



The Social Status Of Vocational Education And Training In Switzerland

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Resumen:

Little is known about the social status of educational paths due to a lack of appropriate data. Hence, this paper proposes a new approach to measure changes in the social status of educational paths. The basic idea is to exploit the information in observed educational choices. We argue that a change in the relative cognitive ability of individuals choosing a particular education reflects a change in the social status of this educational path, *ceteris paribus*. We apply this approach to analyse the change of the social status of the dual apprenticeship system in Switzerland. Our results thereby confirm the hypothesis that the relative cognitive ability of foreign apprentices compared to the foreign cohort increases as they live longer in Switzerland.

Palabras clave: social status, vet, pisa, apprenticeship

1. Objetivos o propósitos:

The dual vocational education and training (VET) system has recently received substantial attention across Europe due to high youth unemployment rates emerging in the wake of the financial crisis. Within Switzerland however, a lively debate takes place as to whether the social status of dual VET is decreasing and whether there is a stigma against choosing a vocational education path, although this is still the most frequently chosen educational path on the upper secondary level.

From research, little is known about the social status of educational paths due to a lack of appropriate data. Hence, in a first step, this paper proposes a new approach to measure changes in the social status of educational paths. This new approach will then be applied in order to get a deeper understanding of this phenomenon in Switzerland. In doing so, the focus will be placed on a specific educational path, namely dual VET, and a specific subgroup, namely foreigners living in Switzerland which show a substantially lower valuation of VET than Swiss (Cattaneo & Wolter, 2013). Due to globalisation, leading not only to an increase in looking abroad but to also to rising immigration, the social status of the dual VET system in Switzerland more and more depends on the perception of VET in other countries. Hence, in a second step, we address the following research question: How does the social status of the dual VET system develop as people live longer in Switzerland?

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2. Marco teórico:

If interested in the definition and measurement of the social status of educational paths, one can distinguish two ways of looking at it. On the one side, the concept can refer to the social status of specific occupations being based either on general or vocational education, or on the social status of people with vocational qualifications compared to those with general education (micro perspective). On the other side, the concept can correspond to an image or status ascribed to a certain institution, e.g. the dual VET system. Up to now, studies analysing the last concept are rare (Cattaneo & Wolter, 2013); (Cedefop, 2014); (Mourshed, Patel, & Studer, 2014)). In addition, existing research reveals that social desirability in the response behaviour makes it a challenge to measure this phenomenon by surveys. Also regarding the determinants and consequences of the social status of VET, mainly investigations on the social status of occupations have been carried out (Van Praag, 2009). On the contrary, the institutional level did not yet receive much attention in this context (Cedefop, 2014).

In sociology, social status describes a position in a hierarchical order or social rank and thus refers to the relative standing of an individual in the society. If we transfer this concept to educational paths, we can define the social status of VET as the relative position of the vocational education path in comparison to other educational paths. Consequently, we build our new approach to measure the change in the social status of VET as an institution on a relative concept.

In Switzerland, the process of stratification in education takes an important step after lower secondary education when adolescents select into vocational or general education. A vast amount of theoretical concepts and empirical research shed light on the relevant drivers and mechanisms behind this decision (e.g. (Becker & Hecken, 2009); (Breen & Yaish, 2006)). They show that different aspects have an influence on the decision of adolescents, including individual parameters, institutional context as well as social norms and rules. In this assessment process, also the individual valuation of educational paths, based on the perceived social status of this path, has an impact on the decision. Consequently, the social status of the VET system is of great relevance as it affects individual educational choices and thus the allocation of young people to different educational paths.

3. Metodología:

The basic idea of our new approach for measuring the change in the social status of VET is to exploit the information in observed educational choices. We argue that a change in the relative average ability of individuals choosing a particular education, i.e. dual apprenticeships as part of the VET system, reflects a change in

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the social status of this educational path, *ceteris paribus*. Hence, the change in the social status of the dual VET system can be written as the change in the ratio between the average ability of adolescents choosing an apprenticeship and the average ability of the whole population of adolescents (ability ratio):

Change in social status of dual VET system = Δ —*cet. par.*—

Accordingly, we can follow that the social status of the dual VET system is the higher, the more adolescents with high ability choose an apprenticeship, *ceteris paribus*, which can be measured by this ability ratio. In doing so, no statement about or interpretation of the level of the social status of the dual VET system can be made as we do not have any reference.

