

Diverging Educational Aspirations Among Compulsory School-Leavers in Switzerland

Tobias Ackermann* and Robin Benz*

Abstract: Educational aspirations play an important role in shaping students' educational trajectories and destinations. Drawing on longitudinal data from the TREE2 study, this paper investigates the effect of tracking on the formation and adjustment of the educational aspirations of Swiss students upon leaving compulsory school. We show that educational aspirations are highly responsive to the educational track attended in upper secondary education. While students in general education tend to stick to their aspirations, their counterparts in vocational programmes exhibit less stable aspirations.

Keywords: Educational aspirations, tracking, upper secondary education, panel data, Switzerland

Divergierende Bildungsaspirationen von Schulentlassenen in der Schweiz

Zusammenfassung: Bildungsaspirationen dienen als wichtiger Orientierungsrahmen bei der Ausgestaltung von Bildungsverläufen. Der vorliegende Artikel untersucht mittels Längsschnittdaten der TREE2-Studie die Herausbildung und Anpassung von Bildungsaspirationen beim Übergang in die Sekundarstufe II. Die Ergebnisse belegen, dass Jugendliche in der Schweiz ihre Bildungsaspirationen am besuchten Ausbildungsgang ausrichten. Während jene in allgemeinbildenden Ausbildungen an ihren ursprünglichen Bildungsaspirationen festhalten, neigen jene in beruflichen Ausbildungen dazu, ihre Bildungsaspirationen anzupassen.

Schlüsselwörter: Bildungsaspirationen, Bildungsübergänge, Sekundarstufe II, Längsschnittdaten, Schweiz

Aspirations éducatives divergentes parmi les diplômé-e-s de l'école obligatoire en Suisse

Résumé: Les aspirations éducatives jouent un rôle important dans la détermination des trajectoires et des destinations éducatives des élèves. En s'appuyant sur les données longitudinales de l'étude TREE2, cet article étudie la formation et l'ajustement des aspirations éducatives des élèves suisses à la fin de l'école obligatoire. Nous montrons que les aspirations éducatives sont très sensibles à la filière suivie dans le degré secondaire II. Les élèves en formations générales ont tendance à rester fidèles à leurs aspirations, alors que les élèves en formations professionnelles ont des aspirations moins stables.

Mots-clés: Aspirations éducatives, orientation, degré secondaire II, données de panel, Suisse

* University of Bern, Interfaculty Centre for Educational Research (ICER), CH-3012 Bern, tobias.ackermann@unibe.ch, robin.benz@unibe.ch.

1 Introduction

Educational pathways are marked by a series of choices that shape students' development and educational destinations. Educational aspirations play an important mediating role in these processes. The educational goals adolescents consider of value are believed to direct and motivate the effort they apply during their educational careers, thereby increasing their chances of succeeding in the education system (e. g., Bandura 2006; Caprara et al. 2008; Domina et al. 2011). Accordingly, many researchers have demonstrated that educational aspirations predict students' educational attainment (e. g., Morgan 2005; Beal and Crockett 2010; Bozick et al. 2010; Guo et al. 2015; Schoon and Burger 2021). Investigating the dynamics that give rise to educational aspirations thus provides an essential basis for understanding educational mobility.

There is an ongoing debate regarding the factors that contribute to the formation of educational aspirations. Established theoretical frameworks such as the Wisconsin model of status attainment (WM) (Sewell et al. 1969; 1970) or rational choice theory (RCT) (Erikson and Jonsson 1996; Breen and Goldthorpe 1997; Esser 1999) suggest that a variety of contextual conditions shapes educational aspirations. The school context is of particular significance as it provides a frame of reference for students when forming and revising their educational aspirations, especially in tracked and highly stratified education systems (Buchmann and Dalton 2002; Buchmann and Park 2009; Parker et al. 2016). On the one hand, sorting students according to their academic achievement creates distinct learning environments, in which some educational destinations are perceived as more favourable than others (Buchmann and Dalton 2002; Roth 2017; Van den Broeck et al. 2018). On the other hand, track placement conveys a strong signal about academic abilities and prospects, which students may consider when setting their educational goals (Buchmann and Park 2009; Karlson 2015; Geven and Forster 2021).

So far, few studies (e. g., Hegna 2014; Karlson 2015; Bittmann and Schindler 2021) have investigated how tracking relates to educational aspirations. The present study contributes to this strand of literature by examining the temporal dynamics of educational aspirations among students that have completed compulsory school in Switzerland. We aim to show how track allocation is related to a potential revision of educational aspirations, considering the entire spectrum of educational pathways. Using longitudinal data from the second cohort of the Transitions from Education to Employment study (TREE2) and examining both the level of educational goals and the way compulsory school-leavers adjust their educational goals, this study underlines the importance of tracking for educational aspirations. Our results show that the educational pathways adolescents pursue after compulsory school not only determine the educational destinations to which they aspire, but also give rise to a process of divergence with respect to educational goals.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: The next section establishes a theoretical framework and outlines the state of research on the formation and adjustment of educational aspirations. The third section describes the data and analytical strategy that were pursued. After presenting the results in the fourth section, concluding remarks discuss our findings critically.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Educational Aspirations

Educational aspirations have been studied thoroughly over recent decades, across various disciplines. Despite being frequently considered in research, there is no universally accepted definition of educational aspirations (Morgan 2005; Trebbels 2015). We rely on the conceptualisation proposed by Haller (1968). Building on classical aspiration theory (Lewin et al. 1944), Haller (1968, 484) defines the term aspiration as a “cognitive orientational aspect of goal-directed behavior”. Hence, aspirations reflect goals individuals set for themselves, given various alternatives. In the case of educational aspirations, the spectrum of alternatives typically follows a hierarchical order, with academically demanding educational degrees (e. g., more time-consuming, requiring specific certificates or performance) on one end of the spectrum, and less demanding on the other (Lewin et al. 1944; Haller 1968).

Haller (1968) further distinguishes between realistic and idealistic aspirations. This distinction acknowledges that the goals individuals wish to achieve may not necessarily coincide with the goals individuals perceive as achievable. Idealistic aspirations thus reflect wishes regarding desired outcomes that are “not limited by constraints on resources” (Hauser and Anderson 1991, 270) and are usually understood as an individual’s commitment to achieving a desired goal regardless of the chances of realising this goal (Rojewski 2005; Trebbels 2015). Conversely, realistic aspirations relate to desired outcomes when taking the likelihood of actually achieving this outcome into account, considering constraints and resources (Haller 1968; Stocké 2013; Trebbels 2015). Empirical evidence suggests that students and their parents generally hold higher idealistic than realistic educational aspirations, while both are highly correlated (e. g., Becker and Gresch 2016; Gölz and Wohlkinger 2019; Hadjar and Scharf 2019; Becker et al. 2022). This paper focuses on realistic aspirations as we acknowledge that this type of aspiration is more sensitive to altered circumstances in the social context, transcends mere wishes, and is a more precise reflection of the goals towards which students direct their effort.

