



On the doorstep to transition

The Finnish- and immigrant-origin youth's attitudes towards school, educational orientations and future aspirations in the end of comprehensive education¹

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Introduction

The follow up -study of Transitions and educational trajectories of immigrant youth - research project started in early 2015. This paper introduces the preliminary findings from a questionnaire targeted to ninth graders in Helsinki Metropolitan area and in the city of Turku. The questionnaire was sent out in either electronic or a paper form and it was designed to inquire the youth's thoughts and expectations about the transition to the upper secondary education as well as their experiences in school and their attitudes towards education and the future in general. The questionnaire also covered experiences and thoughts about multiculturalism, but this section is excluded from this paper¹.

This paper is aimed to present the basic findings of the first questionnaire. The data is analyzed mainly through the division between girls and boys within the groups of the youth with Finnish origin and the youth with immigrant origin. This kind of division carries its own problems. The different groups are not homogenous and thus the categorization will inevitably conceal differences and variations within each group. However, the categorization does make visible some nuances within the groups of Finnish- and immigrant-origin youth, and illustrates the ways in which gender, among other factors, intersects with immigrant (or Finnish) origin as a contributing factor in the youth's life.

The paper is organized in three sections. In the first section the data and methods are introduced briefly with information about the gathering and the consistency of the sample and methods used for the analysis. The second section explores the youth's attitudes and orientations towards school as well as the difficulties experienced in school. The third section describes the youth's school choice after ninth grade, their educational goals and their general expectations of the future.

Description of the data and methods

The sample included both immigrant-origin and Finnish-origin 9th graders and was compiled from three lower secondary schools from the city of Turku and five from Helsinki Metropolitan Area. The schools were selected due to their considerable number of students with immigrant origin. Besides the number of immigrant-origin youth, these schools offer also a wide variety of foreign languages in their curriculum, and, thus, also a plenty of Finnish-origin students enrolled. As a result, these schools consist of students from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The sampling was made in order to gather culturally as rich mix of pupils as possible, instead of seeking schools that represent average Finnish lower secondary schools. Nevertheless, these

schools are not private schools that select their students: most of their students come from local neighbourhoods, assigned by the municipality.

As methods for the analysis, we used cross tabulations for illustrating the distributions, independent samples t-test for comparing Finnish- and immigrant origin youth and variance analysis for examining these groups by gender. χ^2 , t- and F-values and their statistical significance are reported in the end notes.

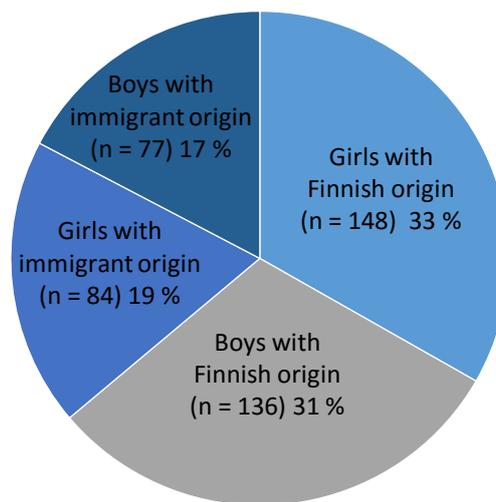


Figure 1. Finnish- and immigrant origin youth by gender (n, %)

The sample consists of 445 students altogether (fig. 1); 284 (64%) of them were Finnish-origin majority, i.e. by definition both parents and their offspring were born in Finland. Whereas, 161 (36 %) of them were youth with immigrant origin, i.e. in broad terms, persons who are born abroad, or whose parents are born outside Finland. In other words, we included to this group: (1) first-generation immigrants, who are themselves born abroad, (2) second-generation immigrants, who's both parents are born outside Finland, or (3) youth from mixed-origin or multicultural families, i.e. a family consisting of a union between a person with immigrant origin and a native Finn. In our data, the youth with immigrant origin consists of 84 girls and 77 boys and the youth with Finnish origin consists of 148 girls and 136 boys (fig. 2).

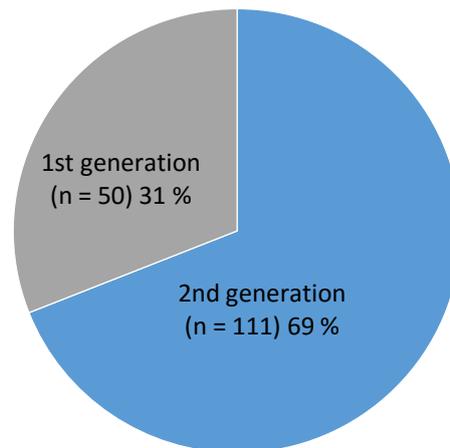


Figure 2. Immigrant-origin youth by immigrant generation (n, %)

A majority of the youth with immigrant origin in our data were second generation (69 %), thus, they were born in Finland, but with one or both parents born abroad (fig. 2). Altogether 50 of the youth were born abroad: 38 per cent of them come from Asia or Middle East, 28 per cent from East Europe, 14 per cent from West Europe, 12 per cent from Africa, 6 percent from North or South America or the Caribbean. One person in the sample didn't know their country of birth. (Fig. 3) The ages of migration of the 1st generation youth varied quite evenly between the ages of 0 to 16, the mean age of migration being 7 years old (Fig. 4).

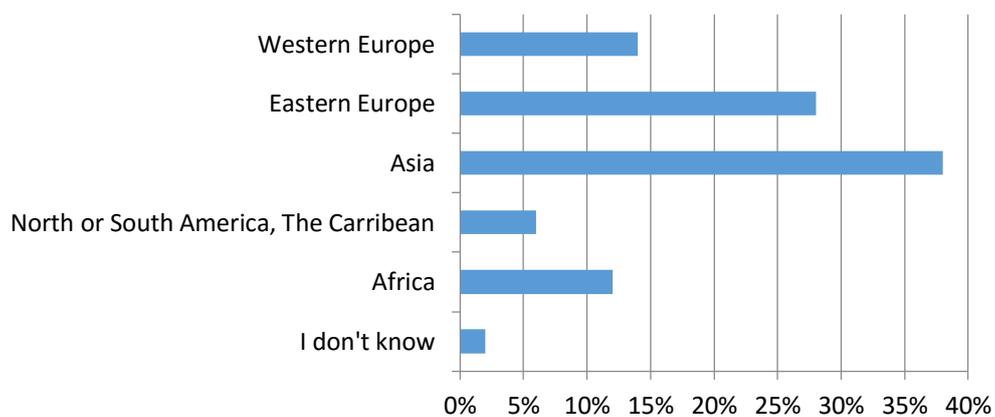


Figure 3. The country of birth of the 1st generation immigrant youth (n = 50, %)

