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**UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF POVERTY
ON CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL**

**A CHILD CENTRED STUDY ON INEQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL
OPPORTUNITY IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF BAKU**

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Abstract

The following thesis applied the theoretical concepts of social exclusion and capabilities approach as well as a child-centred perspective to understand the impact of poverty on children's experiences of schooling. The central questions of the research were what is the relationship between poverty and access to and quality of education in the context of Azerbaijan. Secondly, what is the impact of poverty on the secondary school experiences of children aged ten to sixteen in selected schools of Baku city and are there differences in the school experiences of children from poorer schools and schools in better-off circumstances.

The findings of this research confirm that poverty impacts considerably on children's experience of schooling and the social gap in educational experiences arises from what happens within children's lives in and out of schools. It further emphasises the relative poverty and the poor quality of education as the key factors contributing to precipitous decline in enrollment rates and school dropout.

Key words: capabilities approach, child poverty, child centred approach, education, social exclusion

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Acronyms

CHIP	Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Centre
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDPs	Internally Displaced Person
LSLMS	Living Standards Measurement Study
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SSAC	State Student Admission Committee
SCC	State Statistical Committee
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organisation

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty wears a multitude of faces and has numerous dimensions (UNICEF, 2004: 25). There is no uniform approach to defining and measuring poverty. A dramatic shift in understanding the phenomenon of poverty has occurred with the work of Amartya Sen (1999). Sen's capability approach has broadened the understanding of poverty by introducing the concepts of functionings and capabilities and defining it as a condition that results in the absence of freedom "to lead the kind of life one has reason to value" (Sen, 1999:41).

Links between poverty and education variables are well established in the social research and socioeconomic status is seen as the most important determinant of educational outcomes. Given the importance of what role education can play to overcome disadvantages associated with the home background of students, the research recognizes that poverty is strongly correlated with a wide range of home background variables, including families socioeconomic status, structure, and parental education. Poverty is often considered one of the important reasons affecting access to education and leading to school dropout at later stages.

There is a wealth of literature on child poverty expanding the definition of child poverty beyond traditional conceptualizations, such as low household income or low levels of consumption and recognizing that children's experiences of poverty are different from adult's experiences. The State of the World's Children 2005 report articulates that poverty "threatens all aspects of childhood by depriving children of the capabilities needed to survive, develop and thrive. It entrenches or widens social, economic, and gender disparities that prevent children from enjoying equal opportunities and undermines protective family and community environments, leaving children vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, violence, discrimination, and stigmatization". (UNICEF, 2004:25).

Children, defined as less than 18 years old (UNCRC, Article 1), account for about thirty percent of the population in Azerbaijan. As a result of continuous efforts of international institutions, policy attention and research on the issues of child poverty are increasing. Even

though the issues of child poverty have come into view, the focus, as in many other countries, is still directed towards the child, and little importance is given to the perspectives of the child.

A number of recent studies within the field of “new sociology of childhood” put emphasis on the social construction of childhood and children’s agency in the context of relations between child and adults. Conceptualisation of children as “human beings” with their own perspectives and preferences and not only “human becomings” has led to the development of the child-centered approach (Redmond, 2008). Being relatively new, child-centered approach is based on children as active agents in terms of voice (participation in decision making in communities and societies), vision (of deprivation and wellbeing), and visibility (in terms of the local meaning ascribed to or social construction of childhood) (Miles et al, 2011).

Research aim

The main objective of this research is to explore how different experiences of poverty, its inequitable outcomes, and processes impact children’s experiences of secondary school. It offers a chance to look at different experiences of schooling from the child centered perspective, focusing on what children’s attitudes are towards education and argues that the absolute notion of poverty should be complemented with the social exclusion and capabilities approach to explain the patterns in different phases of the education system in Azerbaijan.

The research further seeks to answer the following questions:

- *What is the relationship between poverty and access to and quality of education in the context of Azerbaijan?*
- *What is the impact of poverty on the secondary school experiences of children aged ten to sixteen in selected schools of Baku city and are there differences in the school experiences of children from poorer schools and schools in better-off circumstances?*

Exploring the links between the children’s school experiences and the level of disadvantage they face, the research will focus on what is the current context of the educational system in Azerbaijan, how important is education for children and what do they think about school, and how they and their parents experience schools.

Focusing on the children's perspectives of economic adversity is a relatively new idea in social research. This thesis contributes to the growing literature on children's perspectives on issues of economic disadvantage often accompanied by social exclusion affecting children's experiences of schooling in developing countries. It further aims to promote children's voices and visibility within the scope of existing research on child poverty.

Organization of the paper

The first chapter of this paper provides a general overview of the research and introduces to the research aim. Chapter 2 presents the socioeconomic context of the country and briefly describes the education system. Chapter 3 describes the main data collection approaches for the information presented and analysed in this paper and concludes with the discussion of the ethical considerations associated with conducting a child-centered research. Chapter 4 reviews the previous research on child poverty, its definition and approaches to its measurement as well as effects of poverty on education. Chapter 5 presents the analytical framework applied in the paper, discusses in detail the social exclusion and Sen's capabilities perspective and introduces a child centered perspective. Chapter 6 considers the first research question on what is the relationship between poverty and access to and quality of education in Azerbaijan and applies the social exclusion and capabilities approach to explain the patterns in different phases of the education system. Chapter 7 applies the child-centred perspective to explore the second research question on what is the impact of poverty on the secondary school experiences of children aged ten to sixteen in selected schools of Baku city and are there differences in the school experiences of children from poorer schools and schools in better-off circumstances. The final conclusion section provides a short summary based on the research's purpose and research questions.

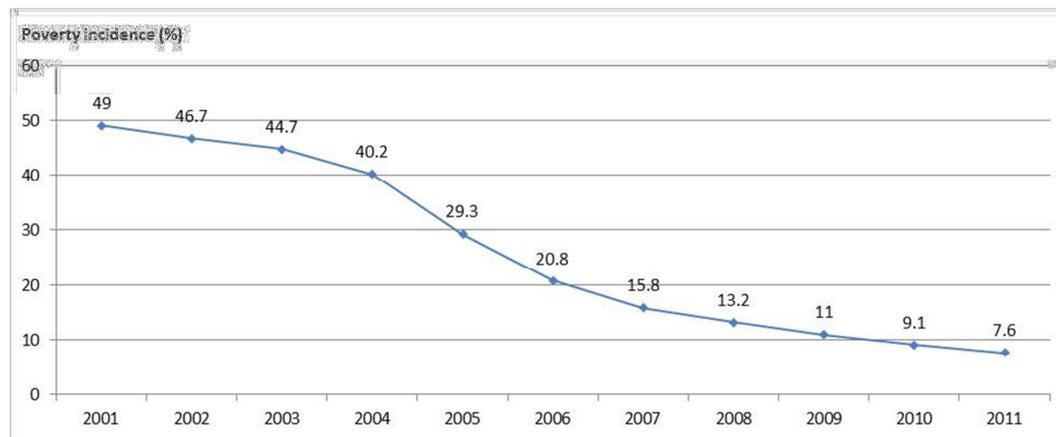
CHAPTER 2. EDUCATION AND POVERTY IN AZERBAIJAN

This chapter provides information about the socioeconomic context of Azerbaijan and describes the country's education system. It will provide a critical basis for further analysis concerning the effect of poverty on educational access and quality, as well as children's experiences of poverty in selected secondary schools of Baku city.

Azerbaijan's poverty profile

Although there is no substantial data on the poverty level in Azerbaijan during the Soviet era, historically the country has had a high poverty rate in comparison with other republics. According to the SSC (2004) in 1990, just before the collapse of the USSR, about 35 percent of the country's population lived below subsistence level. Effective measures such as achieving microeconomic stability, improving the business climate, and promoting private sector development coupled with the recent oil boom have translated into solid and continuous growth. Starting from 1998 Azerbaijan has had one of the highest rates of economic growth among the other CIS countries. The chart below shows that the country's economic growth has led to remarkable improvement in the welfare of the population.

Figure 1. Official Absolute Poverty Rates in Azerbaijan, 2001-2011



Source: SSC, 2012

The economic growth of the last decades was followed by the growth in real wages. The average minimum subsistence level (MSL¹) for 2012 is set at USD 137,45 (108 manats) per capita per month by the Law on The Minimum Subsistence Level in Azerbaijan for 2012 signed by the president Ilham Aliyev on December 20, 2011. That number was USD 120,91 (95 manats) for 2011, while the official poverty rate given by the Ministry of Economic Development in 2011 was USD 136,1 (106,9 manats) per capita per month. It should be noted that there is no updated official data on poverty rates among IDPs and refugees, representing one of the most vulnerable groups in the country, and limited data is available on regional disparities and different ethnic minorities. The recent 2008 Azerbaijan Living Standards Survey (WB, 2008) showed that inequality in Azerbaijan is moderate, especially when compared to other oil producing and other post-Soviet transition countries with mean

¹ MSL is used as an official poverty line and measures absolute poverty level.

income differences between cities, towns, and rural areas being relatively small. The study further shows that the level of inequality between men and woman is minimal, assuming that this is due to the fact that household members divide income.