In summary, aspirations motivate and channel effort towards desired goals. Educational aspirations are expressed preferences on a spectrum of educational destinations that are typically arranged in order of difficulty. As it has been repeatedly shown that educational aspirations are predictive of future educational attain-

ment (e. g., Beal and Crockett 2010; Bozick et al. 2010; Schoon and Burger 2021), investigating how students adapt their aspirations upon leaving compulsory school is pertinent.

2.2 Theoretical Explanations for Educational Aspirations

RCT and the WM frequently serve as points of departure in the literature when it comes to explaining the formation of educational aspirations. From the perspective of RCT, students are expected to be forward-looking and informed actors who try to maximise individual utility. Accordingly, considering benefits, costs and the probability of success, students are thought to aspire to the educational degree that carries the highest subjective expected utility (Erikson and Jonsson 1996; Breen and Goldthorpe 1997; Esser 1999).

There is ample evidence that students align their educational aspirations in the light of information on their likelihood of succeeding in education. Not only is there a strong correlation between achievement and aspirations (Khattab 2015; Karlson 2019; Bernardi and Valdés 2021). Research also suggests that students tend to stick to their aspirations when they are on track to attain the educational degree to which they aspire (Buchmann and Park 2009; Bittmann and Schindler 2021; Geven and Forster 2021). Furthermore, research provides evidence that students aspire to educational destinations they perceive to be most beneficial for later labour market prospects (Dumont et al. 2017; Salazar et al. 2020; Lievore and Triventi 2021). Recent studies that explicitly model the decisive factors of RCT buttress the assumption that educational aspirations reflect rational cost–benefit calculations (Gölz and Wohlking 2019; Jakob and Combet 2020; Zimmermann 2020; Lievore and Triventi 2021).

In contrast, the WM stresses the role of social influence (Sewell et al. 1969; 1970; Haller and Portes 1973). According to the WM, social origin and cognitive skills are linked to educational attainment via educational achievement and the influence of significant others. Significant others are “persons exerting the greatest influence” (Sewell et al. 1970, 1015), commonly specified as parents, friends, classmates and teachers. The mediating role of significant others is based on the idea that, in order to evade cognitive dissonances (Woelfel and Haller 1971), students conform to the pressure exerted by others when forming their educational aspirations. They do so either by imitating their role models’ educational aspirations or by aligning their educational aspirations with the expectations of authority figures – their parents in particular (Sewell et al. 1970).

Social influence has proved to be a viable factor in explaining educational aspirations. In particular, the role of parents has been repeatedly stressed; it is suggested that students align their educational aspirations with their parents’ expectations (e. g., Marjoribanks 2002; 2003; Augustine 2017; Roth 2017; Forster 2021; Schoon and Burger 2021). While the influence of the family provides a baseline

for the initial formation of educational aspirations, it is assumed that peers become an increasingly important source of influence during adolescence (Osterman 2000; Brechwald and Prinstein 2011). The literature provides consistent evidence showing that students adopt their friends' and classmates' educational aspirations (Frost 2007; Roth 2017; Raabe and Wölfer 2019; Lorenz et al. 2020). However, doubts have been raised concerning the robustness of these findings amid potential confounding bias caused by selection effects. For instance, Kretschmer and Roth (2021) demonstrate that selection and peer influence contribute independently to similar aspirations within peer networks. Moreover, some studies show that student–teacher relations mediate the extent of peer influence when forming educational aspirations (Baker et al. 2014; Van den Broeck et al. 2020).

The underlying factors used to test the assumptions of RCT and the WM – most notably social origin and educational achievement – are likely to be linked. Morgan (1998) claims that the WM inherently incorporates processes of rationality, as regards the way that students “adopt the expectations that others have of them and add these to their own expectations formed independently through their own rational self-reflection” (Morgan 1998, 136). The implication that both rational calculus and social influence affect the formation of educational aspirations simultaneously has been given empirical support (Gabay-Egozi et al. 2015; Trebbels 2015; Gözl and Wohlkinger 2019; Zimmermann 2020).

Even though RCT and the WM have proved to be reliable for explaining educational aspirations, the two approaches are not free from criticism. On the one hand, RCT has been criticised for ignoring the role of unobserved early choices and, therefore, the possibility of procedural educational decision-making (Erikson et al. 2005). On the other hand, a major issue of the WM concerns its disregard for institutional constraints imposed by the education system (Kerckhoff 1977; Sewell et al. 2003). In light of this criticism, we agree that one has to consider the altering social and institutional circumstances along educational careers. We therefore argue that educational aspirations should be analysed from a longitudinal perspective, paying particular attention to processes that give rise to altered institutional and social circumstances – such as tracking – to highlight the malleability of aspirations during adolescence.

The literature puts forward other determinants that moderate or go beyond the assumptions of RCT and the WM. Some researchers relate the formation of educational aspirations to psycho-social factors such as self-esteem (e.g., Rothon et al. 2011), school and emotional engagement (e.g., Lazarides et al. 2016), and optimism (e.g., Salmela-Aro and Upadaya 2017). Furthermore, some research suggests that students adjust their educational aspirations when experiencing economic setbacks (e.g., Taylor and Rampino 2014; Renzulli and Barr 2017; Salazar et al. 2020). While it has been repeatedly shown that female students set more ambitious educational goals than their male peers (e.g., Gil-Flores et al. 2011; Berrington et al. 2016),

students with a migration background are found to have higher educational aspirations than native students with comparable academic achievement (e. g., Hadjar and Scharf 2019; Van den Broeck et al. 2020).

2.3 Changes in Educational Aspirations and the Role of Tracking

Considering institutional and social context is pivotal for explaining educational aspirations. So is the focus on educational transitions, as the corresponding changes in context have far-reaching implications – be it a change in the learning environment, the adapted cognitive requirements of differently oriented curricula or a related shift in labour market prospects. The significance of educational transitions is particularly amplified in education systems with early and rigorous tracking (Maaz et al. 2008; Bol and van de Werfhorst 2016; Van de Werfhorst 2019). Sorting students into different tracks creates distinct learning environments as regards students' abilities, interests and social backgrounds. Further, tracking imposes institutional constraints and limits the range of accessible alternatives, while at the same time opening up or consolidating others. Both RCT and the WM implicitly provide additional arguments for why tracking students should affect their aspirations.

From the perspective of RCT, it is assumed that students form their educational aspirations in accordance with what they perceive as maximising utility. When provided with new information, RCT expects that students will revise their educational aspirations (Morgan 1998; Zafar 2011). One of the most relevant pieces of information here is the continuous evaluation of academic abilities (Morgan 2005; Bozick et al. 2010; Khattab 2015). Information about academic abilities, however, transcends mere grades. As Karlson (2015) argues, placement in a specific educational track conveys a strong signal that affects students' beliefs independently of their actual academic abilities, because it involves a process of social labelling (Oakes 2005). Being in a specific track “makes publicly visible the opportunities of achieving success in the educational system” (Karlson 2015, 118). Social labels enter the process of rational calculus by altering students' perceptions of their probability of succeeding. Karlson holds that the behavioural implications of this labelling process depend on the degree of unambiguousness of the signals conveyed by track placement and whether the new information revealed by track placement conforms or conflicts with previous ability signals. Put differently, students are expected to respond more strongly to clear signals as compared to mixed ones, and to consistent signals as compared to inconsistent ones (de Boer et al. 2010; Karlson 2015).

