

## Upbringing and Education in the Context of Migration Change: the Perspective of Russian and Ukrainian Parents with Tertiary Education Living in the Czech Republic

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### Abstract

There is no doubt that migration, especially when involving whole family units, posits a range of challenges, dilemmas and problems. Thus, raising a child while adapting to a new sociocultural environment can turn out to be a particularly demanding task. Drawing on the findings of longitudinal, qualitative research among 10 families of Russian and Ukrainian origin living in the Czech Republic, the paper discusses the concept of parenting with a special emphasis on the issue of education. An important circumstance is the fact that the research sample consists of parents with tertiary education. The paper aims to describe and analyse the way in which parents understand upbringing and education, and what their beliefs and subsequent behaviours in this area are based on. Much attention is focused on uncovering how the ideological and practical dimensions of parental concern interact with the post-migration experience and processes associated with it. The empirical part, based on qualitative analysis inspired by grounded theory research design, depicts the issue as a very complex area of diverse and sometimes contradictory tendencies that dynamically combines deeply- rooted parenting patterns with pragmatic responses to current conditions.

**Keywords:** *Foreign pupils, parenting style, parenting practices, migration experience*

## **Introduction**

Migration change, in any of its aspects, is a multi-layered phenomenon that can serve as an endless source of research problems and topics. For example, we can choose the education of pupils with an immigrant background, which far exceeds the practical issue of cooperation among all of the parties involved. In addition to any practical challenges, the actors' everyday realities can yield various dilemmas that can be potentially related to the values, norms and ideas on which they base their expectations and actions. In that respect, parents, as probable initiators and directors of the act of migration, may feel particularly responsible for their children's integration into a new society. It is therefore necessary to focus on how education is represented within parental conceptualizations of upbringing and how these concepts are or may be marked by the new circumstances caused by the change inherent to migration. At the same time, a focus on parental attitudes towards education is believed to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the parental approach towards the child as a whole.

Drawing on empirical material created through longitudinal qualitative research among 10 families of Russian and Ukrainian origin living in the Czech Republic, the paper discusses parental conceptualizations of upbringing and education and their relation to the post-migration experience. In this regard, context analysis deals with the circumstances of the parents' original socio-cultural backgrounds and their own educational trajectories as well as with the effects of their migrations. Generally, the study builds on the idea of the interactive, relational nature of parenting patterns (Bornstein & Cheah, 2006; Imzh, 2019). Although it primarily focuses on the parents' perspectives, the study is based on the assumption that it is the overall current family situation that plays a significant role in determining (and modifying) positions and roles within the implemented childrearing model. The empirical part provides a qualitative analysis that shows parental beliefs and behaviour to be an intricate configuration comprising diverse tendencies of a congruent, associated or even a conflicting nature. Despite some limitations, the study provides a colourful picture of how immigrants perceive their parental roles, with special attention devoted to the conditions of the post-migration experience. Moreover, the findings appear to be at least partly compatible with the existing theoretical knowledge while providing incentives for deepening our understanding of foreign pupils' education post-migration.

### **Parenting Styles and Practices**

To better understand parental behaviour towards a child, it is useful to consider parenting styles theory. According to psychologists Nancy Darling and Laurence Steinberg, parenting style can be defined as “*constellations of attitudes toward the child*” that manifest through the parent-child interaction (Darling & Steinberg, 1993, p. 488). As this issue is topical in the educational sciences, plenty of classifications stem from miscellaneous theoretical standpoints. Drawing on the criteria of responsiveness and demandingness, the American psychologist Diana Baumrind originally offered an influential, three-component classification distinguishing between authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative styles. Later, she enriched the model by adding the disengaged mode of parenting, which is characterized by a rather indifferent approach to child development (Baumrind, 2005). The authoritarian style emphasizes the importance of an order and obedience that can possibly manifest itself in repressive practices and restrictions on the child’s autonomy in favour of the parent’s requirements. By contrast, permissive parenting is characterized by a positive, accepting approach allowing for significant self-formation by the child. Rooted in a considerably rational approach, the third style – authoritative – is underpinned by clear rules and open communication that, at the same time, support the autonomy and individuality of the child (Baumrind, 1978, pp. 244–245). Referring to contemporary authors, Adriana Imzh (2019), for instance, works with a classification that distinguishes between authoritative, democratic, nondirective, authoritarian, authoritarian-populist, and uninvolved styles. Other Russian authors, Valikina, Korotaeva, and Cherepanova (2015), offer a different model, consisting of authoritarian, liberal, and democratic styles. In addition to parenting styles, the professional literature also discusses the concept of parenting practices. Such practices aim to cover the goals of socialization and, unlike parenting styles, affect the child directly (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

## **Methodology of the Research**

### **General Background of the Research**

The study was created as part of a broader qualitative research conducted for the purposes of the author’s dissertation, which focuses on the post-migration strategies of immigrant families from the former Soviet Union who have settled in the Czech Republic.