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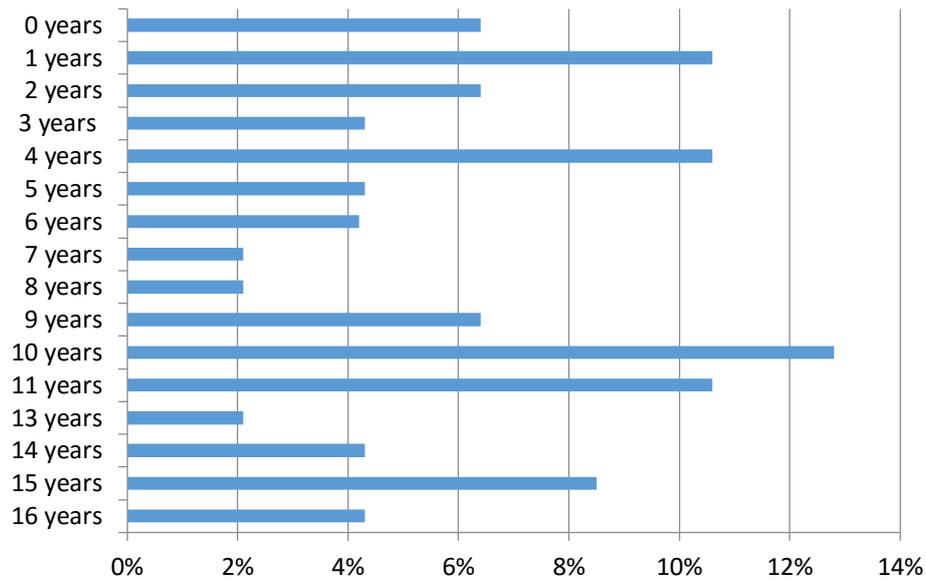


Figure 4. The age of migrating to Finland (n = 50, %)

The majority, around 58 percent, of the youth with both Finnish and immigrant origin lived in a nuclear family with two parents. The youth with immigrant origin reported more often living with only their mother, whereas dividing time between two homes was more common among the youth with Finnish origin. (Fig. 5)

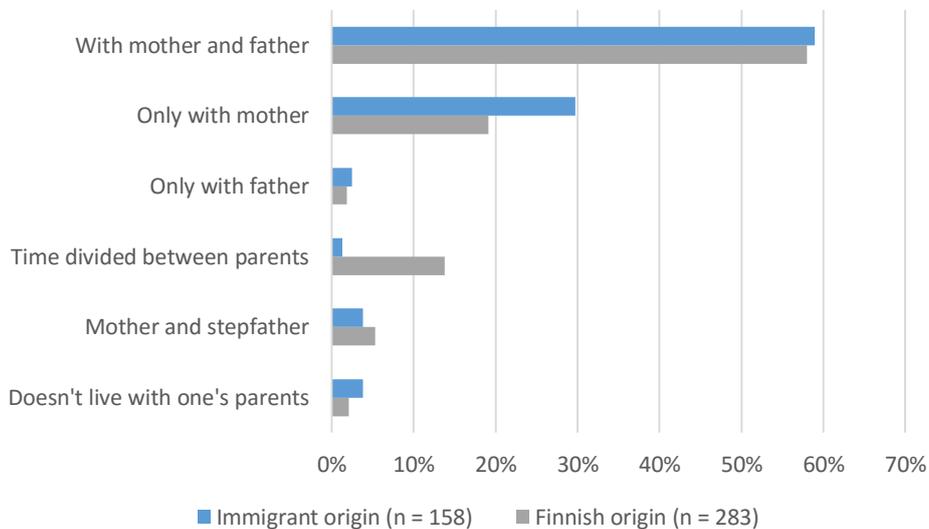


Figure 5. The youth's living arrangements by origin (%)

The majority, around 72 per cent, of the immigrant-origin youth lived in a multilingual household (fig. 6). Speaking several languages at home was somewhat more common within the second generation group, in their case Finnish almost always being one of the spoken languages at home. In multilingual households it seemed typical that the siblings talk (also) in Finnish to each other even though they might use a different language when talking with their parents. Of the immigrant-origin youth born in Finland, i.e. the second generation, around 8 per cent (n = 9) reported Finnish to be

the only language spoken in their home. Of the first generation youth 4 per cent (n = 2) lived in a Finnish-speaking household.

The majority of the immigrant-origin youth also reported speaking several languages with their friends. When asked whether Finnish was the only language spoken among their friends, 14 per cent of the 1st generation youth and 33 per cent of the 2nd generation youth answered yes.

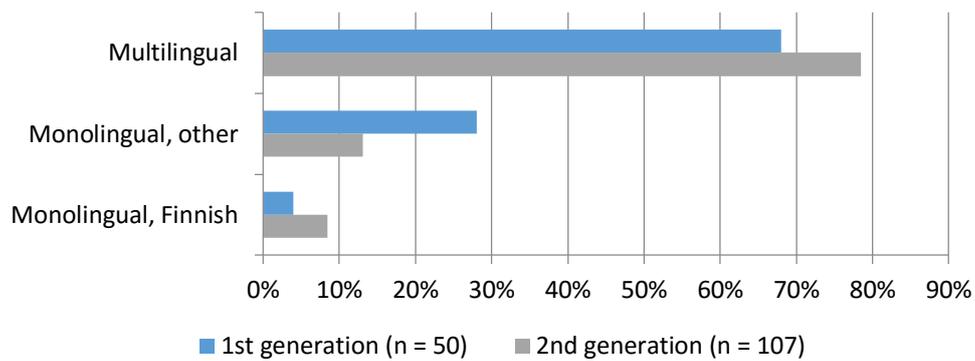


Figure 6. Monolingual/multilingual families of the youth with immigrant origin (%)

The youth's attitudes towards school

This section generally describes the youth's attitudes towards school, i.e. their school liking and general orientations towards school. The experienced difficulties and the youth's friends' attitudes are described as well.