The WM provides a different argument as to why students are likely to revise their educational aspirations upon proceeding to a new educational stage. Sorting students into tracks according to academic achievement creates distinct social contexts for students. Students find themselves in a new learning environment and are confronted with new significant others – be it peers or educators – who may exert social pressure towards specific educational goals (Oakes 2005; Van den Broeck

et al. 2018; Kretschmer and Roth 2021). The degree of stratification and the social selectivity of track allocation defines how distinct these new learning environments are from each other. In particular, when tracking starts at an early age, the impact of primary and secondary effects of social origin (Boudon 1974) is found to be exacerbated, reducing the overall socio-economic and achievement-related heterogeneity at later educational stages (e. g., Maaz et al. 2008; Van de Werfhorst and Mijs 2010). In turn, the reduced heterogeneity accentuates the bias regarding the specific educational goals students are influenced to pursue (Buchmann and Dalton 2002; Parker et al. 2016; Van den Broeck et al. 2018). For example, students in the academically most demanding track are likely to be exposed to a learning environment that predominantly promotes pursuing the academically most demanding degrees.

Despite these theoretical arguments about the role of educational transitions in tracked education systems for the formation and adjustment of educational aspirations, this subject has received limited scientific attention. Buchmann and Dalton (2002) investigate the role of tracking for aspirations in differently stratified education systems. They note that a high level of stratification limits the degree to which significant others influence educational aspirations. It appears that in a more stratified education system, “there is little room for interpersonal effects” (Buchmann and Dalton 2002, 99), in such a way that track placement largely pre-empts the educational goals students set for themselves. This argument is in line with research from highly stratified education systems that reveals a systematic pattern of educational aspirations depending on the academic track that students attend. Students attending general academic tracks tend to have higher educational aspirations than those in non-academic tracks (Buchmann and Park 2009; Roth 2017; Van den Broeck et al. 2020; Zimmermann 2020; Bittmann and Schindler 2021; Geven and Forster 2021).

Recent studies report systematic track-related differences in the way students adjust their educational aspirations in light of transitions to the next educational stage. Karlson (2015) demonstrates for the US that students placed in high-ability tracks experience an upward shift in educational expectations, particularly when placement is consistent across different subjects. While those entering a high-ability track from a low-ability track show substantial increases in educational expectations, those moving downward are more likely to decrease their expectations. Similarly, Geven and Forster (2021) provide evidence for the German context suggesting that students are more likely to adjust their educational aspirations upwards if their track placement in lower secondary education exceeds their expectations – and vice versa. Another recent study from Germany indicates that upon entering lower secondary education, high-ability students in non-academic tracks experience a gradual decrease in their aspiration of acquiring a university entry certificate. In contrast, almost all of their counterparts in the academic track stick to their previous aspiration of obtaining a university entry certificate. This relationship is mediated by

social origin, which contributes to a process of divergence (Bittmann and Schindler 2021). Evidence from Norway suggests that, compared to those in general education, students in vocational programmes are substantially more likely to redirect their educational aspirations away from tertiary education upon approaching the transition to upper secondary education. After entering upper secondary education, this relationship vanishes, suggesting that tracking plays a more substantial role during the decision-making process preceding the transition than during the transition itself (Hegna 2014). Contrary to earlier findings suggesting that students' aspirations are resilient over time (Grodsky and Riegle-Crumb 2010; Andrew and Hauser 2011), these studies underline that many students revise their educational aspirations during educational transitions.

2.4 The Present Study

This study contributes to the literature on educational aspirations by analysing track allocation as a major driver for the formation and adjustment of educational aspirations. Whether tracking defines opportunities and constraints, sends ability signals or alters the composition of significant others, we expect that transitioning from one educational stage to another incites students to revise their educational aspirations. Further, we expect that this is particularly apparent in highly stratified education systems such as Switzerland's (Buchmann and Dalton 2002; Buchmann and Park 2009; Parker et al. 2016).

In Switzerland, students are sorted into lower secondary school tracks according to their academic record, usually in seventh grade. Track placement at this stage is essential as it sets the course for future educational opportunities (Buchmann et al. 2016; SCCRE 2018; Combet 2019). Compulsory schooling in Switzerland ends with lower secondary education in ninth grade. In upper secondary education, students are primarily channelled into either high-ability general education (baccalaureate schools and upper secondary specialised schools) (about 29%) or primarily firm-based vocational education and training (VET) with varying academic requirements (about 60%) (SCCRE 2018; Gomensoro and Meyer 2021; FSO 2021). Students in specific VET programmes can obtain a vocational baccalaureate degree enabling them to enter universities of applied sciences. The strong segmentation of Swiss upper secondary education into several distinctly different tracks or programmes requires an empirical approach that reflects the variety of viable educational pathways after compulsory school. To this end, and unlike previous studies, we go beyond reducing educational aspirations to a dichotomy between tertiary and non-tertiary level educational goals.

While general education primarily prepares students for entry into tertiary education, VET prepares them for entry into the labour market. In contrast, VET programmes that allow obtaining a vocational baccalaureate facilitate tertiary education and labour market entry. Despite the politically claimed permeability of the

Swiss education system, scholars consistently demonstrate that track placement in upper secondary education is predictive of the highest educational attainment (e. g., Buchmann et al. 2016). Furthermore, studies reveal that track allocation at lower and upper secondary levels is characterised by substantial social selectivity (e. g., Becker and Glauser 2018).

Two issues will be investigated in our study: the general impact of tracking on aspirations; and whether track placement is related to distinct patterns of aspirational adjustments. We assume that we will find the highest educational aspirations among students in general education and the lowest among students in VET. While the academically most demanding general education track is geared towards entering tertiary education, students in the least academically demanding VET track are prepared for labour market entry. As institutional constraints limit students' ability to switch tracks, this narrows down the range of feasible educational destinations. At the same time, track placement sends out a strong ability signal. Students in the academically most demanding track are signalled that their academic abilities most likely exceed those of their counterparts in academically less demanding tracks, which encourages them to set high educational goals – and vice versa. In both cases, students entering new learning environments are influenced by significant others, which are now less heterogeneous due to the social sorting that accompanies tracking. This, in turn, contributes to the unambiguousness of the influence of significant others when students evaluate the educational alternatives to which they should aspire. We expect that this consolidates the tendency of students in the academically most demanding track to set high educational goals – and vice versa.