We apply this approach to test whether the relative cognitive ability of foreign apprentices compared to foreign high school students increases as they live longer in Switzerland. Starting from the fact that the social status of the dual VET system is higher among Swiss than among foreigners, we thereby assume that with the time that foreigners spend in Switzerland, their knowledge about the education system and career prospects increases which leads them to less biased assessments of educational paths. In addition, with the time spent in a country, adolescents get socialised to the local norms and values, e.g. the valuation of dual VET. From that, we can draw our hypothesis that the longer an adolescent lives in Switzerland, the higher the perceived social status of the dual VET system, thus the higher the probability of selecting an apprenticeship.

Accordingly, in our quantitative causal analysis, we investigate the impact of the time that foreign adolescents have spent in Switzerland ($\ln\text{Length}$ on the probability of choosing an apprenticeship (App given a certain cognitive ability ($\ln\text{PISA}$ as shown in the following OLS estimation:

$$\text{App} = \beta \ln\text{PISA} + \beta \ln\text{Length} + \beta X + \varepsilon$$

where subscript i denotes the individual. Besides controlling for a large vector of observable characteristics (X such as gender, socioeconomic background of the parents and living conditions, we control for unobserved heterogeneity across regions in Switzerland to account for potential changes in location choices of immigrants. Dummy and trend variables for the country of origin capture potential changes in immigration waves.

In addition, we account for potential changes in immigration structures within countries by comparing students from Germany and Austria, which are more familiar with the dual VET system, compared to students from other countries:

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App β lnPISA β lnLength β X β Similar β Similar * lnLength ϵ

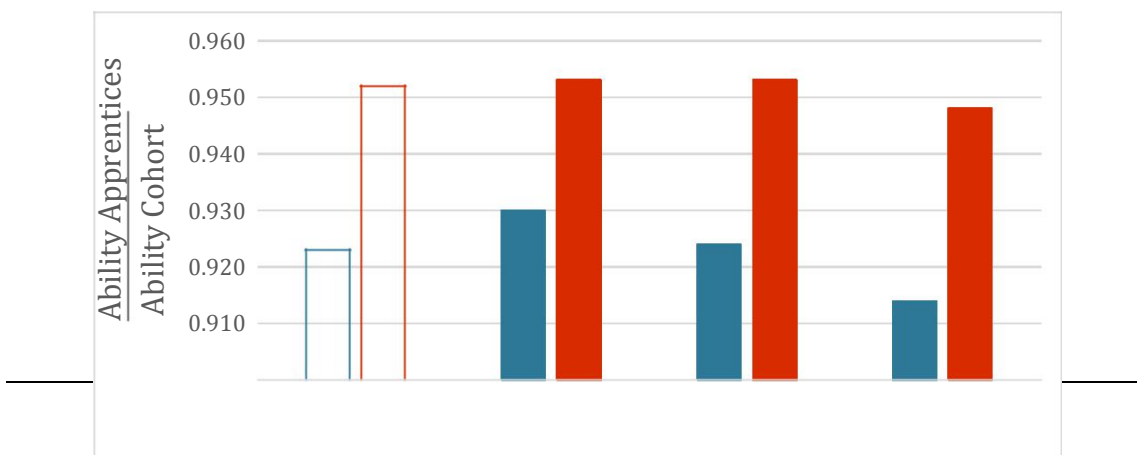
Where Similar denotes a dummy variable that is 1 for Germany and Austria and 0 otherwise. This Difference - in - Difference approach allows us to test the second hypothesis that the interaction Similar * lnLength is negative, i.e. that the adjustment of the social status is lower for students coming from Germany and Austria than if they come from a country where dual VET does not exist.

