Minority Students' Perceptions of Schooling and Teachers Quality To Support Their Learning in Norway

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Abstract

In this study we surveyed 98 migrant or minority students in the Oslo and Follo areas of Norway about their experiences of school. We also surveyed 50 teachers who were teaching in those schools about their background information and teaching practices and how that might impact on student learning. We then followed 32 of the 98 students 3 years later to find out what these students felt about the role of the school and teachers in supporting their learning and its contribution to their success or non-success in school. There were differences in the perceptions of those young people who finished high school and those who dropped out of school after the initial survey, who felt that schools were not very supportive.

1. Introduction

Despite widespread concern about educational under-achievement by ethnic minorities, there have been relatively few studies looking at minority students' own perceptions of school and how they think such school factors affect their educational achievement. Possible causalities of minority school failure according to the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (2006) are insufficient adaptation of teaching to students' needs, insufficient informed choice of education programme, low motivation and absenteeism among others.

Researchers have been more concerned about the problems encountered by minority students, which result in low performance at school, and less about minority groups' perceptions of the school, which affect performance. In most cases research is focusing on the poor schooling outcomes of minority students vis a vis majority students. Researchers have also been drawing their conclusions from the responses of teachers and other service providers rather from the students who have experienced failure or extreme difficulties in school. It is important that the school experience of minority groups who are not particularly successful be explored in order to gain a different understanding of the problem of school under-achievement or failure.

There is a large group of migrants from non-Europeans countries in Norway. According to the Norwegian Statistics Sentral Bureau, the west the Pakistanis, the Vietnamese, Iranians and the Somalis form the majority (SSB, 2004). It has been established that the academic achievement of migrant students from these countries is often lower than their Norwegian counterparts. In addition, 40% of migrant students in the upper secondary school dropped out of school between the late 1990s and 2003 (SSB 2004). Schooling arrangements for migrant students often involves the use of bilingual teaching, placement in special classes and teaching with a multicultural orientation. These methods have been perceived as critical to school success, because they are more likely to help the students transcend the linguistic and pre-education barriers that majority students do not encounter at school. However, in some schools the mere placement of students in special classes does not mean that they will receive instructional modifications such as bilingual and adaptive practices to support their learning. Nordahl and Overland (1998) asserted that placing minority students in special schools without bilingual teaching practices or any other form of adaptive teaching was against the goals and basic principles of multicultural education.

It is important to note that success at school for students who have additional learning needs such as those with disabilities and those from cultural and linguistic diverse backgrounds requires the setting up of an accepting/supportive school environment and the use of adaptive teaching practices (Loreman, et al, 2007, Kuyini & Desai, 2008). This notion of accepting /supportive school environments aligns with the principles of multicultural education and inclusiveness (educational and social inclusion).

Multicultural education theory states that multicultural education is at least three things: an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process. Defined from the reform point of view, multicultural education is a reform designed to change the total school environment so that students from diverse racial and ethnic groups, both gender groups, exceptional students, and students from each social-class group will experience equal educational opportunities in schools, colleges and universities (Bank & Banks, 1995).

> "Multiculturalism must be seen to embrace the whole of humankind. From a strategic point of view, this maturing of multicultural education through co-operative pluralism represents an opportunity of joining with other groups and other movements designed to assist the human race to live together in understanding, appreciation, and peace." (Banks, 2001, p.129).

One of the weaknesses of previous studies about minorities, which is also a problem area of this research is that it does not capitalise on the resources of minorities, for example their cultures. As Banks (2001), points out educators in today's schools need to understand that multicultural education presents avenues for enhancing the quality of education, capitalizing on the resources of all individuals. Some issues facing educators who work with today's students include implementing a relevant multicultural curriculum, utilizing intervention strategies, training school staff, and recruiting diverse professionals. Educators who receive in-depth training in multicultural education will see that minority students learn as well as other young majority students in the public school system. Adopting monoculture teaching approach in schools with multi-ethnic minority groups in a democratic multicultural Norway is really unfortunate as Nordahl & Overland (1998) pointed out.

An identifiable problem in Norway is that even where the so called “unintelligent” minorities are segregated, they are placed in special schools with special teaching more assimilative and far from integrating minorities into the dominant Norwegian society which according to Nordal and Overland goes against both the goals and principles of multicultural schools.

A multicultural education is education based on the strength of diversity, human rights, social justice, and alternative lifestyles for all people, it is necessary for a quality education and includes all efforts to make the full range of cultures available to students; it views a culturally pluralistic society as a positive force and welcomes differences as vehicles for better understanding the global society. (Banks 2001:3).