We further propose that track placement systematically affects how students adjust their educational aspirations upon leaving compulsory school. Again, given the institutional constraints limiting the range of feasible educational destinations, the ability signal conveyed through track placement and the distinct influence by significant others, some educational destinations become less or more feasible and desirable. Students in general education are unambiguously geared towards setting high educational goals. Consequently, we expect these students to predominantly adjust their educational aspirations upwards or to stick to their already high initial aspirations. Analogously, we expect students in VET to predominantly adjust their educational aspirations downwards or to stick to their already low initial aspirations. In contrast, for VET programmes that lead to a vocational baccalaureate, we expect the ability signal to be fuzziest and the influence exerted by significant others to be most diverse. Coupled with the variety of educational pathways students can follow upon completing these programmes, we expect to find the most substantial adjustments of educational aspirations – both upwards and downwards.

3 Data and Methods

3.1 Sample

This study draws on longitudinal data from TREE2 (TREE 2022). TREE2 surveys the educational and occupational pathways of compulsory school-leavers in Switzerland. This data comprises a sample of 8'429 students who participated in Switzerland's large-scale assessment study AES (Assessment of the Attainment of Educational Standards; in German: Überprüfung des Erreichens der Grundkompetenzen, ÜGK), in 2016 (Hupka-Brunner et al. 2021). The population covered by TREE2 includes all Swiss ninth-grade students in school year 2015/2016 who did not repeat their ninth grade in the subsequent school year. This article draws on data from the AES baseline survey and the first and third waves of TREE2 from 2017 and 2019, respectively.¹

The sample is restricted to the 5'850 respondents who participated in all three surveys. Since the research design requires complete information on the dependent variable of realistic educational aspirations in at least the AES baseline and TREE2 third wave, the sample size is reduced to 3'501 respondents. Excluding respondents with missing information for the explanatory variables, the size of the analytical sample amounts to 3'294 individuals that completed compulsory school in 2016. Comparisons of the weighted analytical sample with the original sample weighted for participation in waves 1 and 3 do not indicate any systematic biases.² When we describe the variables below, we refer to the weighted descriptives of the baseline survey.

3.2 Measurements

The dependent variable of realistic aspirations is deduced from the question "What do you think will be the highest educational degree that you will attain one day?", with seven ordinal response categories ranging from a two-year VET certificate (EBA) to a tertiary degree from a university. Due to the insignificant number of observations relating to aspiring to obtain a two-year VET certificate, this category is merged with the second category of the three- to four-year VET certificate (EFZ). At the end of compulsory school, students aspire to either an upper secondary-level VET diploma (29.4 %), a vocational baccalaureate (13.9 %), a general baccalaureate (5.7 %), a tertiary-level VET diploma (11.4 %), a university of applied science or teacher education degree (16.5 %), or a university degree (23.1 %). As the wording of this question incorporates an anticipatory perception of the likelihood of suc-

1 The analyses presented in this study rely on provisional pre-published data of TREE2's third wave as of July 2022.

2 Descriptive statistics of the analytical sample across all survey waves are provided by the authors upon request.

cessfully attaining the desired educational degree, the dependent variable reflects realistic educational aspirations (Haller 1968; Hupka-Brunner et al. 2016).

A categorical variable contrasting the educational degree aspired to at the end of compulsory school and three years later, in 2019, is created to measure the adjustment of realistic educational aspirations. We define students as having stable aspirations (45.1 %) if the educational degree to which they aspire does not change over the observed period. Conversely, students adjust their aspirations downwards (16.0 %) or upwards (38.9 %), respectively, if their reported realistic aspiration in 2019 is lower or higher than at the end of compulsory school, in 2016.

The independent variable of interest captures students' educational track in upper secondary education. We categorise the multitude of educational programmes into the following four categories. The category general education (36.1 %) encompasses entirely school-based programmes that allow students to acquire a baccalaureate degree or a specialised school diploma. Students attending two-to four year vocational education and training (EBA and EFZ) are combined under the category VET (42.0 %). The category vocational baccalaureate comprises all programmes that allow students to acquire a vocational baccalaureate (4.5 %). Lastly, we group paid employment, internships, interim solutions, or pursuing a non-certified education within the category NET (not in education or training) (17.4 %). Since previous educational decisions primarily determine track allocation at the upper secondary level, we include a measure capturing the requirement level for the track attended during the last year of compulsory school. This variable distinguishes between high (35.3 %), advanced (39.6 %), and basic requirements (23.0 %), and a separate category for students in integrated schools, alternative programmes, or special education needs classes (2.1 %).

Given the various factors previous studies (e.g., Rothon et al. 2011; Berrington et al. 2016; Hadjar and Scharf 2019; Salazar et al. 2020) have identified as determinants of educational aspirations, and thus as potential confounders, we consider several control variables in the multivariate analyses. We control for educational achievement by calculating the grade point average for first and second school language, mathematics and science in the last year of compulsory school (mean = 0.06, SE = 0.02). A composite measure capturing the perceived parental pressure to achieve (Böhm-Kasper et al. 2000) acts as a control influence exerted by parents (mean = -0.01, SE = 0.02). Concerning socio-demographic characteristics, the regression models include dummy variables for sex (53.3 % females), migration background (25.8 %) and foreign language spoken at home (19.9 %). To capture multiple dimensions of social origin, we further control for highest parental educational attainment (43.2 % with tertiary education, 45.6 % with upper secondary education, and 11.2 % with compulsory schooling only), highest parental ISEI-08 score (Ganzeboom 2010) (mean = 0.13, SE = 0.02), and the number of books at home (Kunter et al. 2002) (mean = 4.41, SE = 0.03).

3.3 Analytical Approach

When investigating the effects of track placement on the educational aspirations of compulsory school-leavers in Switzerland, this study follows a two-step approach. In the first step, we aim to identify factors contributing to the formation of educational aspirations from a longitudinal perspective. To this end, we analyse the educational degree to which students aspire by estimating random-effects ordered logistic models for unbalanced samples. These models allow for individual intercepts, and thus consider that observations from the same individual are correlated. Provided that these random intercepts are uncorrelated with predictor variables in the model, this estimation procedure yields less biased estimates as it accounts for unobserved heterogeneity between individuals (e.g., Wooldridge 2020; Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2022). To account for systematic temporal trends, these models include wave-specific dummy variables. While keeping the number of students in the analytical sample constant, we apply maximum-likelihood estimation and gradually extend the regression models by including additional covariates.

In the second step, we analyse whether track placement is systematically associated with the way students adjust their educational aspirations, namely sticking to the same degree aspired to at the end of compulsory school or adjusting the aspiration downwards or upwards, respectively. In order to estimate the likelihood of exhibiting one of these three patterns simultaneously, we estimate multinomial logistic regression models (e.g., Long and Freese 2014; Greene 2018). The results of the multinomial models are presented in terms of average marginal effects, which facilitates comparing estimates of nested models and reduces bias related to unobserved heterogeneity (Mood 2010).