Despite considerable decline in official poverty rates, some other non-monetary indicators of poverty confirm that there are still serious challenges in the country: Azerbaijan’s infant and child mortality rates are one of the highest in the region, there is low life expectancy at birth, a substantial portion of the population have limited or no access to basic utility services such as water (including hot water), gas supply, and telephone services (EU, 2011), and there is low coverage and declining quality of health and education services.

Education system

Until independence, while the country was under the control of the Soviet Union, the education system of Azerbaijan followed the same structure as the Soviet educational system; it was determined by Soviet ideology and was based on massive state control over all educational institutions. Azerbaijan’s education system has implemented several reforms and made notable achievements in the past two decades after the independence. However, there are still challenges that have to be addressed to enable the system to adequately support poverty reduction and the country’s growing market economy. The latest research (WB, 2007; UNICEF, 2008) shows that the country’s education system significantly lags behind its comparators in many areas, including deteriorating quality of education, access and participation in early childhood development activities, participation at the tertiary level, limited new research and development, etc. One of the challenges faced by the educational system is how to transform the positive achievements of the Soviet era education system into the modern education system of the democratic and market-oriented society (Spasic, 2007).

According to the recent Law on Education (2009), Azerbaijan’s education system consists of the following levels:

Preschool education	for children 3 to 6 years old
General education	Primary education (4 years, grades 1-4) General lower secondary education (5 years, grades 5-9) Full secondary education (2 years, grades 10-11)
Vocational education	Professional or technical institutions Secondary specialised education

Higher education	Bachelor level studies Master level studies Doctoral studies
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The first two levels of general education constitute basic secondary education. According to the Azerbaijani Constitution and the Law on Education, all children have the right to a free and compulsory 9-year school education.

After completion of the basic secondary education children may choose to continue either with full secondary education or vocational education. A Certificate of Secondary Education is needed for students to be able to enter a centralised Higher Education Entrance Examination and apply for the admission to higher education.

The absolute majority of general secondary schools in Azerbaijan are under public domain.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology and discusses the main data collection approaches used for the data analysed in this paper: qualitative focus group discussions and a review of the quantitative data from the secondary sources. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the ethical considerations associated with conducting child-centered research.

Research design

This research is non-experimental in design and has extensively employed the qualitative approach combined with the review and analysis of the quantitative data from the secondary sources. A qualitative approach is commonly used when the focus of the research is primarily to understand the practices and processes, meaning, perceptions and experiences; attempting to understand not one, but multiple realities (Dirksen, 2012). As opposed to quantitative research being an objective investigation of reality, qualitative approach acknowledges subjectivity as an important part of the research (Bryman, 2008). A qualitative approach was particularly useful for the purposes of this research aiming to develop a better understanding of children’s own perspectives of poverty and considering the complex dynamics of their daily lives. In general, this research can be best described as child focused

and participatory, flexible and reflexive, and responsive to ethical considerations (Crivello et al, 2009).

Qualitative data- focus group discussions

Focus group discussions were used as the most sensitive way to inquire into a subject of children's daily experiences and perceptions of poverty. Another reason for favouring the focus group discussions above children's individual interviews was the advantage of reducing the power relationship between the adult researcher and the "child informant", thus lessening the "social mismatch" between adult interviewer and child interviewee having support from their peers (James et al, 1998). Third, because the focus groups were designed as child-centered as possible, a flexible and unstructured discussion procedure was chosen.

The research took place in Baku, the capital city, selected as it is home to more than 25percent of the country's population. Selection of schools and administrative districts was further discussed and agreed on with the Ministry of Education. In each district one school was randomly selected from a list of all schools in the district, using a simple step-off sample methodology. Out of six selected schools two were amongst the most advantaged schools and four in the most disadvantaged areas (the latter also included two schools for IDPs). Participants for focus groups were randomly selected from the list of all students in the school, disaggregated by age and gender. Ten children (five boys, five girls) were invited to participate in each focus group. In all, 120 children participated in the focus group discussions, twelve focus groups were conducted in total, with two focus groups in each school, one with children aged 10-13, and second with children aged 14-16. Focus group discussions lasted from two to three hours, and were all audio recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Quantitative data - documents as data sources

The analysed quantitative information came from the various large nationally representative surveys, such as the State Statistics Committee, USAID's 2006 Demographic and Health Survey, 2008 Living Standards Measurement Survey of the WB etc.

In addition, data from OECD's 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment and Azerbaijan State Student Admission Committee's reports were used to analyse the impact of the declining quality of education on the issue of educational access in Azerbaijan.

It should be noted that the availability of the quantitative data needed for the analysis was limited. Another factor influencing the choice of sources is discrepancy between official data and alternative sources. Above sources were carefully selected in line with Bryman's rigorous set of criteria against which documents might be gauged (Bryman, 2008:516):

- Authenticity of the data concerning the origins of the data
- Credibility of the data, assuming that it is free from error and distortion
- Representativeness, assuming that the evidence is typical of its kind
- Meaning or clarity and comprehensibility of the data

Ethical considerations

Though exploring children's diverse experiences and perspectives on specific issues can be a beneficial approach both from an analytical and ethical perspectives, since children are usually the best source of information about their everyday lives (Ben-Arieh, 2004), child centered research inevitably involves a discussion on ethics and methods. Some of the dilemmas commonly faced in research with children are about issues of power and control, how to gain access to children, and the contradictory need not only to involve children in research processes, but also to act in "their best interest" and protect them.

Gaining access to children

Permission for children to engage in focus group discussions was sought from both children and their parents (or caretakers). Prior to the qualitative data collection formal consents were obtained from parents of children participating in the focus group discussions. In those cases where parents did not agree, another child was randomly selected from the list of students provided by the school.

As to the participating children themselves, an "informed dissent" approach was sought (Bessel, 2006). Instead of obtaining a signed consent before the focus groups, the research has adopted an approach where children were regularly asked about their willingness to participate and reminded that they have the right to quit discussions at any time. It should be noted that none of the participants opted to leave discussions. Moreover, most of the children said that they enjoyed the discussion and found it useful to hear the opinions from other research participants.

Avoiding stigmatization

As highlighted above, the research aimed to collect information from children from both more affluent and poor families without reinforcing stigma. To avoid stigmatisation of children living in poverty the research compared children in more affluent and most disadvantaged schools. Since the research focused on the schools and not individual children, it has avoided the issues of individual child's relative poverty being exposed to the peers. To ensure and protect the confidentiality of participants no names of participants will be included in this research paper.

Limitations

The aim of this specific research was to understand the diversity and the complexity of the poverty impact in children's experience of school in the selected schools. Hence the research is not concerned about the statistical representativeness of the results. Findings from the focus group discussions concern the present research group and cannot be generalized to the Azerbaijani society.

CHAPTER 4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review considers the previous research informing the debate on child poverty, its definition and approaches to its measurement. It then examines the existing research literature on effects of poverty on education with the aim to portray a broad picture about the research subject and create an understanding for the analysis and the presentation of empirical data in final chapters of this paper, where references are made to the results to previous research.

Defining child poverty

Child poverty is affecting the lives of millions of children worldwide, both in rich and poor countries. According to UNICEF more than half of the children in the developing world live in poverty (UNICEF, 2006). Child poverty and well-being are distinct from adult experiences of poverty and wellbeing. The impact of poverty experienced during childhood has a permanent effect on children. Being different from adults experiences of poverty falling into poverty in childhood can last a lifetime – most children will not have a second chance for getting an education or a healthy start in life. Growing up in poverty damages children's physical, cognitive and social development. It is well documented that child poverty

negatively affects not only the individual child, but is likely to be passed on to future generations, perpetuating the cycle of poverty across generations and triggering inequality in society (CHIP, 2004; UNDP, 2004). Consequently, expanding the definition of child poverty beyond traditional conceptualizations, such as low household income or low levels of consumption, is particularly important.

The State of the World's Children 2005 report presented the following working definition of child poverty: "Children living in poverty experience deprivation of the material, spiritual, and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society" (UNICEF, 2004). This definition highlights that different experiences of poverty are interrelated and multifaceted. This definition also suggests that economic security is only one of the many components of defining child poverty. "Other aspects of material deprivation like access to basic services, as well as issues related with discrimination and exclusion that affect self-esteem and psychological development, among others, are also central to the definition of child poverty" (Minujin, 2005:2).

Despite the extensive and steadily growing research over the past years the definition and measurement of poverty has been a highly contested area. The concepts defining poverty have developed rapidly over the last decades. Key issues behind the rising popularity include the debate about different potential causes of poverty and ways by which poverty can be measured and compared, both at national and international levels.

Approaches to measuring child poverty

Monetary approach

The most widely used approach for identifying and measuring poverty is the monetary approach concerned with the extent to which poverty describes an absolute state or relative inequality. It defines absolute poverty as the absence of financial resources required to maintain a certain minimal standard of living (UNESCO, 2008). Absolute poverty measures the number of people or households living below defined income threshold- poverty line. A poverty line is set based on factors such as the financial resources needed to ensure access and purchase certain basic goods and services, such as shelter, food, water, sanitation, (Deaton, 1997; Fields, 2000; Wratten, 1995). A poverty line usually used by the World Bank and other agencies for making international comparisons was established in 2008 as \$1.25 per

person per day. In contrast, relative poverty is determined by the society and measures the extent to which a person or a household cannot reach a standard of living similar to the average or the majority of the population in the given country (UNICEF, 2008). Relative poverty measures are commonly used as indicators of social inequality (Boltvinik, 1998).

