

Educational Policy as Social Policy:
The Reflection of School and Classroom Mechanisms on Educational Inequalities

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Introduction

This PhD research, as a part of a comprehensive ministerial project, systematically and scholarly examines school and classroom effects on educational inequalities. While inequalities in a society can be studied from multiple perspectives on various outcomes on diverse levels, educational inequalities (Hadjar & Gross, 2016) are framed around “systematic variations in several aspects of educational attainment structured by ascribed attributes of students derived from their social group memberships, such as gender, ethnicity, immigrant background and class (axes of inequality)” (p. 12). Therefore, a study of variation in educational attainment, according to Jacobs (1996), might include the disparity in educational trajectories, educational experiences and outcomes including gained competencies, earned grades and certificates, among students from diverse backgrounds. Taking these aspects into account, this PhD research project explores the spectrum of school and classroom level variables reflecting an influence on inequality in educational attainments by systematically investigating related studies in the literature and then scholarly investigates effects of these variables on inequality in educational attainments in Luxembourg, through nationally representative longitudinal large-scale data. Conducting this study with the multilevel modeling approach (Salkind, 2010) will enable the researcher to make conclusions and yield implications on not only individual, but also classroom and school levels in the Luxembourg education system. Accordingly, the findings of this research study will inform the stakeholders of educational policy in Luxembourg and provide scientific baseline for them.

The Context of Luxembourg

According to national data in 2020 (Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, 2021), Luxembourg as a country has around 626000 inhabitants and more than 180000 cross-border employees. When nationalities in the country is considered, this European hub presents much more surprising numbers. According to the same national dataset, 48% of the inhabitants in Luxembourg are foreigners, who hold 170 different nationalities. Therefore, defining Luxembourg as a diverse society would not be an exaggeration.

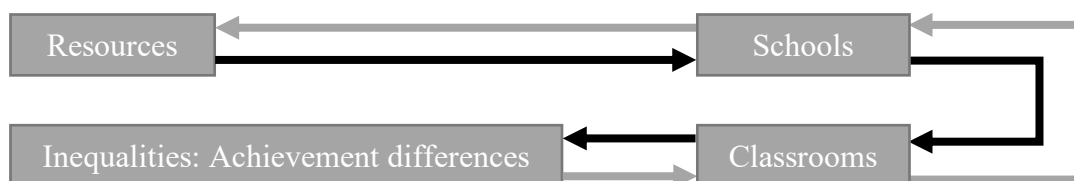
The education system in this diverse country is free, compulsory from the age of 4 to 16, and trilingual; Luxembourgish, German, and French (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale,

2020). Run financially by the government, the fundamental education encompassing primary and post-primary schooling is free and under the responsibility of the ministry of Education, Children and Youth. Moreover, the primary education is divided into 4 cycles, each of which lasts two years, except the cycle 1. Accruing to 3 years, this cycle in the very beginning offers an additional year, for children at the age of 3 for an optional early childhood education. Furthermore, the implementation of trilingual education policy mainly structures the medium of instruction for Cycle 1 in Luxembourgish, for Cycle 2 in German and spoken French, and for Cycle 3 & 4 in German and French. Consequently, when these general characteristics of the primary education in Luxembourg and the diversity in the society are taken into consideration, the country might be highlighted as an authentic context to conduct a study on.

A radical educational reform in Luxembourg was put into action in 2009. The 2009 reform on the fundamental education in the country brought some structural changes in the education system (OECD, 2016; Tamilina, 2021). Besides new approaches to student evaluation and more parental involvement, not only did it introduce the aforementioned learning cycles, but it also delegated more responsibility to schools in the country in terms of educational planning and management encompassing school development plans and an increase in school autonomy. Specifically, the changes in educational planning and management reflected an influence mainly at the primary level (OECD, 2016). Encouraged by the reform, school administration was enriched by the inclusion of additional stakeholders, such as authorities in municipals, parents, and teaching staff. Schools could assemble their own committee of their teaching staff with an aim of collecting their suggestions and proposals on school budget and organization (Tamilina, 2021). Even though aiming to more conveniently respond to varying needs of schools in different municipalities, such an innovation in the school autonomy might result in an alteration of the resource flow.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework utilized in the present study is a simplified version of OECD's conceptual framework to analyze resource use in schools (OECD, n.d.). Fortunately, this framework also depicts the hierarchical structure in educational systems.



As the conceptual framework depicts with the black lines in a quite general way, the influence of resources flows through schools to classrooms and finally contributes to educational inequalities. In fact, any variation on resource distribution either between or within schools might alter the impact of educational inequalities on the individual level differently. Yet, this research study will contribute to the feedback flow (as depicted with the grey lines) and will inform the stakeholders about the effects of schools and classroom level variables.

Methodological Approach

This PhD project revolves around two main research questions, which requires the utilization of two different research methods. The first research question deals with an analysis of school and classroom variables in terms of their utilization in the research studies that have been systematically selected for the review of the state of research, their theoretical and methodological foundations, and their empirical linkage to educational inequalities. Accordingly, this part including its subparts is thoroughly examined with the systematic literature review method (Newman & Gough, 2020). To answer the second research question, the nationally representative longitudinal large-scale data (e.g., the Luxembourg School Monitoring Programme ÉpStan) is employed. ÉpStan regularly and methodically collects data from approximately 28000 students in the Luxembourg education system, which correspond to the entire population on the focused grade levels, in order not only to gather a set of educational records on individual (such as educational competencies gained and motivation to learn), classroom (such as classroom climate and teaching quality) and school levels (such as school climate), but also to compare students' educational attainments regarding some background variables such as socioeconomic and sociocultural backgrounds (ÉpStan, n.d.). Considering the multilevel structure of the available dataset and the second research question, the second part of this PhD study is examined with multilevel modeling (Salkind, 2010).

Research Questions

As mentioned in the methodological approach, the present PhD project encompasses two major parts: a systematic literature review on school and classroom effects on educational inequalities, and a secondary data analysis via a quantitative investigation of these effects in nationally representative longitudinal large-scale data. Therefore, the research questions are presented under two parts as follow:

Systematic review

1. How do school and classroom level variables affect educational inequalities in achievement inequalities?

- a. What are the school and classroom level variables utilized in the research studies, that have been systematically selected for the review of the state of research?
- b. What are the theoretical and methodological foundations of these studies?
- c. What are the empirical findings on the influence of school and classroom level variables on educational inequalities?

Secondary data analysis

Background project question: How does the resource distribution according to a social index on community/school level affect educational inequalities?

2. What is the impact of school and classroom contexts on student performance and educational inequalities in nationally representative longitudinal large-scale data (e.g., the Luxembourg School Monitoring Programme ÉpStan)?
 - a. How does this impact vary between different primary school categories (e.g., école fondamentale versus public international schools; pilot schools, all-day schools)?
 - b. What is the reflection of (additional) human resources on the impact of school and classroom contexts on student performance and educational inequalities?

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