

EDUCATION AND LABOR MARKET IN MODERN AND FUTURE WORLD

DOI: 10.22363/09669-2019-352-360

THE ROLE OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONS IN THE FORMATION OF CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF A TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY. EXAMPLE OF KYRGYZSTAN

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Abstract. Kyrgyzstan is a post-soviet country, which is undergoing transition processes. The collapse of the Soviet Union affected people's lives in many ways. Unstable political and economic situation has brought insecurities to many spheres and has given rise to changes in many biographies. The hope for confident and stable future was also disturbed by two revolutions which happened in 2005 and 2010. Besides, globalization brings its own uncertainties into social structures, when old rules no longer apply and individuals have to adapt or overcome risks and inequalities. All these processes force parents and their children to develop new approaches to ensure children's 'successful' future. In contrast to new approaches, the idea of 'being well-educated' is continually transmitted across generations as one of the most effective strategies to ensure 'successful' future, though its interpretation varies from generation to generation.

The results of various studies show that although children and adolescents of 2000s get more opportunities brought by globalization, at the same time they come across new challenges which are often related to social inequality on the local level. In this contradictory context children tend to declare aspirations, which seem to be vague and inconsistent. This makes it relevant to investigate children's educational aspirations in Kyrgyzstan – the country which is characterized today by the combination of local circumstances and global effects which is described by Doris Bühler-Niederberger (2016) as 'transport of global ideas to local conditions'. The relevance of programs offered by international organizations, and their effect on the quality of childhood in local conditions are questionable. International organizations'

expectations in terms of childhood seem to be different from Kyrgyz parents' expectations. And this can be accounted for by some differences between individualist society vision and collectivist approaches and hierarchical generational order (Alanen L., 2009; Bühler-Niederberger D., 2016).

Besides, parent-child relations have considerably transformed, and the parental role in the formation of children's educational aspirations has increased. For example, several decades ago parents' participation in children's school performance was minimal, and today parents take an active part in gaining school achievements and stimulating academic success of their children. That is why it is important to consider the construction of children's future projects and the formation of educational trajectories in relation to parental strategies and expectations, using parent-child relations (kinship-relational principle). It should be pointed out that parent-child relations are considered in the context of hierarchical generational order of the Kyrgyz society.

For this purpose, the current research employs the intergenerational approach to explore the structuration of biographic projects in families (grandparents born in 1940s - 1960s; parents born in 1970s - 1980s; and children born in early 2000s) in different socio-historical contexts. The main focus of the research is made on women and girls, whose life styles have changed more dramatically compared to boys and men.

Narrative interviews with multigenerational family members (grandparents, parents, children) in 17 families in Bishkek city and 8 families in Osh city (urban context) showed that parents actively participate in the development of children's projects, irrespective of the family socio-economic status. Several reasons have been declared for this: first, to transmit obtained resources to the next generation; secondly, to enrich or to hold on to current socio-economic status of the family; and also to mitigate and avoid possible instability in their own life and in children's future life. Besides, no tendency to individualised biographic projects has been observed in children's narratives, although children are ready to negotiate possible failures on the individual level taking responsibility for being 'not good enough' in the future. The present study shows that parents and children consider global and local opportunities, but they do not completely accept them. Here modernisation encounters restrictions imposed by traditional family roles.

Keywords: social transformations, value transmission, intergenerational approach, social inequality, children's aspirations

Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan as many other post-soviet societies, has been experiencing transformation period processes. The unstable political and economic situation has brought insecurities to people's lives. Besides, globalization introduces its own uncertainties into social structures, when old rules no longer apply and individuals have to develop new strategies and techniques to adapt or overcome risks and inequalities. The lives of children and young people in Kyrgyzstan are influenced significantly by all these transformations. This situation makes it relevant to investigate children's aspirations in Kyrgyzstan – the country which is characterized today by the combination of local circumstances and global effects which is described by Doris Bühler-Niederberger (2016) as 'transport of global ideas to local conditions'.

