

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND AND THE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: KEY FACTORS IN STUDENTS' TRANSITION FROM COMPULSORY TO POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION. A CASE- STUDY

Dr Eleftheria Argyropoulou
School of Education
University of Crete
Greece
eargirop@edc.uoc.gr

This is the first report of findings of an **on-going case study research project** on the St. Vlassios Technical Vocational Senior Upper Secondary School.



The research project started as an “initiative” to help the school management team to overcome serious students’ discipline and order problems by building a coherent set of relations and cooperation between the school and the students’ parents.

It is necessary to get to know the parent characteristics before attempting to encourage involvement.

The research hypotheses

- Transition from Low Secondary to Upper Secondary Tec Voc is a field where parental involvement can be traced.
- Parental involvement can be direct and indirect.
- Socio-economic factors constitute evidence for indirect parental involvement
- Socio-economic factors, as indicators of parental involvement, are easily traced during the transition from Low Secondary to Upper Secondary (post- compulsory) Technical Vocational Education.

Research Questions

- **Low social background and lack of interest result in disorder and lack of discipline**
- **Students' socio-economic background affects their transition to Upper Secondary Technical Vocational School**
- **School underachievement in Lower Secondary affects students' transition to Upper Secondary Technical Vocational School**
- **Underachieving students' parents encourage transition to Technical Vocational Upper Secondary**
- **Parents do not have enough information about the General Upper Secondary and the Technical Vocational Upper Secondary.**
- **Parents' job affects children transition to Technical Vocational Upper Secondary**
- **Low socio-economic background does not permit parents to devote time and get involved with their children's school activities**
- **Parents' low income does not allow low performance students to get extra help with their homework, so underachievement is prolonged.**
- **Effective school management and leadership is a key stone to students' school performance**
- **Effective school management and leadership contributes to parent-school cooperation**

The school profile

Entries	Entry content	Remarks
Name	St. Vlassios Upper Secondary Technical and Vocational School	
Location	Borough in the of	territory, suburban
Borough socio-economic status	Densely populated Low income, Less privileged	High immigrant rate High Roma rate (areas around the borough)
Research period	School year 2008-2009	
Number of students (June-September enrollment)	340	
Drop-outs throughout the year	10	Drop-out reason: unknown
Changed school	10	Reason of change: searching for a better school environment, went to General Upper Secondary
Took part in the research	256	born between 1988 and 1993 year 1: 106 year 2: 87 year 3: 61
Boys	218	
Girls	33	

Technical-Vocational streams	Mechanics [several sub specialists] Electricians Electronic Engineers Designers	Sex per Tec-Voc stream: Designers: 23, all girls. [Also, 10 girls are in year 1, no stream classification] The rest: all boys
Students' origin	Greeks: 63.67% Foreigners: 36.33%	Mostly from or other or ex-Soviet Union countries
Head teacher [school principal]	1	
Deputy Head teachers	2	
Teachers	60	
Sports activities	None	
Cultural activities	5 throughout the year	On national and religious occasions, according to law. No parents invited

The school management and leadership background

- Head teacher: unable to perform his duties, finally resigned in June 2009
- Practically, the management of the school was performed by the two Deputy Heads.
- Older teachers, discouraged by the school situation [climate], asked to be transferred to other schools. New teachers, mostly young and inexperienced were positioned in the vacant posts.
- High degree of students' disobedience and behavioral problems
- Absence of "Parents' Committee".

The research design

□ **Various types of information needed**

1. **Understanding the school context.** Interviews (either semi-structure or free style) with the two Deputies and some senior teachers provided information and insight about further investigation into students and parents' profiles
2. **Investigating the students' socio-economic background, primarily, through their parents' profiles**
3. Impossible to interview parents
4. **Students questionnaire was preferred**

Today presentation



Contains findings from:

- the Deputies and a senior teacher interviews
- the students questionnaire

The students' questionnaire

A detailed 80-item, forced-choice questionnaire was used.

Questions were in four main sets:

- **P:** personal, demographic questions
- **A:** general questions on the students' reasons of choosing the Technical Vocational stream, the information they received from school before and after their choice, their information sources, students' school performance, and school interference with students' improvement
- **B:** questions about students' parents' profile, i.e. age, origin, education level, marital status, job, interference with children's school achievement and transition choice
- **C:** students' choice to work along with their studies, parents and peers' interference with their decision to work

The questionnaire conceptual framework

- Upper Secondary Technical Vocational Education functions either as a “safety net” (increasing employment opportunities after graduation) or reproduction of social stratification (Shavit and Muller, 2000)
- Less privileged social environment is usually identified in educational research through a number of indicators connected with income rates, education level, rate of unemployment, job classification, family structure, ethnic minorities, etc. (Wood and Baker, 1999, Otto and Atkinson, 1997, Owings et al, 1994)
- In previous research (Epstein, 1987) parental involvement has been identified in three ways:
 1. they build a regular communication “channel” with the school,
 2. they participate in school governance
 3. they take an active part in the learning process activities at home