4 Results

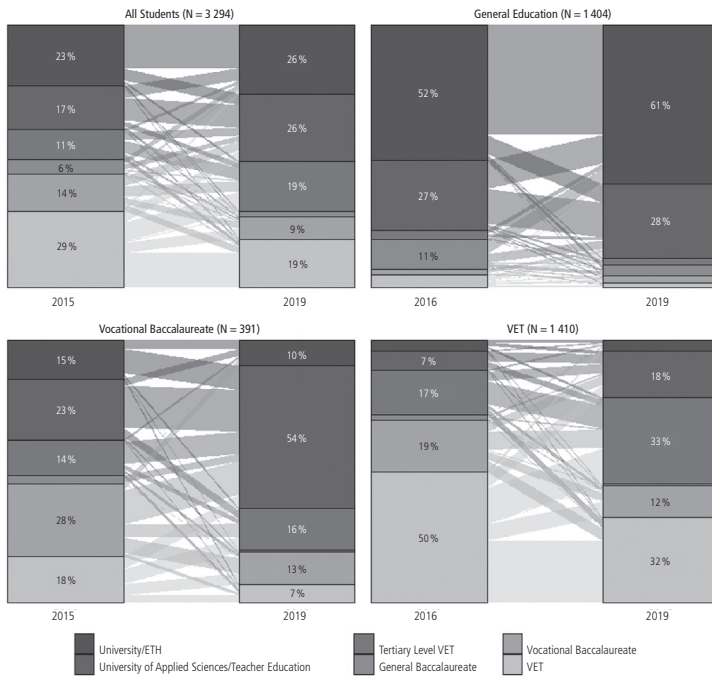
4.1 Educational Aspirations of Compulsory School-Leavers in Switzerland

The educational goals compulsory school-leavers in Switzerland set for themselves cover the entire range of obtainable degrees. Figure 1 depicts realistic educational aspirations over the observed period and illustrates the interrelations between them. Four aspects immediately stand out.

First, some educational degrees are aspired to more frequently than others. Three years into upper secondary education, in 2019, 19% of the entire analytical sample does not aspire to a degree beyond VET. In contrast, more than half aspire to a degree at a university of applied sciences or teacher education.

Second, the illustrated changes in realistic educational aspirations over time disprove the claim that adolescents only rarely revise the educational goals they set at an earlier age (e.g., Grodsky and Riegle-Crumb 2010; Andrew and Hauser 2011). Over the considered period from 2016 to 2019, 55% of compulsory school-leavers

Figure 1 Educational Aspirations Over Time



Note: Weighted percentage (N = 3294), students not in education (NET) in 2019 not shown, Data: TREE2, own calculations.

have adjusted their initial educational aspirations. Notably, 8 % of the respondents return to the degree to which they originally aspired but report other aspirations in between. However, the extent to which students adjust their educational aspirations differs across tracks. While six out of ten students in general education exhibit stable educational aspirations over time, only 39 % of VET students and 30 % of students in a programme leading to a vocational baccalaureate have stable aspirations.

Third, a positive trend becomes apparent when comparing the percentages of degrees aspired to from 2016 and 2019. Three years into upper secondary education, the adolescents considered in the analyses set overall higher educational goals than they do at the end of compulsory school. In total, more cases raise their educational aspirations (39 %) than decrease them (16 %). This pattern, again, varies across tracks. While one quarter of students in general education raise their educational aspiration, we observe a substantially higher percentage of upward adjustments among students in VET (45 %) and students in programmes leading to a vocational baccalaureate (50 %).

Lastly, Figure 1 clearly indicates that students aspire to different educational degrees depending on track placement in upper secondary education. A pattern emerges: students in general education predominantly aspire to a university degree, whereas 32% of students in VET do not aspire to a degree beyond their current training. Less than 5% of VET students aspire to a university degree, although the overall share of VET students aspiring to a degree at universities of applied sciences or teacher education increases from 2016 to 2019. In programmes leading to a vocational baccalaureate, individuals display a remarkable shift in aspirations towards obtaining a degree from a university of applied sciences or teacher education (54%).

Overall, descriptive analyses of educational aspirations reveal that a substantial number of students considered in our analyses revise their educational aspirations upon leaving compulsory school. Not only are there indications of specific adjustment patterns over time, there is also compelling evidence that students systematically differ in terms of their educational aspirations depending on the educational track they attend. This assessment leads us to investigate further how the formation of educational aspirations is affected by tracking, and whether changes in educational aspirations depend on track placement at the upper secondary level.

4.2 Formation of Educational Aspirations

In the first step, we investigate the relation between of track placement and realistic educational aspirations by estimating random-effects ordered logistic regressions. Table 1 presents the results of these models in terms of odds ratios for aspiring to a higher educational degree, along with 95% confidence intervals in parentheses.

Model 1 solely includes the variables of primary interest, Model 2 introduces controls for grades and perceived parental pressure, Model 3 controls for socio-demographic characteristics, and Model 4 contains the full set of predictors. The estimated effects of track placement prove reasonably robust across all four models.

In Model 4, regarding track placement in lower secondary education, we find that the conditional odds of aspiring to a higher educational degree are lower ($OR = 0.237$, $p < 0.001$) for students in the advanced track compared to their counterparts in the high requirement track. Students attending a basic requirement track show an even lower likelihood of setting higher educational goals ($OR = 0.090$, $p < 0.001$).

The negative effects of track placement are even more pronounced in upper secondary education. Adolescents in VET ($OR = 0.109$, $p < 0.001$), programmes leading to a vocational baccalaureate ($OR = 0.196$, $p < 0.001$) or those currently not in education or training ($OR = 0.125$, $p < 0.001$) show a significantly decreased likelihood of aspiring to a higher educational degree than their counterparts in general education. The effects of track placement are in line with the findings of Buchmann and Park (2009), who show that students' aspirations align with the orientation of the track they attend, and that students adapt their educational goals in accordance with the ability signals they receive (Karlson 2015).

Table 1 Random-Effects Ordered Logistic Regression Models on Educational Aspirations. Odds Ratios with 95 % Confidence Intervals

