

Ethnic Educational Inequalities: School Careers and Experiences of the Second Generation in France

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Because of large-scale immigration, ethnic inequalities in education have become an important issue in many of the countries of Western Europe as they are in the United States. Have the children of immigrants benefited from the democratisation of schooling in the same way as the mainstream population? Are educational trajectories similar or do they differ according country of origin?

In this paper, we analyse the school careers and experience of the children of immigrants in France, to investigate the links between educational inequalities and perception of discrimination. After a description of the educational careers and attainment in secondary and higher education by gender and ethnic groups (compared to the natives), we explain the differences between groups in shaping the impact of social background, ethnic origins, gender, previous school careers and context on educational outcomes. Then we look at the school experience, by analyzing the feeling of unfairness at school (concerning tracking and grading) and their motives, declared by the young people themselves. Furthermore, we analyze the links between school experience and effective careers.

Data

We use the data of the new French “Trajectories and Origins” Survey, focused on the immigrant and the children of immigrants, carried out by INED and INSEE in 2008, that allows to deal with children of immigrants from recent waves, less known in France. We can compare in particular the natives French with the following groups: children whose parents come from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, Sub-Saharan Africa, South-East Asia, Turkey and Portugal.

We can reconstitute the whole educational career and attainment in secondary and higher education and have original questions about the perception of the school “treatment” (in grading and tracking), the motives of the unfairness (sex, origins, skin color etc.). Besides, a lot of questions allow to measure the children’ social and educational environment (such as parental education and occupation, and family educational investments).

Methods

We use multivariate analysis to look at the factors influencing both the school careers and experiences in taking into account the effects of social background, ethnic origins, gender, family composition and investments and the previous school career. As educational indicators, we use the dropout, tracking (general versus vocational), high School diploma, access to Higher Education and Graduate from Higher Education.

Preliminary Outcomes

We find that Second Generation children are disadvantaged in school; they are more likely to repeat a year, to drop out and to follow the less valued tracks than the natives. However, most of the disadvantages are related to their social background and success and failure vary a lot among ethnic groups. And some groups do even better than the majority with similar background. Besides, some

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Second Generation groups express a strong feeling of unfairness towards the process of tracking in upper secondary education as well as in higher education, the descendants of immigrants from Sub-Saharan, North Africa and Turkey in particular. The latter perceive it as ethnic and racial discrimination. Then, there is a strong link between “objective” and “subjective school trajectories”.

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