Closely aligned to the concept and philosophy of multiculturalism is the concept of inclusion and exclusion (social and educational) which are very important to the adaptive potentials of students of minority backgrounds. While social inclusion strives towards opening doors for the participation of those on the fringes of society**,** social exclusion is a complex phenomenon and consequently, difficult to reach a joint agreement of how it should be defined. Social exclusion is a two-sided process in the sense that it denotes both the instances, when a person is expelled from a community or a place *and* denial of access to ‘outsiders’. In addition, there are more symbolic forms of exclusion, such as being marked as different (Vestel, 2004: 428). These cases of ‘othering’ can vary from overt racism, to institutionalized ways of treating someone as ‘different’, such as special classes or projects targeted to specific groups of people (even though such strategies are meant as a help). We can distinguish between the *feeling* of exclusion and the more observable exclusion when actually not being allowed access (this can be on a legitimate basis when the person does not fulfil requirements of access or illegitimate as in discrimination) (Fangen 2006a). Either way, it is hard to think of a person being totally outside the society.

For young people, the common trend is that social exclusion is more in relation to education and work, which are the two arenas for young migrant students in secondary schools. Raaum et al. (2009) argued that a young person is socially excluded at some moment in time if he or she is currently outside the structured arenas of school and work but also has a high probability of remaining outside in the near future. Atkinson (1998: 14, cited in Raaum et al., 2009) points out that ‘people are excluded not just because they are currently without a job or income, but because they have little prospects for the future’. When schools do not have environments that foster inclusion, young minority students will perceive schools as hostile and less motivating for learning. Educational inclusiveness allows for students to experience meaningful participation in school learning and social life, through the setting up of school environments that foster acceptance, cooperation and learning support that meet the unique needs of diverse learners. For migrant students creating inclusive school environments and classrooms would require pursuing actions underpinned by multicultural

education theory and teaching strategies that support the learning of students from bilingual backgrounds. The expectation is that migrant students will experience school environments as welcoming and classroom teaching as supporting their learning and development towards similar educational outcomes as the majority-group students.

Despite this broad perspective on the potential for schools to create conditions for optimum school achievement for migrant students, research shows that students as individuals are autonomous agents that can shape their own inclusion or exclusion from education and thereby contribute decisively to their ultimate school outcomes. Positive effort can contribute to inclusion and negative effort can lead to exclusion and marginalise their school achievement. In relation to the above, van Dijk (1992) observed that it is important to view social exclusion as a process, and therefore one that allows us to avoid trying to fix the explanation to an either/or situation. In addition, it is important to ask questions like: Who is doing the excluding? And is the exclusion caused by people in positions of power such as employers, teachers, politicians, police or social workers?

In asking these critical questions it is not surprising that it is often common to blame schools and teachers for all the exclusion that minority students experience in school. However, in order to grasp the complexity of social exclusion, it is important to note that in some situations, students are choosing to stay out of the main group for various reasons. Raaum et al. (2009) argued that traditional assimilation theories have a flawed assumption that all young migrants are yearning for inclusion. But, some young persons temporarily choose to stay outside the more institutionalized settings of society (Raaum et al. 2009), as an expression of opposition to or a feeling of not mastering the behaviour demanded in a regularized school or work setting. For others, it is related to alternative priorizations, such as the wish to explore possibilities of work or the fact that they become parents at a young age and therefore feel forced to temporarily stay outside the arenas of school and work. In a study, Kuyini (2006) found that young African migrants in Melbourne, Australia, felt that their schools were exclusionary in the sense that the teachers were not supportive even in the face of unjustified provocations from fellow students. According to the students, the worst things included unfriendly mainstream students, inadequate homework, class organization and subject choice, and problems with teaching methods in some subjects.

Many of the participants indicated that the main reason for which they would consider leaving the schools they were attending at the time was the unfriendly atmosphere generated by other (majority-group) students and some school staff. Some of them therefore chose to leave school early.

1.1Norwegian Situation

Data from the Norwegian Statistical Central Bureau (2009, in Vebjørn, 2009) shows that there are almost as many descendants as there are young people without an immigrant background under 25 in education (or in employment) (Olsen, 2009). The same holds for those who migrated as children, whereas for young, first-generation immigrants the level is much lower (ibid.). Surprisingly enough, however, length of residence in itself does not have much impact on differences in grades or dropout rates (Støren 2005). Brekke (2008) and Brekke and Fekjær, (2007) contend that social background is the main reason why young immigrants and descendants have a higher dropout rate from upper secondary school than teenagers from the majority population. Pupils with non-western background have parents who more often have lower education, lower income and more often are unemployed than parents from western countries (Støren, 2005). If we compare young people with immigrant backgrounds and young people without immigrant backgrounds but with the same social background, we see that the differences in grades are small, and within each social strata there are more young people with immigrant background than without immigrant background that continue with higher education (Støren 2005: 82, 93).

