

Introduction

This study considers the role of migration and group-specific ethnic penalties in minority groups' life chances. More specifically it focuses on the ethnic and class inequalities in educational attainment in Belgium among young adults, namely 19- to 21-year-olds of the second generation and their native peers. Educational attainment is measured by considering the delay in age when graduating from secondary education and the extent of that delay.

Better education is often mentioned as a strategy for integration, especially in the labour market. If second generation immigrants as an increasing share of the population pass the educational system being systematically disadvantaged, this may justify the consideration of policy interventions. Various studies (e.g. Crul & Vermeulen, 2003) have examined ethnic inequalities in education. In Belgium these have shown that children from ethnic backgrounds perform worse than other children, the extent however is often different for the various ethnic groups (Lesthaeghe, 2000; Neels, 2000; Timmerman e.a., 2003).

The association between social class and educational attainment has also been extensively documented (e.g. Duncan & Blau, 1967; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1991). Minority ethnic groups are heavily concentrated towards the bottom of the class structure and it might therefore be expected that many of the inequalities in performance can be explained by the differential distributions of the major ethnic groups across the occupational framework. How the effect of social class varies by ethnicity is less clear.

Additional one can expect immigrant children to start the education process with a disadvantage caused by their parents' lack of familiarity with the local schooling system (Riphahn, 2003). There are several reasons to expect that the extent of this disadvantage has declined over time and over the generations. On the one hand immigrant groups have now produced an adult second generation, socialized in the receiving society and having the potential to challenge or cross boundaries that are more or less taken for granted in the case of its immigrant parents (Alba, 2005). In other words, later born children of immigrants are more likely to have more assimilated parents who will provide their children with better tools for success. On the other hand one can expect the Belgian host society to have become accustomed to a considerable proportion of immigrants in its population and society itself will anticipate the needs of the immigrant group better, both in education policies as well as in integration in general (Riphahn, 2003).

The questions addressed here are first whether a comparable proportion of Belgium's second generation obtains their secondary education degree at the same age and whether there is diversity within the second generation regarding the explanation of the different educational achievements. Second we focus on regional variation and examine which tracking practice appears to be more successful for the second generation. Finally we focus on whether the educational gap declines and investigate whether the explanatory model converges over time.

A framework to integration

Classic assimilation theory is based on the premise that the process of individual adaptation leads to the convergence of the individual and the group characteristics with those of the host society over time (e.g. Park, 1950; Gordon, 1964; Alba, 2005). This implies that the second generation would be much closer to their peers from the

host community in educational terms.

Others argue that the integration experiences of many immigrant groups remain blocked in spite of increased knowledge of the language or of the host society's culture and traditions. Veenman (1996) describes it as the deficit-thesis which states that the ethnic gap in education can be accounted for in terms of deficient qualifications.

Today we are more sceptical to these structured patterns of assimilation. We came to realise that there is no general matrix that can capture the assimilation process for all societies and for all ethnic minorities. Its heterogeneity (diversity in socio-economic traits) and its heteropraxis (diversity in pace and domain under consideration) have become widely accepted (Lesthaeghe, 2000).

Portes and his colleagues (Portes & Zhou, 2001[1993]; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) introduced the theory of segmented assimilation which describes the various patterns of adaptation followed by different ethnic minorities resulting in convergence or divergence with the host society and which applies specifically to the second generation. Three variants are distinguished. The first classical variant concerns immigrants with a greater than average human capital and who are (partly because of that) positively received by the government and the general population. Their children usually are quite successful. The second variant applies to immigrants with little human capital. The host society isn't as hospitable upon their arrival, condemning them to live in poorer neighbourhoods where they come into contact with native minorities resulting in a process of downward assimilation. The third variant or so-called linear ethnicity may be experienced when the solidarity of co-ethnic communities strengthens the immigrants and provides them with social capital that compensates for their lack of human capital (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Critics of this model argue that the perspective may erroneously attribute poor outcomes primarily to racialization when they may stem from low social class (including poor educational backgrounds) or factors that slow the rate of mobility. They also point out that a model whose empirical assessment has often had to stop with the second generation (particularly a young second generation) may misinterpret oppositional attitudes commonly found among the young and misconstrue the pace of assimilation. Moreover, empirical assessments of segmented assimilation theory have often had to focus on the second generation, a point before enough time has elapsed for full economic integration to occur (Brown & Dean, 2006).