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 1

Students' reasons for going into Technical Vocational Education

n	REASON	%
1	very low performance	39.5
2	Tec Voc Upper Secondary studies easier than those in General Upper Secondary	50.8
3	do not like “classical-theoretical” subjects [General U.S. curriculum], or, do not understand these subjects	57.4
4	do not like “science-math” subjects [General U.S. curriculum], or, do not understand these subjects	42.7
5	do not like studying at all, find school boring	35
6	Have Special Educational Needs [dyslexia, dyscalculia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, etc.]	12.4
7	Wish to obtain specific work skills and find a job immediately after Tec- Voc school graduation	63.3.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 2

Information about transition, curricular choice and misconceptions

- **Misconception:** the easiness of the Tec Voc Curriculum
- **Information about transition to Tec-Voc Upper Secondary**

Question content	Rates before transition %	Rates after transition %
Job orientation subjects	[Lower Secondary] 42.9	[Upper Secondary] 27.1
School Head	[Lower Secondary] 12.5	[Upper Secondary] 9.8
Teachers		[Upper Secondary] 40
Parents	14.5	12.2
Friends- Peers	34.9	
School visits to industrial and professional sites	[Lower Secondary] 17.3	[Upper Secondary] 15.3
Tec-Voc graduates (older peers)	39.2	26.7
No information at all	11	15.7
Individuals working in jobs relevant to the Tec-Voc subjects		24.3
Family business relevant to the Tec-Voc subjects		11

Deputy 1 interview

- “New students’ **parents often tell us that their children were guided to choose Tec Voc Upper Secondary by their teachers in Low Secondary. Low Secondary teachers involved in Job Orientation are incapable of providing concrete updated information.** They have never studied or made a detailed research on what is available in the job market and on how Tec Voc Education supports it. Most of them have ever worked in a Tec Voc School. They do not know what the content of their own teaching subject is in a Tec Voc context. For example, students need a very high Math and Physics learning background to deal with High Technology issues in Electronics or Engineering.
- They [the Job Orientation teachers] often rely on obsolete knowledge going back to their own school days. They are usually appointed to teach Job Orientation in order to complete their weekly working schedule when they are short of teaching hours in their own subjects. Thus, what **they do is to reproduce a fixed idea that poor performing and undisciplined students are not capable of going into the General track, so they should follow the Tec Voc track** as if the Tec Voc schools are the garbage can of Education. Such an attitude underlines their own incompetence to get closer to these students and help them improve.....
-SEN ... Ah! Another misconception! They say children with Special Educational Needs cannot cope with hard study so they should be occupied with skills and craft providing subjects. Then, **Tec Voc schools have been confused with SEN schools.** This also proves a general lack in theoretical background and appropriate teacher training regarding SEN and Inclusive Education. You see, here, we have to fight various enemies...”
- D1 int1 p.B

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 3

Parental Involvement Direct

1.The parental direct involvement in the transition process

REASONS	Father %	Mother %
To find a job immediately after school	25.7	46
Poor school performance so far	15.1	27
No money for further studies	7.8	14
other (unstated) reasons	10.6	19

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 3

Direct Parental Involvement

2. Parents' involvement with the improvement of students' school performance

	Parents offering help	35%
HOW	Extra help in an organized prep school (less costly)	36%
	Private tuition (more costly)	22%
	Help provided by elder brothers or sisters	41.9%
	Parents not offering help	65%
WHY	They do not care	8.1%
	They believe their children could manage on their own if they were not lazy	69.1%
	They have no money	22.8

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 3

Direct Parental Involvement

3. Parents – School Communication

- Communication between parents and school has also been rare. During the past school year the ex-Head did not take any initiative to build relations and/ or cooperation with parents.
- Parents came to school only on the students' progress report day.
- Deputy 2 interview extract

“Parents in our school are very difficult to communicate with. They work long hours.....

In the past we used to organize cultural events, students playing theatre, traditional dances nights, painting exhibitions, etc. Teachers liked to get involved, too.

This year [2008-2009] was a disaster. It ruined whatever we have tried for so hard...

Progress reports day was our only chance to get in touch with parents. Parents came that day, almost 85% of them, a quite high number, but they refused even to greet him [the ex- Head]. I do not blame them”.

D2 int2 p.G-L

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 4

Indirect Parental Involvement

1. Parents' education level

Level of education	Father	Mother
Low [Primary and/or Lower Secondary School]	51.1%	46.8%
Medium [Upper Secondary, General or Technical Vocational]	33.9%	38.2%
High [Tertiary Technical Vocational or Military School]	11.7%	9.1%
Higher [University]	3.3%	5.7%

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 4

Indirect Parental Involvement

2. Parents' job

Type of job	Father %	Mother %
Civil servant [mostly working for the local borough departments]	17.6	12.1
Private sector employee [mostly working for companies or industries in the borough area]	31.8	32.4
Self-employed [Owner of small business, such as: newsagent's kiosks, greengroceries, hairdressers, etc.]	21.3	5.9
Working in a building site [Builders, carpenters, plumbers, etc.]	14.6	0.4
Pensioner	6.3	1.3
Artist	0.5	1.7
Temporarily unemployed	4.6	4.4
Housewives	-	41.4
Unable to work Prisoner, drug user, individual with special needs]	2.3	0.4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 4

