

The Impact of the OOIH School Integration Program in Hungary on Classroom Work, Skills and Inter-Ethnic Attitudes

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The National Educational Integration Network (Hungarian acronym OOIH for Országos Oktatási Integrációs Hálózat) was founded by the Ministry of Education of Hungary in 2002, with the aim to promote integrated and quality education of disadvantaged and Roma children in elementary schools in Hungary. One of the major activities of OOIH was the design and management of a small and intensive program. Our impact assessment study examines the effects of that program in its initial phase with a few dozen participating schools, from 2005 through 2007.

Our study focuses on the effects on classroom work (teaching methods, classroom management, interactions, student autonomy etc.), the students' ethnic attitudes, and their skills. We interpret skills in a broad sense, including the cognitive dimension (reading comprehension in particular) and non-cognitive dimensions as well. Recent research results demonstrate that, besides cognitive skills and competences, positive self-esteem, the sense of controlling one's own destiny and the ability to cope with difficult situations are also important determinants of labor market success.

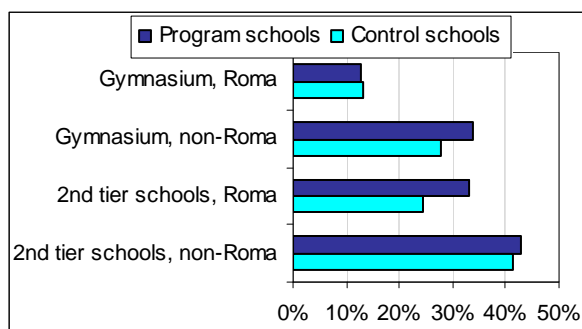
The analysis is based on a matched sample of 30 participating schools and 30 control schools that are very similar to the program schools. The student composition of the program schools and the control schools are virtually identical. The study estimates the effect of the program in various ways: by comparing outcomes in the program and the control sample; controlling for student background and students' results recorded in the beginning of the program; and restricting the sample to the schools that were not integrating before the program (and their control pairs). The different estimation methods yield very similar results, which suggests that the measured differences are indeed caused by the program.

In summary, the study shows that the program increases the level of integration within schools, and it leads to a shift in the direction of student-centered education, higher levels of student autonomy and a wide-spread use of cooperative group work. The study finds that the students of the program schools achieve somewhat higher grades, their reading skills are also somewhat better, and they are more likely to pursue further education in secondary schools that provide a maturity examination than their peers in control schools. The effects on cognitive and academic development are largest for the Roma students, it is positive, if often modest, for all student groups.

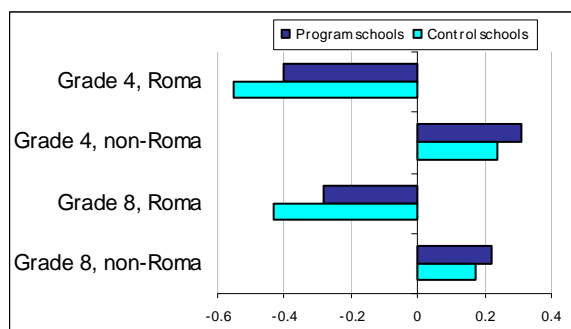
The effect on non-cognitive skills is also positive and larger than on cognitive skills and achievements. Program school students have more internal locus of control (they are more likely to

believe that they themselves are responsible for their successes or failures), they have more positive self-esteem (especially in terms of general, external, and school-related items of self-esteem. Some of the effects are larger for Roma, others for non-Roma students, but again, they are positive for all student groups analyzed. Ethnic prejudice against the Roma is also positively affected by the program. Non-Roma students of program schools see the Roma in a less stereotyped way, they keep a smaller social distance from them, and they think less in terms of social hierarchy. Finally, students of program schools are characterized by lower levels of social dominance orientation and social anxiety.

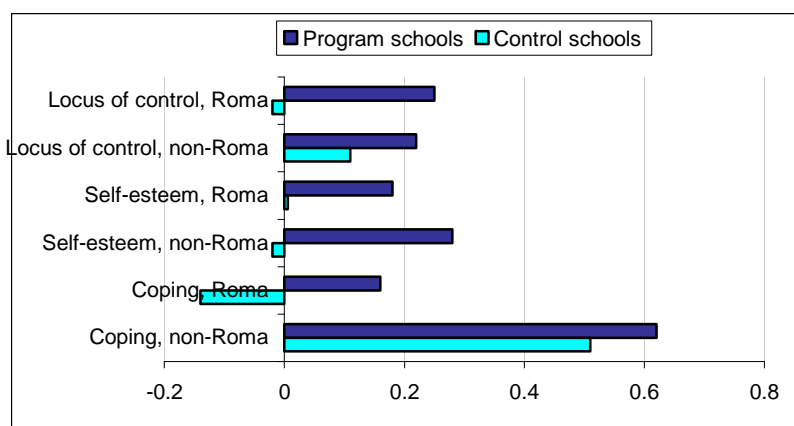
Some of the most important results are summarized in the following graph. The first panel shows the admission rates to the top two tiers of secondary schools after the eight-grade elementary school. The second and the third panels show standardized test scores. Each graph shows the average results of the Roma and the non-Roma students in the program schools and the control schools. The difference between the bars shows the simplest estimate of the effect of the program.



Admission rates



Reading skills



Non-cognitive test scores

Other studies documented imperfections in the implementation of the program. The small but uniformly positive effects we document across the analyzed dimensions are all the more remarkable. The mechanisms in the background of the success are hard to identify. On the one hand, integration seems to be a necessary requirement, especially for more tolerant ethnic attitudes. On the other hand, the main driver of the positive effects seems to be in the use of modern, student-centered educational methods that reinforce student autonomy and cooperation.

Since participation in the program was not random, one cannot be one hundred per cent sure that the observed positive differences are all caused by the program itself. There are several arguments for the impact of the program. Whether because of the program or not, the program schools, with integrated education, achieve better results than the control schools that have students of identical family background.

The results of this study demonstrate that it is possible to achieve integrated education in which both the Roma and the non-Roma students develop better skills and attitudes. Naturally, it is not an easy task for the schools. It may necessitate significant changes in the organization of education, it may require new teaching methods and a new approach from the schoolteachers, and it surely involves extra work by all teachers and managers. Those teachers as well as managers need appropriate training, support, and incentives. The OOIH program seems to have put those elements in place in a small scale. All those elements should be adopted if we want to enjoy similar effects on a national scale.

The study can be downloaded in Hungarian from the link below:

[Egy sikeres iskolai integrációs program tapasztalatai](#)

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