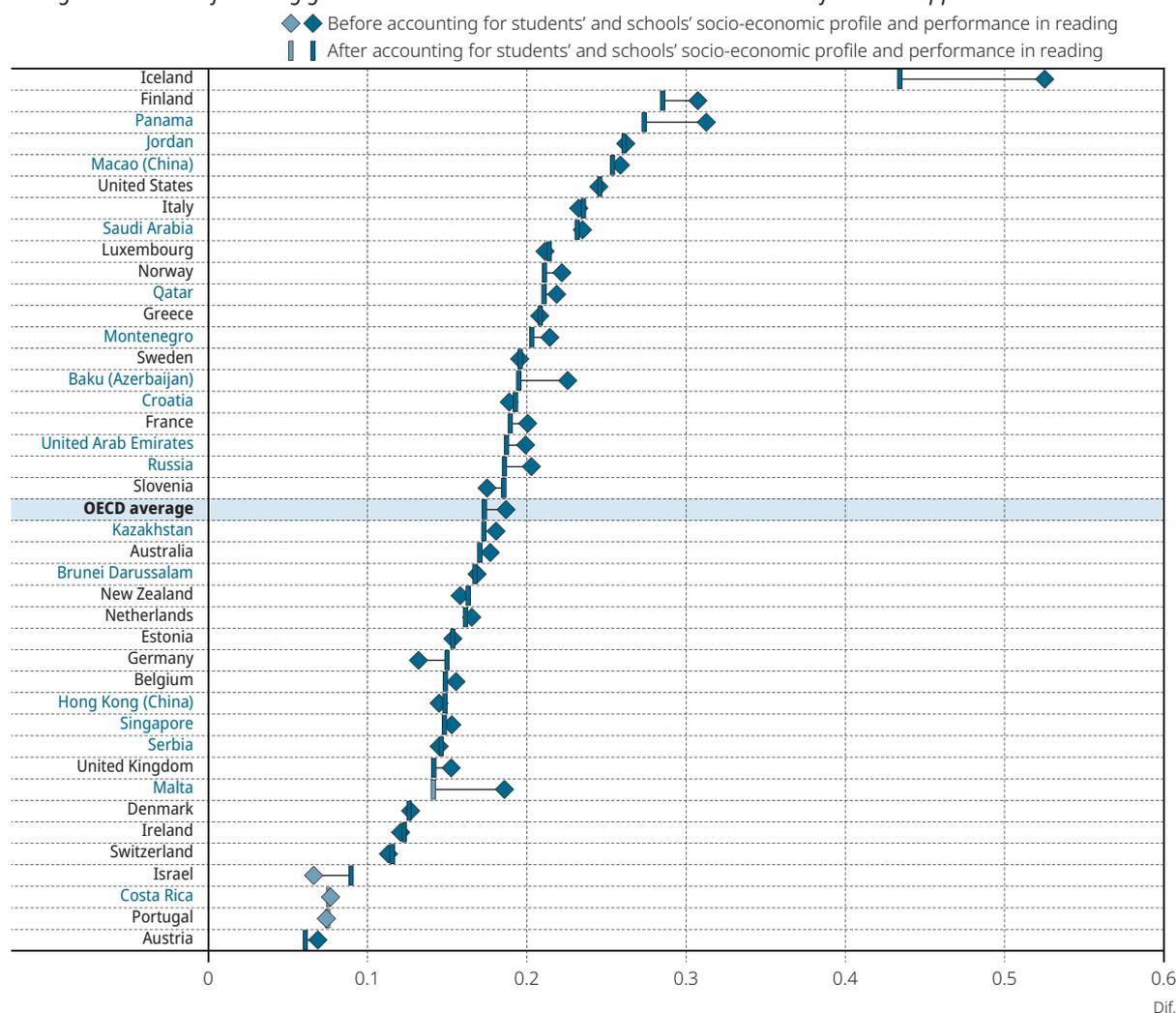
Immigrant students' attitudes and dispositions

with perceptions of difficulty in reading. The associations were moderate for motivation to master tasks and goal orientation, and weak for the two other indices. No major differences were observed between immigrant and non-immigrant students. The associations remained almost unchanged after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile.

On average across OECD countries, an increase of one unit in the index of teacher support was associated with a rise of 0.17 of a point in the index of learning goals, after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile. Associations exceeded 0.25 of a point in Finland, Iceland, Jordan, Macao (China) and Panama; they were non-significant in only three countries (Figure II.10.6).