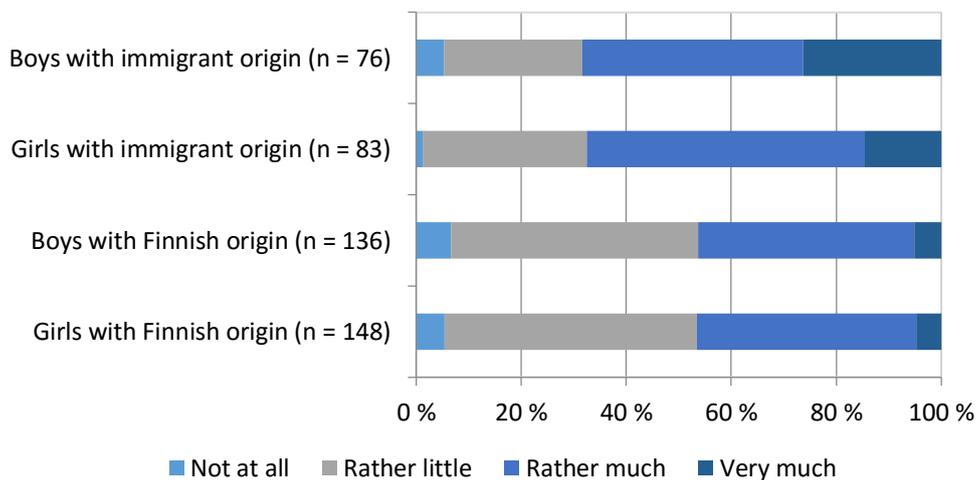


Figure 7. The youth's attitudes towards school based on the question "At the moment, do you like going to school?" (%)

In the questionnaire, the youth's attitudes towards school were inquired with a straightforward question of "At the moment, do you like going to school?" In general, the youth's attitudes towards school were more often positive than negative (fig.7²). However, the youth with immigrant origin were more positive towards school than

the youth with Finnish origin³. The biggest difference was between the immigrant-origin and the Finnish-origin boys. On scale from 1 = “I don’t like going to school at all” to 4 = “I like going to school very much” boys with immigrant origin responded with the highest average of 2,89, while the boys with Finnish origin responded with the lowest average of 2,45.

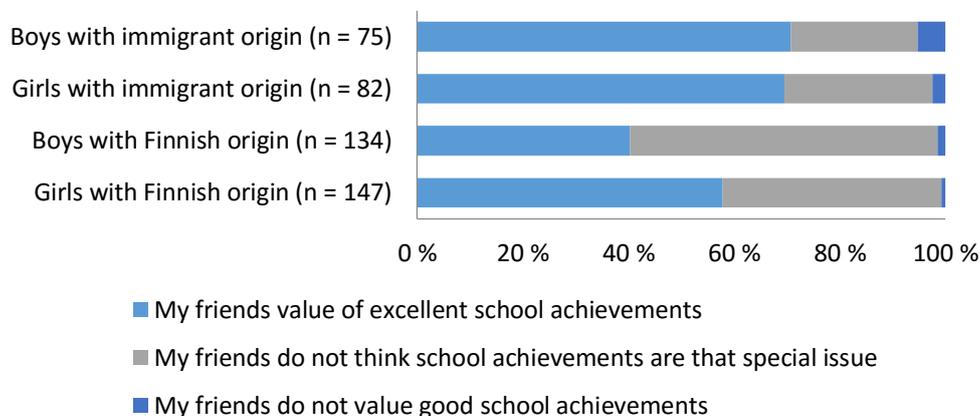


Figure 8. Friends' attitudes towards school achievements (%)

The youth with immigrant origin estimated that their friends value school achievements significantly more often than Finnish-origin youth (fig. 8⁴), although within the Finnish-origin youth there was a difference between girls and boys. The boys with Finnish origin estimated that their friends valued good school achievements the least, while the boys with immigrant origin estimated that their friends value them the most. Interestingly, the boys with immigrant origin had the most variation within their responses. While the majority of the boys with immigrant origin estimated that their friends value good school achievements, proportionally largest amount (5,3 per cent) of them also estimated that their friends do not value good achievements at all.

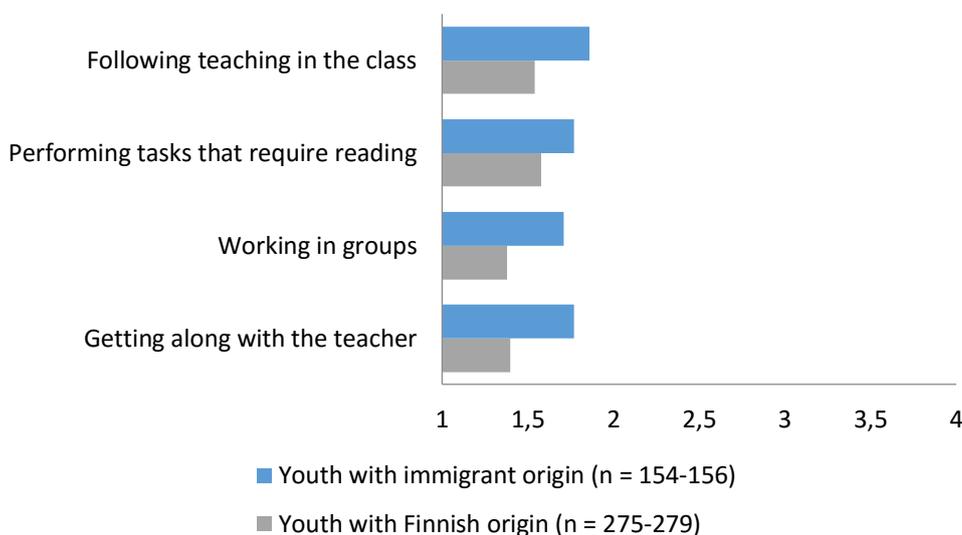


Figure 9. Experienced difficulties on scale 1 = “Not at all” to 4 = “Very much” (means)

The youth’s experiences of difficulties in school were inquired through seven sub-questions of different kinds of problems, four of which are reported here as a sample. The youth with immigrant origin experienced more difficulties in all the inquired

categories than the youth with Finnish origin (fig. 9⁵). Examination through the division between boys and girls brings out the distribution of difficulties within the groups of Finnish- and immigrant-origin youth. In both groups boys experienced more difficulties than girls. Of all youth the boys with immigrant origin experienced the most difficulties, averaging significantly higher than others. The girls with Finnish origin experienced the least difficulties in all inquired categories. (Fig. 10⁶)