In deed, there are vast differences in grades, dropout rates and length of education between immigrants with different countries of origin. Some minority students perform better than the majority population, whereas others perform worse. The main reason for these differences seems to be the fact that immigrants of different origins have different pre-migration class backgrounds and educational profiles (Modood, 2007). Pakistani and Turkish young people have been found to have a higher rate of school drop out than other Asian groups. They are also more often less likely to take up higher education than young people of Indian and Vietnamese origin (despite the same length of residence) (Fekjær, 2007). The reasons can be found in class differences among the parents from these different groups, but also significant differences in attitudes towards education. In this way, class and ethnicity (here in the sense of country of origin, which in reality does not always equal ethnicity) *interact* in producing distinct patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Just as attitudes to schooling, to higher education and to financing education by means of loan, are influenced by class, so are they influenced by ethnicity (Fekjær, 2007; Modood, 2007). Henricksen (2007) also found that immigrants from Somalia are often unemployed and if employed have a low income, combined with having more children than all other immigrant groups in Norway.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite of the seemingly uniform Norwegian Government's policy objective of multiculturalism and equal opportunity, there is still high school drop out and/or school under-achievement among migrant students. While Støren (2005) and Brekke and Fekjær (2007) conclude that social background is the main reason why young immigrants have a higher drop-out rate from upper secondary school than students, from the majority population, some for example Gibson and Ogbu, (1991) attribute this occurrence to social adjustment problems. In deed some research suggests that apart from individual responses and adaptation to the new environments, schools and school cultures are very critical to learning and school outcomes. And while researchers have been looking at what schools are doing to support students achieve in school, little attention is paid to migrant students' own perceptions of schools, how they experienced school learning and the types of teachers providing instruction to these students. This leads to a need to explore the perceptions of migrant young people to schooling and the quality of the teachers to support the learning of this cohort of students.

3. Aim or Purpose of Study

The aim of this study was to explore minority students` perceptions of schooling and the teachers' quality to support their learning.

3.1 Research Questions

- How do minority students perceive school arrangements and their teachers' instructional practices to support their learning and inclusion?
- Are there differences in the perceptions of students who completed high school and those dropped out of school?
- What qualities do the teachers in schools possess to support minority students?

4. Method

A total of 97 students and 50 teachers participated in this study. Two sets of questionnaire, one for students and the other for teachers were used to collect data in the first stage of the study. Students and some teachers were then interviewed, individually and in groups based on school clusters. Two group interviews each were held for students and teachers. In stage 2, we followed up 32 of the students, three years after the initial data collection.

In stage 1, students responded to questions about how they felt about schooling, the support they received and their views about teachers' instructional practices. The statements were to be rated on a 6-point Likert-type classification from Strongly Disagree (rated as 1) to Strongly Agree (rated as 6) The teachers responded to questionnaire requiring them to provide background information, and then rate their knowledge of other cultures and teaching practices to support minority students. The group interviews tried to explore reasons for feeling included or excluded from the school and how students felt the school and teachers were helping them to learn.

In stage 2 we followed up students who participated in the first survey and interviews. We were able to get responses from 32 of the 97 students about whether or not they had completed high school and what they were doing. The follow-up revealed that only 11 of the 32 had completed high school. The rest either dropped out after finding work or dropped out due to school difficulties, family reasons or for no obvious reason.

The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software and involved descriptive statistics, ANOVA, t-tests and correlation analysis. The responses to qualitative data were simply put into themes deriving from interview questions.

5. Results

5.1 Student Responses

When the 97 minority students were asked to rate barriers that stopped them from learning or perform well, the analysis showed that many students considered Language problems (M=6.2) and Family issues (M=5.1) as affecting their leaning more than School barriers (M=4.6). However, in comparing the mean scores of those who dropped out of school and those who completed high school, the results showed that those who dropped out had an overall higher mean (M=5.7) on the perceived effect of school factors on their learning compared to those who completed high school (M=3.5). The mean differences were statistically significant (p=.00). However, there were no significant differences between the two groups on their rating of language and family barriers to school learning. (See Tables 1 and 2)

<Tables 1 & 2 about here>

When asked to rate teaching class arrangements and strategies that help them to learn or perform well, the analysis showed that many students considered teaching that fostered cultural pluralism (M=5.6) and bilingual teaching (M=5.3) to be helpful in their learning more than being placed in a special class (M=3.2).

<Table 3 about here>

When asked to rate the extent to which teachers used different teaching strategies, the analysis showed that students perceived teachers as using few divergent strategies to get them to learn (M=4.2).

Students' rating of the extent to which they thought teachers understood their culture (had cross-cultural knowledge) showed that students perceived teachers as having little or no knowledge of other cultures (M= 2.4). This result in was in contrast to teachers (especially younger teachers) own rating of themselves as having good knowledge. In any case, it draws attention to the need for cross-cultural training for teachers.