### Research Questions

The research questions covering the studied issue were formulated as follows:

- What are the key characteristics of the parental conceptualization of upbringing and what is that conceptualization based on?
- What are the expectations, goals, and responsibilities parents hold towards their children's development and education?
- How does the parents' approach interact with the migration experience?

### Research Method and Sample

In order to achieve deep insight into the research problem, the study was conducted as a purely qualitative process. The methodological approach is based on grounded theory research design, a flexible framework for creating and analysing data that enables the researcher to explore social processes as well as the interactive context of the actors' actions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The sample consisted of 10 Russian and/or Ukrainian families who have settled in the Czech Republic over the past 15 years. The sample construction was based on the criterion that at least one school-aged child had to be part of the family at the time the research was being conducted. As a result of such a strategy, as well as through the use of snowball sampling, the participants were quite varied in terms of their family situations and migration trajectories. On the other hand, the participants' age was similar, as the sample was predominantly comprised of middle-aged parents. Moreover, the final group was highly homogenous in one other aspect that stems from the participants' educational and professional status – all have obtained a university degree and in many cases occupy (highly) professional positions in the Czech labour market.

Table 1 shows selected characteristics of the families. In order to preserve the anonymity of the participants, the study provides just general information about them. The names given in the sample statements below are fictional.

**Table 1.** Selected characteristics of the families

Country of origin	Family structure	Number of children	Parents' education	Area of parents' employment in the Czech Republic
Ukraine	Complete f.	3	Medicine	Medicine
Ukraine	Complete f.	2	Engineering/social sciences	Engineering/services
Russia	Complete f. with a father living abroad	3	Humanities/technology	State service/services

Country of origin	Family structure	Number of children	Parents' education	Area of parents' employment in the Czech Republic
Ukraine	Complete f.	3	Medicine	Science and research
Russia	Complete f.	3	Medicine/social sciences	Services
Ukraine	Incomplete f. with a single mother	2	Law	International trade
Ukraine	Complete f.	2	Technology/humanities	Science and research/services
Russia	Complete f. with a stepfather from the Russian-speaking community	1	Biology/Economy	Services
Russia	Complete f. with a Czech stepfather	1	Technology	Project management
Russia Ukraine	Complete f.	1	IT/humanities	IT/project management

### Data Collection Procedure

The data were created using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, ideally conducted with both parents in several circuits scattered over time (in terms of months or years between 2016–2020) and eventually combined with participatory observation and interactions with their children. Together with detailed field notes, the informal contact served as an indispensable tool of specifying and deepening the information obtained through the interviews. Similarly, the time organization of the study made it possible to follow the chronology of situations and processes and can be identified as another important element of triangulation.

In accordance with the ethical requirements, the participants were provided with detailed information about the research process and it was agreed that their position would be completely voluntary. The interviews were primarily held in the Czech language. Mutual knowledge of the communication partner's dominant language (most of the participants were exclusively or bilingual Russian speakers), however, made switching between the two languages possible when necessary.

Alas, there are several limitations of the study that may diminish its potential. As the number of participants was relatively small, the findings cannot be generalized. Moreover, in six cases, the empirical data was not created to the extent as intended at the initial stage of the research. As a result of organizational and other obstacles on the one hand and personal disinterest in participation on the other, just the

perspectives of mothers ended up being used for the analysis. Thus, a total of 14 parents participated in the study, including four of the seven complete couples.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

In accordance with the methodological principles, the analytical procedure proceeded alongside the data creation and was comprised of several stages of close reading, evaluation, sorting and comparison of the empirical material. The results of the analytical work match the criteria of open and axial coding in traditional grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The process of selective coding, i.e. determining the central category and structuring the comprehensive story around it, was not fulfilled. Such a step would require more complex process of data creation and analysis; it also exceeds the scope of this study.