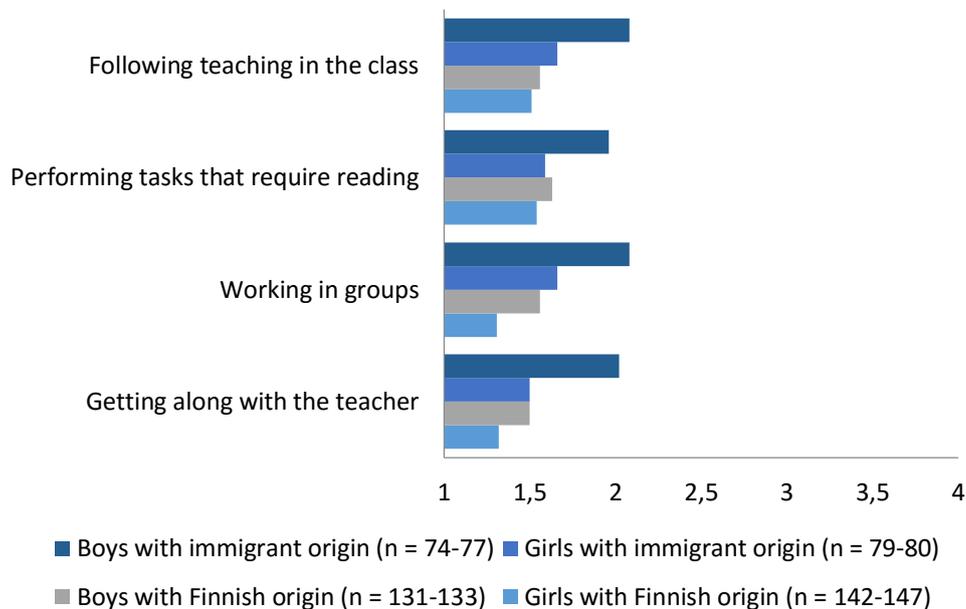


Figure 10. Experienced difficulties on scale 1 = "Not at all" to 4 = "Very much" (means)

The youth's school orientations were measured with twelve statements, out of which four factors were compiled. Each factor consisted of three statements (scaled from 1 = "I completely disagree" to 4 = "I completely agree") as follows:

1. *Learning orientation* (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0,81$), statements "The most important goal at school is to gain new knowledge", "Learning new things is the most important goal for me at school" and "The most important thing at school is to learn as much as possible".
2. *Achievement orientation* (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0,78$), statements "Good school achievements are the most important at school", "I try to be successful with my studies" and "It is most important for me to have good school grades".
3. *Avoidance orientation* (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0,77$), statements "I try to put as little effort as possible to school work", "I do not feel like doing anything extra for school" and "I will try to do only the homework that is required, nothing more".
4. *Peer orientation* (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0,61$), statements "I would be lonely if I would not meet my friends at school", "School is a place to meet friends" and "The best thing in school are friends".

As for school orientations, there were some moderate differences between the Finnish-origin and the immigrant-origin youth (fig. 11⁷). The youth with immigrant origin were more oriented towards learning and good school achievements than

Finnish-origin youth. Learning orientation was especially strong among boys with immigrant origin. Avoidance orientation was stronger among Finnish-origin youth and especially strong among boys. As for immigrant-origin youth, avoidance orientation was also stronger among boys. Peer orientation was slightly stronger among Finnish-origin youth and, in general, more common for girls than for boys.

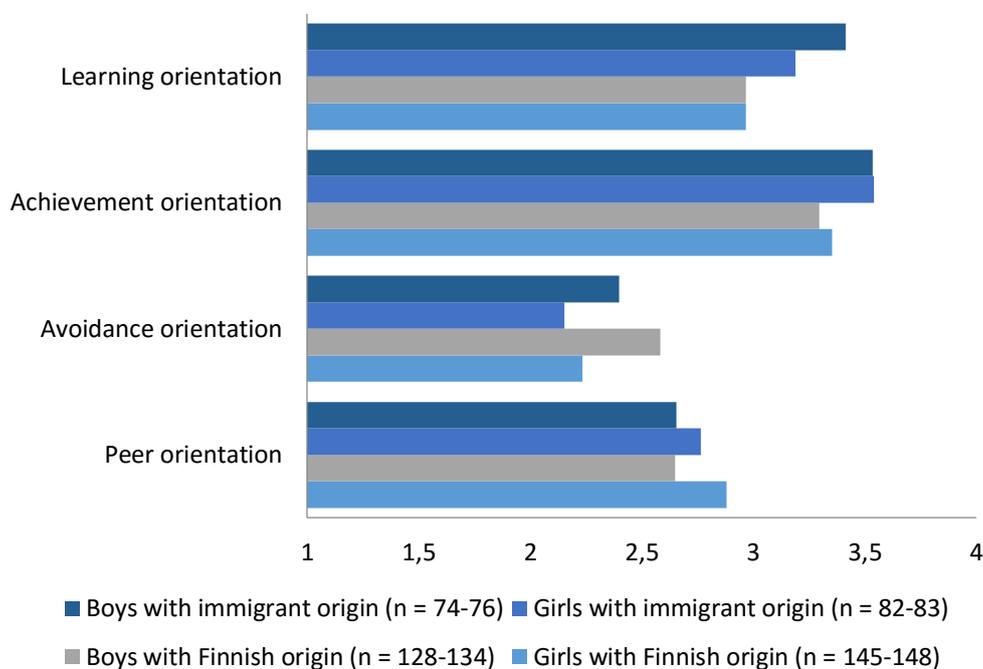


Figure 11. The youth's school orientations (means of sum scores)

The data presents an interesting paradox: the youth with immigrant origin have more positive attitudes towards school (fig. 7) and stronger orientations towards learning and good school achievements (fig. 11) even though they experience significantly more difficulties in school than the youth with Finnish origin (fig. 9). Boys with immigrant origin stand out from the data, as they represent the extremes in the statistics of the experienced difficulties as well as school liking and the orientations towards learning and school achievements.

Educational goals and expectations of the future

The questionnaire was executed in the early spring of the youth's 9th grade. At that point the joint application for secondary education was ahead, but the final choices had not been made yet. This section explores the youth's plans after 9th grade, their educational goals, general orientations towards the future and the expectations of their adult life.

In general the youth's visions of the future were very similar. Again, inspected through the division of origin and gender, the data presents some nuances which will be further described in the following.

Choice after 9th grade

The youth's school choice after 9th grade was inquired through an open question about their first choice for secondary education. The answers were categorized as general upper secondary school, vocational school or unsure, the latter including both the respondents with an explicit mention of being unsure as well those who left the question unanswered.

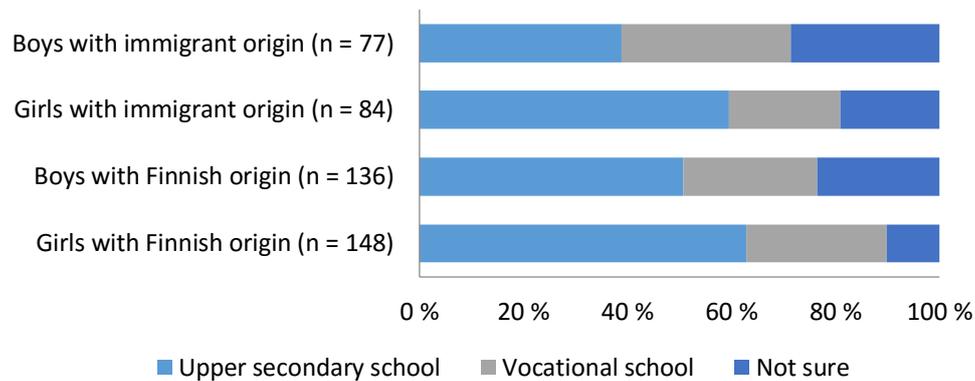


Figure 12. The youth's school choice after 9th grade (%)

In general, the youth's choices were rather similar (fig. 12⁸). Of all the youth, the majority (around 54 per cent) were heading for upper secondary education while roughly a fourth were going to apply to vocational schools. Although the Finnish-origin youth were heading for upper secondary school slightly more often than the immigrant-origin youth, the difference was not significant enough to imply that the mere origin, either Finnish or immigrant, would predict the youth's choice between upper secondary and vocational education.

