

**A sad story:
the impact of ethnic narrative identity on the
underachievement of students from minority
groups in secondary education
An Italian case study**

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Underachievement of students from Ethnic Minority Group in Italian Secondary Education.

The case of Region Emilia-Romagna

The research

- ✓ explores how perceived conditions of marginalization, social disengagement, feeling powerless and frustration reinforce each other in narrative identities of students from EMG, favouring ethnic achievement gap in secondary education

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The case of Region Emilia-Romagna

Students with both parents of non-Italian origin/EU definition 'Children of Migrants'

students from EMG

are underachieving in high schools, where their failure rate in Region Emilia-Romagna schools (38.8% in year 2011-2012) doubles the one of Italian students

data from Italian Ministry of Education (2013). Failure includes failing examinations and schools drops out in the course of the year

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The case of Region Emilia-Romagna

High school enrolment rate, Region Emilia Romagna, 14-15yrs (data: Regional Education Office, 2012)

ITA or mixed Background: 89,4%

EMG: 91,9%

High school certificate Region, Emilia Romagna, 18-19yrs (data: Regional Education Office, 2012)

ITA or mixed Background: 73,1%

EMG: 49,7%

In Italian pedagogical and political debate, the most frequently cited explanations for underachievement of EMG students are



linguistic competence

socio- economic disadvantage

linguistic competence

95% of students from EMG in high schools in Region Emilia-Romagna have completed primary schools and middle schools in Italy (data: Italian ministry of Education, 2013)

socio-economic disadvantage

students from EMG are underachieving also with respect of Italian students in the same socio-economic conditions



ISEE (index of economic conditions), used to evaluate the economic status of families in Italy

linguistic competence

economic disadvantage

May contribute to ethnic gaps in educational attainments,
but cannot explain them fully

Hypothesis:

narrative identities impact on educational achievements



Identities formed by integrating life experiences into an internalized, evolving story of the self, with characters, episodes, imagery, a setting, plots, themes, often following the traditional model of a story

Methodology:

the subject matter deals with perceptions and expectations, therefore a **qualitative approach** was used: in-depth, **biographical focus groups** with students from EMG with previous experience of educational failures

Fieldwork was completed in 27 high-schools in Emilia-Romagna Region of Italy, identified for their high rate of educational failure among student from EMG

The participants were selected based on various criteria to ensure having young people with diverse ethnic and personal backgrounds, for instance the length of their permanence in Italy

The research

27 focus groups in high-schools in Region Emilia-Romagna

160 students from EMG

- ✓ Tunisia and Morocco (35 participants, 22 M, 13 F)
- ✓ Albania (27 participants, 15 M, 12 F)
- ✓ Ghana and Philippines (13 participants, Ghana: 5 M, 8 F, Philipp. 6 M, 7 F)
- ✓ Ukraine (10 participants, 3 M, 7 F)
- ✓ Turkey and Nigeria (7 participants, Turkey: 5 M, 2F, Nigeria 2 M, 5 F)
- ✓ Others participants from Senegal, India, Angola, China, Ivory Coast, Iran and Peru

The research

Analysis of data from focus groups highlight the impact of two components of narrative identities on disengagement and distrusts in education

- ✓ **Experiences of marginalization in the schools**
- ✓ **Expectations of fewer career opportunities**

Experiences of marginalization in the schools

Although "the classroom" is recognized as a crucial socialization context, it is the first context where students from EMG experience marginalization and disengagement, which are observed as consequences of educational policies, first of all the placement of migrant students in classes below their age

Marginalization in the school

- ✓ connected to educational policies that are concerned with standardized academic results, overlooking student's social inclusion
- ✓ is experienced in primary or middle schools, but creates the conditions for disengagement from school education and weakens motivations

