

Educational Opportunities through Scholarships?

The Social Status of Scholarship Holders of Germany's Hans Böckler Foundation

Introduction

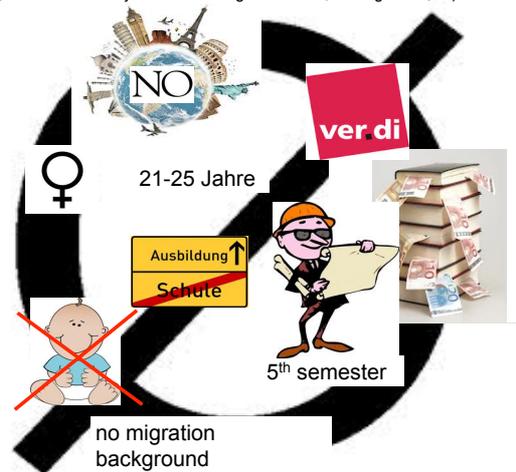
- Education is an important determinant for individual life chances and professional success in our society. However, the access to higher education institutions has never been reached for students with low social background seems difficult to achieve, taking certain conditions into account.
- The educational expansion of the 1960s and 70s has led to a widespread increase of the educational level in knowledge societies. The target of equality of opportunity, however, was never reached. There is still a strong link between social origin and educational success.
- Supporting engaged and qualified students and doctoral candidates is the goal of several government-funded funding organizations in Germany. Among these organizations, the Hans Böckler Foundation (HBS) occupies a special position, as it encourages the reduction of educational barriers and social inequalities by facilitating access to higher education.
- Higher education system characteristics include institutional settings that reflect societal conditions. A well-documented finding is the coherence between socio-economic status and educational participation. Working-class children are often thought to be led away from the direct paths to universities through prior schooling. Educational choices are determined by subjective expectations of success at university and the associated costs (e.g. loss of earnings and time, fear not to find a job after finishing the studies, leaving home, ...).

Figure 1: Average scholarship holder of the Hans Böckler Foundation

The HBS deals with co-determination, research and the support of students on behalf of the German Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB). The Foundation's work is primarily financed by employee representatives in company supervisory boards. They give the majority of their royalties to the Foundation. Donations are also received.

- Priority funding of working students or students of second-chance education, children of workers, socially-disadvantaged students, who are not yet members of a trade union, and sociopolitical engaged students
- 3 entryways: trade union selection procedure, "Böckler-Aktion-Bildung", supplementary selection procedure
- Financial support and non-material funding: workshops, seminars, internships, networks, stay abroad, language courses, and intensive mentoring

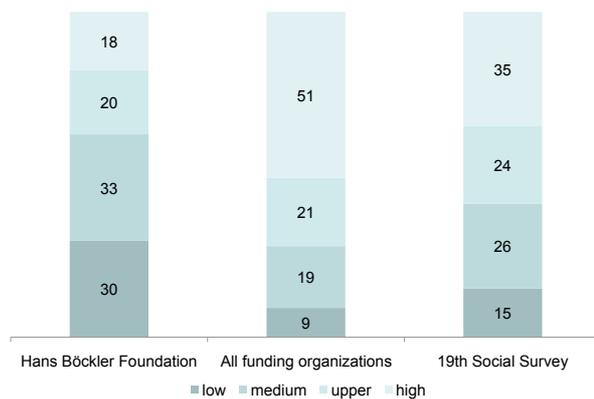
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Research questions

1. What clientele has been recruited from the HBS in the last years?
2. Does the Hans Böckler Foundation achieve her social compensatory goal better than other state-funded foundations?

Figure 2: Social origin – HBS, all funding organizations, 19th Social Survey



Source: All funding organizations (student scholarship holders of all funding organizations): Middendorff et al. 2009: 29; 19th Social Survey; Isserstedt et al. 2010: 129. N=854.

Project description

"Bildungschancen durch Begabtenförderung" funded by the Hans Böckler Foundation

This project is among the first self-implemented studies of the scholarship holders of the HBS. The aim of this study is to get more detailed information in four main areas:

1. socio-structural characteristics, family, and personal background,
2. self-evaluation of the situation of studies, and orientation at the university,
3. use of the (individual) workshop offers,
4. social engagement.

The results of this survey shall be used to adjust the support and funding of all scholarship holders (students and PhDs) of the HBS optimally.

Data and methods

An online-census of almost 1900 scholarship holders was collected in winter term 2010/11. 1184 funded students and PhDs participated in the survey. After data cleaning 860 records were available for analysis (response rate: 45%). The response is altogether representative for the basic population.

For a better classification of the presented results into the national context, data on two important peer groups were compared: the Social Survey of all German students on behalf of the "Deutsches Studentenwerk" and a survey of all scholarship holders in government-funded funding organizations in winter term 2008/2009, realized by the German Centre for Research on Higher Education and Science Studies, formerly HIS Higher Education Information System.

Results & Conclusion

1. HBS funded students are still a highly selective group that differs from other students.
2. Who applies for a scholarship or feels addressed by funding organizations depends on social origin. The potency of such effects is, however, shapeable by the foundations themselves.
3. The HBS is more successful than other foundations in supporting socially-disadvantaged students. Students diverted from the direct path to university, reached by a special scholarship program, are encouraged to start university studies through HBS funding. This is, however, insufficient to fully compensate educational disadvantages. This becomes particularly obvious when comparing these findings with results of the Social Survey of all German students.
4. The HBS supports students of all groups of social origin equally, and make a contribution to improve equal opportunities in higher education.
5. The actions to be taken to reduce educational barriers and social disadvantages by university admission are promising, but they are only effective once school-leavers have decided to study and this is socially-selective.