Girls were heading for upper secondary education more often than boys, the extremes being Finnish-origin girls (63 per cent heading for upper secondary) and immigrant-origin boys (39 per cent heading for upper secondary). Girls seemed to be surer about their choice than boys. Of the boys with immigrant origin, more than a fourth either left the question unanswered or reported being unsure about their school choice. (Fig. 12)

In addition to the school choice, the youth also estimated their actions after 9th grade with statements about continuing to 10th grade, seeking a job and taking a gap year (fig. 13⁹). The statements were not exclusive, so a respondent could simultaneously estimate a high probability for e.g. seeking a job and applying to a school.

By average, the youth with Finnish origin were heading for upper secondary schools with slightly stronger certainty than the immigrant-origin youth. Girls were heading for upper secondary education with more certainty than boys while boys were more certain about applying to vocational education. However, these differences were not statistically significant. Boys with immigrant youth stood out from the data as they averaged higher on their estimation about applying to vocational school and seeking a job. (Fig. 13)

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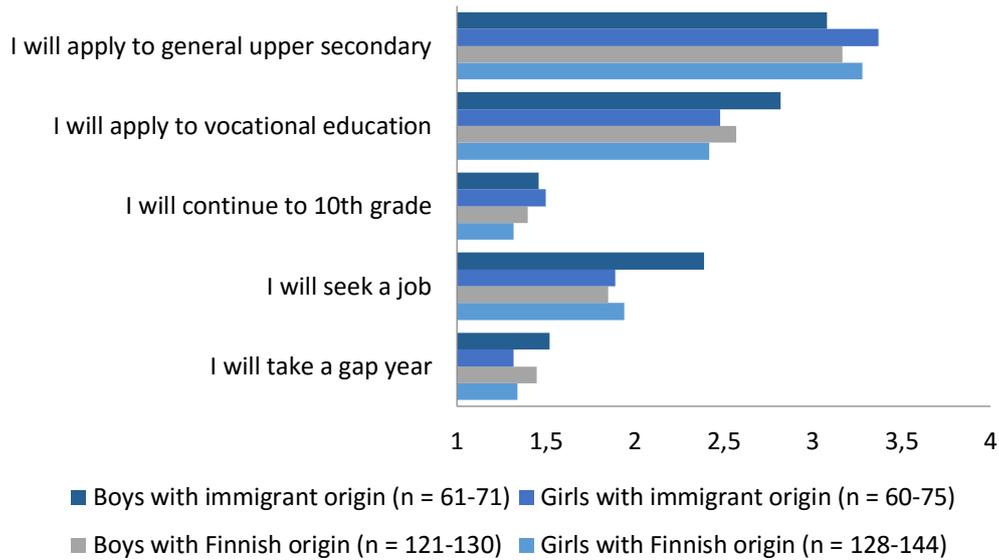


Figure 13. The youth's plans after 9th grade on scale 1 = "Definitely not" to 4 = "Definitely" (means)

The respondents estimated the influence of their social environment (i.e. parents/guardians, siblings, relatives, friends, teachers and student counsellors) on their school choice on scale 1 = "Not at all" to 4 = "Very much" (fig. 14¹⁰). All youth reported their parents having the strongest influence on their choice. After parents, the youth estimated their choice to be influenced mostly by their student counsellor and their friends. In general, the immigrant-origin youth estimated their social environment having stronger influence on their choice than the youth with Finnish origin, the only exception being the influence of friends, which was estimated equally strong among both groups. (Fig. 14)

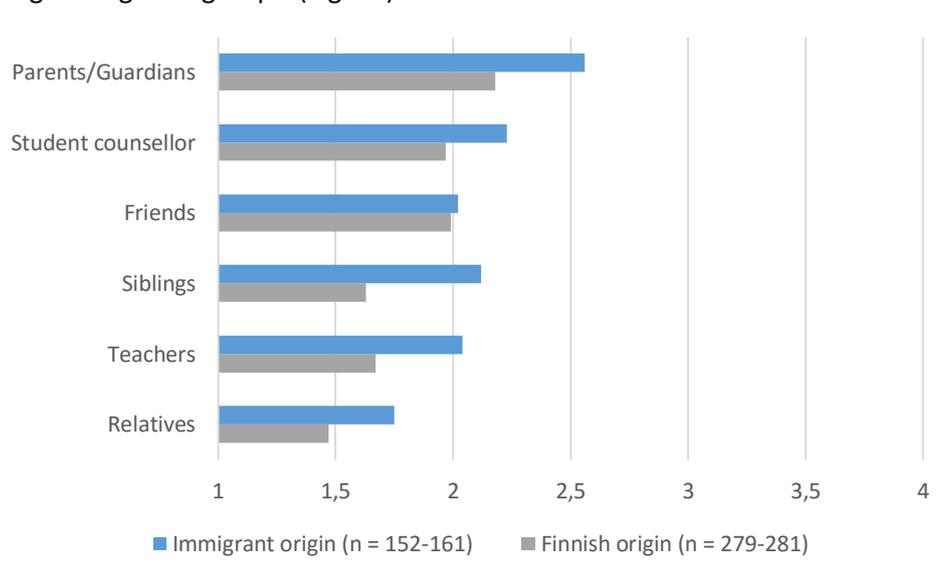


Figure 14. Influence on the secondary education choice on scale 1 = "Not at all" to 4 = "Very much" (means)

Within the groups of both Finnish- and immigrant origin youth, the boys estimated their social environment (i.e. parents, siblings, relatives, friends, teachers and student counsellors) having stronger influence on their school choice than girls; girls seemed

to make the choice more independently than boys¹¹. Girls with Finnish origin estimated their social environment having the least influence on their choice, while the immigrant-origin boys seem to be the most easily influenced by their environment. The differences were statistically significant and applied to all categories, excluding the influence of friends. It is noteworthy that the boys with immigrant origin in the sample were also the most unsure group about their choice after 9th grade (fig. 12).

Educational goals and expectations of the future

The inquiry about the youth's thoughts about the future included a set of 10 statements, through which the respondents envisioned their life as 21-year-olds (fig. 15¹²).