4. Discusión de los datos, evidencias, objetos o materiales

In order to empirically quantify the ability ratio introduced above, we need to measure the cognitive ability of different groups of adolescents at the end of lower secondary education while knowing the selected educational path for the upper secondary level. Hence, we will approximate the cognitive ability of adolescents at the time of the educational choice by using mathematic test scores of foreign 9th grade students in Switzerland. For that purpose, we will make use of national PISA data on the individual level for Switzerland in 2000, 2003 and 2009, pooled across time. The PISA data of 2006 need to be excluded from the analysis because one of the central indicators for our multivariate analysis, namely the country of origin, is not available for this wave. Based on background questionnaires, PISA provides detailed information on the students and their families, for instance gender, family structure, cultural and socioeconomic background, as well as information about the projected future activity after upper secondary school (general school, apprenticeship etc.).

The following figure 1 illustrates our approach, showing the relative ability ratios of apprentices compared to the cohort (additionally including adolescents from the same cohort choosing general education or only school - based VET, respectively) for Swiss and foreign adolescents. This figure already provides evidence that in general, the social status of VET is perceived higher by Swiss than foreign students.

Figure 1: Relative ability ratios of Swiss and foreign apprentices

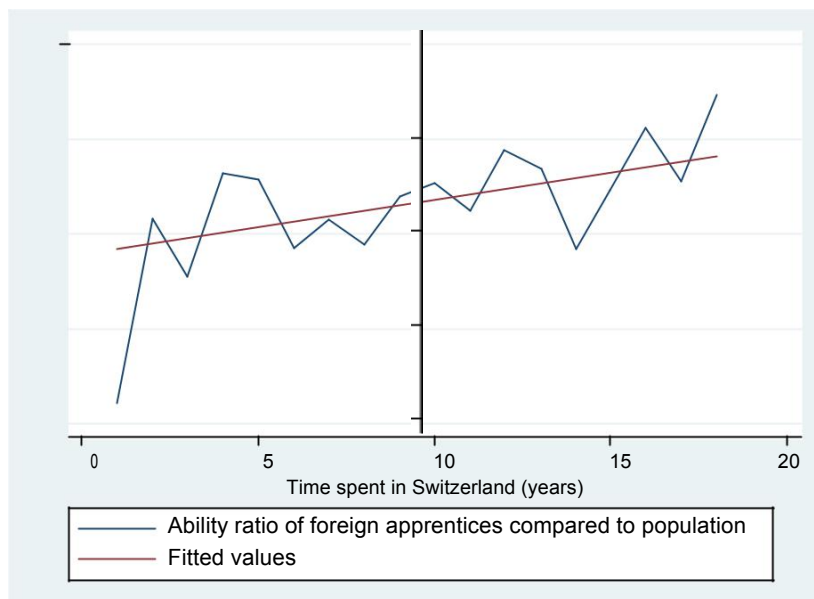




Data: Own calculations based on weighted PISA data of waves 2000, 2003, 2009; N=34'341

In addition, figure 2 shows the change of the relative ability ratio of foreign apprentices compared to the foreign cohort with the time spent in Switzerland.

Figure 2: Change of relative ability of foreign apprentices compared to foreign cohort with time spent in Switzerland



Data: Own calculations based on weighted PISA data of waves 2000, 2003, 2009; N=3'559

5. Resultados y/o conclusiones

The results of our regression analysis confirm the descriptive evidence. They show that more able students select into apprenticeships as foreigners live longer in Switzerland. The fact that this pattern holds for students from countries that have no dual apprenticeship system but not for students from Germany and Austria suggests that knowledge about the Swiss education system increases the social status of the apprenticeship.

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6. Contribuciones y significación científica de este trabajo:

We firstly contribute to the existing literature in providing a new approach to measure the social status of educational paths. This approach helps to avoid possible challenges, e.g. social desirability bias, occurring if adolescents and their parents are directly questioned about educational preferences. In addition, such a ratio can be calculated based on available data measuring the cognitive abilities of adolescents in lower secondary education, hence at the time of the individual educational choice. Moreover, such a concept does not only refer to single aspects of educational choices, e.g. expected career perspectives or social prestige, but rather considers all these aspects in one measure. Secondly, we investigate the change in the social status of the dual VET system in Switzerland based on our new approach and thereby analyse whether the social status of dual VET increases as people live longer in Switzerland, which has not been analysed before.

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