Figure II.10.6 **Teacher support and immigrant students' learning goals**

Change in the index of learning goals associated with a one-unit increase in the index of teacher support



Notes: Statistically significant changes in the index are shown in a darker tone (see Annex A3).

Countries where less than 5% of students had an immigrant background are not represented in the figure.

Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the difference after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile, and students' performance in reading.

Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Table II.B1.10.5.

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Language spoken at home

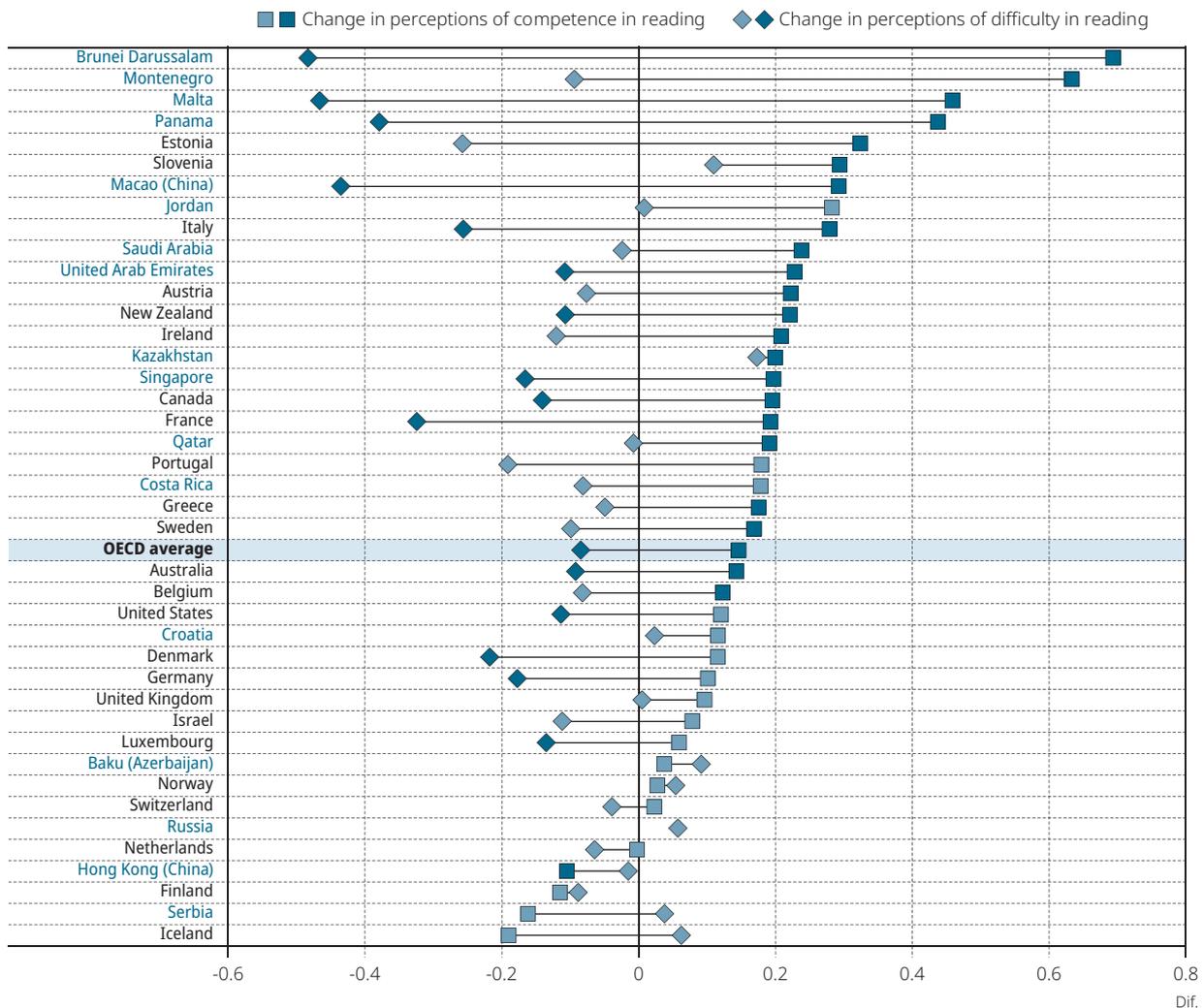
Mastery of the language of the host country is essential if immigrants are to integrate fully into their new community. It is one of the greatest challenges immigrant students face (Isphording and Otten, 2014_[17]), and many immigrants never reach adequate proficiency in the host-country language (Isphording, 2015_[18]). This subsection examines the association between speaking a language at home that is different from the language of instruction, and students' perceptions of competence and difficulty in reading.