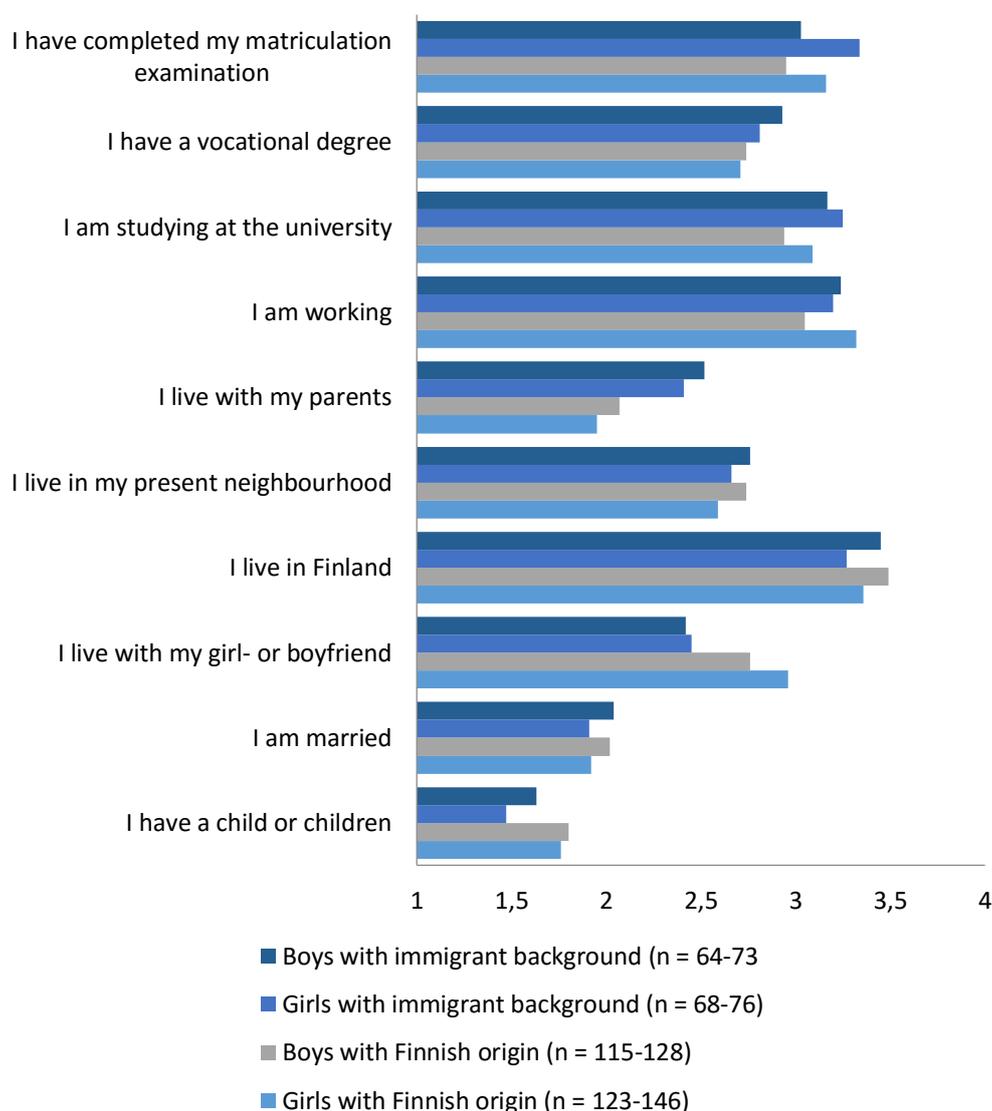


Figure 15. The youth's estimations about their life when 21 years old on scale 1 = "Definitely not" to 4 = "Definitely" (means) (see also Kalalahti et al., submitted)

As figure 15 illustrates, the youth's thoughts about the future were very similar, and generally there were not many statistically significant differences. By average, the youth were the most certain about living in Finland, working, having completed their

matriculation examination and studying in tertiary education. The youth with immigrant origin estimated living with their parents more likely while the Finnish-origin youth were seemed to be more oriented towards having a family, as they estimated higher likelihood for living with a partner and having children. These differences were statistically significant.

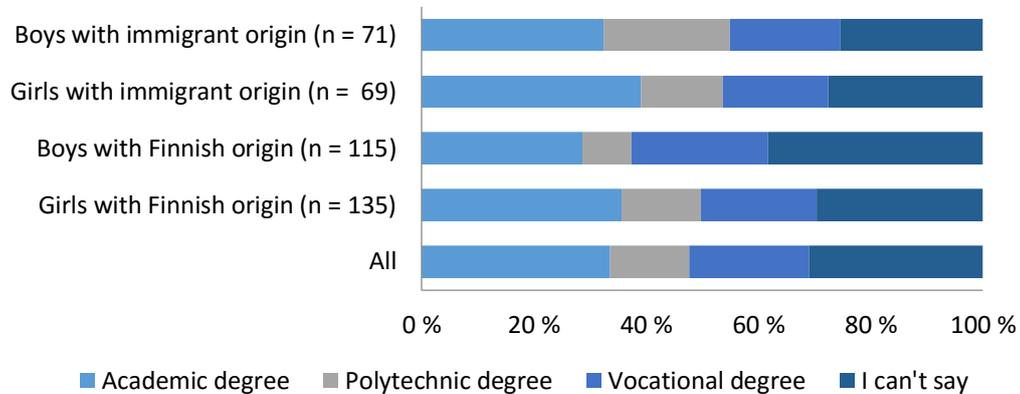


Figure 16. The youth's educational goals (%)

The youth's educational goals and work aspirations were inquired through open questions about the desired educational degree and occupation. Of all youth, a third were aiming for an academic degree, around 14 per cent for a polytechnic degree and slightly more than a fifth for a vocational degree (fig. 16¹³). Almost a third weren't able to say what degree they are aiming for. In general, girls were aiming for an academic degree more often than boys. Girls with immigrant orientation were especially strongly oriented towards academic education, while boys with Finnish origin had the lowest average on the aim for an academic degree. The boys with Finnish origin were also the most uncertain about their desired educational degree. Interestingly, the boys with immigrant origin seemed to be the most certain about their desired educational degree even though they were uncertain about their school choice after 9th grade (fig. 12).

The youth's work aspirations were categorized in two different ways: according to the educational degree required in their desired occupation (fig. 17) and more specifically by the field they were hoping to work in (fig. 18).

The youth's work aspirations (fig. 17¹⁴) were rather consistent with their educational goals (fig. 16). Of all youth, slightly more than a third wished for an occupation in the academic field, 15 per cent in the polytechnic field and roughly a fifth in the labour field. Slightly over 5 per cent were hoping to be self-employed in the future, working e.g. as a freelancer or an entrepreneur. The youth with immigrant origin were more oriented towards occupations in both the academic and the polytechnic field. They were also more aware about their work aspirations than the Finnish-origin youth, who were more often unable to name the kind of work they would like to do in the future. In general, girls were more interested in working in the academic field while Finnish-origin boys were the group least interested in academic work.

