

Examining Information Processing Skill Proficiencies Among Black Adults in the U.S.

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(1) What is the research question?

Do known associations between information processing proficiencies, demographic characteristics, education, employment, health, social trust, civic engagement, and political efficacy vary within the Black adult population in the U.S. by information processing skill levels?

(2) Why this study?

The preponderance of literature in educational and health-related scholarship focuses on Black adults from a deficit and comparative perspective (Goings, 2016). In this research report, we focus on the variability *within* the Black population by using a nationally representative sample of Black adults in the U.S., the PIAAC U.S. 2012/2014/2017 Restricted-Use File (RUF) data, to explore and describe the three information processing skill proficiencies of literacy, numeracy, and digital problem-solving skills across low, mid, vs. high proficiency levels and corresponding differences in larger categories of demographic, household, background, and language characteristics, educational characteristics, employment characteristics, health characteristics, and characteristics related to social trust, civic engagement, and political efficacy for this significant population over two data collection cycles.

(3) What are the key findings?

- Most Black adults had mid-to-high levels of literacy (65%) and digital problem solving (56%) skills, and most Black adults had low levels of numeracy (57%) skills.
- Black adults with more advanced skills tend to be younger, have fewer children, have more educated parents, and are more likely to speak English as a home language.
- Black adults with higher literacy and numeracy skills are also more likely to be employed, work in careers in STEM, have higher incomes, and report higher self-rated health, social trust, and political efficacy compared to low skill individuals.

(4) What are the policy/practice implications?

While educational experiences for Black adults in the U.S. remain inequitable (Goings, 2018; U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2020), given the disparate educational experiences of older and younger Black adults, we see possible evidence that, with expansion of educational opportunity for the Black population, came greater educational achievement, educational attainment, and economic outcomes for some.

This study demonstrates the need for:

- The continuance of policies meant to expand educational and health systems access and opportunity for the Black population of the U.S.
- Equity Auditing of local educational systems to better identify and redress contemporary disproportionalities for subgroups within the Black population.
- A targeted expansion of policies and programs focused on numeracy skills for some subgroups- as these skills often undergird both the frameworks of STEM focused education and health systems.
- Wrap-around program models, like those which provide childcare and family literacy, in addition to educational services for Black adults who identify related barriers to educational access.