Educational Transitions to General Upper Secondary Education in German-Speaking Switzerland

A Multilevel Comparative Case Study Analysis

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Research context

The transition from lower to upper secondary education is particularly prone to exacerbate regional and social inequalities (Baeriswyl, Trautwein, Wandeler & Lüdtke, 2009; Becker & Lauterbach, 2016; Wolter et al., 2014);

Even when controlling for ability and performance, selection by socio-economic and migration background along with gender account – to a considerable extent – for differences in secondary students’ educational opportunities and attainment (SKBF, 2018);

Average baccalaureate rate in Switzerland: 20.2% (2016) – a slight increase from 2006 when 19.4% of young pupils graduated (Hoidn & Schultheis, 2017);

Baccalaureate rate in the canton of St. Gallen: 14.7% (sixth-last place, FSO, 2017); at the same time, the canton displays an above-average cantonal performance in PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) (Buccheri, Brühwiler, Erzinger & Hochweber, 2014).
Focus: Transition process from lower secondary to general upper secondary schools, especially baccalaureate schools

Source: http://www.edk.ch/dyn/16833.php
Research objective

Contribute to a deeper understanding of the transition process from lower secondary to general upper secondary schools, especially baccalaureate schools, in selected cantons and schools in German-speaking Switzerland.

Contribute in-depth knowledge of

- how lower secondary schools organise the transition process,
- how far secondary teachers are involved in this transition process and
- how far/why this process generates social (in)equality regarding students’ socio-economic background.
In Switzerland, the chances of attending a baccalaureate school (for an identical academic performance) are much higher for young people from socio-economically better-off families – a strong indicator for lack of equity (Becker, 2016; Egger, 2011).
(1) Swiss context (macro level): How is the political, educational, economic and socio-cultural context in Switzerland characterised (German-speaking Switzerland, general upper secondary education, educational participation/attainment related to students’ socio-economic background)?

(2) Cantons/Schools (meso level): How is the transition process organised in selected cantons and lower secondary schools in terms of selection criteria, structures and procedures (including differences of baccalaureate rates and (transitioning) students' socio-economic composition)?

(3) Secondary teachers (micro level): How far are lower secondary teachers involved in their pupils’ transition processes and decisions? Are there structural and institutional impediments or barriers that students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are likely to face when transitioning to general upper secondary education?
Theoretical background

*Rational choice or rational action theory* (Boudon, 1974; Maaz, Hausen, McElvany & Baumert, 2006);

*Social reproduction theory* (Bourdieu, 1983, 1987; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1971);

*Critical perspectives on schools* identify a range of school factors thought to reproduce/exacerbate inequality (e.g. Hofstetter, 2017);

*View of schools as compensatory* with regard to socio-economic gaps in cognitive skills (Alexander, 1997; Alexander, Entwisle & Olson, 2007).
Empirical research

... documents a strong impact of social background and strict (early) tracking on students’ educational trajectories and attainment.

- Different prevailing *structural models in secondary education* (cooperative, integrated, streamed model) provide differential LE (Scharenberg et al., 2017);

- *Track allocation and mobility:* The odds of entering a BS are about 20 times higher for students from high requirement tracks as compared to their peers from lower tracks (e.g. Brosziewski & Nido, 2005; Hupka-Brunner & Wohlgemuth, 2014);

- *Person-related characteristics* (gender, socio-economic status (SES, measured with highest parental education)) as well as *school- and achievement-related variables* (school absence, PISA reading literacy, marks in mathematics);

- *Secondary teachers’ tracking recommendations* (e.g. class-biased assessment).
Research methodology

- **Pragmatist research position** emphasizing practices and the *use-value* of ideas and theories produced by research and the *constructionist epistemological view* that meaning is socially constructed (e.g. Crotty, 1998; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011);

- **Multiple case study research (CSR)** to gain a better understanding of these complex social and organisational processes in German-speaking Switzerland and to draw implications for secondary education policy, research and practice (Yin, 2014, 2016);

- **Data selection, collection and analysis** will follow Grounded Theory (GT) procedures put forward by Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Charmaz (2006, 2011).
German-speaking Switzerland: Case selection

Four major economic regions

- Eastern Switzerland
- Zurich
- North-Western Switzerland
- Central Switzerland

Bac. rates (av. of last 3 years)

- Eastern Switzerland: St. Gallen (low)
- Zurich: Zurich (high)

Elec. district 1+2 (low) → 4 LS schools
Elec. district 3+4 (high) → 4 LS schools
2 Baccalaureate schools

Theoretical sampling strategies to select cantons/electoral districts, schools and interviewees over the course of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hoidn, 2017)
Data collection

Expert interviews
- with lower secondary schoolteachers and the principal of the selected lower secondary schools (8 schools per canton);
- with principals of selected baccalaureate schools in each canton (2 per canton);
- with 1-2 representatives of the cantonal education authorities;
- with 1-2 education researchers (academics) located in each of the four selected cantons.

Document (literature) analyses
- of canton and school specific documents concerning transition criteria and procedures, cantonal and school statistics (meso level);
- of the wider political, educational, economic and socio-cultural context, especially in German-speaking Switzerland (macro level).
### Timeline (3-year study)

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Implications

(1) Political, educational, economic and socio-cultural context in (German-speaking) Switzerland

Education policy

(2) Organisation of the transition process in selected cantons and lower secondary schools in terms of: selection criteria, structures and procedures

Education administration, curriculum and pedagogy

(3) Lower secondary teachers’ involvement in their pupils’ transition processes and decisions

Teacher education and development
Thank you very much for your attention!

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References


References


References


