Exploring young peoples’ experiences and perceptions on their educational trajectories in Antwerp (Flanders)

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Although the overall rate of early school leaving (ESL) in Flanders is close to the EU2020 target, large inequalities still exist between localities and between social and ethnic groups. Flanders’ two largest cities - Antwerp and Ghent - have a much higher rate of ESL (respectively 24% and 17%) than the Flemish average. Furthermore, students from socially disadvantaged and ethnic minority families tend to be much more at risk of ESL than their native peers from higher SES families. In Flanders, several initiatives have been developed outside of regular educational institutions to allow early school leavers to obtain an ISCED 3 qualification via compensatory pathways, such as the examination commission, second chance education, and part-time work-based vocational education and training.

In this paper we look at the narratives of youngsters in Antwerp (Flanders) to explore how they navigate the educational landscape. Given the high rate of ESL in Antwerp, this city is a particularly interesting site to focus our study on. The analysis of interviews (n=24) and focus group discussions (n=40) with youngsters in 4 regular secondary schools and 4 institutions that provide compensatory pathways, and interviews (n=8) with early school leavers that are not in education or training, allow us to capture the voice of these youngsters and explore the experiences and perceptions of their educational trajectories, and how these influence the choices they make. The respondents in compensatory pathways and those outside of education and training have in common that they both left regular secondary education without obtaining a diploma. While the former continue their secondary education in an alternative learning arena, the latter left education altogether – at least temporarily. Exploring the experiences and perceptions of these different groups will provide interesting insights in how and why specific compensatory pathways provide a viable alternative to attain an educational qualification for some, but will not necessarily do so for others. In the exploratory analysis attention is paid to whether the narratives indicate differences in experiences, perceptions and choices made between different social groups, focussing particularly on the ethnic cultural background of the respondents. Given the fact that students with an ethnic minority background are disproportionately represented in the group of early school leavers, it is relevant to explore whether compensatory pathways can provide a viable alternative for this particularly vulnerable group.

References