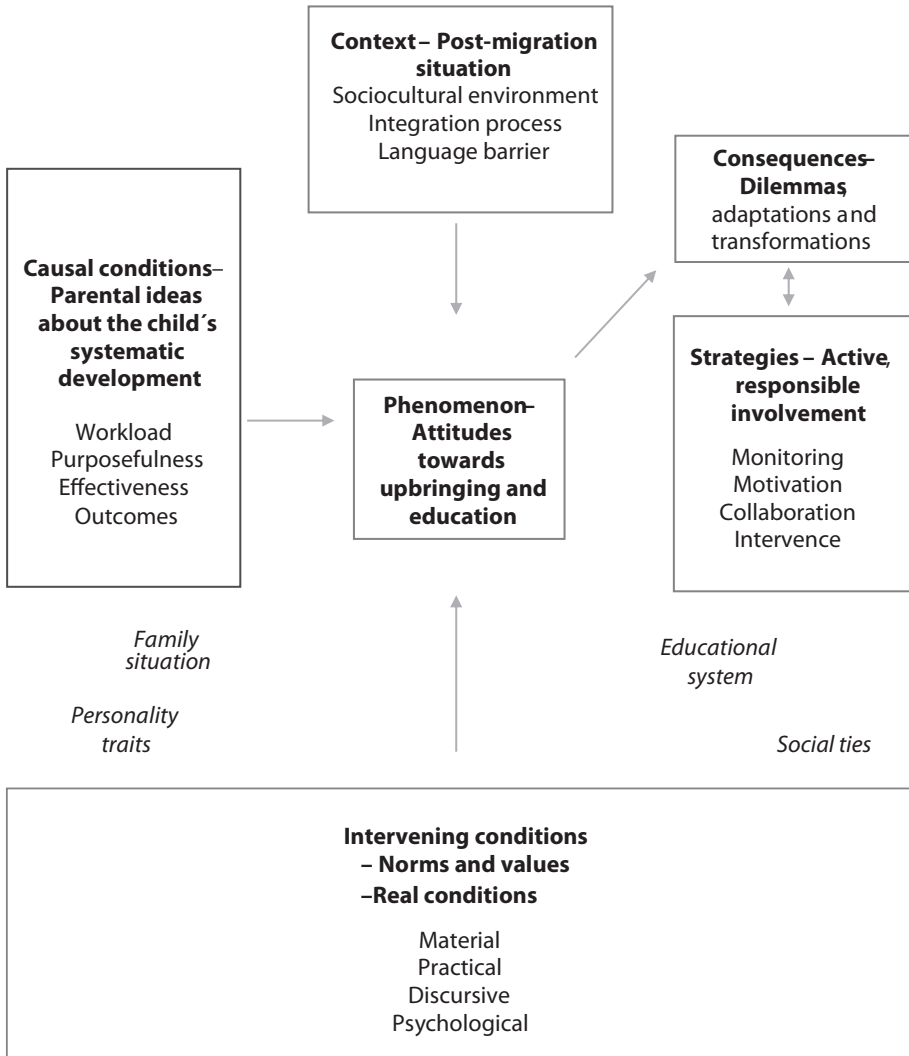
Within the open-coding phase, key topics were identified in the transcribed material. The topics were subsequently assigned to concepts, which were then grouped into overarching units – categories. Table 2 shows the result of the open coding process, i.e. the initial draft of the concepts and categories.

**Table 2.** Statements, initial concepts and categories

Statements	Concepts	Categories
We [in the country of origin] understand the child as an already functional unit that must perform tasks that are being continuously updated (Anna, mother of two children aged 15 and 6).	Workload Purposefulness Effectiveness	Systematic development
If you want your child to grow into a capable person, you simply need to devote time and money to the process (Tamara, mother of one child aged 7).	Monitoring Collaboration Interventions	Upbringing responsibility
They [children] have to work hard. I wanted them to realize that, in contrast to their homeland, here, they are much more likely to benefit from their efforts (Pavel, 40, father of three children aged 15, 13, and 6).	Good future (Self-)development Active engagement	Value of education
I think he should not draw attention to himself by bad behaviour. As a foreigner, he is exceptional enough (Nikita, father of three children aged 14, 13, and 8).	Integration Language barrier	Post-migration conditions
As the demands I place on my children have eased since we started living here, my parents are putting pressure on me to do something more (Eva, mother of three children aged 25, 9, and 7).	Real possibilities Adaptation Tensions	Contextually caused transformation

Further classification and regrouping of the categories and concepts led to the creation of a schematic model connecting the final concepts, subcategories and categories according to the relationships between them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

**Table 3.** Scheme of key categories and concepts



The analysis has shown that parents build on a clear notion of child development that should be ideally driven by an elaborated, updated plan for the child's effective, comprehensive acquisition of diverse abilities, competencies, and habits. In that respect, the family of orientation and the school – i.e., the parents' own experience – were reported to be the key sources of such understandings.

Parents' norms and values determine their childrearing priorities and, at the same time, influence the way their priority-based intentions are fulfilled. However, the implementation is framed by a number of conditions concerning the external environment and its elements, relationships in the family, and the psychology of its members. In this respect, a substantial set of circumstances concerns the family situation itself, i.e., its completeness and the model of family life. Thus, as permanent or temporary separation of one parent can cause the other parent (typically the mother) to become responsible for a greater number of practical issues – or for all of them. On the other hand, the new conditions can also induce more active involvement of fathers or of older children in caring for younger siblings. Especially older or adult children, when still living with their parents, can play the role of an important caregiver and can perform school-oriented responsibilities.

