



A comparison of transitions into tertiary nursing education in the French and German speaking part of Switzerland: What role do individual and educational characteristics of healthcare assistants (HCA) play?

Oral Presentation (Scientific)

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Background: For years, the occupation “healthcare assistants (HCA)” has been one of the most frequently chosen vocational education and training (VET) occupations in Switzerland. The career paths of these graduates are important for the skilled nursing staff situation: On the one hand they are in demand as skilled workers in the labour market; on the other hand, they are an important recruiting pool for tertiary healthcare and nursing education. Tertiary education varies according to the language region: in German-speaking Switzerland, the majority of study places is at tertiary level B (nursing colleges of higher education) and in French-speaking Switzerland at tertiary level A (university of applied sciences). The former is accessible without, the latter with a federal vocational baccalaureate diploma. This means that access to tertiary nursing education requires higher educational credentials in the French-speaking Switzerland than in the German-speaking Switzerland. Institutional characteristics of education systems structure the link between social characteristics of students, school achievement and subsequent placement in the labour market. Two important institutional characteristics is the degree of differentiation and stratification (Kerckhoff 1995). Previous research has shown that highly stratified systems are more selective compared to comprehensive systems and lead to more social inequality (Shavit et al. 2007, Pfeffer 2008). However, neither the impact of the institutional structure nor the impact of individual social characteristics and school achievement on the transition from upper secondary to tertiary level education has previously been studied. These results are important for adequate training measures to combat the shortage of skilled workers.

Research question: Against this background, we examine the joint influence of institutional characteristics of the educational system and individual characteristics on the transition to tertiary healthcare education. In particular, we test two hypotheses. First, keeping other influence factors equal, a smaller proportion of HCA graduates should transfer to tertiary nursing education in the more stratified educational system of French-speaking Switzerland than in the German-speaking regions. Second, the socio-economic background should exert a greater influence in the more stratified system in the French-speaking part.

Data and Method: The analyses are based on a longitudinal data set of a complete survey of healthcare assistant students in their last year of training (n=920), 130 of them from French-speaking and 790 from German-speaking Switzerland. In addition to the first wave in 2011, the respondents were surveyed one year (2012) and five years after completion of training (2016). Educational decisions were analyzed using multinomial logistic regressions.

Results: The data show that individual social characteristics, school achievement of the respondents, but also the distribution among training companies differ depending on the language region. In French-speaking Switzerland, about half as many HCA graduates enter tertiary level healthcare education compared to German-speaking Switzerland. School achievement plays a role in both systems. On one hand, a federal vocational baccalaureate in French-speaking Switzerland increases the chances of tertiary nursing education. On the other hand, HCA graduates with a federal vocational baccalaureate from German-speaking Switzerland are more often employed outside the health care system, or not employed.



Discussion: Overall, the findings show that admission to the tertiary healthcare education in the French-speaking Switzerland seems to be more demanding, due to their exclusive offer at universities of applied sciences. However, this is not solely responsible for the different educational and occupational careers. The two regions differ in terms of educational provision at tertiary level, the share of hospitals providing training and the individual characteristics and academic achievement of VET students.

Conclusions: Regional characteristics, such as the composition of students and training companies or the institutional characteristics of education should therefore be taken into account in a differentiated manner for targeted training and specialist staff planning.