



I go to Teachers Conferences, but I do Not Understand What the teacher is saying”: Somali Parents `Perception of the Swedish School

Ali Osman

Department of Education, Stockholm University

Background

- Somalia has been “failed state” for the last three decades.
- Those children who were born at start of the civil war are today in lae 30s. While thos that were in their teens are today in their early 40s or late 40s and are parents today.
- They have lived their early lives in a non-functioning state, with major shortcomings in school, health care, justice, infrastructure, and so on.
- The have short or no education and have experienced years of war, personal trauma, years in refugee camps, low education
- In Sweden they meet a historically high-tech knowledge intensive labour market and a high demands on the individual

State of Research on School Performance of migrant Children

Swedish and international research generally shows that immigrants and descendants of immigrants are:

- Investing in tertiary education, particularly in the field of science, engineering and medicine (Crul & Heering, 2008; HSV, 2005).

State research

Studies also show that the underachievement among different categories of immigrants is a result of:

a) parents socioeconomic background

b) family and community expectation vis-à-vis education irrespective of the parents' ethnic background (Benard, 2004; Fraser, 2004; Williams, 2012).

State of research

c) From the 1980s and onwards, there is a large number of ethnographic studies revealed that micro-level practices (such as teacher's practice, attitudes, racism and discrimination etc) contributed to the underperformance of migrant students in the United Kingdom (Archer & Francis, 2005).

State of Research

- **However, there are exceptions: for instance, Iranian and Bosnian** academically outperform other ethnic groups or even native White Swedish children (Cruel & Heering, 2008; Fången, 2010; Osman, 2013; Osman & Andersson, 2011).
- Children of Somali refugees, compared to other similar ethnic or national groups, are at the bottom of the league (Osman, 2012). However, there are some studies that show that they perform as well as native students if they come from families with high cultural capital.

The research questions addressed

The study adresses the following research questions:

- 1) What kind of obstacles do the parents encounter in supporting a proactive academic performance of their children, and what strategies do they have in order to overcome these obstacles?
- 2) What types of social network are the Somali parents embedded in, and how does this affect their relation with the school teachers?

Analytical Framework

Ideational support – the ability of parents and other influential figures to inculcate a pro-academic norm in these students.

Material support – material resources such as tutor, home conditions, leisure activities etc.

Bridging support – the linkage between ideational and material support (linking the child to others in their parents network).

Osman & Niclas

Method

Ethnographic method:

- Interviews
- Observations
- Teacher notes and reflections

The Somali Parents and Children studied

Ahmed

Came to Sweden when he was four years old. Lives with 4 other siblings and single mother. He is exhibiting anti-social behaviour and not performing well in school work

Teräs, Eliasson, Osman

Mohamed

Is 11 year old. Has only lived in Sweden for one year. Has had limited school experience before. Parents are currently unemployed and both have post tertiary education. Difficultues in understanding Swedish. Has difficulties to sit still and is involved in many conflicts with other students. Has committed parents who support him.

Pa

Result

The Parents had high educational expectation despite the fact that these parents were functionally illiterate .

Teachers as experts

“We trust the teachers to do their job. I am not in a position to judge the teachers whether they are doing a good job or not, and if our children are not performing as well as the teachers expect, I expect them to tell me”.

The role of the parent

“My role as a parent was to see that the children went to school with a “full stomach” and that the teachers “do their job” – teach my child. I could not help them with their school and trusted that the teachers were doing their best to teach my children.

The encounter with the school/teachers

The parents experience of the encounter with the school is that it is teacher-driven. An example is the teacher parent conference

In the conference I am often told that my child is doing well in the school and I leave the conference, often believing that my child is doing well academically. At the end of the academic year I find out that my child is not performing well academically. I am presented with a fait accompli. In the teacher conference I want the teacher to tell me how my child is progressing academically, how I can help him if he is not performing well, what help I can expect from the school or the teacher, etc. These are the issues I am interested in but, because of the nature of the conference, and my language ability in Swedish, I cannot communicate my concerns to the teachers.

Conflictual parent –child relation

The relation between the parents and their children was characterized by conflicts. The parents felt that they constantly had to negotiate with their children on what they could or could not have. One pointed: “If my child does not respect, he will not respect the teacher or any other adult”

Conclusion

1)The parents did no have relevant social network that could provide ideational, bridging and material support in relation to their school life. But also in dealing with anti-school behavior.

2) The perception of teachers as expert and the role they is due to a) the parents in this study were functional illiterate and perceived that they had nothing to contribute.

b) Language barrier- even if they tried to engage with the teachers they perceived they could not make themselves understood or understand the teachers.

Self exclusion in relation to the school

Self-exclusion or minimal contact with the school is a consequence of experiences of the Somali school system. In Somalia, the school and home were two distinct worlds, with different roles. The teachers in Somalia are the experts, and the role of the parents is to ensure that the children leave home for school.

- To advocate and support children of newly arrived parents requires parents but also the school to help the parent to understand the rules of the game. Provide the parent a safe condition to engage with the school and teachers.

» Thanks

» Questions