	Model 1 Realistic Aspirations	Model 2 Realistic Aspirations	Model 3 Realistic Aspirations	Model 4 Realistic Aspirations
Lower Secondary Track (Ref. High Requirements)				
Advanced Requirements	0.201*** (0.154, 0.261)	0.185*** (0.144, 0.240)	0.263*** (0.205, 0.338)	0.237*** (0.186, 0.303)
Basic Requirements	0.064*** (0.045, 0.091)	0.061*** (0.043, 0.087)	0.101*** (0.071, 0.142)	0.090*** (0.064, 0.127)
Other	0.237*** (0.112, 0.502)	0.202*** (0.101, 0.405)	0.258*** (0.136, 0.486)	0.219*** (0.120, 0.399)
Upper Secondary Track (Ref. General Education)				
NET	0.082*** (0.059, 0.113)	0.106*** (0.077, 0.147)	0.101*** (0.074, 0.140)	0.125*** (0.092, 0.172)
VET	0.069*** (0.053, 0.090)	0.083*** (0.064, 0.108)	0.096*** (0.074, 0.124)	0.109*** (0.084, 0.142)
Vocational Baccalaureate	0.137*** (0.103, 0.184)	0.156*** (0.117, 0.207)	0.180*** (0.136, 0.239)	0.196*** (0.148, 0.258)
Wave (Ref. 2016)				
2017	1.381*** (1.203, 1.586)	1.383*** (1.205, 1.588)	1.397*** (1.217, 1.604)	1.398*** (1.218, 1.605)
2019	2.511*** (2.209, 2.854)	2.572*** (2.263, 2.924)	2.499*** (2.200, 2.839)	2.555*** (2.248, 2.903)
Parental Pressure		1.161** (1.049, 1.286)		1.041 (0.940, 1.153)
Average Grade		1.889*** (1.710, 2.085)		1.722*** (1.566, 1.895)
HISEI 08			1.409*** (1.271, 1.562)	1.365*** (1.232, 1.511)
Parental Education (Ref. Tertiary Education)				
Compulsory Schooling Only			0.384*** (0.272, 0.543)	0.409*** (0.291, 0.575)
Upper secondary education			0.474*** (0.390, 0.577)	0.498*** (0.411, 0.604)
Number of Books at Home			1.218*** (1.136, 1.305)	1.168*** (1.091, 1.251)
Language Spoken at Home (Ref. Test Language)				
Other			1.306 (0.981, 1.738)	1.309 (0.990, 1.730)
Immigration Status (Ref. Native)				
Migration Background			2.253*** (1.712, 2.966)	2.294*** (1.755, 3.000)
Sex (Ref. Male)				
Female			0.909 (0.764, 1.082)	0.884 (0.743, 1.052)
BIC	149561.3	148002.5	147091.7	145863.0
N of students	3294	3294	3294	3294
Observations	8938	8938	8938	8938

Note: Weighted estimates of random-effects ordered logistic models. Conditional odds ratios (OR), 95 % confidence intervals in parentheses. Cut points and sigma squared have been omitted. Predictors HISEI 08 and Average Grade are z-standardized. * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. Data: TREE2 (2022), own calculations.

Over the observed three-year period, students set increasingly higher educational goals. Compared to the baseline survey of 2016, the conditional odds of a higher educational aspiration increase by a factor of 1.398 ($p < 0.001$) for the first survey wave of 2017 and more than double for the third survey wave of 2019 ($OR = 2.555$, $p < 0.001$). Our findings suggest that students generally opt for higher aspirations later in upper secondary education.

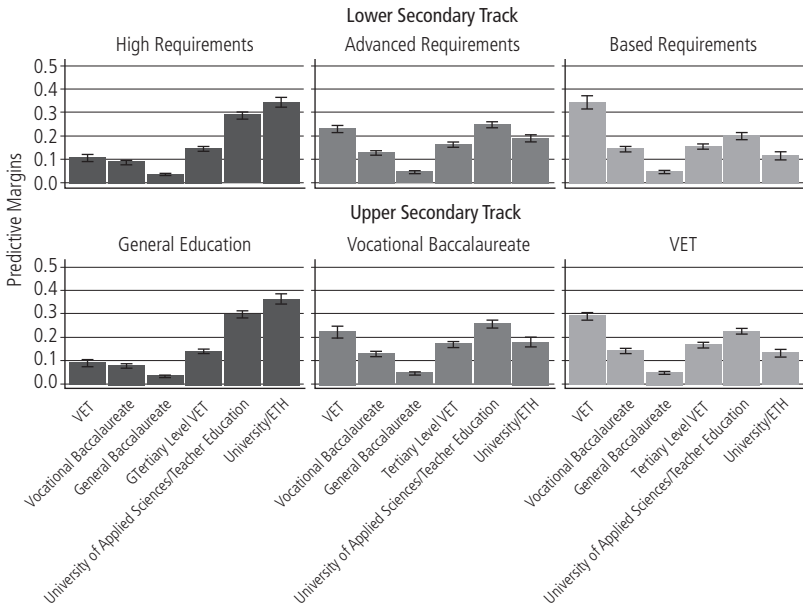
For the first set of controls, we find that perceived parental pressure to achieve is unrelated to educational aspirations ($OR = 1.041$, $p > 0.05$), underlining the notion that peers become a more important source of influence during adolescence, as compared to parents (Osterman 2000; Brechwald and Prinstein 2011). Further, we see that an increase by one standard deviation in grade point average increases the conditional odds of aspiring to a higher degree by a factor of 1.722 ($p < 0.001$). This supports findings on the effect of educational achievement on aspirations, as reported by several other studies (e.g., Khattab 2015; Roth 2017; Karlson 2019; Bernardi and Valdés 2021).

The second set of controls reveals that socio-demographic characteristics are strongly predictive of educational aspirations. An increase by one standard deviation of the highest parental ISEI is related to an increase in the conditional odds of aspiring to the next higher degree ($OR = 1.365$, $p < 0.001$). Adolescents whose parents have not attained tertiary education are predicted to set lower educational goals for themselves (compulsory schooling only: $OR = 0.409$, $p < 0.001$, upper secondary education: $OR = 0.498$, $p < 0.001$). In a similar vein, the number of books at home is significantly positively related to the educational degree aspired to ($OR = 1.168$, $p < 0.001$). These results confirm the crucial role of social origin in the formation of educational aspirations, as illustrated by previous research (e.g., Buchmann and Dalton 2002; Baker et al. 2014; Roth 2017; Gölz and Wohlkinger 2019).

Furthermore, and in line with previous research (e.g., Salikutluk 2016; Hadjar and Scharf 2019; Van den Broeck et al. 2020), we find a positive but statistically insignificant effect for speaking other languages at home ($OR = 1.309$, $p > 0.05$) and a positive significant effect for having a migration background ($OR = 2.294$, $p < 0.001$). Unlike findings from previous studies (e.g., Gil-Flores et al. 2011; Baker et al. 2014; Berrington et al. 2016), our model predicts lower educational aspirations for girls than for boys, although this effect is not statistically significant ($OR = 0.884$, $p > 0.05$).

Summarising the results from these models, we find substantial support for our hypothesis that track placement has a direct effect on the formation of aspirations. To illustrate this effect, Figure 2 depicts predictive margins from Model 4 for each educational goal considered, depending on track placement in lower and upper secondary education. In the upper panels, we see the predicted probabilities by lower secondary track. This reveals that students in high requirement tracks aspire to more demanding degrees than their counterparts in basic requirement tracks, who aim mainly for VET degrees. In advanced tracks, however, students are predicted to aspire

Figure 2 Predicted Educational Aspirations by Track Placement



Note: Predictive margins with 95 % confidence intervals calculated from Model 4 in Table 1. Data: TREE2, own calculations.

in almost equal parts to VET or tertiary education, while the largest share realistically aspires to a university of applied sciences or teacher education. Focusing on the lower panels showing predicted probabilities by track placement in upper secondary education, an almost identical picture emerges. Students in general education aspire to the highest degrees, while VET students are still most likely to aspire to a VET diploma. Students in programmes leading to a vocational baccalaureate are again the most diverse in their predicted aspirations, with the largest share aspiring to a university of applied sciences or teacher education, followed by VET and university.