However the monetary approach is not appropriate for measuring child poverty as it does not consider entirely the household structure, gender, and age related factors, ignoring different nature of children's needs (Vandemoortele, 2000; Minujin, 2005). It also reduces poverty reduction strategies to increasing individuals' income levels (Vandemoortele, 2000) and disregards that children's wellbeing is defined by non-market-based goods, such as access to basic services.

Multidimensional approaches

Broadly acknowledging the fact that poverty is about more than just low incomes, multidimensional approaches, such as the basic needs, capability and human rights approaches use a comprehensive set of indicators to identify and measure poverty. The steadily growing literature now includes researchers like Deutsch and Silber (2005), Chakravarty, Deutsch and Silber (2008), Maasoumi and Lugo (2008), Alkire and Foster (2011a), Ravallion (2011) and others. The concept has also been part of the broader policy debate, for example, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) of Alkire and Santos (2010), reported against over 100 countries in the UNDP's Human Development Report 2010. Advocates of this approach argue that monetary measures, while highly correlated with deprivation and unfulfilled needs, are not able to effectively identify the poverty and inform policy making processes. *Instead, the objective of multidimensional approaches is to ensure that the basic needs and rights of the poor are met – such as access to public services, infrastructure, shelter, food, and so on* (UNICEF, 2006:31).

While there is widespread agreement amongst both skeptics and proponents of the multidimensional poverty approach on the fact that: poverty is multidimensional and that deprivations exist in multiple domains (such as education, health, social status, political power etc) and are often correlated, the debate is “about how best to measure this multidimensional poverty – i.e. how best to convey information about the extent of these various deprivations in a way that is useful for analysts and policy makers” (Ferreira and Lugo, 2012:3). The debates continues on whether the various dimensions of poverty can be

aggregated into a single, multidimensional index, which requires the use of relative weights for each dimension.

Researchers like Maasoumi and Lugo (2008), Alkire and Foster (2011a) and others advocate for the use of “scalar indices that seek to combine, in a single number, information from those various dimensions” (Ferreira and Lugo, 2012:3) . Others, like Ravallion (2011), have proposed a “dashboard approach”, focusing efforts on developing “the best possible *distinct* measures of the various dimensions of poverty ... aiming for a credible set of “multiple indices” rather than a single “multidimensional index”(Ravallion, 2011:13).

Capabilities approach

The capabilities approach to poverty is a multidimensional methodology introduced by Amartya Sen (1992, 1999) is one of the first approaches moving the focus of the poverty debate from economic welfare towards defining poverty as a deprivation of basic capabilities and not as insufficiency of income. *“If our attention is shifted from an exclusive concentration on income poverty to the more inclusive idea of capability deprivation, we can better understand the poverty of human lives and freedoms in terms of a different informational base (involving the statistics of a kind that the income perspective tends to crowd out as a reference point for policy analysis). The role of income and wealth – important as it is along with other influences – has to be integrated into a broader and fuller picture of success and deprivation”* (Sen, 1999:20). Sen extends understanding of poverty beyond the subsistence measures to include whether the people are free to live the life they want and defines human capabilities as “the substantive freedom of people to live the lives they have reason to value and enhance the real choices they have”(Sen, 1999:293).

Sen (1999) presents three major arguments supporting the capability approach to poverty definition. His approach concentrates on deprivations that are intrinsically important to identifying poverty (contrasting with low income, which is only instrumentally significant). Second, he argues that there are influences on capability deprivation other than low income (income is not the single instrument in generating capabilities). To conclude, he recognizes that the impact of income on capabilities is contingent and conditional, in other words that different individuals, families, or communities may need different levels of resources to achieve the same capabilities (Sen,1999: 87-88).

While Sen does not define a list of basic capabilities, there have been a number of attempts aiming at creating an objective and non-culturally bias list. Researchers like Nussbaum (2000), Narayan et al (2000), and others have each surveyed and produced “lists” of human needs, which can be used as indicators to identify and address the level of poverty and the needs of the poor.

The major criticism against the capability approach is concerned with the challenge of transforming a set of basic capabilities into a set of measurable indicators as “that capabilities represent asset of potential outcomes and as such are problematic to identify empirically” (Laderchi, Saith and Stewart, 2003:18).

Establishing links between poverty and education

Though the concept of education (defined in various ways and in relation to indicators of enrollment, retention, and educational outcomes) is contested similarly to the concept of poverty, the links between education and poverty have been clearly established in the research literature. Children living in conditions of poverty, however it is defined, are more likely to be affected and not to enroll or be retained in education and demonstrate poorer educational outcomes than those children who live in relative wealth. Similarly, those children who are not enrolled or retained in education and those having low educational outcomes in either narrow attainment terms or in more general terms of educational well-being are also more likely to then experience poverty (Raffo et al, 2007). However, economic research has demonstrated that education can positively affect earnings, as better-educated people have more chances to be employed and are economically more productive. While there is widespread agreement that poverty and poor educational outcomes are related the research literature offers competing explanations as to why this might be. Attempts to conceptualise the relationship between poverty and education raises issues about how both terms are being defined.

Review of Theories on Education and Poverty

The social and economic functions of education are related to the very origins of educational systems (Archer, 1984). The most fundamental difference in reviewing the theories on links between education and poverty is in how the different approaches understand the role of education in producing “good society”. Raffo et al (2007), in one of the most fundamental

works reviewing the existing research literature on links between poverty and education, distinguishes between two main theories representing the debate on the functions of education: the functionalist theory and socially critical perspective.

The functionalist theory. The functionalist theory focuses on the ways education serves the needs of society and assumes that education plays an important role in the functioning of society. Functionalists divide society into separate groups, each of which performs a task that is necessary to the survival of society as a whole; the organic whole, for example, the role of education would be conveying basic knowledge and skills to the next generation. The major criticism of the functionalist perspective on education is the supposed benefits do not often materialize in the case of learners from poorer communities and therefore it ignores social inequalities that may restrict attainment.

The socially critical perspective. The socially critical theory sees education as potentially beneficial and can both challenge existing power structures and enable democratic development. The proponents of this approach highlight that the ability to participate in economic and social development is itself intrinsically inequitable and that education in its current form reflects unequal distributions of power and resource (Raffo et al, 2007). They further suggest that education should not be perceived as an unproblematic good and that its benefits cannot be taken for granted.

Using the above approaches to education Raffo et al (2007) further review the existing literature on poverty and education aiming at identifying principal conceptualisations underpinning different approaches. They have identified research-relevant literature explicitly addressing the relationship between poverty and education, such as research and policy papers, evaluations, and other reports. Their findings are presented through the framework which categorizes the research literature around three different foci (Raffo et al, 2007):

- The micro level, focusing on the individual and including areas such as the characteristics of the individual or his/her relationship with family, teachers, and peers.
- The meso level, focusing on 'immediate social contexts' that might be located in families, communities, schools, and peer groups.
- The macro level that focuses on social structures and are linked to notions of power and vulnerability.

Effects of poverty and social exclusion on education

Beginning with Coleman's 1966 Equality of Educational Opportunity Report, a large body of educational research literature demonstrates that home background is the single most important factor influencing educational outcomes in most developed and developing countries (UNESCO, 2008: 9). Given the importance of what role the school can play to overcome disadvantages associated with the home background of students, the research recognizes that poverty is strongly correlated with a wide range of home background variables, including family socioeconomic status, structure, and parental education.

An exploration of some of the key factors affecting childrens' risks of experiencing poverty reveals how socioeconomic status (SES), family structure, race/ethnicity, and cultural factors are assumed to influence educational outcomes. In much of this research the family background is determined by some combination of occupation, education, income, and family structure. The consistent finding is that the higher the family's social status, the more likely the child is to be successful in school (Epps, 1995:597). These relationships vary in strength for different populations and for different outcome variables (Duncan, 1994; Epps, 1969; Epps and Jackson, 1988). Researchers such as Bradshaw (1990), Khumar (1993), Gordon et al (2000), and Howard et al (2001) have identified strong links with unemployment, long term social benefits reliance, ethnicity, family disruption (lone parenthood), disability, and sickness.

Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (1997) further see socioeconomic status (SES) as an important mediator of the effect of family structure on young adult outcomes, since economic status and family structure are correlated and low income has demonstrated negative consequences for children. Evidence shows that family income also affects the type of neighborhood where families can afford to live and children living in higher income communities are more likely to receive positive peer influences encouraging achievement and pro-social behavior (McLanahan and Sandefur ,1994). In addition, extensive research evidence (Conger et al., 1992; Dodge, Petit, & Bates, 1994) shows that poverty and economic vulnerability may also result in less effective parenting having in turn adverse consequences for childrens' development and adjustment.

Shropshire and Middleton(1999) raised concerns about the pivotal role of disadvantage in affecting the formation of expectations and behavior. They argue that children in families with higher levels of socio economic status are more likely to expect to attain high levels of education, while children in families severely affected by constrained economic circumstances are more likely to be reducing their aspirations and “learning to be poor”. Other research by Willms (2006) has found that the poverty level of the general school community has an additional negative effect, over and above the poverty level of an individual, even for schools with similar resources. Accordingly, children attending schools where most students are poor are at an even greater disadvantage than poor children attending more wealthy schools (Willms, 2006:68).