Crul & Vermeulen (2003) found that this typical US model of segmented assimilation cannot be transposed to the European settings without further preface. They find that the Turkish second generation seems to qualify for the variant of upward mobility through ethnic cohesion. The Moroccan second generation however doesn't fit the pattern and they conclude that the segmented assimilation model doesn't suffice to describe the European second generation.

The Belgian context

Various research has shown that ethnic underachievement in Belgium is quite common and that ethnic minorities are over-represented in vocational training (Lesthaeghe, 2000; Neels, 2000; Timmerman e.a., 2003). In comparison to other OECD countries Marks (2006) found the achievement gap for the second generation in Belgium among the largest.

Turks are more likely to take up technical or vocational training and are mostly leaving school after graduating secondary education. Moroccans on the other hand are more likely to take up general subjects at the secondary level, but show higher proportions of dropping out (Neels, 2000).

Educational attainments differ substantially and are subject to regional variation. This regional variation is a result of differing policies, since Belgian education is in the hands of the three regions (Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia) but also of differing

tracking practices despite of common hierarchical structures in education. In comparison with students in the Dutch-speaking Flanders, students who fail their exams in the French-speaking Wallonia are more often repeating class and are less often reoriented 'downward' towards vocational tracks (Ouali & Réa, 1994).

Recent research with the Belgian second generation has shown that ethnic disadvantage is perpetuated from one generation to the next through mechanisms of class disadvantage. Evidence was found of cumulative ethnic and class disadvantage, especially among Turkish and Moroccan minorities (Phalet, Deboosere & Bastiaenssen, 2007).

Data and methods

The data used in this study are the 1991 and the 2001 Census. The exhaustivity of the data enables us to map the position of the youngsters in detail without having to worry about the number of students in our group.

Different ethnic groups are identified through ancestry rather than nationality. Because of the enhanced possibilities for ethnic minorities and their children to obtain the Belgian nationality, nationality in combination with nationality at birth no longer suffice to identify youngsters of immigrant origin. By taking both their and their parents' nationality at birth into account, various migrant groups are identified and distinguished.

Most research on intergenerational mobility has focused on the role of the father as the main determinant of social class origin. This study uses a scheme that includes social class of both parents. Social background is measured through occupational status, profession, educational achievement and quality of housing of the parents. Very often the nature of self-reported earnings are unreliable, therefore the quality and ownership of housing provide a better estimation of material wealth.

Furthermore we control for gender, region, educational track and householdtype.

Educational achievement is analysed by comparing the results of logistic regression for the various ethnic groups both in 1991 and in 2001.

Preliminary results

We expect analysis to show that gender, region and social background insufficiently explain educational underachievement and provide evidence of differential processes operating not only for different ethnic groups but also for different moments in time.

Based on preliminary research considering the track of secondary education with 16- to 18-year-olds we expect the impact of parental resources as powerful explanatory variables to remain for both allochthonous and native young adults. Ethnic minorities still have significantly higher probabilities to end up in middle/technical and lower/vocational tracks controlling for socio-economic background. However, heterogeneity appears to be the key word in explaining educational trajectories for various ethnic backgrounds: regarding the effects of the socio-economical covariates, regarding the effects of region and regarding changes over time.

This research also showed that the impact of socio-economic background was smaller for the Moroccan and Turkish second generation in comparison to their native peers, with the Italians holding a middle position. We expect findings to show that this holds when examining the delay in age at graduation.

On top of that important regional differences were found both for the educational tracks of the different ethnic minorities and for the impact of socio-economical explanatory variables. Accordingly expectations are to find evidence of significant regional interactions and of the different tracking practices in the regions affecting the school careers of ethnic minorities differently.

We expect analysis to show indications of convergence over time between natives and ethnic groups as well as between the regions.

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