4.3 Adjustments of Educational Aspirations Upon Leaving Compulsory School

After bringing forward evidence that track placement has an effect on which educational degrees students aspire to, we examine to what extent the transition to upper secondary education is related to how compulsory school-leavers adjust their educational aspirations. In doing so, students’ educational aspirations at the end of compulsory school are contrasted with their aspirations three years into upper secondary education. Using multinomial logistic regression, we examine whether students’ educational aspirations were stable, shifted downwards or upwards, re-

Table 2 Multinomial Logistic Regression Models on Adjustments of Educational Aspirations from 2016 to 2019. Average Marginal Effects with 95 % Confidence Intervals

	Stable	Downwards	Upwards
Lower Secondary Track (Ref. High Requirements)			
Advanced Requirements	-0.074** (-0.130, -0.018)	-0.038 (-0.081, 0.006)	0.112*** (0.057, 0.167)
Basic Requirements	-0.019 (-0.095, 0.057)	-0.048 (-0.102, 0.006)	0.067 (-0.007, 0.141)
Other	-0.063 (-0.201, 0.076)	-0.041 (-0.144, 0.062)	0.104 (-0.041, 0.249)
Upper Secondary Track (Ref. General Education)			
NET	-0.150* (-0.278, -0.021)	0.211*** (0.094, 0.327)	-0.061 (-0.174, 0.052)
VET	-0.136*** (-0.198, -0.073)	0.069** (0.026, 0.112)	0.067* (0.005, 0.129)
Vocational Baccalaureate	-0.245*** (-0.312, -0.179)	0.084*** (0.034, 0.134)	0.161*** (0.092, 0.231)
Parental Pressure	0.007 (-0.017, 0.031)	0.012 (-0.006, 0.030)	-0.019 (-0.044, 0.005)
Average Grade	0.020 (-0.001, 0.042)	0.000 (-0.016, 0.016)	-0.021 (-0.042, 0.001)
HISEI 08	0.000 (-0.025, 0.025)	-0.012 (-0.030, 0.006)	0.012 (-0.013, 0.037)
Parental Education (Ref. Tertiary Education)			
Compulsory Schooling Only	-0.029 (-0.110, 0.051)	-0.061* (-0.114, -0.008)	0.090* (0.011, 0.169)
Upper Secondary Education	-0.063** (-0.110, -0.016)	-0.028 (-0.064, 0.008)	0.090*** (0.044, 0.137)
Number of Books at Home	-0.003 (-0.019, 0.013)	0.007 (-0.003, -0.018)	-0.004 (-0.020-0.012)
Language Spoken at Home (Ref. Test Language)			
Other Language	-0.047 (-0.109, 0.014)	-0.001 (-0.046, 0.043)	0.049 (-0.015, 0.112)
Immigration Status (Ref. Native)			
Migration Background	0.004 (-0.054, -0.061)	0.010 (-0.034, 0.054)	-0.014 (-0.073, 0.046)
Sex (Ref. Male)			
Female	0.007 (-0.034, 0.047)	0.016 (-0.014, 0.045)	-0.022 (-0.063, 0.018)
N of students	3294		
BIC	41523.590		
Pseudo R ² (McFadden)	0.035		

Note: Weighted estimates of multinomial logit regression. Average marginal effects (AME), 95 % confidence intervals in parentheses. Predictors HISEI 08 and Average Grade are z-standardised. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Data: TREE2 (2022), own calculations.

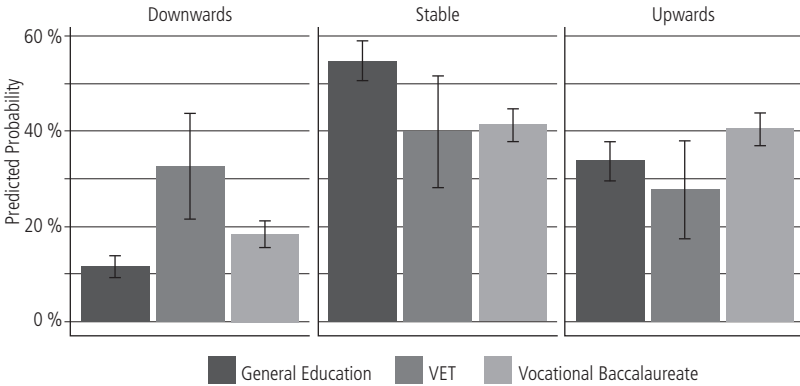
spectively, over this period. Table 2 presents the results in terms of average marginal effects and 95 % confidence intervals in parentheses.

Track placement in upper secondary education is an influential predictor of whether and in which direction students adjust their educational aspirations after leaving compulsory school. Individuals pursuing any other pathway than general education are significantly less likely to stick to the educational aspirations they had at the end of compulsory school. These effects are sizeable, with VET students being 13.6 percentage points (pp.) less likely ($p < 0.001$), and those in programmes leading to a vocational baccalaureate even 24.5 pp. ($p < 0.001$) less likely to stick to their aspirations. In contrast, holding other covariates constant, students in VET are 6.9 pp. ($p < 0.01$) more likely, and those pursuing a vocational baccalaureate 8.4 pp. ($p < 0.001$) more likely to lower their educational aspirations upon leaving compulsory school. Yet students in the aforementioned tracks are also more likely to adjust their educational aspirations upwards (VET: AME = 0.067, $p < 0.05$, vocational baccalaureate: AME = 0.161, $p < 0.001$). Thus, students in these two tracks exhibit a similar pattern of aspirational adjustment when compared to those in general education. In addition to these findings, the track attended at the end of lower secondary education is also statistically related to the way students adjust their aspirations. Compared to their counterparts in the high requirement track, students who attended the track with advanced requirements show a higher likelihood of adjusting their educational aspirations upwards (AME = 0.112, $p < 0.001$). However, those who attended the other two lower secondary tracks considered do not differ from students in the high requirement track regarding their adjustment of their educational aspirations.

In contrast to the results in Table 1 predicting the level of educational aspirations, socio-demographic factors, perceived parental pressure and educational achievement only play a limited role in explaining adjustments of educational aspirations. Although adolescents whose parents have no tertiary degree show a higher propensity to set higher educational goals, neither the highest parental ISEI nor the number of books at home are related to aspirational adjustments.