There is ample evidence that other outcomes of poverty for children, including poor health and nutritional status, homelessness, poor physical environment, and poor housing conditions negatively affect education, reducing ability to learn, enrollment, and attainment (Bradshaw, 1990; Hobcraft, 1993; Gregg and Machin, 1999; Ermsch et al, 2001).

CHAPTER 5. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will present the analytical framework used in the analysis of the empirical data. It will discuss in detail the social exclusion and Sen’s capabilities perspective in the context of the relationship between poverty and education as well as introduce a child centered perspective within the framework of the new sociology of childhood as the major focus of this research. The final operationalization section will outline how the theory, research questions, and data will be integrated.

Education, social exclusion and capabilities perspective

The capability approach to poverty analysis was presented and discussed in detail in the previous chapter. This chapter will further explore the capabilities perspective looking at the relationship between the capability approach and education and introducing it from the educational perspective, which has not yet been critically explored, despite the fact that the capability approach has received substantial attention from social science researchers.

There is a crucial interrelationship and interaction between the capability approach and education (Saito, 2003). Two critical roles which education might play in relation to the development of capacities are: the enhancement of capacities and opportunities and the development of judgment in relation to the appropriate exercise of capacities(Saito, 2003).

According to Sen's view of poverty, the limits imposed on the freedom to participate fully in society, social marginalization can be understood as another form of poverty, even when it does not entail a lack of financial resources (UNESCO, 2008:16). The capability approach sees education as strongly connected with human freedom, viewing educational benefits and results as multidimensional, not value-free, and as measured by substantial achievements in freedom (Lanzi, 2007). The overall value of education in the capability approach is defined by the sum of instrumental values (wages, test scores, certificates, etc), intrinsic values (achievements in agency, autonomy, and well-being) and positional values (established social relations, access to positional goods, etc) (Lanzi, 2007: 426).

In his work, Sen points out that education plays a critical role not only in accumulating human capital, but also in expanding human capability. He gives an example of a person benefiting from education 'in reading, communicating, arguing, in being able to choose in a more informed way, in being taken more seriously by others and so on' (Sen, 1995: 294). According to Sen, education plays a role in influencing both intrinsic and instrumental values. He sees education is an important factor in broadening human capabilities, which include human capacities and also highlights that human capabilities play a role in influencing both intrinsic and instrumental values.

Sen's capability approach further highlights some important issues, revealing that quality of education and access are inextricably linked. The notion of "functionings" focuses attention on the outcomes of capabilities, such as the outcomes of access to schooling, thus going beyond the issues of physical and including the ability to participate and engage in meaningful education. According to Sen, education needs to help in living a meaningful life, or increasing the chances of turning innate abilities and contexts into capabilities. The capabilities approach assumes that learners have to perceive education as meaningful and place their experience at the centre. To assess whether a learner has capability (educational utility) one needs to understand the internalization of the learner's experience (Dieltiens et al, 2008:9). Sen points out that: "freedoms are not only the primary ends of development, they

are among its principal means" (Sen,1999:10). In addition, he gives an example of the interdependence of freedom and individual responsibility as "a child who is denied the opportunity of elementary schooling is not only deprived as a youngster, but also handicapped all through life" (Sen,1999:284).

Social exclusion can also be perceived as a part of Sen's capability approach and it can be defined as a process leading to a state of functioning deprivations (Sen, 2000). One of the key assumptions underpinning the concept of social exclusion and setting it apart from the other concepts of poverty or deprivation, is that (active or passive) actions by people and institutions can have the impact of excluding children from participating in what is considered normal in a community or society (Atkinson, 1998). Thus, the "process" of social exclusion produces a "state" of exclusion that can be interpreted as a combination of some relevant deprivations (Poggi, 2003:2). While education has great intrinsic significance as access to education is an important right and being educated is an important and very valuable capability, it can be a source of exclusion for children and thus carry with it the intrinsic problems this involves. In addition, educational policies can be seen as (instrumentally) promoting (or failing to stem) social exclusion as adults (Klasen, 2002: 9).

As stated earlier, Sen (2000) distinguishes between active and passive exclusion. He defines active exclusion as the result of a deliberate act (for example, a law reducing access to schooling for irregular migrant children). Passive exclusion is explained as a result of failure to identify and address (intentionally or unintentionally) evident barriers, such as hidden costs associated with education. Sen further warns that such tolerance of passive exclusion may provoke more active measures over time.

Summarizing the above discussion it could be concluded that the concept of social exclusion resonates with children and has potentially much greater power to reveal the multidimensional nature of poverty and educational disadvantage experienced in childhood.

Child centred perspective

The second approach to the analysis used in this research is the child centred perspective. Child well-being and poverty are distinct from adult experiences of wellbeing and poverty. While there is a wealth of literature on child poverty, little is known about childrens' everyday experiences of poverty and their very particular social needs. In consequence,

important dimensions of childrens' experiences of poverty are often overseen by many mainstream "adult centric" approaches to child poverty. Traditionally, researchers tended to see children as "adults-to-be" and research was largely concentrated not on the experiences of children, but rather on the future implications of childhood poverty for the society. Although the children evidently have come into view, previous research involving children has been mainly on them, rather than with them or for them (Hood et al, 1996).

The approach adopted by this paper can be best described as "the new sociology of childhood", which acknowledges the fact that children are not only outcomes of the social processes, but also participants of it by recognizing children as a full part of the society and as social actors. James and Prout highlight that this view of structure and agency complementing each other is an essential component in the new sociology of childhood: *It is important to recover children as social actors (and their activity as a source of social change). We need also, however, to grasp childhood as a social institution that exists beyond the activity of any particular child or adult. There must be theoretical space for both the construction of childhood as an institution and the activity of children within and upon the constraints and possibilities that the institutional level creates (James and Prout, 1997:27)*

Conceptualizing children as social actors in their own right, not just inadequately socialised future adults has been extended into the research and has led to a shift from children being an "object" of the research to becoming a "subject". The new sociology of childhood further attempts to reinforce visibility of children and their voices within the broad scope of research on child poverty by focusing on personal experiences and own actions of children actually living in poverty. Many researchers agree now that without having a research agenda able to understand and acknowledge childrens' different experiences, perceptions, and meanings, there is risk of missing or misinterpreting the real and subjective experiences of what it is like to be poor as a child (Ridge, 2002).

A child-centered approach is based on children as active agents in terms of voice (participation in decision making in communities and societies), vision (of deprivation and wellbeing), and visibility (in terms of the local meaning ascribed to or social construction of childhood) (Miles et al, 2011) . Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) clearly states that children have a right to be heard: "*States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those*

views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” (UNCRC, Article 12).

Developing a more child centered approach to understanding the effects of childhood poverty and social exclusion requires a critical review of conceptual frameworks, which were traditionally used to analyze and understand poverty. By definition, asking children about their experiences of poverty assumes that they are competent actors. This approach recognises that adults’ views of children and children’s views of themselves may be completely different and what adults perceive as relevant to children might be different from what is articulated by the child. (Ridge, 2002:7).

Within this research the new sociology of childhood will provide an important conceptual framework to explore the personal experiences of children and highlight useful methodological considerations in the field of child poverty research by acknowledging children as research participants and not research subjects.

Integrating theory, research questions and data

The theoretical concepts of social exclusion and the capabilities approach, as well as the child-centered perspective presented in the analytical framework are relevant to the particular research. The majority of the existing research literature exploring the impact of poverty on childrens’ experiences is based on the data collected in rich countries, such as the United Kingdom (Ridge, 2002; Ridge , 2007; Wikeley et al., 2007, Sutton et al, 2007; Backett-Milburn et al., 2003), Australia (Taylor and Fraser, 2003; Taylor and Nelms, 2006), the Netherlands (van der Hoek, 2005) and the United States (Weinger, 2000). These studies explore childrens’ perspectives of economic disadvantage in rich countries and examine a wide range, including childrens’ family incomes and income sources, personal and social lives, family relationships, education and future aspirations, health, and strategies employed by children to cope with living in low-income families.

However, many of the findings and conclusions emerging from the above-mentioned research seem to be relevant to children living in low and middle-income countries. This research will attempt to apply the social exclusion and capabilities approach as well as the child-centered perspective to the data collection and analysis in the context of educational systems in a developing middle-income country, which is undergoing a period of extensive social changes

and reforms. The chosen analytical framework will aim to enhance the data collection process as well as guide analysis and presentation of the research findings to reveal how the socioeconomic differences are associated with a wide range of influences on the learning process.

While answering the first research question on what is the relationship between poverty and access to and quality of education in the context of Azerbaijan, this paper extensively uses quantitative data from various secondary sources, such as the State Statistics Committee, USAID, WB, and OECD. It will then apply the social exclusion and capabilities approach to explain the patterns in different phases of the education system in Azerbaijan to propose an expanded understanding of how poverty influences educational access.

The research will further apply the child-centered perspective to the analysis and presentation of the empirical data to answer the second research question on what is the impact of poverty on the school experiences of children aged ten to sixteen in selected schools of Baku city and are there differences in the school experiences of children from poorer schools and schools in better-off circumstances.

CHAPTER 6. POVERTY AND ACCESS AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AZERBAIJAN

This chapter will consider the first research question on what is the relationship between poverty and access to and quality of education in Azerbaijan. It will begin with the presentation of quantitative data from secondary sources, such as SSC, WB, UNICEF, USAID, OECD, and others. Social exclusion and the capabilities approach will be further applied to the analysis to explain the patterns in different phases of the education system in Azerbaijan and to propose an expanded understanding of how poverty influences educational access.

