



The Jacobs Center Research Seminar Series

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Effort and dynamics of educational inequality: Evidence from a laboratory study among primary school children

Effort is often seen as one of the main pillars of academic achievement. In this paper, our aim is to study the impact of students' effort on schooling and educational inequalities. Using an innovative research design, effort is captured through two measures: students' own cognitive effort and teacher-perceived effort. Following the literature, we expect that both measures will be positively associated with school grades. Moreover, we investigate two potential mechanisms that might contribute to the reproduction of inequalities through effort, derived from Compensatory Advantage theory and Cultural Reproduction theory, respectively.

Data stems from a lab experiment carried out with 380 5th grade students from primary schools in the metropolitan area of Madrid, Spain, during the school year 2019/2020. Students

carried out three real-effort tasks adopted from economics and psychology (i.e. the Simon, AX and Slider tasks). We estimate a hierarchical two-level linear probability model with random intercept and random effort slope to account for the heterogeneity between school classes.

Results show that both measures of effort are positively and significantly associated with higher grades in math and Spanish. Notably, the effect size is larger for teacher-perceived effort than for student effort measured in the lab. Furthermore, our findings reveal differential benefits of (perceived) effort by social background. While much is known about how structural circumstances shape individual achievement, the study contributes novel insights into the processes via which effort translates into educational outcomes.

Friday, May 20, 2022, 10:00 h

Online via Zoom:

<https://uzh.zoom.us/j/63869720189?pwd=VTc0S1I4V01sMFN0Rmsybmg1UUNkUT09>

Individual meetings with Prof. Radl are available,
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