

The role of the social environment in the decision to study

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Short outline

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Theoretical framework: The study decision and the social environment
 - 2.1 The social environment
 - 2.2 Sociological theoretical approaches to the analysis of educational decisions
 - 2.3 Psychological approaches to explaining educational decisions
 - 2.4 Social capital theoretical approaches
 - 2.5 Reference group effects
 - 2.6 Summary and Conclusion
- 3 State of the Research
 - 3.1 The study decision
 - 3.2 Influence of the social environment
- 4 Research interest
 - 4.1 Research desideratum and research questions
 - 4.2 Hypotheses
- 5 Data and Methods
 - 5.1 Data basis
 - 5.2 Operationalization of individual and contextual characteristics
 - 5.3 Excursus: Measurement of individual social capital
 - 5.4 Multilevel analysis
- 6 Empirical Findings
 - 6.1 The study decision from an individual perspective
 - 6.2 The role of school composition, peers and parents
 - 6.3 Influence of social capital
 - 6.4 The role of the social environment
- 7 Summary and discussion

Summary

This article deals with the role of the social context of school leavers with a higher education entrance qualification during their educational decisions due to higher education. On the base of both sociological Rational-Choice-Theories and Theories of the fields of psychological, social capital and network analytics the impact of pupils, peers, parents and further network contacts are getting analysed. Furthermore the connection between contextual and individual ... is point of interest. Additionally these results are taken to evaluate their role for the different educational chances of school leavers with a higher education entrance qualification

This paper addresses the role of the social context of school leavers with a higher education entrance qualification in the process of deciding to study. Based on theories of rational choice and taking into account psychological, social capital and network theory approaches, classmates, friends, parents and other relevant network contacts are considered as influencing factors and the interplay between contextual and individual characteristics is determined. In order to determine the relevance of the social environment for the genesis of the observed social inequality, the identified correlations are differentiated according to the educational background of the students. This work thus serves to better understand the existing mechanisms at the transition from school to university and contributes to setting the educational and socio-political course for the design of the educational path.

To answer the research question, data from the DZHW Panel Study of School Leavers with a Higher Education Entrance Qualification of the graduating class of 2015 are analysed using multivariate analyses and multilevel methods. The results show that the social context plays a relevant role in the study decision. Thus, characteristics of the school context, the peer group and the parental home show direct influence on the decision whether to start higher education studies after obtaining the higher education entrance qualification. In addition, indirect effects mediated by context can be identified. The normative expectations of parents, friends, and the behaviour of relevant socializers, as expected from the available evidence, significantly condition assessments of success and earnings with respect to higher education, which in turn are considered central decision-making components of the study decision (Eccles, 2005; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Assessments of the relevance of costs, on the other hand, are found in the present analyses to be largely unaffected by the social environment characteristics examined.

For some of the contexts considered, the expected origin-specific differences emerge. A high proportion of friends in the circle of friends who have a study intention is significantly more relevant for non-academic children than for academic children. A similar, albeit weaker, effect

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is seen with regard to the educational intentions of classmates. Larger differences in the propensity to study can also be observed at average schools compared to low-performing schools. Non-academic children at schools with average performance levels are less likely to decide to study than those attending schools with below-average performance levels. No correlation is found in this regard for academic children. The expected difference in the effect of students' status maintenance intentions is also evident in the analyses.