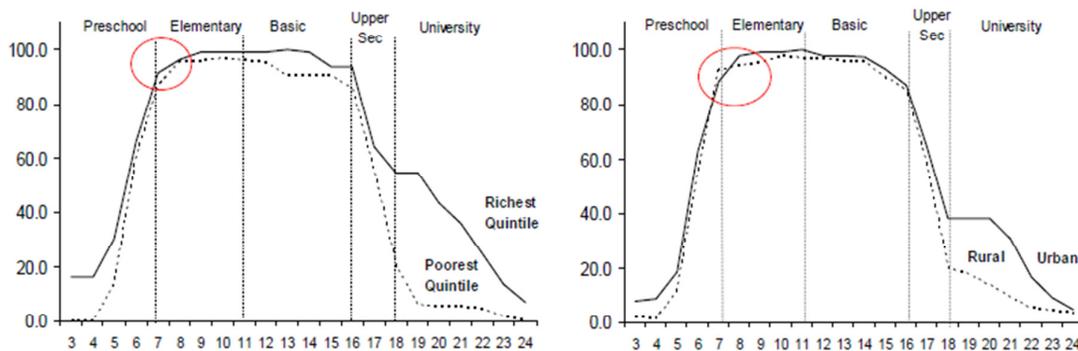
Access to education

As Article 5 of the 2009 “Law on Education” of Azerbaijan Republic declares, “The State guarantees the creation of adequate conditions required for education provision for all citizens and does not allow deprivation from any grade, level, and form of education.

Regardless of sex, race, skin colour, language, religion, political views, nationality, economic and social standing, origin, and health conditions of citizens, the State ensures provision of education and prevention of any discrimination of citizens.”

Overview of the data available from SSC, WB, UNICEF and others confirms that access to general secondary school is nearly universal in Azerbaijan. The general tendency for participation in schooling can be presented by an inverted U-shape, with very low enrollment rates in preschool institutions, followed by nearly universal enrollment rates at primary and general lower secondary levels (grades 1-9) and a speedy decline at upper secondary and higher education levels.

Figure 2. Rate of enrollment by age (poor/rich and rural/urban)



Source: LSLMS, WB, 2008

When comparing enrollment rates based on families socioeconomic status LSLMS data (WB, 2008) further reveals that there are relatively small differences in the participation of children aged 7-15 (approximately grades 1-9) between the richest quintile and poorest quintiles; and rural and urban areas. Contrarily, there is a large difference in the percentage of children with access to preschool education in both rural and urban areas and between poorest and richest quintiles. According to the SSC (2012), only 25,7 percent of children aged 1-5 attend preschools in urban areas and 9,5 percent in rural areas. The key triggering factors in addition to the generally deteriorating education system, discussed earlier in Chapter 2, are poor or non-existent preschool infrastructure mainly in rural areas, massive unemployment of woman who usually are the primary caregivers and the informal costs of preschool institutions.

A closer look at the data further shows that there are significant disparities in access to post-secondary education between rich and poor and urban and rural areas depriving a large percentage of youth from the access to higher education. According to LSMS data (WB, 2008) the enrollment rate for the richest are twice as high as those for the poorest - 70percent and 35 percent respectively. The general precipitous decline in enrollment rates at higher education levels can be explained by high private costs, particularly unaffordable for the poor. The disparities across economic groups and rural-urban areas can be attributed to factors, such as generally low incomes and low quality of secondary schools in rural areas. In addition, a recent study of the Caucasus Research Resource Centre (2006) demonstrates a strong relationship between parent's education level and the likelihood of children being at school after age 16, leading to intergenerational inequity in access to higher education. These findings are similar to the research findings presented earlier in Chapter 4, while discussing links between education and poverty.

It should be noted that Azerbaijan's official statistics do not measure Net Enrollment Ratio (NER)². However, Demographic and Health Survey conducted in 2006 reveals low primary school enrollment rate - around 73percent only. This can potentially indicate that there are a certain percentage of children falling outside of the official school age or higher repetition rates at the primary school level. However, the remaining percentage seems to be too high – 27 percent, highlighting that there might also be other factors, such as late school start (children who are not 6 years old in October of the starting academic year will not be accepted to school) and migration (EU, 2011). AzDHS 2006 further demonstrates that the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GAR)³ is 108 at primary school education. This may indicate that approximately 35 percent of students are either under or above the specific age group. The survey also shows that the highest net primary school attendance in Azerbaijan is among children living in the wealthiest quintile and as with the primary school level, the highest complete secondary school attendance is among in the wealthiest quintile.

The above discussion relates to the findings of the previous research discussed in detail in Chapter 4 showing that income poverty and family's socioeconomic status are seen as major factors in influencing access to education particularly at preschool and postsecondary levels.

² UNESCO defines NER as the number of pupils in the theoretical age group who are enrolled expressed as a percentage of the same population.

³ UNESCO defines GER as the number of pupils enrolled in a given level of education regardless of age expressed as a percentage of the population in the theoretical age group for that level of education.

However, it should also be noted that the limited quantitative data availability (such as gender disaggregated, regional data, data on ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, IDPS and refugees) restricts analyse of the relative effects of poverty on the educational access in Azerbaijan.

Quality of Education

Enrollment and attendance rates can only provide a limited understanding of the education challenges in Azerbaijan, since they cannot be used to measure the quality of education. However it is notoriously difficult to elaborate a set of criteria to measure the quality of education. Considering the scarce data and limited access to it this paper will use some proxy measurements of quality such as surveys of learning achievements to look at learning outcomes, besides the indicators measuring the inputs and resources invested in the country's education system. It will then apply Sen's capability approach to enlighten the reasons of precipitous decline in post-secondary education when the effects of poor quality education are the most hard-hitting by expanding the notion of access beyond the physical meaning of getting through the school gates to include the ability to participate and engage in meaningful education (Dieltiens, 2008). It will further examine what is the perceived value and meaning of education and argue that in the case of Azerbaijan many children are clearly not able to translate educational inputs into functionings.

Expenditures on education

Public expenditures on education

Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP is a strong indication of the political priority of education in national policy and gives an indication of how a country prioritises education in relation to its overall allocation of resources and includes spending on schools, universities, and other public and private institutions delivering or supporting educational services (OECD, 2011). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, public expenditures on education have consistently fallen as a percentage of GDP, for example, in 2007 Azerbaijan's allocation on education as a percentage of GDP was 2,8 percent, much lower than OECD's average of 4,6 percent (UNICEF, 2008).

The below table shows trends in education spending compared with total public expenditures and GDP from 2000 to 2006.

Figure 3: Growth in education spending lags that of both total public expenditures and GDP

	GDP (current prices)	(current Annual growth)	Total expenditures (current prices)	(current Annual growth)	public education (current prices)	(current Annual growth)	Total public expenditures on	public expenditures on	total public expenditures	Annual growth
	Mil. AZN	Annual growth	Mil. AZN	% GDP	Annual growth	Mil. AZN	% GDP	% total public expenditures	total public expenditures	Annual growth
2000	4,718.1		764.0	16.2		181.8	3.9	23.8		
2001	5,315.6	12.7	783.3	14.7	2.5	186.0	3.5	23.8		2.3
2002	6,062.5	14.1	931.8	15.4	19.0	191.2	3.2	20.5		2.8
2003	7,146.5	17.9	1,234.5	17.3	32.5	234.8	3.3	19.0		22.8
2004	8,530.2	19.4	1,502.1	17.6	21.7	294.1	3.45	19.6		25.3
2005	12,522.5	46.8	2,140.7	17.1	42.5	372.5	3.0	17.4		26.7
2006	17,735.8	41.6	3,789.7	21.4	77.0	479.1	2.7	12.6		28.6

Source: WB, 2007

Concerning budget allocations across different education levels in 2012 out of 1,582,937,213 Azerbaijani Manat the largest share of the budget - 46 percent- goes to general education, with only 6,1 percent allocated for preschool education and primary and about 4,6 percent and 7,4 percent respectively for vocational and higher education levels.

A significant part of the education budget is spent on renovation, maintenance, and construction of new schools, thus leaving insufficient funds for investing in improvement of qualitative aspects such as curriculum development, teacher training, etc. Particularly low salaries of teachers are leading to increased corruption and have created “a public tutoring phenomenon when a teacher teaches his pupils the same materials that he is supposed to teach in the class for additional payment” (EU, 2011:39).

Private Expenditures on Education

Contrary to decreasing public expenditures on education, private spending on education is continuing to increase (WB, 2007). A WB report estimates that private expenditure on education has outperformed GDP. Different household surveys conducted in the country during recent years show that all wealth groups increased their spending on education, with the richest 20 percent of the population regularly accounting for nearly 40 percent of private spending and the poorest 20 percent of the population spending 10 percent of the total private spending on education (WB, 2007).