PISA 2018 asked students to list the languages they speak at home. Using this information, a binary indicator was constructed to indicate whether or not a student speaks the language of instruction at home. On average across OECD countries, immigrant

students who speak the language of instruction at home perceived that they are competent in reading (0.15 of a point higher in the index) and that they have little difficulty in reading (0.12 of a point lower in the index). These findings vary between countries and economies, however. For instance, in Brunei Darussalam, Estonia, Malta, Montenegro and Panama, speaking the language of instruction at home was associated with a rise of more than 0.3 of a point in the index of perception of competence, and exceeded 0.65 of a point in Brunei Darussalam, even after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile. The associations were positive and statistically significant in 23 out of 38 countries where, in 2018, more than 5% of students had an immigrant background. Moreover, in Brunei Darussalam, France, Macao (China), Malta and Panama, speaking the language of instruction at home was associated with a decline in the perception of difficulty in reading of more than 0.30 of a point in the index. The associations were negative and significant in 17 out of 38 countries (Figure II.10.7).

Figure II.10.7 **Language spoken at home and perceptions of competence and difficulty in reading**

Change in perceptions of competence and difficulty in reading between immigrant students who speak the language of instruction at home and those who do not, after accounting for socio-economic status



Notes: Statistically significant changes in the index are shown in a darker tone (see Annex A3).

Countries where less than 5% of students had an immigrant background are not represented in the figure.

Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the change in perceptions of competence in reading.

Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Table II.B1.10.4.

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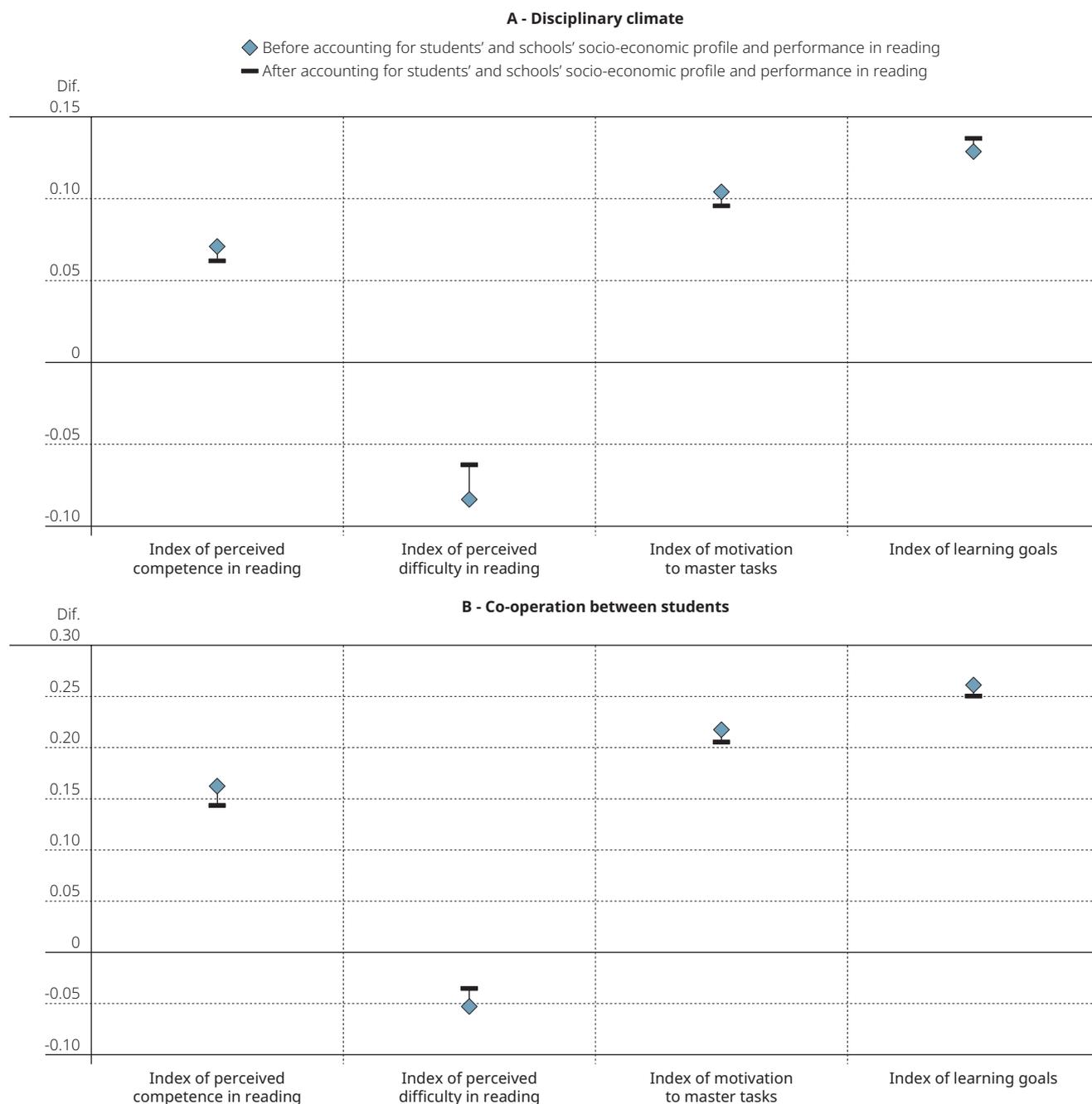
When comparing the findings for immigrant and non-immigrant students, it is clear that the associations were much stronger for the former than for the latter. This is not surprising, because mastering the language of the host country is more challenging for immigrant students and, as such, is more likely to have a stronger association with their attitudes. In addition, the number of non-immigrant students who do not speak the language of instruction at home was much smaller (Table II.B1.10.4). Those non-immigrant students are likely to be either members of linguistic minority groups or third- or fourth-generation immigrants (i.e. their grandparents or great-grandparents were immigrants in the host country) who were classified as non-immigrant students in PISA.

