Despite equal performance, migrant children receive lower grades in math

After transferring to a Gymnasium, migrant children attain lower grades in math assignments – even if they achieve the same results as their classmates in standardized tests. These are the results of a new study conducted by the Chair of Educational Psychology at the University of Mannheim.

In order to determine whether there is a correlation between pupils’ migrant backgrounds and the math grades they receive, educational researchers at the University of Mannheim conducted a study where they monitored the math skills of 1,500 pupils attending the Gymnasium, a type of secondary school in Germany. Over the course of two years the participants were asked to regularly take part in standardized tests during the fifth and sixth grade. The researchers then compared the test results with the grades the pupils had received in exams and reports during that time period. The study found that migrant children, despite having the same level of language proficiency and social background, received lower grades in math than their classmates. This was even true after achieving the same results in the standardized tests.

“We were already aware that pupils with a migrant background receive a recommendation to attend a Gymnasium a lot less frequently than pupils without a migrant background,” says Meike Bonefeld from the University of Mannheim who headed this study. “We did not expect, however, that these differences would persist throughout their secondary school career.” These results indicate that, even after making the significant transition to secondary school, migrant children are systematically discriminated against in the German educational system.”

Finding out more about the teachers’ evaluation process that governs their grading and possible reasons for the differences that were identified, will be the researchers’ objectives in further studies. According to Bonefeld, understanding and overcoming these mechanisms poses an important challenge for future research.

The manuscript “Migrationsbedingte Disparitäten in der Notenvergabe nach dem Übergang auf das Gymnasium” was published in Zeitschrift für Entwicklungspsychologie und Pädagogische Psychologie in June 2017.
Contact:
Meike Bonefeld
Chair of Educational Psychology
University of Mannheim
Tel.: 0621/181-2494
E-mail: meike.bonefeld@staff.uni-mannheim.de