Measuring learning achievements

Review of international and national benchmark tests, such as PISA and SSAC's entrance tests demonstrates clearly that the general secondary education system of Azerbaijan is performing poorly and children are consistently failing to achieve literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)⁴

Student Performance. Assessing knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society PISA focuses on children's ability to use their knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges (OECD, 2010). According to PISA 2009 results, Azerbaijan's performance is one of the lowest out of 65 participating countries and economies surpassing only Kyrgyzstan. Azerbaijan's students have demonstrated a mean score of 363 in "literacy skills" (which refers both "to students' capacity to apply knowledge and skills in key subject areas and to their ability to analyse, reason, and communicate effectively as they pose, interpret, and solve problems in a variety of situations" (OECD, 2010:3)), ranking the country at 64. Similar results were obtained for "science", where with a mean score of 373 Azerbaijan has surpassed Peru and Kyrgyzstan and ranked at 62. Student's performance in "mathematics" is more encouraging with a mean score of 431, comparable to outcomes achieved by Romania, Bulgaria, and Uruguay, but still significantly below the OECD average, ranking the country at 45.

Gender differences in performance. While looking at gender differences in reading performance, the data shows that in all participating countries girls outperform boys in reading and Azerbaijan's gap of 24 score points is close to the OECD average of 33 points. In mathematics, boys outperformed girls, with an advantage of 12 score points on average across OECD countries. In Azerbaijan, boy's advantage on the mathematics scale is by 8 score points much smaller than corresponding gender differences observed on the reading scale. In science, gender performance differences seem to be small, both in absolute terms, but also compared with the large gender gap in reading performance and the more moderate gender differences in mathematics. As in most countries, in Azerbaijan, the difference in the average score for boys and girls is not statistically significant and girls outperform boys by 7

⁴ PISA is an internationally standardised assessment assessing how far students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society. It measures the domains of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy not only in terms of mastery of the school curriculum, but also in terms of important knowledge and skills needed in adult life (OECD, 2011).

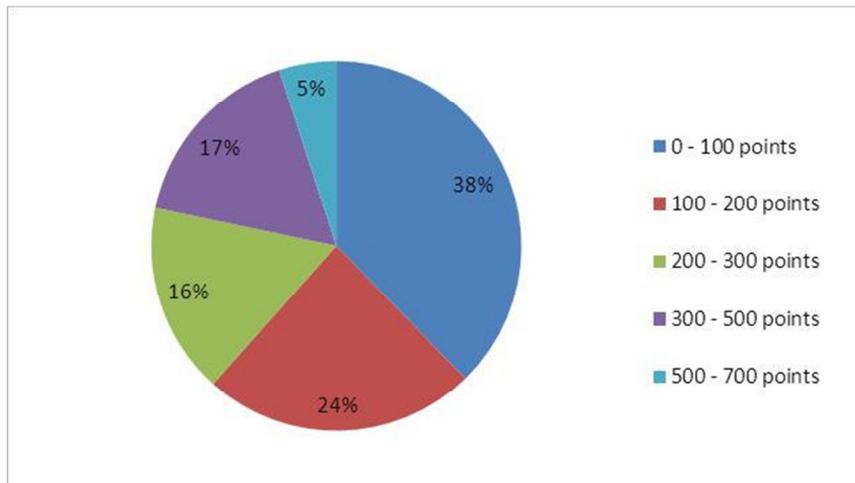
score points only, showing that science is a subject where gender equality is closer to reality than in mathematics or reading.

Socioeconomic background. A closer look at PISA 2009 results for Azerbaijan reveals some differences in educational outcomes within the country and shows that socioeconomic background has a powerful influence on student performance across the country.

State Students Admission Committee (SSAC) tests

The analysis of the results of the national admission tests administered by the State Students Admission Committee (SSAC) also suggests that the general secondary education system is performing poorly. As it can be seen from the below chart, about 61,5 percent of the applicants scored less than 200 points, which is considered the minimum passing level for some universities.

Figure 4. Results of 2011 SSAC tests



Source: SSAC, 2011

A WB study (2007) based on the review of SSAC scores and other available evidence further confirms that graduates of upper secondary lack key competencies that are expected to be developed by the end of compulsory school or training. Another survey conducted in 2006 by the SSC - Sample Statistical Survey of the Economic Activity of Population - shows that there is also an important mismatch between the skills of the university graduates and the needs of the developing market economy. According to the survey results, 18,5 percent of the unemployed population between ages 25-54 have completed higher education and 58,2

percent have completed general secondary education levels. While the high unemployment rate among people with only secondary general education is not surprising, the comparatively high unemployment rate among people with higher education is unusual (EU, 2011).

This paper does not intend to analyse the reasons for the declining quality of education, however, in addition to the information presented in the background section it is important to highlight the major factors such as the prioritisation of investments in the hardware (material goods, construction, and equipment), outdated curriculum, and teaching methods, low quality textbooks, and most important the declining quality of school teachers and principals, since children's learning is ultimately the product of what goes on in the classrooms. And in consequence the opportunity costs of formal education are becoming higher than the anticipated benefits, resulting in declining student attendance and engagement, and eroding public trust (Berryman, 2000). Educational deterioration may further continue to erode the educational system's professional capacity and legitimacy, prompting families to seek other options, such as private tutors (Silova et al, 2007).

From the point of view of the capability approach presented earlier in the analytical framework, the above data and its analysis demonstrates that children, realising that the education they receive does not improve their capabilities, are reluctant to continue with the upper secondary education, when enrollment figures drop significantly. It illustrates that children who come to realize their limited capability - that their knowledge of literacy and numeracy is inadequate to graduate and that high unemployment devalues the final certificate - may conclude that education has little value (Dieltiens et al, 2008:9). It further shows that when education has no utility and does not assist learners and their families in having the life they have a reason to value (Sen, 1999) the notion of access has to be expanded beyond the physical meaning of getting through the school gates and include the ability to participate and engage in meaningful education.

CHAPTER 7. DISCUSSION OF FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

This final chapter will apply the child-centred perspective to explore the second research question on what is the impact of poverty on the secondary school experiences of children aged ten to sixteen in selected schools of Baku city and are there differences in the school

experiences of children from poorer schools and schools in better-off circumstances. It will present and discuss the findings from focus group discussions on children's perspectives of economic adversity, revealing how the socioeconomic differences are associated with a wide range of influences on the learning process.

Children spend a significant part of their lives in the school environment and the importance of the academic performance, especially in the case of disadvantaged children, is particularly vital for their future well-being and employment prospects. While the previous chapter elaborated on the issues of quality and access from a capability perspective, the below chapter presents and discusses different experiences and perceptions of school life for children from selected advantaged and disadvantaged schools. As noted in the analytical framework (Chapter 5), child well-being and poverty are distinct from adult experiences of wellbeing and poverty. Within this chapter the child-centred approach will provide an important conceptual framework for exploring children's personal experiences and perceptions of school – an integral part of everyday school life (Ridge, 2002).

Attitudes towards school

The analysis of the findings from the focus group discussions shows that all children, regardless of the school they attended, agreed that school and education are very important. They all have relatively high aspirations for the future and all highlighted the importance of getting knowledge and learning things at school as an entry point to the future: to being able to go to university, get a good job, etc, though the importance of getting a good job was more explicit in the discussions with the older group of children. The below list shows typical answers from the older group of children:

Boy 1: We're coming to school to learn things and to be able to make our future more secure.

Girl 1: Everyone needs to attend lessons at school. If you want to have better future.

Boy 2: School is important as it is laying down the foundation for the further success and ensuring a good life later.

Girl 2: The most important thing for me is to gain a better life, for this I need to be in the school.

However, children in disadvantaged schools see education more as a way of avoiding problems in adulthood, while children in advantaged schools see education as a way of getting a good job and high pay.

Most of the children across all groups appreciated the role of school for the overall development of a person, highlighting that the aim of school is not only to teach, but also to support their upbringing (education) as the competent members of the society:

The school is defining our first steps in the society and educates us as responsible citizens (Girl, 15 years).

Most of the children recognised school not only as a medium for learning, but also as an important social setting. Compared to the older group, younger children were more focused on the importance of school for their socialisation. Most of them think that school provides them opportunities for making friends and frequently meeting them.

School is not only about learning the science it is also about getting friends, and sharing your ideas and thoughts with them and learning what do they think about (Girl, 12 years).

However, it should be noted that the social side of school seemed to be more important for the children from advantaged schools than disadvantaged. The second observation is that the importance of friendship and the value of social relationships were more acknowledged by girls than boys.

Worries about school

Children were asked if they have any worries about school, and if so, what are the issues they are worried about. The majority of children, regardless of the age group and the type of school they attend, expressed their concerns about the assessment methods used by teachers. They mostly think that the assessment system is not able to reveal and adequately evaluate their knowledge. Final tests were among the most cited reasons for worrying about school.

Children from advantaged schools were clearly more worried about their parents' expectations. In some cases the pressure from parents was that strong that some children mentioned that they have to hide their school diaries⁵, so that teachers cannot mark lower scores there.

⁵ Diaries are student's personal books of records of academic achievement.

Most of children are worried about the scores and not about leaning things, that's understandable. Though it depends greatly on parents. When they are getting upset or reprimanding... (Boy, 12 year)

It is right to wish to get good scores, because my family is trying its best to support me. And I have to show them that I value their support (Girl, 11 years).