The students also rated the extent to which they thought teachers tried to ensure mastery of lesson content as moderate (M=3.7). This response was similar to the rating on the use of questions to promote active responding and evaluate mastery of lesson content (M=3.9)

The students' rating of the extent to which they thought there were adequate support services to help you cope with schooling showed that students perceived support service as average (M= 4.5). This finding indicates that students may have received the services but did not think they were adequate. On the other hand, in rating the extent to which they had good feelings about their school, the analysis showed that majority of students had good feeling about their school.

However, in analysing the difference between those who dropped out school and those who completed high school, we found that the mean score for those who dropped out was very low (M=2.4) compared to those who completed high school (M=5.8). The mean differences were statistically significant (p =.00). (See Table 4). This finding mirrored the score on school factors as a barrier to student learning and the schools meeting their needs (Table 5), where this same cohort of students (those who dropped out) had a lower mean score than those who did not drop out.

<Table 4 about here>

In general, the students rated the extent to which they thought the school was meeting their needs high (M= 5.2). Again in analysing the difference between those who dropped out school and those who completed high school, we found that the mean score for those who dropped out was very low (M=3.6) compared to those who completed high school (M=5.9). The mean differences were statistically significant (p=.00). (See Table 5 below).

<Table 5 about here>

5.1.1 Interview Results: Students

In the individual and group interviews we tried to explore reasons for poor performance, feeling included or excluded from the school and how students felt the school and teachers were helping them to learn. The interview data showed that many students attributed their average or poor school performance to their pre-arrival experiences in refugee camps and how they were placed in the Norwegian education system; language difficulties; the negative experiences of older siblings or family members who did not benefit from completing school; dissatisfaction with the help they received from teachers and the school; and preference to learn the skills required to integrate into a distinct minority cultural community in Norway.

For those who attributed their average or poor performance and/or eventual drop out of school to their pre-arrival experiences and placement in Norwegian schools, the system was to blame. One of the young people from Somalia (Ahmed) related his experience of placement in school as follows:

> *I got here July, and started August, so I was lucky. (…) at (…) a reception class for immigrants. It was hard! (…) The first day of school and a language you've never heard before. But it went all right. I improved. I got out of that period, and I eventually could communicate in Norwegian.*

Taqi from Afghanistan had this to say:

> *"I want to learn Norwegian and learn the culture…..…but I have no Norwegian friends I can talk to.…..the Norwegian students have no time for us….I don't know….they are closed and it is difficult to socialise with them…and also sometimes we are left on our own without any teacher and when the teachers come it seems they are not prepared to teach us….sometimes they send us home and tell us to watch a particular film…I just feel that I am wasting my time at school".*

Taqi`s socialisation with others at school is minimal. Alhassan (2003) sees the school as a socialisation system and that teaching and learning are socialisation processes, thus the school as a social system has both formal and informal

socialisation processes, and without formal socialisation happening in the classrooms among individuals or groups effective learning may not be adequately facilitated.

Although the Norwegian education system acknowledges the differences in country of origin of refugees, it seems to give little attention to their learning experiences. For example, there

are vast differences in the experiences of those young immigrants coming from southern Somalia who had never attended school because of the war and some young immigrants from other countries (or other areas of Somalia) who had ordinary access to schooling in the home country before arriving in Norway. After coming to Norway, they were all placed in a reception class for a year, and then directly into the school class of their own age group. For those who were illiterate, the barriers were huge: they had to start learning how to read

and write, while their classmates learnt this maybe eight or nine years earlier. For those who had had access to schooling in the home country, it did not take long before they managed to cope. A common experience is that the first year was hard, but after a while they managed better. This was the case with Ahmed from Somalia and affects the young people's motivation to attend school, as they find school learning very challenging.

For those who attributed their average or poor performance and/or eventual drop out of school to language difficulties, the ultimate effect was similar to the pre-arrival experience with education. Although young people are able to lean the Norwegian language quite easily, the acquired skills usually relate more to what they need for social interaction and less with language required for academic tasks. One of the young people said that: "I find it hard to understand some books…, some words … and cannot write essays and other work. It is very hard". These difficulties lead to frustration and it is easy for some to exclude themselves.

For those who attributed their average or poor performance and/or eventual drop out of school to the negative experiences of older siblings/family members who did not benefit from completing school, it was a case of "once beaten twice shy". They seem to asking themselves why bother going to school if you are not going to get a job or a job which will be better than your parents or siblings who have completed high school. Two of the young people Basha, who, during the interview noted that his elder brother has finished university. However "…he cannot a find job…he has been looking for a job almost two years…." His main question then was: Why should I bother finishing school?

