

**Ad-hoc Question: *'The opportunity cost (private and public) of low achievement or early school leaving of persons with special educational needs (SEN)'***

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The aim of this review is to provide background information on the evidence available concerning the opportunity cost of low educational achievement and early school leaving of individuals with special education needs (SEN). The analysis proceeds as follows. First, an overview of the literature on the identification and classification of the SEN group is presented. Second, the available evidence on the broadly defined costs of low educational achievement for SEN students are examined. Last, an overall appraisal and concluding remarks are provided.

### **1] Identifying SEN**

The definition of students with SEN varies across countries as it is closely related to the country-specific legislation. The identification of special needs students is a key step as it allows drawing a distinction between students with and without disabilities, and then sorting eligible students into the available special education programs. Much focus of the existing literature has been on how SEN students are identified and then on their placement. There is quite a large literature for the United States.

Some studies have highlighted to what extent changes in the accountability system may have an impact on the classification of SEN. In this context, Figlio and Getzler (2006) examine the identification of SEN following the introduction of a school accountability system across U.S. states in the framework of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Under this legislation, a lack of annual progress in students' proficiency in reading and mathematics can have some consequences on schools and districts (e.g., the reallocation of federal funds). The Authors' findings suggest that the introduction of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test led to an increase in the probability for students from a lower socio-economic status, and for students with low academic performance to be reclassified to disability categories not subject to the test-based accountability. Studies based on other states (e.g., Illinois, Texas) find comparable evidence.

More recently, Elder et al. (2016)<sup>1</sup> rely on a unique dataset which matches birth certificate records to the education records for individuals in the state of Florida. This is an important contribution to the literature given that the birth certificate records include detailed information on the individual's health status at birth. This makes it possible to assess the factors associated with the SEN identification process to a level of detail that was not possible in earlier studies. Their preliminary findings suggest that socio-economic characteristics and birth anomalies explain little of the gap and decline with children's age but there are important and persistent differences related to the racial composition of the school.

In the European context, a comparative study by Smith and Douglas (2014) examines how students with special education needs and disability are included in the PISA international study and discusses the role of accountability. They show that the share of SEN students in the sample of PISA 2009 varies across the advanced economies

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<sup>1</sup> The paper [Elder, Todd, David Figlio, Scott Imberman and Claudia Persico (2016) 'An Exploration of Economic and Racial Gaps in Special Education Identification', *forthcoming*] was not available at the time when this document was prepared. The information is based on the abstract available and on an exchange of emails with one of the Authors.

participating in the study. However, it is not possible to draw implications for the country-specific accountability systems given the nature of the study and the sampling method.

Moreover, there is no study currently available that matches birth certificates to education records but country-specific studies examine various aspects related to the identification of the SEN status.

Keslair et al. (2012) evaluate programs for students with special education needs in England. Students with SEN are identified by schools, and then assigned to specific programs specifically targeted for them. The evaluation of the SEN status is carried out at the school-level and the classification of moderate learning difficulties does not rely on a medical record. Using a longitudinal dataset that includes children in English state schools aged between 7 and 11, they find that the placement in remediation programs for children with moderate learning disabilities depends on the composition of the student body in terms of learning difficulties within the school.

Isaksson et al. (2010) describes to what extent the identification of SEN students take place at the local level in Sweden and relies on an assessment of the 'knowledge goals, medical conditions and socio-emotional status'. However, the Authors describe the complexity of the identification process in practice by relying on semi-structured interviews carried out within schools.

Iversen (2013) examines the use of special education after the 2006 reform of the Norwegian education system that was implemented gradually across municipalities. Central to the reform was a change in governance related to the accountability system. The Author's findings suggest that the increase in the SEN-placement is lower in the municipalities where the reform has been implemented.

Van der Veen et al. (2010) describe the Dutch education system and the performance of SEN students in mainstream primary schools. Bruggink et al. (2013) by relying on a sample of primary school children in the Netherlands focus on those children who were

identified by teachers as having SEN. They point out the heterogeneity of this group of students with respect to the norm-referenced group. Their analysis also suggests that these children were more likely to have lower scores with respect to their socio-emotional status.