Jessica Schwittek (2017) argues that at present in Kyrgyzstan children and youth are provided with multiple opportunities. At the same time the corruption, especially in the educational sector makes these opportunities unavailable for a large part of the population (Schwittek J., 2017). In addition to this, children and youth have less guarantees from the state than earlier generations, particularly the generation of their parents, who were provided with government social support and protection (Kuehnast K., 1999). International organizations point out that in spite of the fact that access to general secondary education is rather high, its quality is rather low (UNDP, 2013). In 2009 Kyrgystan took the last place in the world in PISA - Program for International Student Assessment (Esengul C., Mamaev B. & Yefimova-Trilling N., 2014). Other researchers also note that state educational system in Central Asian countries has deteriorated and lost its effectiveness (Silova I., 2011). In spite of numerous universities and the increased enrolment of youth in higher education, the quality of higher education is on a poor level as well. The number of graduates is overwhelming and it mismatches the demand of labour market (MER, 2016). The level of unemployment in the country is high, and among those who are unemployed 40% - young people of 20-29 years old (National Statistical Committee, 2015). This leads to the migration of youth to neighbouring countries, where it is easier to find jobs. (Brück T. & Esenaliev D., 2013; Orozbekov S., 2014).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan has become more open for the international community. International organisations are actively conducting studies and developing new educational projects and programs. Bühler-Niederberger in her research (2016) discusses the relevance of educational programs offered by international organizations, and their effects on the quality of childhood in local conditions. According to her

findings, international organizations' expectations in terms of childhood seem to be different from Kyrgyz parents' expectations. And this can be accounted for by some differences between individualist society vision and collectivist approaches and hierarchical generational order (Alanen L., 2009; Bühler-Niederberger D., 2011). So, in this context childhood in Kyrgyzstan experiences the influence of multiple, different and sometimes contradicting messages.

Research on Childhood

Childhood is the period when people start thinking about critically important choices for their future life (Schoon I., 2001). Doris Bühler - Niederberger and Alexandra König (2011) talk about childhood as a "laboratory in which elements of fantasy, play but also a bland realism concerning social structure and one's own social position within it are mixed in order to draft possible future selves" (p.191). The shaping of a *self-project* may become a limitation for a child, as well as a resource that may lead to the realisation of a child's aspirations into the future profession (Bühler-Niederberger D. & König A., 2011). It has been empirically proved that belonging to a social class or a specific group of the population influences significantly the formation of children's educational and career aspirations. Children, whose parents have less resources and opportunities, tend to shape lower ambitions and are less sure about the possibilities of upward mobility than children from higher class families (Howley, 2009; Berzin, 2010; Zipin, Sellar, Brennan & Gale, 2015; Salikutluk, 2016). Besides, children seem to be aware of class structure and generate their expectations taking this into account (Bühler-Niederberger D. & König A., 2011).

Family is an essential institution for the development of children's values (Whitbeck L. & Gecas V., 1988). Alongside with available cultural and social resources family interactions impact the formation of children's self projects.

At the same time, researchers in the field of childhood in western societies observe the trend towards individualisation in children's everyday lives (Lareau A., 2007; Edwards R. & Alldred P., 2000). It was also noted that today children in western societies are recognised by their parents as independent persons with autonomous needs and interests. Furlong and Cartmel (1997) support the idea that biographies become more individualized and young people consider their lives to be filled with risks and uncertainties nowadays. At the same time their studies show the evidence that "...risks are distributed in an unequal fashion and correspond closely to traditional lines of disadvantage based on class and gender" (p. 39, 1997).

In this context it is necessary to consider the construction of children's future projects in Kyrgyzstan, and to explore the formation of educational trajectories in relation to parental strategies and expectations, using parent-child relations based on kinship-relational principle. The main question of the current research is what is the role of intergenerational family relations, particularly, parent-child relations in the formation of child's educational aspirations.

Methodology of the present study

The whole research project research employs the intergenerational approach to explore the structuration of biographic projects in families (grandparents born in 1940s - 1960s; parents born in 1970s - 1980s; and children born in early 2000s) in different socio-historical contexts. For this purpose narrative and semi-structured interviews were conducted in 17 families in Bishkek city and 8 families in Osh city (urban context). It should be pointed out that parent-child relations are considered in the context of hierarchical generational order of the Kyrgyz society.