It is also clear that some migrant parents face barriers to insertion in the labour market also seek comfort in ethnic networks that might be counter-productive to active participation and consequently, they serve as poor role models for their children. Fatoma, a young Somali woman, said that her mother has always been working. "In Somalia she had an important position and after coming to Norway she has been working in a kindergarten…" This young woman views her own mother as a role model. But since her mother had no further schooling than the mandatory years, education appears strange for Fatoma, and she would rather find herself a job. She has many Somali friends like herself who would not go on with higher education, and would thus orient themselves to the lower status positions in the labour market. Fatoma said "this country has no respect for what we have and what we can do…they always want work experiences from Norway and no regard from anything like Somalia".

Similar to the survey results, the students spoke about school barriers to learning as contributing to average or poor performance or leaving school. The main thrust of this was their dissatisfaction with the help they receive from teachers and the school and obvious derogation by peers, which sometimes were not stopped by teachers. Among our interviewees, many had experienced being ascribed racial categories such as 'nigger' or stigmatizing descriptions of their ethnicity such as 'Turk-mentality'. Some interpret the seemingly reserved attitude of people from the majority population as a sign that foreigners are not welcome in the Norwegian society. Even if it is not interpreted this way, these behaviours and experiences might feed feelings of being excluded. For example, Ahmed thinks that Norwegians have a different way of behaving towards strangers than what he is used to in Afghanistan. Ahmed had this to say; "When you are quiet in class they say you are reserved and when you ask questions too the teacher says this is not immigrant class….this makes learning difficult because we are not supposed to ask too many questions even when we don't understand…..what can we do…..maybe go back to Afghanistan but we cant".

The final issue that broadly emerged from the interviews was that some of the young people preferred to learn skills required to integrate into their distinct minority cultural communities in Norway. In other words, they did not think that they should strive to achieve integration/inclusion in the broader Norwegian system. This is because, the distinct multicultural community of the peer group was for some of our interviewees an alternative setting for inclusion, instead of school which is an arena where they do not feel comfortable. One example is Omar, who was born in Norway to Turkish parents. He quit school when he was 17. He stated that: 'I was tired of school. The worst thing was getting up in the morning and having to sit quietly for many hours. That totally knocked me out'. He went to a school where 95 per

cent of the pupils had an immigrant background. Instead of going to school, Omar liked to hang around with his friends, who had many different ethnic backgrounds. When being together they had their own language representing a mixture of all these backgrounds; something totally different from what the majority Norwegian learnt in school.

Another example is Abdulrahim, who during his youth participated in a gang, dressed 'cool' and committed petty crimes. He was criticized by elderly Somali men and he avoided contact with them. As he grew older, he gradually became interested in the Somali community, dropped his gangster style and took more responsibility for others. From excluding himself both from adult Somalis and from the majority society represented in the view of

Fangen(2006a) social exclusion and inclusion of young immigrants the school and community. In other words, his transition to adulthood meant excluding himself from the gang and including himself in the Somali community. However, he was still not included in majority society in the sense that he did not continue education and he had problems getting stable and well-paid jobs.

5.2 Teachers' Responses

The 50 teachers who participated in the study had the following characteristics in terms of gender, age, educational qualification, teaching subject qualifications, years of teaching experience, experience teaching minority students and cultural knowledge.

There were 27 female (46%) and 23 Males (54%). The majority of the teachers were in the age-bracket 41 years and above (n=19, 38%). Those in the age-bracket 31- 40 were 16 (32%) and those aged between 20 and 30 years were 15, constituting 30%. In terms of educational qualifications, 76% of the teachers (n=38) had a bachelor's degree and the rest 12 (24%) had a Masters degree. Most of the teachers had experience teaching minority students. However, teachers with between 1 and 5 years experience were the majority (n=19, 38%). Those with 6-10 years experience were 17 (34%). The rest of the teachers (n=14, 28%) were those with more than 10 years experience.

The finding with more serious implication for teaching quality was that relating to teacher training or qualifications in the subjects they taught to the minority students. Our analysis revealed that up to 23 of the teachers (46%) were not qualified to teach the subjects they were teaching. Another 20 (40%) were qualified and seven teachers (14%) were highly qualified, that is had a masters degree in the subjects they taught. (See Table 6 below).

<Tables 6 & 7 about here>

Overall, teachers in the study reported having good subject matter knowledge. Specifically, 20% of the teachers reported having very high subject matter knowledge over, with 42% (n=21) reporting good knowledge. However up to 38% of the teachers reported having below average subject matter knowledge.

In terms of cross-cultural knowledge, the teachers in this study reported high levels of cultural knowledge over all. However up to 24% of the teachers reported having low levels of cultural knowledge and given that self-report data are often not very reliable there is the possibility that some of the teachers reporting high cross-cultural knowledge may have below average knowledge. In any case education authorities should be concerned about the limited cross-cultural knowledge of a substantial chunk of the teachers (24 %) who are teaching these minority students. It therefore calls for more cross-cultural training for teachers in these schools.

A One-Way between groups Analysis of Variance showed that there was significant difference in the cross-cultural knowledge of young teachers (20-30 years) and older teachers above 30 years old) (see Tables 8a and b below).