Children from advantaged schools have agreed that the way the traditional assessment is undertaken is very stressful: standing in front of the class and answering the lesson without feeling any support from either the teacher or the peers in the classroom⁶. In some cases the pressure from the teacher or class is that strong that children have difficulties to answering the teachers' questions:

Some children are afraid to get bad scores, or they are not comfortable standing in front of the classroom, or they feel that other children are laughing at them when they make mistakes. The frustration is so big that they cannot concentrate and answer questions... (Girl, 12 years).

While children from disadvantaged schools have also expressed some worries about the current assessment system they were mainly concerned about the physical infrastructure of their schools. The wide range of answers covered issues such as: classrooms in need of renovation, lack of water supply, irregular electricity supply, problems with the heating system, absence of ICT equipment, lack of equipment for chemistry, biology and physics lessons, as well as absence of any physical education facilities, or musical instruments for the music lessons and poor condition of textbooks. Most of the children clearly recognised that these are the factors hindering the quality of education they get. The below list shows typical answers from one of the disadvantaged schools:

Girl 1: We cannot use computers since there are problems with the electricity.

Boy 1: Sometimes it is difficult to understand well the lessons because of the lack of adequate teaching aids, for example the chemistry lessons, etc.

Boy 2: Our whiteboards are so bad (old), that sometimes we do not see what is written there.

Boy 3: We do not have any opportunity for doing sports as there is no room for gymnastics in our school.

⁶ As stated earlier the majority of schools in Azerbaijan still use outdated traditional frontal teaching methods

It should be noted that none of the children from advantaged schools had concerns about the physical infrastructure of their schools; they felt that everything is being taken care of by school principals and teachers.

Apart from those, maintaining adequate social relationships at school was one of the major concerns for children from both groups. Peer bullying was the most common issue mentioned by younger children from both types of schools. However, none of the children had an experience of being bullied, they mostly knew someone who had been bullied. They also have indicated that the conflicts were mostly settled with the involvement of teachers or other adults.

Relationships with teachers

An important area for understanding how children engage with learning is their relationship with their teachers. Some researchers (Ruddock 1996, Cox, 2000) argue that teachers attitudes towards the children are an influential stimulus for academic motivation and progress and the perceptions of teacher's warmth and care are essential in students' engagement in school (Wentzel, 1997).

When asked about their attitudes towards teachers, an absolute majority of children, regardless of the school type and age group, said that they liked their teachers. However, as Ridge (2002) argues, the reality of children's relationships with their teachers might be different and their responses can be interpreted as representing their desire to like teachers. Another reason for the mostly "positive" responses might be that the answers have been influenced by the presence of an "adult" facilitator.

To explore it further children were asked about what their teachers' attitudes are towards them. While the answers were generally positive for both school types, children from advantaged school seemed to be more aware of what constitutes a good teacher, and the common complaints were about unfair assessment methodology, authoritarian teaching styles, and teachers being old. Children from disadvantaged schools seemed to be more protective of their teachers, arguing that the quality of teaching is also influenced by the poor physical conditions of their schools:

If we all [children and teachers] are freezing in the classrooms, how can they [teachers] teach us things? (Boy, 15 years)

Most of the children from both school types agreed that children's academic performance and behaviour are strong predeterminants of the positive relationships between them and teachers:

Teachers' attitudes depend mostly on children. If you're doing well and are always coming prepared for your lessons, you will have a positive attitude. If not, it will mostly be negative (Girl, 13 years).

I do not think it is fair. We are all pupils, and teachers attitudes should be the same towards all of us, regardless how well we're doing in school (Girl, 11 years).

To summarise, the analysis of the children's responses further confirms that children from advantaged schools are more likely to experience more control over their learning, while children from disadvantaged schools seem to be just passive recipients of the taught curriculum.

Perceived costs of going to school

Despite the fact that education is free in Azerbaijan the costs of sending children to school remains relatively high, particularly for low-income families. While there are no studies exploring in depth what the costs associated with sending children to school in Azerbaijan are, key common items contributing to the real costs of state provided education can be estimated as follows: school uniforms and clothing, sports kits, books and stationery, lunches, school trips, and transport. It should be noted that this section is not looking at the issues of informal payments discussed previously in Chapter 6.

When asked about the costs associated with going to school most of the children across both school types and age groups said that "the school is free and we do not pay for it". However, they were then prompted by a few other children mentioning costs of uniforms and books and started to mention other costs. Children from all focus groups viewed uniforms, school lunches, and books and stationary as the biggest costs associated with going to school. Contrary to children from advantaged schools who were just mentioning these, children from disadvantaged schools seemed to be more aware of the difficulties their parents face trying to meet all the costs:

September back to school costs are hard to cover, they [parents] have to pay for the new uniforms, school bags, stationary and books, sport kits etc. It is hard for families, especially when there are two children or more (Boy, 15 years).

Outwear is very expensive. And I have to wear my older sister's outwear. But still my parents need to pay for shoes for both of us. And the sports kits, it is good that we're not asked to buy the same uniforms for the sports lessons, most of parents will not be able to do so (Girl, 10 years).

Buying things to eat at school for the lunch time is very expensive, my mother says that it's adds up, when you pay for it every day, and that's why it is more convenient to take it [food] from home (Girl, 10 years).

In general, the discussion on school uniforms seemed to be controversial. While children recognised “equalising” effects of school uniforms as helping to reduce stigma for children for poor families, they were critical about extra costs associated with it. Some children were under the opinion that the rules should not be that strict, and should allow children to wear their own clothes. However, they recognised that the consequences of not having the right clothes might be exclusion from a certain social group.

Children have mentioned books and stationary as the second biggest expenditure related to school costs. Though in Azerbaijan throughout the general secondary education all textbooks are provided by the state free of charge, parents still need to buy the workbooks and other supplementary books as recommended by school. Children from all schools see these costs as an extra charge and agree that there is no need to buy extra books as they are not being used in the process of teaching. The requirement to buy books seems to be more challenging at the higher grades, when children need also to pay for the books with collection of preliminary tests⁷.

They made us to buy some extra books at the beginning of the school year, saying that we'll need them later. But we did not use any of them (Girl, 16 years).

I do not understand why they sell books at school and why we have to buy those, if we never use them (Boy, 16 years).

⁷ For the university entrance tests

Children across all schools have also mentioned lunch and transportation costs as big costs associated with schooling.

It is evident that despite the official free education policy, there are many other costs that are covered by parents and that as usual, disadvantaged families are hit the hardest when trying to meet these costs.

Parents school relationships

The research suggests that parental involvement and interest in their children's school lives is playing a critical role in children's aspirations and educational achievement and there are established links between negative attitudes to school and low parental support (Ridge, 2002:124).

It should be noted that the concept of Parent Teacher Associations is relatively new to Azerbaijan and the main avenue for parental involvement in their children's school life is still through old style Parents' committees inherited from Soviet times. This section will discuss parent's school relationship as perceived by children. Since the present research's focus is on exploring children's views and experiences there were no parents or teachers interviewed regarding this subject.

Most of the children participating in this research listed end of term meetings, events, and open lessons as the main forms of parental engagement. A few others added regular phone conversations between their parents and teachers. The frequency of parent's school contacts varied from none (only a few children) to 3-4 times during the year.

An interesting finding is that some older children from both school types see their parents engagement as a negative sign: some of them think that they are old enough to solve their problems by themselves; others think that in general, there is no need for parents to be involved, unless there are some considerable issues with performance or behaviour:

I am at grade 11 and I do not think that my parents should come to school. I can solve all the issues myself (Boy, 17 years)

It is a child responsibility to make sure that he (she) is doing well at school and that his (her) parents do not need to come to school because of teacher's complaints (Girl, 16 years)

Another interesting finding is that children from disadvantaged schools are considerably more aware that their parents have to contribute financially to support their schools, and in many cases this contribution was perceived as being rather a duty than voluntary support:

Last time when we had a class meeting, my mother was asked to give money for so many things, that she does not want to come anymore. But still they [teachers] send messages home and we have to pay for things. (Girl, 11 years).

My parents were asked to pay for curtains and table covers for our classroom. And they [teachers] are right, we need it, to improve a bit the conditions ...(Boy, 14 years).

As briefly discussed in Chapter 2, background, the context in which many disadvantaged schools operate affects considerably teaching and learning processes and makes it difficult. In the absence of adequate state support in many cases schools are relying on financial support from parents.

The analysis of focus groups further shows that in general, parents both care deeply about their children's learning, however, parents of children from advantaged schools seem to be slightly more engaged with performance of their children, regularly checking their schools diaries, getting in touch with teachers, and attending some of the lessons when they are not happy with their children's marks.

In summary, the review of focus group discussions has demonstrated that parental involvement in schools is still very low, reflecting the negative legacy of Soviet school system and children from both school types do not perceive their parents as being proactively involved with their schools and a few of them do not feel it is needed.

Homework

Homework is believed to be an enduring aspect of students' educational experiences throughout school life (Bempechat et al, 2011). Many researchers (Cooper et al, 2006; Keith

et al, 2004; Trautwein, 2007) agree that developmentally appropriate and supported homework tasks can enhance academic achievement and frequently associate it with higher achievement. The purpose of this section is to look at the perceptions that children construct of their homework experiences.

An interesting finding is that the majority of children, regardless of the type of school that they attend, are overly burdened with their homework and do not believe it is meaningful and signalled their need for support in their learning while working on the homework. Children's answers show that the higher the grade, the more additional support is needed. Foreign languages, literacy, math, chemistry, and physics were the most frequently mentioned subjects where the external support is needed. This support is taking several forms and is not limited to the school building and teachers only, and includes parents, older siblings, and private tutors.