- NIGF1: when I came here, they put me in a classroom with children two years younger than me in the Medie (Middles Schools). So I learnt Italian, OK, but **did not make real friends at all**, because classmates were too young, and **school was a kind of obstacle in my life for being happy**, and I learnt to see school like this
- UKRF2: they say this was to help me and give time to learn Italian and it was true, but you don't learn how Italian guys of your age are, what they do if you spend six days a week with children and **I felt so alone and useless. I wanted to be everywhere but at school**
- GHAM1: yes and the head-teacher told me 'You can stay with people of your age after school', but how can you know them, if you do not see them? **It was like being in a prison**
- NIGF1: exactly, you do not know where they go, what are the right places to be and **you dream of leaving the school to have the possibility to live you life**

MARM1: I was lucky I am a good football player, so a scout noticed me while playing in the park and ask me to join Sirenella (local football team) and I could stay with mates of my age, but **then I hated the classroom and the school** your mates in the squad they talk about girls, of going out at night, and you stay with classmates who think only of Playstation

ALBM1: true, your real mates, when there is the break at 10, they meet to plan how to buy beer at the supermarket and to smoke cigarettes, and you would like to hanging around with them, not to spend eight hours with children collecting dog puppies stickers. **Then you hate school because school is against your life and you never stop to do that**

MARM2: and if you are not lucky like him (MARM1), it is worse; al least he spends good afternoons. They put me with children in Medie because I had to learn Italian; it took three years to know someone as a real friend and before I was in Superiori (High Schools) **I was so sick of it I just wanted the school to end somehow**

expectations of fewer career chances

Students from EMG are expected to meet standardized performances that overlook their personal and social situation; however, career opportunities are observed as indifferent to the skills and knowledge certified by the education system. Participants identify two reasons:

- ✓ ethnic prejudice
- ✓ lack of support from social networks

expectations of fewer career chances

- ✓ Delegitimizes education system
- ✓ Weakens motivations and engagement in education

- GHAF3: you have great results but when it comes to find a job, **there is prejudice**
- SENF1: they do not want to spend money on training for African women because people think that we are all to marry very young and to have children so they would waste their money
- GHAF4: yes, it is not your skin, **is what they expect from you**. So if a job is good and you have to do some training of course they will not spend money for you
- NIGF2: you are good just for cleaning or something like that
- GHAF4: you want great things when you start Superiori, but you grow up and see the real world and you still want great thing but you do not expect them actually and this makes you think **'what am I doing here? Accounting? To clean the floor in a shopping centre Middle Schools are OK'**

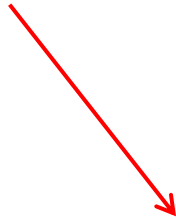
ALBM1: do you know what the problem is? Is that the people you know, I mean the one who care for you, parents and relatives and friends how could they help you? 'Hey, Amir, I know that guy in the factory...' I know that courier' and you think 'Ok, just to start somehow, the factory is good'... **but then you will be a factory guy forever**

ANGM2: yes, you don't move from the factory working from 10pm to 6am to business, there is no way to do that, I mean when all the people you know are like you. **So you go to school for your family but you don't really believe in it**

ALBM2: this is the problem: when you start in the factory, then people will look at you like this for your life and you too, you get used to this. If you know that you cannot wait for the perfect job and you know that the opportunity you'll have will be a job like all the people you know, **school makes no sense**

MARM1: the real problem is the opportunities you have when you first start to work, these make your life and if you don't know anyone with good job or power, you take the first job and you are like tied for life. And **you know that school makes no difference when you cannot actually choose**

- ✓ Experiences of marginalization
- ✓ Expectations of few career opportunities



Are interrelated components of narrative identities including distrust in education, delegitimization of teaching and disengagement

Conclusion

Linguistic competence and differences in socio-economic status need to be integrated by the knowledge of the impact of narrative identities to explain educational underachievement of students from EMG.

Narrative identities embody students' expectations and personal experiences reinforcing each other to produce an identity as powerless and marginalized people

Findings suggest that social disengagement, distrust and expectations of limited career opportunities may be influential in educational underachievement of students from EMG

THANK YOU!



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