<Tables 8a & b about here>

The ANOVA analysis with the teacher subject qualification variable also showed significant difference (p=.037) between the groups (teachers with no qualifications in the subject they taught and those with qualifications or higher qualifications). The post hoc analysis showed significant differences in the cultural knowledge of teachers who were Qualified and those who were highly qualified in the subject they taught (Masters degree) (p= .035). There is no plausible reason for such a difference and this could have occurred by chance. However, there are fewer numbers of teachers in the "highly qualified" group (n=7) compared with 20 teachers in the "Qualified group". The unequal number could have influenced the analysis.

<Tables 9a & b about here>

When the teachers were asked to rate the amount of effort they put in to help the minority students (at a more individual focussed level), the majority (n=30, 60%) reported that they made a very big effort to help their students. Another 28% reported making big effort and only one person (12%) reported making some effort.

Those who reported some effort (minimal effort (12%) revealed, during the interviews, three factors for their inability to

exert maximum effort to support such students. First, they felt that some times the need of these students were overwhelming and when you have other students in the class, it is hard to give them maximum effort. The second factor was that some of the minority students demonstrated challenging and non-compliant behaviours and so managing them was difficult. The teachers also noted that some students were just generally negative about attending school due to feelings of exclusion and more time was spent on trying to let them see the positive side of things in the school.

<Table 10 about here>

Finally the correlation analysis was done with teachers; background variables such as, level of qualification, teaching experience and subject matter with cross-cultural knowledge and effort to help minority students. The most outstanding finding from the correlation analysis is that teachers' level of effort to help students was not correlated with any of their other variables such as level of Qualification, teaching experience, subject matter or cross-cultural knowledge. This is surprising because one would have thought that these factors would lead teachers to want students to achieve. This finding suggests that other school contextual factors, such as school inclusive culture may account for teachers trying to harder to help minority students.

<Table 11 about here>

6. Discussion

This study sought to explore the experiences of migrant or minority students of schooling in selected secondary schools in the Oslo and Follo areas and the schooling outcomes of 32 students of total sample of 97 students, three years later**.** It also gathered data on the background and practices of teachers in these schools.

Overall the results showed that the students, perceived schools as welcoming and supportive of their needs. The factors that negatively impacted on the learning were language barriers, family problems and school factors (defined as perceptions of acceptance and inclusion, availability of support for learning and coping with other psychosocial issues). The students felt that their teachers did not have adequate knowledge of other cultures and did not use diverse teaching strategies, questions and other means to promote mastery of learning content. The availability of other support services was perceived as average.

The follow up interviews of the 32 students showed that the majority did not complete high school. Interview data revealed that the key factors for disengaging from school were perceptions of exclusion, non-acceptance, difficulties with mastering school demands, language problems, lack of motivation due to insufficient adaptive teaching strategies, wrong choice of education programme and family issues. It is clear that difficulties in meeting the required learning progress may lead to students absenting themselves from school.

The teachers' responses showed that many of them were not qualified to teach in the subjects they were teaching at the time. There were strong correlations between years of teaching minority students, levels of qualification and subject matter knowledge. These variables however, did not correlate with cross-cultural knowledge and the level of teacher effort to help minority students.

During teacher interviews, some teachers reported that some the minorities students demonstrated challenging and non-compliant behaviours and so managing them was difficult. Some other students were just generally negative about attending school due to feelings of exclusion and more time was spent on trying to let them see the positive side of things in the school. This finding aligns with Raaum et al. (2009) argument that although traditional assimilationist theories of social exclusion seem to be based on the assumption that young people prefer inclusion to exclusion, many young persons temporarily choose to stay outside the more institutionalized settings of society. This might be related to an opposition to or a feeling of not mastering the behaviour demanded in a regularized school or work setting. In this case, some of the students showing negative behaviours may be finding it difficult to master the demands of schooling.

The need for cross-cultural knowledge is essential both as a facilitative skill for welcoming students and also for addressing their learning needs. There was evidence that younger teachers claimed more cross-cultural knowledge. This may be due to the fact that they (younger teachers) went to school in a more culturally diverse Norway than older ones, whose school experiences (some decades ago) would have been in a more culturally homogenous Norway. This finding suggests that it might be beneficial to provide more cross-cultural training that in some way targets older teachers.

Collectively, these findings draw attention to two key issues in school engagement and school outcomes; namely inclusion and quality teaching. According to social and educational inclusion theories, exclusion for a young person occurs when he or she at some moment in time is outside the structured arenas of school and work but also has a high probability of remaining outside in the near future (Raaum, et al., 2009). On his part, Vestby (2004) noted that social exclusion as a two-sided process denotes both the instances, when a person is expelled from a community or a place *and*

denial of access to 'outsiders'. There are also more symbolic forms of exclusion, such as being marked as different (Vestel, 2004: 428). These cases of 'othering' can vary from overt racism, to institutionalized ways of treating someone as 'different', such as special classes or projects targeted to specific groups of people (even though such strategies are meant as a help).

