School Achievements of Ethnic Minority Youths: Factors behind the Majority-Minority Gap

Zuza Kusá

Institute for Sociology Slovak Academy of Sciences Bratislava, Slovakia

Abstract

The aim of the presentation is to deal with factors that contribute to the gap in school achievements among the majority and the minorities. The differences in school achievements of the majority and minority students are more or less well grasped by the official school statistics (category „ethnic origin” is not used in the majority of EDUMIGROM countries) and in the EDUMIGROM survey reports. In the beginning data from the comparative survey report will be provided to outline the existing difference in the communities and the countries under study. Then the findings from the Comparative community study report and the Slovak CSR will be introduced that might elucidate factors behind the gap in the school achievements. The intent is to “decompose” general statement that school systems are not sufficiently strong to overcome the impact of family background into (the description) of partial and interwoven organisational and interaction practices and arrangement of school environment that weaken the agency of the school and undermine its capacity to equalize conditions for good school achievements and prospects. These practices are such as the early streaming of pupils on the basis of their school results, organisational amnesia of absenting school policies of inter-ethnic cooperation, excessive reliance on parents’ sharing of schooling responsibilities, early dismissal of minority children from organised and supervised after-school activities and letting them develop protective subculture of unconcern, and so on. Illustrations will be drawn here mainly from the Slovak community study and schooling of Roma children in standard elementary schools. Attention will also be given to the differences and similarities in explanations of Roma pupils lagging behind that are provided by teachers, parents and pupils. Finally it will be shown that the teachers’ explanation attributing the key responsibility to Roma parents “insufficient understanding of the value of education” tends to colonise Roma pupils’ and parents’ understanding of the factors behind the school achievement gap. Final conclusion will be that this discursive dominance constitutes another factor of fixing and perpetuating the gap among the school achievements.