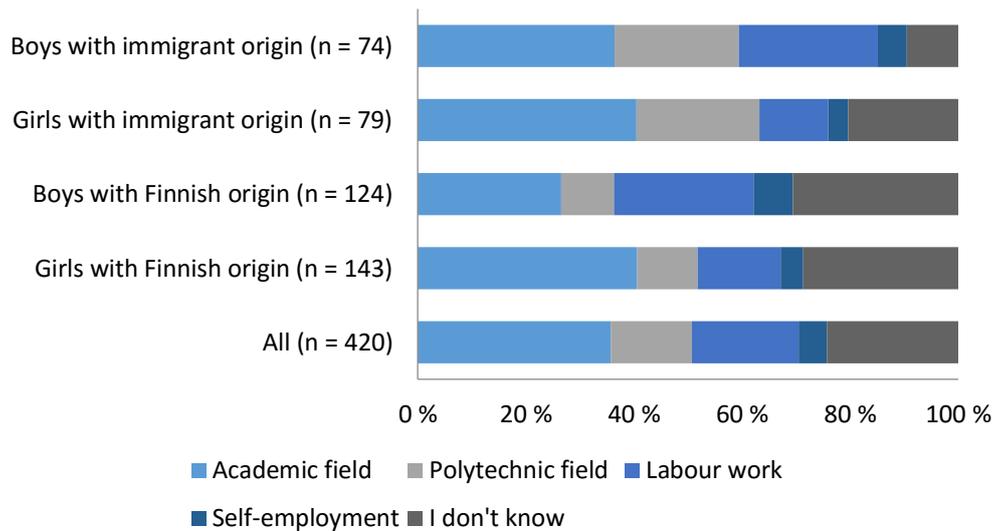


Figure 17. The youth's work aspirations categorized by the educational degree required (%)

Categorized in a more detailed way according to the field, the youth's work aspirations seemed to contain certain rather strongly gendered tendencies (fig. 18¹⁵). According to the data, labour work, health and social work and technical work seemed to be the fields most strongly divided by gender. Differences between immigrant-origin and Finnish-origin youth can be seen in relation to work aspirations in the field of office work, sales and service. The most significant difference between Finnish- and immigrant origin youth was, however, in the amount of respondents who were unable to name their work aspirations.

It is to be noted that not all fields are defined by the aforementioned dichotomies. An interesting example is the field of education, research and other public sector work, which seemed to attract immigrant-origin boys and Finnish-origin girls, but not so much Finnish-origin boys or immigrant-origin girls (fig. 18).

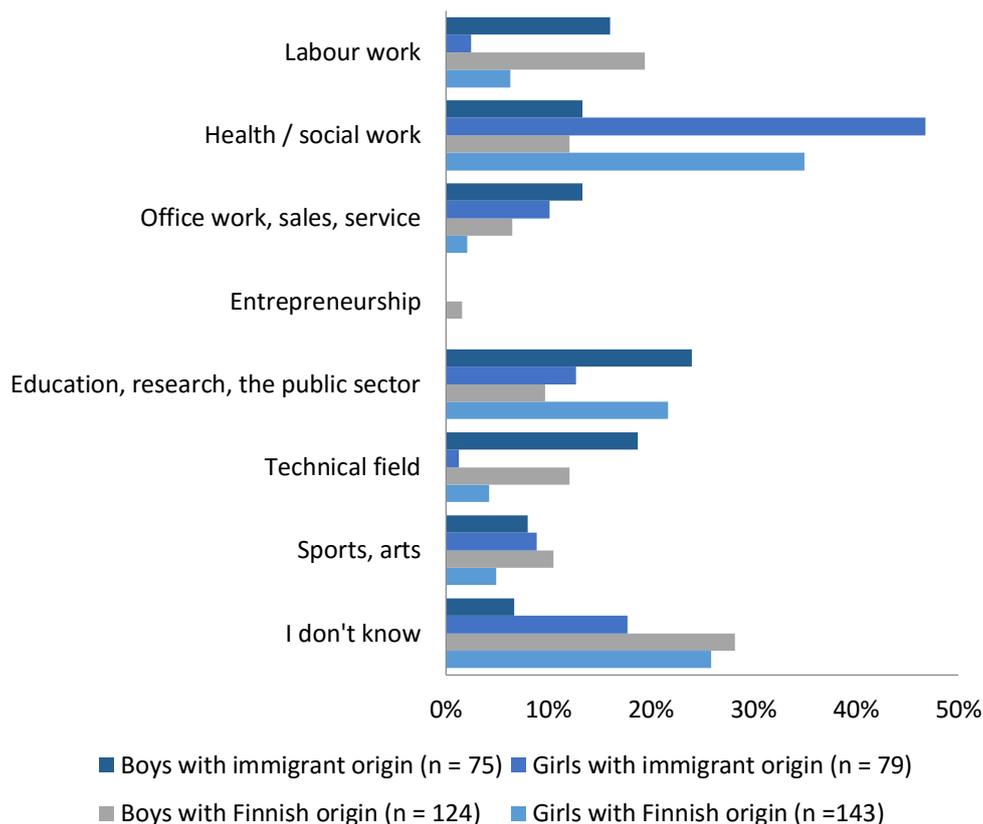


Figure 18. The youth’s work aspirations categorized by field (%)

In addition to the estimation of their life as 21-year-olds (fig. 15), the youth’s thoughts about the future were inquired through a set of 14 statements regarding e.g. their trust in education and future employment and their thoughts about the benefits of their multicultural capacities. Figure 19 presents the means of the respondents’ views that showed statistically significant difference between gender and origin. The youth with immigrant origin seemed to have a stronger trust in education: they believed more often that education has a positive effect on finding a steady job and on the general success in life. They were also more optimistic about the future benefits of their language skills.

As for future occupation, the immigrant-origin youth seemed more aware of their aspirations than the youth with Finnish origin (fig. 21). Especially sure about their desired occupation were the boys with immigrant origin, which can also be seen in figure 20. The immigrant-origin youth were more oriented towards seeking a job abroad, although the girls with Finnish considered it possible. Worrying about future income was divided by gender: although all youth expressed some concern over their future income, the girls averaged higher than boys.

