



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).
- <http://blogs.helsinki.fi/transit-okl/about-transit-research/>



Educational aspirations by upper secondary choice (survey data, $n = 423$)

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



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)

		Profession based on Master's degree	Profession based on Bachelor's degree	Occupation based on vocational degree	No plans for education or employment
Immigrant origin	General upper secondary	19	5		3
Finnish origin		16	9	1	5
Immigrant Origin	Vocational upper secondary		15	9	11
Finnish origin			2	13	4



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?