The parental approach is primarily driven by a sense of significant responsibility for the childrearing process. Its fulfilment largely depends on maintaining an up-to-date insight into what is happening in the child's life. According to their statements, when performing their tasks, the parents predominantly strive for egalitarian communication, motivation, and cooperation with the child. Although the parental behaviour should generally correspond to the prevailing nondirective manner, in some cases directive practices were presented as a contextually effective tool that can be employed in response to a given situation or as a result of a child's psychological characteristics. In the sample, there is a striking similarity among the participants in how they depicted education as a fundamental element of the whole upbringing task. Proper education, in harmony with other dimensions of comprehensive development, is believed to be the key to a good future, directly linked to an individual's job prospects and a successful career. In addition to such a pragmatic point of view, the natural goal of education is to shape a capable, reasonable and purposeful personality.

The context of the post-migration experience generally refers to the issues of integration and adaptation that, although perceived as inherently multidimensional, have been associated largely with the problem of language. On the one hand, the endeavour to learn the Czech language corresponds to the fact that it is dominant within the school curriculum. On the other hand, the activity is driven by an effort to diminish the – sometimes already experienced – risk of being



labelled as a foreigner who deviates from the mainstream. The language situation is nonetheless complicated by the fact that there are usually more than two languages that affect the child. This state can be credited to the family's multilingualism on the one hand, and on the other to the (often simultaneous) focus on acquiring other foreign languages – largely driven by the overall developmental goal.

When describing their situations, the parents in most cases noticed that they have adapted their behaviour in certain respects to the current social environment. Although the post-migration changes were primarily reported as involving practical matters resulting from the surrounding conditions, on closer inspection these transformations appear to be inevitably interrelated with the ideological dimension of parenting patterns. Drawing on the parents' statements, these changes can generally be classified as following a more relaxed trajectory for the child's development. At the same time, such an approach is still assessed as less systematic and less stimulating. As a result, the parents may perceive their role as the need to constantly analyse and balance the child's psychological well-being with the parallel necessity of compensating for a lack of an intellectual and practical workload.

## **Discussion**

As it is evident from the analysis, the findings are at least partially fruitfully compatible with existing theoretical knowledge.

Underpinned by a significant level of responsiveness and open communication, the prevailing parental approach most closely matches the definition of the authoritative parenting style (Baumrind, 1978; Imzh, 2019). These tendencies are also significantly reflected in the specific practices that parents consider and apply to solving general issues of upbringing, as well as to addressing situations arising as a result of migration change. The general approach, predominantly based on supportive and assertive types of parental control (Imzh, 2019), analogically determines parental attitudes to school attendance. Based on supplementary techniques and strategies to ensure the validity of the findings, it is possible to state that such a model has predominantly positive effects on school performance (Imzh, 2019) and simultaneously leads to the relatively successful internalization of pivotal values and goals by the child.

The study has touched upon several important topics that go beyond the scope of this paper, but deserve further examination. These include the question of the parents' cultural capital, especially in the form of competencies and habits regarding education (Bæck, 2005; Kim, 2009). Such dispositions, acquired during

socialization and especially from formal education up to the university level, patently influence parents' attitudes and are reflected in their post-migration strategies concerning the education of their descendants. The issue of language competencies seems equally important and effectively illustrates the complexity and ambiguity of the whole adaptation process. Although multilingualism can be generally supported by the parents, mixing different languages can also result in negative effects on the child's well-being or even on the child's speech development that can be interpreted as evidence of the ambivalent, potentially counterproductive nature of multilingualism (cf. Jazbec & Kacjan, 2019).

## **Conclusions**

Working with a sample consisting of Russian and Ukrainian families living in the Czech Republic, the paper aims to deepen the understanding of how immigrant parents perceive and approach their children's upbringing and education. The study generally draws on the idea of the multidimensional, dynamic nature of parental beliefs and practices. Specifically, the theoretical part considers the concepts of parenting styles and practices.

Predictably, the migration experience has turned out to be an important factor influencing the parental approach towards the child. The data suggest that parental action takes the form of a permanent effort to meet ideas and expectations about the child's systematic development while, at the same time, engaging in a constant, pragmatic reflection about the practical, material, and psychological factors involved. The emphasis on education in terms of the child's performance and behaviour at school needs to be understood as a combination of the parents' convictions based on their own educational trajectories and socio-culturally rooted notions as well as on the effort to eliminate the sources of potential deficiencies and labels typically ascribed to foreigners.

Despite the above-mentioned limitations that do not allow the findings to be generalized, the study provides a picture of how immigrant parents perceive the issue of upbringing and education within their overall migration experience. To cope with the condition of a strongly heterogeneous social reality, the theory of education must follow the multiple contexts that would enable us to understand the interaction patterns among the actors in a more comprehensive manner. In that regard, there is still a need for meaningful attempts to enrich the existing knowledge.

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