Indirect Parental Involvement

3. Parents' marital status- Family structure patterns

- 50.2% of parents live together (married couples)
- From the rest 49.8%

9%	Live separated or divorced	Certain cases with one member living in Greece and the other one in the country of origin
2.7%	Were left behind in the country of origin	Fathers 2.3%, mothers 0.4%
5.9%	Have started new families	
7.9%	One member dead	5.9% fathers dead, 2% mothers dead

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 4

Indirect Parental Involvement

4 . Students working along with their studies /a

- **58.1% of the students work along with their studies. It was their own decision**
- ***Their reasons for work***

To contribute to the family budget	34.7%
To be financially independent	48.3%
To put school knowledge in practice	8.5%
To make their dreams come true (buy a mobile, a CD player, etc)	28.9%
To acquire work experience	7.1%

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 4

Indirect Parental Involvement

4 . Students working along with their studies /b

“It is not only their families’ financial status that dictates this behavior. They show a great degree of independence in their school life. They decide for themselves, what to do, what to pursue in the course of life. I cannot say that this is good for them. Very often, their parents seem absent from any activity.

I think it has also to do with their family background, the relationship among family members.

I try to understand the way they think but it is very difficult to approach them.

Sometimes, they appear to cluster and make groups to fight for petty things, for example to “bargain” a day excursion or to support a classmate who has made a mistake and a teacher punishes him; they support him by providing a false excuse, on which they have decided and they remain consistent. Some other times, they react in a very mature way”.

Physics subject manager int.1 p.1

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 4

Indirect Parental Involvement

5. Cross tabulations

Cross tabulations were possible only between the entries of students' reasons for choosing the Tec voc track (Table 2) and the students' reasons for work (Table 7). Other crosstabs did not provide reliable results because the number of entries in each variable was smaller than the expected.

The first set of crosstabs (T.2 –T.7) revealed certain statistically significant answers:

- Students who work in jobs different than the school specialty/field are more interested in a finding a job suitable to their studies
- Students who work to contribute to the family budget show a greater intention to obtain specific work skills and find a job immediately after graduation
- Also students who work to be financially independent or those who work to make their dreams come true show a greater intention to obtain specific work skills and find a job immediately after graduation

Commentary: Their choice of Technical Vocational Upper Secondary track in connection to their immediate working decision seems to be **need-driven**. In this aspect, the above evidence might be assessed as an indirect indicator of poor socio-economic background.

Results 1 a:

testing our research questions

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	RESULTS
Low social background and lack of interest result in disorder and lack of discipline	None of the above data provide a justification for this research question. It is a common belief but it cannot be justified by the research data so far
Students' socio-economic background affects their transition to Upper Secondary Technical Vocational School	Results show that is partly true. It is possibly true only in cases of poorer families whose children work to support the family budget and wish to have a steady qualified job immediately after school graduation
School underachievement in Lower Secondary affects students' transition to Upper Secondary Technical Vocational School	This statement was justified by the research results. Actually, it appears to be the major reason for the transition to Tec Voc Education, in our case. There is evidence that Job Orientation teachers in Low Secondary guide poor performance students to opt for Tec Voc Upper Secondary
Underachieving students' parents encourage transition to Technical Vocational Upper Secondary	According to our research plus previous research evidence this seems to be true. Mothers seem to be more involving than fathers.

Results 1 b:

testing our research questions

<p>Parents do not have enough information about the General Upper Secondary and the Technical Vocational Upper Secondary</p>	<p>This is not explicitly stated but it can be inferred by the fact that parents are not the principle source of information about transition and that their education level does not allow them much knowledge about Tec Voc Education content</p>
<p>Parents' job affects children transition to Technical Vocational Upper Secondary</p>	<p>This is not explicitly stated, but it can be inferred by the fact that they do not keep in close touch with the school. It is attributed to their long working hours</p>
<p>Low socio-economic background does not permit parents to devote time and get involved with their children's school activities</p>	<p>It is implied. There is evidence that this explanation may be true</p>
<p>Parents' low income does not allow low performance students to get extra help with their homework, so underachievement is prolonged.</p>	<p>This statement proved –to a significant degree-true, according to students' answers. Parents of underachieving students tend to think that offering them help by paying a tutor is a lost cause as their children are reluctant to study hard</p>

Results 1 c:

testing our research questions

Effective school management and leadership is a key stone to students' school performance	Research results so far do not permit such conclusions. It may be inferred but there is not relevant evidence.
Effective school management and leadership contributes to parent-school cooperation	There is some evidence for this statement being true. Ex Head's leading style has not encouraged the parent school cooperation

Conclusion

- This case study examined aspects of spontaneous parental involvement.
- Since this is a case study research project, results are more probabilistic and explanatory, though similar to results of previous relevant research, rather than general.
- Socio-economic background seems to be a key factor, though indirect, in the transition process from compulsory to post-compulsory Technical Vocational Education
- The prevalent factor in the transition process seems to be the young adolescent's school achievement
- School achievement seems to be strongly affected by the students' socio-economic background
(family income- parents' job, parents' education level, family structure)

Thank you

