



It's Your Choice, Don't You Know? – Social and Educational Factors Influencing Professional Orientation as Paths to Future Social Exclusion or Inclusion for Young People

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Abstract

Social and economic participation and inclusion is determined and directly correlated to the choice of profession and its future prospective. In Germany, it depends above average on the social and cultural capital young people bring, as OECD reports repeatedly for years. The number of young people without a professional qualification rise. Albeit an increasing number of formal professions and possibilities in vocational and higher education, many young people take only a very limited scale of options into consideration by many young people, as annual governmental reports on vocational and higher education reveal.

A lack of knowledge on the variety of possibilities is part of the problem. The current crisis worsens further limits abilities to connect to companies or other future employers. To balance the influence of social background, education institutions like e.g. economic education with a focus on orpfessional orientation at schools and the employment agency (Bundesanstalt für Arbeit, BAA) are officially in charge of equalizing chances by bringing economic knowledge and education to public schools, in order to fill the information and support gaps.

Essential pre-condition for making educated choice under insecurities is a basic knowledge of possible professions and the skills and knowledge needed. The education system with its institutions has to cope with the occurring gaps. Questions arise what the reasons and responsibilities are for the limitation of knowledge and how to open minds to having more choice than known. Based on a socio-economic framework, the present paper presents results from empirical research on cognition of vocations by young people standing in the process of professional orientation. The quantitative analysis of answers on the scale of proficiency knowledge and their origin shows that there are conspicuous differences between the meaning of public institutions, competing with movies or social media. The results found consequences for education with a focus on future social inclusion/exclusion and the special role of economic education. Further need of research are withdrawn.

Keywords: *Choosing professions, social exclusion, inclusion*

1. Introduction

Despite the high number of 325 officially approved and recognized occupations requiring formal training [1] in 2020, only a limited amount of professional occupations are taken into consideration by young people in the transmission into the German Dual VET System. The scale of popular vocations covers only a small fraction of the possible options [2].

This lack of knowledge leads to immanent insecurities for the future work force – if young people do not know the range of possible qualified VET, an educated decision on their future profession is limited to what is known. Regarding the social gap in German education system between socially high-potential pupils joining Gymnasium and heading for university and the others, many of them choosing a vocational education, special attention has to be put on professional orientation of those starting with less social capital [3].

This paper presents intermediate results (final analysis of results available July 2021) from research on cognition of vocations by young people standing in the process of professional orientation. Since cognition is a precondition for the professions' choice, this paper shows sources of knowledge on professions and the meaning of several institutions and influencing groups.

Findings has it, that the institutions, especially schools with the subject *Economic Education* and the employment centers (*Bundesanstalt für Arbeit, BAA*), are not significantly relevant to the knowledge of vocational professions. Influence comes from personal experience, from people personally known, from movies and from social media significantly more often than from institutional sources.

The results found consequences for education with respect to social inclusion/exclusion and the special role of economic education. It is to be reflected what the institutions in charge could do better to support young people in finding their vocational and professional future, overviewing possibilities beyond what they know organically.



2. Problem and Hypotheses

Social inclusion is determined and directly correlated to the choice of profession. In Germany, social and economic participation depends above average on the social and cultural capital young people bring in [4]. Problem has it, that despite this insight, the number of young people without a professional qualification rise for years. The awareness of choices is a limiting factor for the professional orientation. A lack of knowledge and cognition on the variety of possibilities might be part of the problem. Essential pre-condition for making educated choices under limited-information condition is the knowledge of possible professions and the skills needed. The education system has to cope with the occurring gaps in information.

The limited cognition has effects in several dimensions: From an economic point of view, human capital is limited to what is known to the individuals as a possible qualification. Socially, the freedom of choice and development by equal chances is in danger. For the education system and practitioners, questions occurs who is in charge of widening the knowledge on the professional landscape. Who is in charge besides the parents? The institutions? The school subjects? Professional orientation is part of the economic education at schools (*WBS: Wirtschaft, Berufs- und Studienorientierung*, meaning *economy and professional orientation*, bearing the professional-education approach explicitly in its name).

