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# Types of Education, Achievement and Labour Market Integration over the Life Course

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## Information

In the face of high rates of youth employment in many Western countries, educational system characteristics have become the center of attention in research as well as in educational policy. Countries with strong vocational education and training (VET) have been shown to fare better in integrating young people swiftly into the labour market after completion of education (Bol & van de Werfhorst, 2013; Breen, 2005; De Lange, Gesthuizen, & Wolbers, 2014; Ryan, 2001; Shavit & Müller, 1998; van der Welden & Wolbers, 2003; Wolter & Ryan, 2011; Zimmermann et al., 2013). This has been attributed to the high level of occupational specificity of VET, which increases initial productivity and reduces the immediate need of on-the-job training. As a result, the strengthening of vocational education and training has been proposed as a remedy for difficulties at labour market entry. However, the literature that goes beyond the question of unemployment at labour market entry reveals a more complex picture.

Firstly, country comparisons suggest that the effect of vocational education on the job quality differs between countries (Levels, van der Velden, & Di Stasio, 2014; Wolbers, 2003). Country comparisons are also hampered by not being able to disentangle the effect of the national system, the type of education (vocational and general) and of the student composition within VET and general education, which differs markedly between countries.

Secondly, the simple distinction between general education and VET does not take into account that general and vocational education programmes vary in their degree of occupational specificity (Forster & Bol, 2017; Lazear, 2009; Ormiston, 2014). Recent research has shown that occupation-specific skills facilitate labour market entry irrespective of whether they had been acquired in programmes typed as vocational or general (Eggenberger, Rinawi, & Backes-Gellner, 2018; Forster & Bol, 2017; Heijke & Meng, 2011; Menze, 2017; Vogtenhuber, 2014).



Thirdly, there is some evidence that VET falls short in teaching numeracy and literacy skills, thus contributing to achievement inequality (Brunello & Rocco, 2015; van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010). In the same vein, some studies suggest that there may be a trade-off between a smooth labour market entry and long-term disadvantages of vocational compared to general skills (Forster, Bol, & van de Werfhorst, 2016; Hanushek, Schwerdt, Wössmann, & Zhang, 2017; Korber & Oesch, 2016; Lavrijsen & Nicaise, 2017). The results on the timing and magnitude of the disadvantage of VET in the later career are, however, controversial, and some studies find no disadvantages for VET graduates at all (Hall, 2016; Malamud & Pop-Eleches, 2010).

Fourthly, there is some first evidence that the relationship between skill specificity and labour market outcomes differs between upper-secondary and tertiary education (Brunello & Rocco, 2015; Culpepper, 2007).

In summary, it remains unclear whether and to what extent different types of education and skills at the upper-secondary and tertiary level matter for educational achievement and long-term labour market outcomes beyond the school-to-work transition.

Furthermore, the possible mechanisms explaining different career outcomes have hardly been investigated. Given the rapid changes in skill demand, triggered by technological developments, more knowledge on the sustainability of different types of education and skills is badly needed.

The aim of this thematic issue is to shed more light on the mid- and long-term effects of different types of education beyond labour market entry and their possible context-dependency. We are seeking single-country and comparative studies (including replication studies) looking at labour market outcomes, such as employment/unemployment, labour market exit, income, status, fixed-term contracts, part-time work etc., and their relationship with different types of education and skills. Papers on educational achievement or skill development are also within the scope of this issue. Studies looking at the context-dependency of types of education and skills and at potential mediating (e.g., job tasks) or moderating factors (e.g., gender) are particularly welcome. Theoretical and empirical contributions focusing on institutional factors promoting or curtailing certain long-term labour market outcomes are also welcome.

## Instructions for Authors

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