During the group interviews, most of the minority students interviewed attributed their low school achievement and lack of persistence to what they call in general not belonging, which is a feeling of exclusion. The student gave instances such as not being able to take part in activities and lack of friends who are native Norwegians.

Some Raaum et al. (2009) have argued that schools do not do the exclusion all the time but that some students choose to exclude themselves through their choice of alternative life styles or what Willis (1977) calls counter-school culture, which prepares them for the shop floor. For reasons such as these Raaum et al. (2009) suggest that many young persons temporarily choose to stay outside the more institutionalized settings of society such as the school.

For some minority children difficulties grasping the Norwegian language at the level that facilitates learning of other school content would be frustrating to the extent that they give up. This finding is similar to research in America and Australia studies (Birman & Bachuss, 2001; CMYI, 2002; Richards, 1994), which have highlighted the correlation between language problems and the motivation to participate in education among refugee and migrant young people. In this study language difficulties couples with a situation where many of the teachers are untrained (46%) to teach in the subjects they are teaching. This certainly says a lot about the quality of teaching these students received. Undoubtedly such frustration with mastering learning would lead students to naively decide to disengage from education as a way of avoiding humiliation. This idea of avoiding humiliation has been promoted by Bourdieu (2002: 61) in his work *Weight of the world.* Bourdieu writes about a young Moroccan man who has an illiterate father and a mother who is hardly able to write. He then argues that: 'Everything suggests that the organizing principle behind his rejection of school and the defiant attitudes that lead him towards, and gradually trap him in, the role of the "tough", is the desire to avoid the humiliation of having to read out loud in front of the other students'. In cases like this, the self-exclusion comes about in order to avoid the humiliation of being excluded by others.

School disengagement derives also from past experiences with learning. There are differences between first-generation immigrants who come as refugees and those coming through family reunion, as well as differences between those coming from war areas and those who do not have such experiences. This is partly a matter of having had any access to schooling before arriving in the host country, partly a matter of the extent to which one has experienced traumas or having or not having someone to relate to when arriving. There are vast differences in the experiences of those young immigrants coming from southern Somalia who had never attended school because of the war and some young immigrants from other countries (or other areas of Somalia) who had ordinary access to schooling in the home country before arriving in Norway. For those who had access to schooling in the home country, it did not take long before they managed to cope. Similar findings have been reported in Australia among young people migrants (Omar, 2005; Kuyini, 2006).

This finding indicates that many of the migrants start from a position of double disadvantage in that they have never been to school or had limited schooling and also have to use a new /unfamiliar language. These factors are certain to create feeling of exclusion when, as our findings suggest, students also feel that support services are inadequate. Moreover, some students felt that teachers were not meeting the needs and this reflected in their low rating of teachers' use of different teaching strategies. This perceived dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching may be the result of the fact that up to 46% of teachers in the study had no qualifications in the subjects they were teaching and this has obvious implications for both the quality of instruction and student learning.

An open ended question asked to students to explain the nature of school barriers to their learning and it emerged that many of the students were of the view that the school culture was exclusionary. Exclusion occurred in the fact that they did not have good relations with majority students and some teachers were not very helpful when they had academic and social problems in the school. This compares with Kuyini's (2006) finding in Australia, where migrant young people felt excluded based on similar reasons. However, it is important perhaps students recognise that although all teachers must share the responsibility for student welfare, there are designated staff for different issues and some teachers may simply be limiting themselves to the issues that are within their allocated areas of responsibility. And if some minority students do not understand this, they will get the impression that such teachers are not very helpful.

In terms of the results from teachers, the most outstanding finding was the lack of correlation between key teacher variables and their level of effort employed to help students. The correlation analysis showed that the level of effort to help students was not correlated with any of their other variables such as level of Qualification, teaching experience, subject matter or cross-cultural knowledge. This is surprising because one would have thought that these factors would

lead teachers to want students to achieve better in school. This finding suggests that other school contextual factors may account for teachers trying harder to help minority students. Studies on multicultural education and also inclusive education suggest that school culture in itself can foster teachers' sense of their personal obligation to support weaker students (See for example the work of Sage and Burello (1994), Riehl (2000), Kuyini & Desai (2007) who suggest that in the framework of the Theory of planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985), subjective norms created by schools, through school-principal expectations can lead teachers to support more inclusive learning for those with additional learning needs. Therefore, school climates and teachers' orientation towards supporting more needy students should be developed through more training, in order to promote better school outcomes for minority students in Norway.