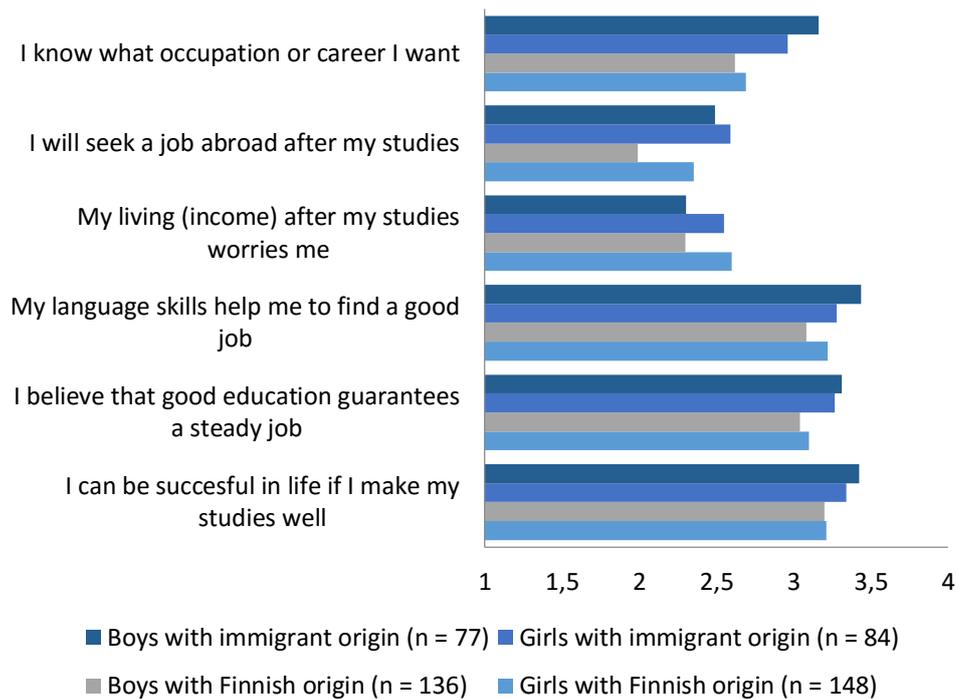


Figure 19. The youth's thoughts about future on scale 1 = "I totally disagree" to 4 = "I totally agree" (means)

Conclusions and future

According to the analysis, some differences can be seen between the Finnish-origin and the immigrant-origin youth. Despite experiencing more difficulties in school, the immigrant-origin youth seem to have more positive attitudes towards school and stronger orientations towards learning and good school achievements. Boys with immigrant origin stand out in these statistics, as they experience the most difficulties and yet have the most positive attitudes towards school and learning.

In general, the youth's future expectations and aspirations were rather similar. Girls seem to have a stronger orientation towards general upper secondary education and further to academic education and occupations than boys. The immigrant-origin youth, especially boys, seem to be well aware about their educational and work aspirations, whereas the Finnish-origin youth were more unsure about their future aspirations.

During the years 2015–2016 the first questionnaire will be supplemented with a survey about the youth's final school choices and their current life situations in the first year of upper secondary education. The statistical differences reported in this paper will be further examined in a qualitative manner through analyzing interview data.

Notes

¹ Preliminary findings are also presented with different methodological and theoretical framings in two papers in process: *Maahanmuuttajataustaisten nuorten toisen asteen koulutusvalinnat* (Kalalahti et al., submitted to Yhteiskuntapolitiikka) and *Immigrant transitions from lower secondary to upper secondary education in Finland – Future orientations and educational expectations* (Kalalahti et al., working paper presented in ECER 2015).

² $\chi^2(9) = 42,124$; $p = 0,000$

³ $F(3, 443) = 10,469$; $p = 0,000$

⁴ $\chi^2(6) = 35,138$; $p = 0,000$

⁵ Following teaching in the class $t(427) = -4,048$; $p = 0,000$

Performing tasks that require reading $t(430) = -2,225$; $p < 0,05$

Working in groups $t(431) = -4,073$; $p = 0,000$

Getting along with the teacher $t(432) = -4,326$; $p = 0,000$

⁶ Following teaching in the class $F(3, 429) = 9,261$; $p = 0,000$

Performing tasks that require reading $F(3, 432) = 4,373$ $p = 0,005$

Working in groups $F(3, 433) = 7,411$; $p = 0,000$

Getting along with the teacher $F(3,434) = 13,386$; $p = 0,000$

⁷ Learning orientation $F(3, 430) = 16, 486$; $p = 0,000$

Achievement orientation $F(3, 438) = 6,890$; $p = 0,000$

Avoidance orientation $F(3, 435) = 11,381$; $p = 0,000$

Peer orientation $F(3, 438) = 4,232$; $p < 0,05$

⁸ $\chi^2(6) = 19,189$; $p < 0,005$

⁹ I will apply to general upper secondary $F(3, 420) = 0,978$; $p > 0,05$

I will apply to vocational education $F(3, 401) = 1,538$; $p > 0,05$

I will continue to 10th grade $F(3, 379) = 0,897$; $p > 0,05$

I will seek a job $F(3, 374) = 3,426$; $p < 0,05$

I will take a gap year $F(3, 371) = 0,789$; $p > 0,05$

¹⁰ Parents/guardians $t(431) = -4,875$; $p = 0,000$

Student counsellor $t(410) = -3,549$; $p = 0,001$

Friends $t(411) = -,812$; $p > 0,05$

Siblings $t(414) = -5,843$; $p = 0,000$

Teachers $t(431) = -5,819$; $p = 0,000$

Relatives $t(420) = -4,431$; $p = 0,000$

¹¹ Parents $F(3, 433) = 10,668$; $p = 0,000$

Student counsellor $F(3, 412) = 5,356$; $p < 0,005$

Friends $F(3, 413) = 0,483$; $p > 0,05$

Siblings $F(3, 416) = 17,926$; $p = 0,000$

Relatives $F(3, 422) = 13,742$; $p = 0,000$

Teachers $F(3, 415) = 13,273$; $p = 0,000$

¹² I have completed my matriculation examination $F(3, 423) = 2,078$; $p > 0,05$

I have a vocational degree $F(3, 375) = 0,794$; $p > 0,05$

I am studying in the university $F(3, 403) = 2,107$; $p > 0,05$

I am working $F(3, 412) = 3,208$; $p < 0,05$

I live with my parents $F(3, 397) = 8,814$; $p = 0,000$

I live in my present neighbourhood $F(3, 387) = 0,918$; $p > 0,05$

I live in Finland $F(3, 405) = 2,045$; $p > 0,05$

I live with my girl- or boyfriend $F(3, 385) = 12,041$; $p = 0,000$

I am married $F(3, 402) = 0,995; p > 0,05$

I have a child or children $F(3, 416) = 4,360 p = 0,005$

¹³ $\chi^2(9) = 11,442; p > 0,05$

¹⁴ $\chi^2(12) = 33,401; p = 0,001$

¹⁵ $\chi^2(21) = 105,875; p = 0,000$