Course clear?

Concrete educational expectations and abstract career aspirations of immigrant- and Finnish-origin youth
Transit

- Transitions and educational trajectories of immigrant youth: A 4-year longitudinal study from compulsory to further education
- Funded by the Academy of Finland for years 2014–2018. Universities of Helsinki & Turku, Finland
- The mixed-method research draws upon survey (N = 445) and thematic interviews (n = 112), executed during the last year of comprehensive school (9th grade).
### Educational aspirations by upper secondary choice (survey data, \( n = 423 \))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Master's degree</th>
<th>Bachelor’s degree</th>
<th>Vocational degree</th>
<th>No plans for education</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finnish origin ((n = 250))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General upper secondary</td>
<td>49 %</td>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>36 %</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>20 %</td>
<td>64 %</td>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>16 %</td>
<td>3 %</td>
<td>16 %</td>
<td>66 %</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant origin ((n = 141))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General upper secondary</td>
<td>55 %</td>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>28 %</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>35 %</td>
<td>43 %</td>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>17 %</td>
<td>17 %</td>
<td>23 %</td>
<td>43 %</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( \chi^2=127.6(6), p=.000; \chi^2=51.0(6), p=.000 \)
Research task

- The aim is to analyse the linearity and certainty of the *concrete educational expectations* and *abstract career perceptions* of immigrant- and Finnish-origin youth, as well as to understand the reasoning and orientation preceding them.

Concrete educational expectations and abstract career perceptions

- **Concrete educational expectations**
  - Reflect the ‘diverse empirical realities’ of particular immigrant or minority groups
  - Expected enrolment to general academic or vocational track of the secondary education or indecisiveness

- **Abstract career aspirations**
  - Concern more general beliefs about education and its ability to foster social mobility
  - Envisioned professional or workers occupation

Immigrant paradox

- Immigrant parents and their children are widely reported to hold positive attitudes towards education as well as high academic aspirations, despite various difficulties that immigrant-origin youth face within education.

- Attitude-achievement paradox
  - Why immigrant-origin youth underperform while maintaining positive attitudes towards education?

- Aspiration-achievement paradox
  - The explanations underlying the high educational aspirations of immigrant-origin?

Context

• Finnish *universalistic transition regime*
  - Comprehensive school system
  - Post comprehensive routes that equally guarantees access to tertiary education
  - Counselling is widely institutionalised throughout all stages of education, training and transition into employment
  - Most “second chance” options aim to (re-)open access to the regular and recognised options, rather than adapt to low-status careers

• Nevertheless…
  - Youth of immigrant origin tend to have a higher probability of dropping out of secondary education
  - The probability of graduating from secondary education is lower for the young people with an immigrant background even after controlling prior school performance and the education level of parents
  - First-generation immigrant groups tend to be more likely to drop out of education than second-generation groups, and non-European groups more likely than European groups

## Career aspirations by upper secondary choice (interview data, n = 112)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Profession based on Master’s degree</th>
<th>Profession based on Bachelor’s degree</th>
<th>Occupation based on vocational degree</th>
<th>No plans for education or employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant origin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General upper secondary</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish origin</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish upper secondary</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant Origin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational upper secondary</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish origin</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish upper secondary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
General upper secondary school as a route to distinguished professions

• I want to go to medical school after my general upper secondary. I wish I would be able to take extra courses in math, physics and chemistry, and so on. (Immigrant-origin girl)

• Q: Why do you want to go to a general upper secondary school?
• A: I want to aim high with my studies, I want to go to a university, to study some entrepreneurial stuff. I want that, my whole family has gone to upper secondary school and I want to follow in their footsteps. (Immigrant-origin boy)
“Buying time” in general upper secondary school

- I don’t really know yet what I want to do, so it wouldn’t really make sense to go to vocational school. Some of my friends are going to a graphic designer thing [...] and then my other friend, she went to a business school or something like that [...] But for myself, I don’t know yet what I want to do and I think that, well, going to general upper secondary school maybe could give me a more clear view of everything, like better perspective. But I don’t really have anything that I’m really expecting, I’m just expecting to get a clearer view of what I want to be when I grow up, or something like that. (Immigrant-origin girl)
Any general upper secondary school will do

• I was just like, this school is good enough… All the general upper secondary schools are basically the same in the end, you study the same stuff. I have no other options, I just need to get into general upper secondary. (Immigrant-origin girl)
Vocational education as a short route to work?

Q: Where did you apply?
A: My choice was forest machine driver. As a general rule, I wasn’t very good at school.
Q: Why did you apply there?
A: Well, I like machines and all. And I like to be in forest all by myself.
Q: And your grade point average is around 7 [at scale from 4 to 10]?
A: Yes, I have raised my GPA about half a number. Think I will have a motivation boost when I get there. (Immigrant-origin boy)
The road less travelled: from vocational school via university of applied science to bachelor’s level profession

• I’ve decided to continue studying after vocational school. I’m going to a university of applied science and challenge myself.
• Q: So you’re going to finish the three-year vocational training first?
• A: Yeah, and then I’ll get a job for at least a year to get some work experience. And after that I’ll proceed to a university of applied science.
• Q: So you’ll get a polytechnic degree in nursing?
• A: Yes. (Immigrant-origin girl)
The road less travelled: from vocational school via university of applied science to bachelor’s level profession

- If I get a vocational qualification for electrical engineering or plumbing, whichever, if I get into a vocational school… Then I will definitely aim to a university of applied sciences within that field and be an engineer. […] My goal is to proceed [to tertiary education], and maybe it has been going a bit badly recently, or maybe not… It’s been okay. But if I get into a vocational school, it will be a fresh start, and I’ll do my best and proceed to a university of applied sciences from there. (Immigrant-origin boy)
Concluding remarks: different dynamics of aspirations and expectations

General (academic) upper secondary education:
• Youth of Finnish-origin are often “buying time”
• Youth of immigrant-origin: implications of aspiration-achievement paradox

Vocational upper secondary education
• For youth of Finnish-origin: vocational upper secondary education often a short pathway to workers’ occupations
• Youth of immigrant-origin: the lack of “blue-collar workers” identity, but vocational upper secondary education as a pathway to professions with lower tertiary education qualifications
Concluding remarks

• Youth of immigrant-origin are more determined with their abstract career aspirations
  • Generally more specific and ambitious targets in the labour markets than their Finnish-origin counterparts
  • More positive attitudes towards education in general?
  • Parental influence / immigrant optimism?
• Youth of Finnish-origin are more determined with their concrete educational expectations
  • Familiarity with the practices of admission system / forms of cultural and/or social capital?