Results and discussion

The study shows that parent-child relations have considerably transformed, and the parental role in the formation of children's educational aspirations has increased. For example, several decades ago parents' participation in children's school performance was minimal, and today parents take an active part in gaining school achievements and stimulating academic success of their children. Narrative interviews with multigenerational family members have shown that parents actively participate in the development of children's projects, irrespective of the family socio-economic status. Parents might be interested in doing this for several reasons: first, in order to transmit obtained resources to the next generation; second, to enrich or to hold on to current socio-economic status of the family; and also to mitigate and avoid possible instability in their own life and in children's future life.

All transformations in the country force parents and their children to develop new approaches to ensure children's 'successful' future. Alongside with new approaches, the idea of 'being well-educated' is continually transmitted across generations as one of the most effective strategies to ensure successful future, though its interpretation varies from generation to generation. To support child's educational development parents choose various strategies. One of the most popular is the investment into a child's cultural capital through the choice of a prestigious educational institution. Families with high socio-economic status are more likely to send their children to private schools, many of which have been established during the latest 20-25 years. There were 66 private secondary schools in 2013, in 2017 the number of those increased up to 114 (National Statistical Committee,

2017). Most private schools offer intensive foreign language programs. That is why they are selected by parents who consider the future opportunities for their child abroad. 13 children out of 26 declared a wish to go abroad to live or to study. Russia, Turkey, USA, Korea and Germany were mentioned by children as countries where they would like to study or to live.

Studying in private schools and payment for extracurricular activities in public schools require essential financial investments. This makes a child strongly dependent financially on their parents' decision when choosing extracurricular activities and formulating future career plans. It is not unexpected that parents are considered by children as one of the main resources to construct and maintain their biographic projects.

Individualised biographic projects have been rarely observed in children's narratives, although children are ready to negotiate possible failures on the individual level taking responsibility for being 'not good enough'. Even if the child declared his own decision about the choice of the career or the field of the studies, later the interview showed that these are the plans which were suggested by parents or grandparents. So, the findings of the research indicate that many children are pushed to adopt parental projects.

It is also observed in the study that children from families with more cultural and social capital resources tend to present more detailed description of their plans and better knowledge about education needed for their future. This allows us to assume that they might be more prepared for the formation of their biographic projects. But at the same time, the study shows that higher economic opportunities of the family seems to be hindering for the construction of individualized biographic projects. Children in affluent families cannot always choose and decide about their educational and professional trajectories on the basis of their own wishes and interests. One of the possible reasons is that they feel responsible in front of their families and obliged for the resources they received from their parents.

One more interesting observation should be pointed out. Parents with high cultural and social capital resources expect their children to attain higher educational results and future career. At the same time the analysis of the interviews shows that children from families with low economic resources tend to declare too high status-oriented aspirations which are baseless and don't correspond to present reality in sense of opportunity structure and labour market in Kyrgyzstan. This confirms the findings of some previous studies (Bühler-Niederberger D. & Schwittek J., 2014), which show that children tend to declare very ambitious plans without considering their current economic and cultural resources.

There is one paradox in the findings of the study: though there is no trust and confidence in 'fair system' of the current state structure, there is a strong tendency among families to believe that personal efforts and high academic performance will ensure good jobs and career.

Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that in Kyrgyzstan parents and children consider global and local opportunities, but they do not completely accept them. Here modernization encounters restrictions imposed by traditional family roles. New opportunities provided by social transformations and globalization alongside with insecurities related to no welfare state and rising inequality are strengthening inter-generational ties and mutual obligations in the life course, thus pushing children to perceive the family to be the main resource of opportunities. Perceiving their lives as lives characterized by insecurities, children rely on family resources - social and cultural capital. Offered opportunities outside the family are perceived as unclear and often shifted to foreign countries. The ways to reach these opportunities are often unknown and not well-structured. In this contradictory context children tend to declare aspirations, which seem to be vague and inconsistent.

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