While treating all other covariates as they were observed, the predicted probabilities in Figure 3 clearly indicate that students in the academically most demanding general education track are least likely to adjust the educational goals they set at the end of compulsory school. The multinomial regression model in Table 2 predicts that 54.8 % (+/- 4.3 pp.) of students in general education will stick to their educational aspirations over the observed period. Conversely, only 11.5 % (+/- 2.3 pp.) of these students lower their educational aspirations. Students in VET (18.3 % +/- 2.9 pp.), and particularly those in programmes leading to a vocational baccalaureate (19.9 % +/- 4.4 pp.), are substantially more likely to adjust their educational goals downwards upon entering the upper secondary level. In contrast, 40.4 % (+/- 3.4 pp.) of VET students and 49.8 (+/- 5.9 pp.) of students in programmes leading to a

Figure 3 Effects of Track Placement on Adjustments of Educational Aspirations



Note: Predicted probabilities with 95% confidence intervals (N= 3294), Data: TREE2, own calculations.

vocational baccalaureate set higher educational goals than they set at the end of compulsory school.

Overall, our results on the adjustment patterns with respect to educational aspirations only partially support our hypotheses and findings from previous research. In line with the mechanisms suggested by RCT and the WM, students placed in the academically most demanding track of upper secondary education are less likely to lower their educational goals. This pattern closely mirrors recent evidence from Germany (Bittmann and Schindler 2021; Geven and Forster 2021), a country whose education system is similarly stratified. Students in the track leading to a vocational baccalaureate degree appear to receive a rather mixed ability signal (Karlson 2015), coupled with a less marked influence of significant others towards aspiring to specific educational goals (Van den Broeck et al. 2020). This is exemplified by the fact that more than two-thirds of students in this track adjust their educational aspirations upwards or downwards. However, students pursuing VET are not dissuaded from setting more ambitious educational goals. On the contrary, an equal share of these students stick to their aspirations or set higher educational goals. This finding contradicts Hegna’s (2014) and Bittmann and Schindler’s (2021) notion that students in vocationally oriented tracks are increasingly diverted from aspiring to tertiary degrees.

5 Conclusion

Educational aspirations play an important role in shaping students' educational trajectories and destinations. In this study, we examined the formation and dynamics of educational aspirations among compulsory school-leavers in Switzerland, drawing on longitudinal data from the TREE2 study. Theoretical frameworks for explaining educational aspirations, namely RCT and the WM, suggest that proceeding to the next educational stage constitutes a pivotal moment for revising educational aspirations, particularly in highly stratified education systems such as Switzerland's.

Our first analysis of the effect of track placement on the formation of educational aspirations shows that aspirations strongly diverge by track in lower and upper secondary education. Students in academically demanding tracks set substantially higher educational goals than those in the academically least demanding tracks, with those attending intermediary programmes situated in between. This finding proves robust when controlling for various other determinants of educational aspirations identified by previous research.

However, investigating how students adjust their aspirations after leaving compulsory school reveals more nuanced insights. Supporting our hypothesis, we find that students in general education tend to adjust their aspirations upwards or stick to their – generally high – initial aspirations. Further, in line with our expectations, students in programmes leading to a vocational baccalaureate adjust their aspirations the most, either by lowering or by increasing their initial educational goals. Contrary to our expectations, the results suggest that students entering VET are not dissuaded from setting higher educational goals after leaving compulsory school. Students in VET not only stick to or lower their aspirations, they also substantially increase them. This result suggests that students in VET develop aspirations for tertiary education much later than their counterparts in general education. This argument is in line with the fact that many VET graduates enrol in a subsequent vocational baccalaureate programme (e. g., Trede et al. 2020).

The results of the two analyses combined draw an interesting picture. On the one hand, they underline theoretical arguments by showing the unambiguous effects of general education, as this track is strongly oriented towards tertiary education and is accompanied by strong ability signals (Karlson 2015) as well as the influence of significant others towards aspiring to a specific educational goal (Van den Broeck et al. 2018). Similarly, they prove a good fit for intermediary tracks with no clear track orientation, fuzzier ability signals and more diverse influence exerted by significant others. On the other hand, the upward adjustment in the VET track is surprising under the theoretical premises. A similar pattern is observed by Basler and Kriesi (2019) for the occupational aspirations of adolescents in Switzerland.

How can we explain this interesting finding? Like Hegna (2014), we find that social characteristics strongly affect the formation of aspirations, while only barely

affecting the way students adjust their aspirations. Empirically, the revision of aspirations is found to be mainly based on track placement and factors that change with it. First, beliefs about costs and benefits strongly mediate the formation of aspirations that coincide with milieu-specific norms, explaining the strong correlation between social characteristics and aspirations in the first place. Second, as track placement limits the spectrum of viable educational options, sends ability signals, and alters the constellation of significant others, there is less space in which milieu-specific norms can unfold. Students will not only assess their opportunities and abilities according to track placement, but also within a track (Bittman and Schindler 2021). When track placement exceeds or is below the students' expectations, they are more likely to revise their aspirations (Geven and Forster 2021). These new evaluations comprise their perceptions of abilities, motivation, and possible opportunities in the future (Heckhausen and Buchmann 2019). Consequently, track placement can shape beliefs about appropriate aspirations for a specific track upon its completion.

Students who complete VET are potentially about to enter the labour market and see that further investment directly affects their prospects. From their perspective, it is reasonable under certain preconditions, or in light of specific beliefs, to set goals for the next stage, as they have already passed a hurdle by obtaining a qualifying certificate. General education tracks do not prepare students to directly enter the labour market as they are oriented towards tertiary education. Given the investment students have already made, it seems most reasonable to follow this orientation and to stick to their aspirations as the hurdle of labour market entry is still ahead.

Despite identifying robust effects across different model specifications, this study has some limitations. The three-year period examined in this study is a specific, though undeniably important, snapshot of a student's educational career. However, the study does not provide insights into the long-term processes behind the formation of educational aspirations, nor does it allow us to evaluate whether and to what extent educational aspirations are realised. Further, the data does not explicitly enable us to model the proposed mechanisms of rational calculus and social influence. Neither can we control for students' educational performance in upper secondary education (which is an undeniably important determinant of educational aspirations; e. g., Khat tab 2015; Karlson 2019), or for the learning environment. We further acknowledge the notion of Buchmann and co-authors (2016) that VET programmes are unique and offer different opportunities, and thus may best be treated as a heterogeneous category. Specifically, it is plausible that the requirement levels of different VET programmes correlate with the adjustment of educational aspirations.

The identified track-specific disparities in how students form and adjust their educational aspirations add to an emerging strand of literature and contribute to a deeper understanding of students' educational mobility in Switzerland. Although this cannot be determined here, these mechanisms are presumably more pronounced in the highly stratified Swiss education system than in systems with comprehensive

secondary education (Buchmann and Dalton 2002; Parker et al. 2016). Although aspirations do not predetermine educational outcomes, they deserve adequate scientific attention. By demonstrating that educational aspirations are subject to temporal dynamics that are markedly shaped by track placement, we aim to contribute to a better understanding of educational trajectories. On this basis, we encourage researchers to investigate processes of aspirational change further. Specifically, we believe that explicit identification of the underlying mechanisms for, and examining the long-lasting implications of the adjustment of educational aspirations are promising approaches in this regard.

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