It appears generally that, minority students are satisfied with their situation about schooling, nevertheless several respondents complained about the lack of adequate textbooks adapted to minority students and the need for qualified and motivated teachers to teach minority students. To reduce failures at school this paper sees the need for sufficient adaptation of teaching to minority students needs, sufficient informed choice of education programme and sufficient follow-up of minority students at risk by teachers and school counsellors so as to reduce absenteeism.

7. Conclusion

This study explored minority students` perceptions of schooling and the teachers' quality to support their learning. The key findings that students were dissatisfied with the support they received was in part substantiated by the fact that many teachers had limited cross-cultural knowledge and were not trained in the subject they taught in the classrooms where these minority students were placed. The fact that students who dropped out school, attributed their decisions to school and teacher-related factors, underscores the fact that a prerequisite for successful school achievement of minority students in regular classes is that the education system and the individual teachers within the system need to welcome diversity, address and respond adequately to the specific needs of the individual learners. Finally, the findings of this research clearly suggest that reducing dropout rate in upper secondary education could be achieved by working to improve the school performance in basic education and strengthening the support systems for first and second-generation immigrants.

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Table 1. Factors affecting students' learning

	N	Mean	SD
Language barriers affected my learning	97	6.30	6.06
Family barriers affected my learning	97	5.14	1.20
School barriers affected my learning	97	4.63	1.65
Total	97		

Table 2. t-test: High school completion and the effects of school barriers to learning

School Completion	Mean	SD	"t"	(p)
Completed high School	3.45	1.75	5.466	.000
Did not complete high school	5.71	.56		

Table 3. School arrangements fostering student learning

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teaching fostering cultural pluralism helps my learning	97	5.55	.829
Bilingual teaching helps my learning	97	5.31	1.034
Special class helps my learning	97	3.32	1.846
Valid N (listwise)	97		

Table 4. Mean scores for "having Good feelings about my school

School Completion	Mean	SD	"t"	(p)
Completed high School	5.8	.40	-7.10	.000
Did not complete high school	2.4	1.57		

Table 5. t-test: High school completion and Perception of school meeting students' need

School Completion	Mean	SD	"t"	(p)
Completed high School	5.9	.30	-4.77	.000
Did not complete high school	3.6	1.60		

Table 6. Teachers qualified to teach subject they teach

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not Qualified	23	46.0	46.0
Qualified	20	40.0	86.0
Highly Qualified	7	14.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

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Table 7. Teachers' cross cultural knowledge

Frequency	N	Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Below Average Knowledge	12	24.0	24.0
Good Knowledge	21	42.0	66.0
Very Good Knowledge	17	34.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Table 8a. ANOVA Cross-cultural Knowledge to help minority students

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9.182	2	4.591	11.17	.000
Within Groups	19.318	47	.411		
Total	28.500	49			

Table 8b. Post Hcc Analysis - Cross-cultural Knowledge to help minority students: Tukey HSD

(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
20-30 years	31-40 years	1.046*	.230	**.000**
	41 & above years	.786*	.221	**.003**
31-40 years	20-30 years	-1.046*	.230	.000
	41 & above years	-.260	.218	.462
41 & above years	20-30 years	-.786*	.221	.003
	31-40 years	.260	.218	.462

Table 9a. ANOVA - Cross-cultural Knowledge to help minority students and teachers qualified to teach subject

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.731	2	1.866	3.540	.037
Within Groups	24.769	47	.527		
Total	28.500	49			

Table 9b. Table Cross-cultural Knowledge to help minority students: Tukey HSD

(I) Qualified to teach subject currently teaching	(J) Qualified to teach subject currently teaching	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Not Qualified	Qualified	-.076	.222	.937
	Highly Qualified	.745	.313	.055
Qualified	Not Qualified	.076	.222	.937
	Highly Qualified	.821*	.319	**.035**
Highly Qualified	Not Qualified	-.745	.313	.055
	Qualified	-.821*	.319	.035

Table 10. Effort of teachers to help teachers

	Frequency	**Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Some effort	6	12.0	2.0
Big effort	12	28.0	30.0
Very big effort	30	60.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Table 11. Correlations

		Qualificat'n Level	Qualified to Teach Subject	Number: Years Teaching	Cross-cultural Knowledge to Help Students	Effort to Help Minority Students	Subject Matter Knowledge
Level of Qualification	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
Qualified to Teach Subject	Pearson Correlation	**.720****	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.000**					
Number of Years Teaching	Pearson Correlation	**.304***	**.387****	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.032**	**.005**				
Cross-cultural Knowledge to help Minority Students	Pearson Correlation	-.261	-.240	-.201	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.068	.093	.161			
Level of Effort to help students	Pearson Correlation	.083	-.013	.144	.061	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.567	.929	.318	.676		
Subject Matter knowledge	Pearson Correlation	**.580****	**.848****	**.290***	**-.290***	-.065	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.000**	**.000**	**.041**	**.041**	.654	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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