The question occurs: What promotes knowledge about professions and its opposite side, reversely sharpened by the question where knowledge does not come from.

The Hypotheses resulting from this are

H1: Pupils are not aware of more than 10% of the available vocational professions

H2: Cognition of professions is preferentially provided by the institutions officially in charge, which are the school subject economic education and the employment center (Bundesanstalt für Arbeit, BAA).

H3: Speaking a foreign language at home is considered a strength and taken into consideration for the choice of vocational professionalization.

3. Methodology

A total sample of 181 pupils from middle schools ("Realschule", "Werkrealschule", "Gemeinschaftsschule") in the state of Baden-Württemberg/Germany from the forms 8, 9 and 10 have been asked to answer questions by a questionnaire. Questions cover (a) vocation cognition, (b) source of cognition and (c) awareness of multi-language speaking as an advantage of young people with a migration background. The leading question on (a) was: "Which professions do you know?". The number of answers was not limited. With reference to H1, it was expected that at least 10% of the possible 325 options could be mentioned (app. 32 nominations). Additional question (b) pointed at the source of information: "From what source do you know that occupation?" with a selection of choices: (1) personal experience/observation, (2) economic education as a school subject, (3) other subjects, (4) employment center, (5) movies, (6) social media, (7) parents/relatives, (8) friends/acquaintances or (9) other sources (open entry field).

Due to the socio-economic relevance of rising the potential of underprivileged pupils, a special focus has been put on the strengths coming with a migration background. One of these potential strength could be seen in the awareness and skill of speaking another language fluently. Since the problem of finding a fitting and adequate professional future is the bigger, the less social capital is founding the decision, a special focus (3) is put on pupils with a migration background. Nearly half of the pupils in the sample (49%) are having a migration background, meaning that at least one parent is not coming from Germany, pre-assuming there might be any further language skill beyond German. A sub-cluster of this group speaks another language but German at home. Question was if this sub-group would be willing to take a profession with a need for that second mother tongue into consideration, and if they explicitly look for a job with a need of their language skills.

The questionnaires offer technically a choice to the sample group between either a paper-and-pen version or online questionnaires via SoSci, a public online tool, access available by a QR-code using smart-/ cellphones. In terms of objectiveness as a research quality, repeated conduction is possible. Presently (state of May 2021), results were exiting in forms of descriptive statistics and evaluation, first significance tests have been applied. Further analysis will be finished in June 2021.

4. Results

The number of valid results was $n=81$. The results on the question (a) how many professions they knew, showed an arithmetic mean of 7.1. This is only a percentage of less than 2% of the number of 325 existing vocational professions. Expectations according to H1 have been that at least 10% could be mentioned. There was no significant variation between sub-groups like female/male pupils or pupils



with or without migration background. Concerning the source of cognition, the personal experience and observation of the professional decisions of family members, relatives and friends are the leading influences. As visible in Fig. 1, a wide-spread distance becomes obvious between these personal sources and the effect of institutions in charge for professional orientation and economic education.