School climate

Good relationships with peers help immigrant students cope with the challenges of adapting to their host societies. Schools can also play an important role in integrating immigrants into their new communities, encouraging students' disciplined efforts, facilitating their motivation to master tasks, and nurturing a strong belief in the students' own abilities to pursue personal goals (Masten, 2001^[19]; Güngör, 2008^[20]; Van Geel and Vedder, 2010^[21]). This subsection examines the association between students' perceptions of disciplinary climate and co-operation at school, on the one hand, and their attitudes and dispositions, on the other. The two indices were described in detail in Chapter 3 and are presented in Annex A1 of this report.

Figure II.10.8 **Immigrant students' attitudes, disciplinary climate at school, and perception of co-operation between students**

Change in key indices associated with a one-unit increase in the index of disciplinary climate or the index of student co-operation



Note: All changes in the index are statistically significant (see Annex A3).

Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Tables II.B1.10.6 and II.B1.10.7.

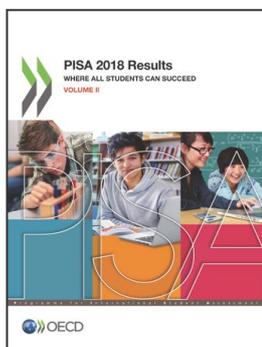
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The findings show that immigrant students' perception of discipline in their language-of-instruction lessons was positively associated with their perception of their own competence in reading, their motivation to master tasks, and their ability to set and pursue academic goals. By contrast, it was negatively correlated with their perception of difficulty in reading. However, the associations were weak; the strongest were with the index of learning goals, after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile. Similar but stronger associations were observed between immigrant students' perception of co-operation at school and their various attitudes. In particular, an increase of one unit in the index of student co-operation was associated with a rise of 0.21 of a point in the index of motivation to master tasks and 0.24 of a point in the index of learning goals, even after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile. The findings vary little between immigrant and non-immigrant students. This indicates that the associations are not sensitive to students' immigrant background, and thus all students would benefit from a better school climate and greater student co-operation at school (Figure II.10.8).

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From:
PISA 2018 Results (Volume II)
Where All Students Can Succeed

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/b5fd1b8f-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2020), "Immigrant students' attitudes and dispositions", in *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/7e9d780e-en>

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