

Migrants' children and education in Greece: Gender and academic outcomes

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The case of Greece

In the first part of this paper the presence of migrants' children in the greek educational system is in the question. In the second part the focus will be on the role of gender in migrant's students academic outcomes.

The last decades after 1990, the school population in Greece changes considerably due to the immigration flows. The data that we have in our disposal are collected by two governmental institutions. IPODE, the Institute for the Greek Diaspora Education and Intercultural Studies and the national survey about "Migrant students in greek education" (2004). And IMEPO, the Hellenic Migration Policy Institute and the research "Migrant students of secondary education in the region of Attica" (2005).

Migrant students rate

According to the data, migrant students comprise 6,9% of the total student population in nursery school, 8,6% in Primary school, while in Gymnasium they represent 6,9%. In Lyceum and in the Technological Educational Institutes the percentage of migrant students is 3,2%. The majority of these students -55%- are concentrated in the Primary school. As we can observe, there are significant discrepancies in the proportion of migrant students in the different levels of education. However, there is no clear interpretation concerning these discrepancies. In order to examine the dimensions of this "student leak" more data is needed, such as the number of migrants' children in Gymnasium during the previous school years. In addition, given that migration flows are recent in our country, migrants' children born in Greece still concentrate in the younger age groups of the demographic pyramid. Many migrants also left initially their children in their country of origin and brought them to Greece later on.

What is worthwhile to mention is that the data change considerably over the school years. If we compare the rates of the two researches, we draw significant conclusions. The total student population of secondary school in Attica is reduced by 8,9% and simultaneously the migrant students' rate is increased by 20,8%. In two years time the greek students are 33.000 less and the migrant students in full expansion.

Geographical concentration

There is a higher concentration in Attica. The half of the migrants' students population -49,73%- live in that region, more specifically in the center of Athens and they represent 9,90% of the total student population. Since migrants present geographical concentration in specific regions, there is subsequently a geographical concentration in schools too. That is the case in the city centers of both Athens in Attica and Thessalonica in Central Macedonia.

Nationality

According to data the majority of migrant students have the Albanian nationality. If we take the example of Attica where the percentage of migrants is particularly high, we observe that Albanians represent 80,02% of the migrant students. The second nationality is the Russian one with 2,80%, followed by the Bulgarian nationality -2,29%- and the Ukrainian one -2,23%-. The Albanian nationality has the greatest presence.

Gender and performance

In all levels of education, apart Lyceum, boys are more numerous than girls. They represent almost 52% and 48% respectively. This rate changes only after Gymnasium in favour of girls. We notice a considerable shift. 53,2% for girls and 46,8% for boys. Although more data and research work is needed in order to draw reliable conclusions about student leak, we could suggest that the precocious outing of boys from school and their access in the labor market is related to the discrepancies in the proportion of boys in the different levels of education.

On the other hand, data concerning the performance are also of great interest. If we consider the grades obtained, we observe that the academic outcomes of girls in Gymnasium and Lyceum are firmly better than those of boys. The big majority of boys -60%- obtained grades between 10-14, while half of the girls -53,1%- obtained grades up to 14. In comparison with boys, double number of girls managed to have the distinction "excellent".

Gender and academic outcomes

The role of gender has been particularly ignored in studies of immigrant children. However, it is very important to understand how, when and why it makes a difference to be male or female in immigrant children's adaptation. Boys lag behind girls in academic settings across many ethnic groups. Girls do better than boys in terms of grades, and attitudes toward school. Boys are less engaged, have lower level of interest and work effort, as well as lower career and educational goals. They are less likely to pursue further education over time (Lee, 2001, Faliciano & Rumbaut, 2005).

Why do immigrant girls outperform boys in educational settings and have higher educational and future aspirations? A number of factors may help to account for the observed gender differences in immigrant youth's educational adaptation.

Gendered socialization at home

Gendered socialization at home, particularly around monitoring and control, is another factor impacting educational outcomes. Immigrant parents usually place much stricter controls on their daughters than their sons, when regulating their children's activities outside the house. Children and parents indicate that girls are supervised much more strictly than boys in daily activities and dating. Young people have a clear perception of their parents double standards in supervision (Lee, 2001, Sarroub, 2001).

Such parental monitoring may have benefits to girls' schooling. It minimizes girls' exposure to violence and toxic environments. As a result of stricter parental control, girls are likely to spend more time at home, focusing more on their studies

than boys (Smith, 2002). On the other hand, immigrant girls have more positive attitudes toward school. These positive attitudes may stem from girls' view of school as a liberating social space, where they are free from their parents' heavy monitoring (Olsen, 1998) and their instrumental view of education as "empowerment against tradition" (Keaton, 1999).

Household responsibilities

Migration can challenge expectations about gender-related roles requiring renegotiations. Processes of immigration and resettlement may increase the burden of children's involvement in household responsibilities due to the necessity for both parents to work, and as well as parents' lack of English proficiency. Compared to their brothers, immigrant girls tend to have many more responsibilities at home (Valenzuela, 1999, Espiritu, 2001, Lee, 2001, Sarroub, 2001). Valenzuela (1999) found that, compared with boys, immigrant girls participate more in tasks that require "greater responsibility" and "detailed explanations". Their roles include translating, advocating in financial, medical and legal transactions and acting as surrogate parents. Girls are also significantly more likely to report responsibilities for cooking and childcare (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004).

Research findings on the impact of household responsibilities and educational outcomes are inconclusive. Excessive home responsibilities, some argue, put extra burden on immigrant girls and hinder their educational achievement (Morse, 2000, Ginorio & Huston, 2001). There is also evidence, however, suggesting that household responsibilities may not have negative association with educational outcomes (Fuligni & Pederson, 2002). While "filial responsibilities" sometimes compete with schooling pursuits, performing caretaking tasks also provide youth with "an increased sense of personal and interpersonal competence". Hence, this involvement may provide unanticipated benefits to girls who shoulder greater household responsibilities (Jurkovic et al., 2004).

Gendered relations at school

School is a highly gendered institution (Williams et al., 2002, Lopez, 2003). Girls and boys often have very different experiences in school. Boys tend to be more rambunctious. Teachers are less understanding of them and more likely to discipline them harshly than they would girls (Gillock & Midgley, 2000, Ginorio & Huston, 2001). A related critical difference between genders is in the realm of social relationships and support. Compared with boys girls are more likely to have friends who are serious about schoolwork and supportive of academics (Qin-Hilliard, 2003). Girls also have better relationships with their teachers and perceive more social support at school than boys do (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Peer pressure for boys to engage in problem behaviors is stronger than for girls (Smith, 2002). These deviant activities are often a response to negative experiences at school. Behaviors that gain respect with their peers often bring boys into conflict with their teachers. Immigrant boys are more likely to develop an "oppositional relationship" with the educational system. They are more likely also to perceive racism from the mainstream society and thus they are more pressured to reject school when compared to immigrant girls (Gibson, 1993).

Examining the role of gender can contribute to the field of immigration and

education. As Portes and Rumbaut (2001, p. 64) contend: “gender enters the picture in an important way because of the different roles that boys and girls occupy during adolescence and the different ways in which they are socialized. We expect gender differences to affect important adaptation outcomes such as language acculturation, aspirations and academic achievement”.

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