In higher grades the homework is becoming burdensome not only for us children but also for our parents and takes out really a lot of time. We had to ask someone to help us almost all the time. It is very rare someone can do all the homework independently. Just a few, one or two cases by class (Girl, 15 years).

Further analysis shows that children from advantaged schools seem to be better placed in terms of resources they have access to while working on their homework, with many of them having an opportunity to stay after classes and have additional explanations from their teachers (with teachers being paid for it by parents) or refer to the private tutor's help. They also seem to be enjoying the help from their parents more, as compared to the children from disadvantaged schools, where children as young as 11 years old (grades 5-6) mentioned that their parents lack necessary academic knowledge to support them:

When I ask parents to help, they read the task and say that they do not understand it. So I have to do it by myself. If I can I do. But if I cannot I get reprimanded by my teachers... (Boy, 10 years)

The findings from the focus groups are similar to the findings of other researchers (Xu and Yaun, 2003) seeking to understand differential perspectives on the importance of and reasons for doing homework and show that children are mainly focused on performance goal outcomes (to get good marks or avoid bad marks) and extrinsic reasons (to please parents and teachers) for completing homework. The evidence from this analysis further points to the

need, highlighted by countries' many educational experts, to review and change the school curriculum and teaching approaches. It also shows that children from more disadvantaged schools are particularly at risk for underachievement and educational detachment.

School attendance

When asked about school attendance, children across all schools mentioned that they are attending school regularly and indicated illness as the common reason for absenteeism. Some children from younger groups added the weather conditions (cold and strong wind) to the reasons for missing lessons and older children frequently mentioned "tiredness" (resulting from private lessons and hard homework, as indicated by children).

An interesting observation is that older children (grades 10-11) from both school types were aware that some "other children" from their schools, neighborhood, or social environment who were not attending school at all. As explained by the children, they are missing lessons because they have to prepare for the university entrance tests and have hired private tutors, opting to spend their time working on preparatory university tests rather than attending lessons, which they do not perceive as meaningful. The children further demonstrated awareness that this is illegal and fulltime attendance is needed to obtain a certificate of secondary school completion and assume that these cases are settled by illegal payments between parents and school management.

The above findings suggest that the quality of the general education provided by school is worrying and leads to children's disengagement in higher grades. It further confirms the findings presented in Chapter 6 that one of the reasons of disengagement is the perceived low value of the learning in school.

Out of school activities

Many recent studies (Horgan, 2007; Lauer et al, 2006; Wikeley et al, 2007) highlight the importance of out of school activities for educational outcomes and social confidence and their potential to improve engagement in school. This section looks beyond school-based and

home-based experiences of how children engage in learning through organised activities outside school⁸.

In general, many of the children participating in this research enjoy various out of school activities. Diverse lists of out of school activities attended by children from both school types includes among others, music classes (piano and national instruments), dance, foreign languages, creative arts, and different sports. One of the striking aspects of children's engagement in out-of-school activities was constantly highlighted interest and confidence in learning and doing things they choose to do and recognising well the variety of skills and understanding they gain from those activities.

However, further analysis of children's responses shows that children from disadvantaged schools participate in a fewer activities compared with their peers from more affluent schools. The possible explanations emerging from children's answers could be the high costs of participation in activities and accessing them (such as transportation) and restricted knowledge about the available options:

There are no clubs close to the area where I live. They were few in the past, but now they are closed. Or maybe there are some, but we just do not know (Girl, 11 years).

I used to attend piano classes but had to drop it. It gets very expensive paying both for the piano lessons and for transportation (Girl, 12 years old).

Another disturbing finding is that many of the children from older age groups (grades 10-11) across both school types said that they had to drop out from out of school classes to be able to manage the burden of daily school requirements coupled with burden of additional extensive preparation for the university entrance examination. It should be noted that most of the children also attend preparatory private classes/tutors to meet the needs of university entrance examination, with the proportion of children in advantaged being higher than in disadvantaged.

My family had to make a choice between the musical school I attended for past five years and the private tutor for English language and History. I have no time left to do everything... Basically there was no choice; I need to go to university more than I need my piano classes (Girl, 17 years)

⁸ Extracurricular activities are usually offered outside of school by specialised private and public institutions

I do not have time left for anything. Even playing football outside, with my friends. After coming from school I go straight to my room, and spend there the rest of the day, studying and preparing for university tests (Boy, 16 years).

My father says, that I should focus on the preparations for the university tests next year and I do not have time to go to out of school clubs. What [knowledge] we get in school is not enough for being able to pass these tests...(Girl, 15 years)

This study has highlighted the benefits gained by young people from participating in out-of-school activities and the positive effects this can have for them both in and outside of school. As a number of studies looking specifically into out of school experiences of children from different backgrounds confirm, through their lack of participation in out-of-school activities, children, especially those in disadvantaged schools, are often denied important learning experiences, which may positively affect their engagement in formal school learning (Wikeley et al, 2007).

CHAPTER 8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Education has a great intrinsic significance and needs to help in living a meaningful life, however, it can also be a source of exclusion for children and thus carry with it intrinsic problems (Sen, 1999). This research further reveals some structural and institutional processes within schools that result in exclusion of disadvantaged children from their peers and looks at different aspects of it, encompassing issues beyond economic/ monetary aspects to include social aspects. It also indicates that children from disadvantaged areas are at risk of having “qualitatively different” (Ridge, 2002) experiences at schools than their peers attending schools in advantaged areas.

As stated in the analytical framework, developing a child-centred understanding of social exclusion, firmly located in childhood, has an advantage of being a child measure rather than an adult or household measure of poverty and exclusion (Ridge, 2002:144). Listening to the voices of children from schools in different areas provided invaluable insight into their everyday experience of school lives and issues they face. Children were very open and

informative in discussing their attitudes and experiences of their school lives and revealing how poverty and disadvantage can affect one of the most important aspects of their lives.

The key findings from the focus groups discussed in Chapter 7 are summarised below and in many aspects they are similar to the findings of similar studies from developed countries (Ridge, 2002; Horgan 2007, Wikeley et al, 2007)

- All children think that school and education are very important and recognise school not only as a medium for learning, but also as an important social setting.
- Overloaded school curriculum, poor assessment methods, and time consuming homework coupled with traditional teaching methods were perceived as the biggest sources of worry for all children. Children from disadvantaged schools have added deteriorating physical infrastructure to this list.
- Children from advantaged schools are likely to experience more control over their learning, while children from disadvantaged schools seem to be just passive recipients of the taught curriculum.
- Uniforms, school lunches, sports kits, books, and stationary are seen as the biggest costs associated with going to school and disadvantaged families are hit the hardest when trying to meet these costs.
- Parental involvement in schools is generally very low, however, parents of children from advantaged schools are slightly more engaged with the performance of their children.
- Children from advantaged schools seem to be better placed in terms of resources they have access to while working on their homework, whereas children from more disadvantaged schools are particularly at risk for underachievement and educational detachment.
- Lack of participation in out-of-school activities often denies important learning experiences particularly for children in disadvantaged schools.

Though the data collected during the focus group discussions cannot be interpreted as nationwide, it already raises serious concerns about the assumed equity and parity of children's experiences of schooling. The findings of the focus groups have further confirmed and supported the outcomes of the general countrywide analysis presented in Chapter 6, restating once again that the quality of education and access are inextricably linked with the latter going beyond the issues of physical access and including the ability to participate and engage in meaningful education. The evidence from the focus groups has also reiterated other

findings presented in Chapter 6, suggesting that the low quality of general education leads to disengagement in higher grades and thus arguing that the notion of access has to be expanded beyond the physical meaning of getting through the school gates and include the ability to participate and engage in meaningful education.

Overall this research confirms that poverty impacts considerably on children's experience of schooling and the social gap in educational experiences arises from what happens within children's lives in and out of schools. It further emphasises the relative poverty and the poor quality of education as the key factors contributing to precipitous decline in enrollment rates and school dropout.

Schools are commonly seen as major targets in addressing the issues of child poverty. This research has shown that the social aspects of exclusion are very important for children and policies and measures to address the problems of exclusion identified by children within schools need to be child-centred in their concept/essence to be able to the equality of educational opportunity.

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Annexes

Focus group questions

The following questions were used for guiding the discussions during the focus groups:

- What do you think about school? Do you think it is important? Why? Why are you going to school? What do you think you will be doing after graduating from school?
- Are there any issues at school you or your friends are worried about? What are they?
- Are you happy about your teachers? Do you like the way you are being taught? Do you think your teachers are well qualified? What do you think are the teacher's attitudes towards you?
- What do you think are the costs associated with going to school?
- What is the relationship between school and parents? Do you think your parents are involved in with your school? How?
- What about the homework? Do you get help while working on it?
- Out of school activities / extracurricular activities: what are you doing? Where and with whom?
- How frequently do you have to miss classes? What are the reasons?

Schools participating in the research

- Secondary school N 132-134, Sabayil district, Baku city
- Elite gymnasium, Baku city
- Secondary school N 142, Sabuncu district, Baku city
- Secondary school N 280, Surakhani district, Baku city
- Lachin Secondary school N 253, Garadag district, Baku city
- Secondary school N 221, Xatai District, Baku city