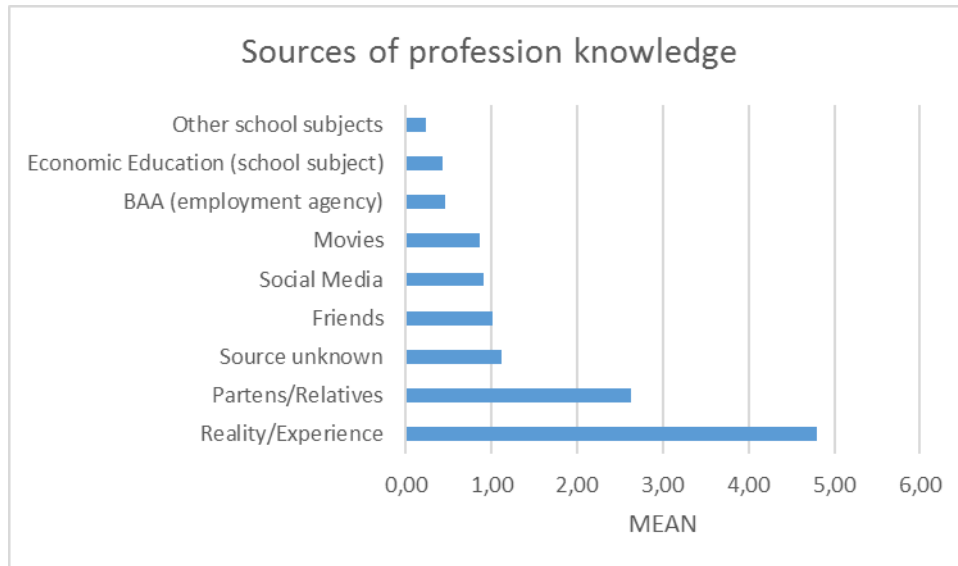


Fig. 1. Sources of professional cognition resp. knowledge and mean value, N=81

We observe from Fig. 1 that there is only a weak orientation towards professions with an explicit use for foreign languages. The most important source of information is observation and reality awareness, followed by professions occurring in the private environment and periphery. Movies and social media are twice as relevant as the institutions in charge, BAA and Economic Education, which is a remarkably weak result for both.

Concerning the additional language skills, Tab. 1. focusses upon those pupils with a migration background who do speak another language but German at home (33 of 48). This sub-group was asked if they were willing to use their home-spoken language in their future job, 26 of 33 answered they would, but only 6 of these 26 were actively seeking for a job with a need for this special skill.

		N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Standard Deviance
A	Migration Background	81	0	1	48	0,59	0,494
B	Migration Background & Non-German language at home	80	0	1	33	0,41	0,495
Derived from B	Use language in job?	34	0	1	26	0,76	0,431
	Actively seeking for a job in need of the additional language	34	0	2	6	0,18	0,459

Tab. 1. Orientation towards a profession with need of the foreign language the pupil speaks



In percentage, from those with this additional spoken-language skills 76% are willing to use their other language in their job, but only 18% is actively seeking for a profession in need of this special language skill.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

From the total numbers of registered professions, app. 2% have been mentioned. 98% of all proven professions seem to be outside the awareness of young people. They are not on the mind of the young people facing the need to make an educated choice, determining their future life.

As seen in Fig.1, the main sources of profession knowledge is personal experience and observation of family and friends. The surprising aspect is that the institutions (*BAA* and *Economic Education* as a school subject) do not play an important role for the professional orientation and choices, if any at all. Here, institutions, which are explicitly demanding to provide professional orientation, fail. Therefore, hypothesis *H1* could be accepted: *Pupils are not aware of more than 10% of the available vocational professions.*

H2: Cognition of professions is preferentially provided by the institutions officially in charge, could be rejected. The vast amount of knowledge of or about professions comes from the observation within families and peer groups. Combined with *H1*, the results show that the institutions do not play an important role for the professional cognition. This reveals a dysfunctional contribution to professional-orientation education by the subject *Economic Education* and the active influence of the *BAA*.

Even more surprising are the further results in the aspects of cognition sources and the lack of awareness of strengths and potency of a second language for professional futures. This could be interpreted as a lack of awareness of the immense meaning of language skills in a globalized labor market.

Concerning *H3: Speaking a foreign language at home is considered a strength and taken into consideration for the choice of vocational professionalization*, there seems to be a hidden potential for a society and economy in a global context. The potential of bringing in more than German and English seems to be massively underestimated and brings amazing capacities for widening chances for young people with a migration background, a treasure yet buried.

As a consequence, the low contribution of institutions in charge, to widen the view upon possible professions for young people, needs expansion. This covers several levels within the education system: professional orientation has to be re-thought in the curricula for economic education. On the level of practitioners, teachers and *BAA* service have to be aware of the fact that they cannot postpone their responsibility upon coincidence and outside-school knowledge, but have to offer arrangements for pupils to see and reflect not only in terms of abstract skills needed for future jobs, but with focus on the complete landscape of professional vocation.

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