## **2] Evidence related to the cost of low achievement or early school leaving among SEN**

It has been observed that SEN students have on average lower levels of educational attainment than the average student population (OECD, *various years*), and individuals with disabilities have on average lower employment rates and lower wages than the non-disabled population. In the framework of a rigorous evaluation of the estimated costs it is important to establish what are the returns to education for this group. That is, lower average levels of educational attainment could be partly explained by lower returns to education, which are not related to factors associated with either inequality or discrimination.

The existing literature has mainly focused on estimating the returns to formal education for non-disabled individuals. The main empirical approach was formulated by Mincer (1974) and was derived from the human capital theory. In this framework education is regarded as an investment where the direct and indirect costs related to acquiring education are compared to the present value of the earnings during the life cycle. In practice, the estimation of the empirical model has consisted of estimating the logarithm of earnings as a function of the individual's years of schooling, age, experience and other observable characteristics (Card 1999, 2001). There is a large literature for the non-disabled population that has focused either on country-specific or comparative analyses across countries (e.g., see Heckman et al. 2006 for a review of the existing studies). Among the recent studies, Montenegro and Patrinos (2014) provide comparable and consistent estimates of the returns to education for 139 countries by relying on 819 harmonized household surveys. Hanushek et al. (2015) estimate the returns to numeracy skills in 23 countries by relying on the comparable data for 23 OECD countries extracted from the

PIAAC study. They provide estimates for subgroups and find some statistically significant differences. For example, they find that returns increase with parents' level of education, and are larger in the private than the public sector, whereas they do not find any statistically significant gender difference in their sample of full-time, prime-age workers.

The literature related to the estimation of returns to education for individuals with SEN is limited. The existing studies have examined the labor market outcomes of disabled individuals, in some cases by drawing a distinction with respect to the type of disability. There is a limited number of rigorous studies. They provide mixed evidence, and mainly focus on the United States. No rigorous study was identified in the European context. There are some methodological issues related to measurement and endogeneity that make the analysis more complex and need to be addressed in order to identify the causal effect of schooling on labor-market outcomes for individuals with disability. That is, there may be some error in identifying individuals with a disability status for example in the context of surveys where the status is self-reported by individuals. Moreover, there may be reverse causality as labor market outcomes (e.g., labor force participation status) may have an impact on the disability/health status.

In order to address these issues, Stern (1989) examined the effect of disability on labor force participation in the United States by using symptoms as instruments in a simultaneous equation model of self-reported disability and labor-force participation. The Author relies on two sets of variables extracted from questions in the Survey of Disability and Work, and the Health Interview Survey. Respondents were asked about the limitations concerning the nature and amount of work that they can carry out, and to provide a rating over their health status. The empirical findings suggest that the disability status explains a significant share of the variation in labor force participation, and that both variables are good proxies for disability.

Hotchkiss (2004) examines the employment outcomes among disabled individuals after the introduction of the American's Disability Act, which was designed to address equal access to labor market opportunities. The Author finds that the Act did not have an impact

on affecting the change in probability of employment growth for disabled individuals but the decline in the labor force participation of disabled individuals was explained by a reclassification of the categories of disability status.

Another study is directly related to SEN students and addresses the possible endogeneity related to the choice of education affected by the age of disability onset. Hollenbeck and Kimmel (2008) examine the returns to education associated to disability by controlling for the age of disability onset. Their analytical sample includes men that they classify into three categories of disability status: early-onset, late-onset, non-disabled. The cut-off age of onset is 25 and is self-reported by the individuals interviewed. The possible effect of the timing of disability onset remains an empirical question. That is, an early onset may allow an individual to adjust more quickly his/her education decisions and labor force participation plans but at the same time may have more significant consequences on his/her educational investment. Their findings suggest that returns to education are not significant for those with a disability onset prior to age 25 –and this could be explained by the small size of the sample-. On the other hand, there are very large returns to education for those with a later onset of disability. The Authors also show that the average wage of the individuals with disability in the sample examined are below those with a non-disability status.

In order to be able to assess the wider cost of low achievement or early school leaving among persons with SEN it would be necessary to estimate the non-pecuniary private returns to education in and outside the labor market, as well as the social returns to education. Returns to education for the non-disabled and total population have been estimated with respect to several non-financial outcomes, such as job satisfaction, job characteristics and unemployment in the labor market, and health-related outcomes, marriage, parenting, outside the labor market (e.g., for a comprehensive review see Oreopoulos and Salvanes (2011)). Social returns to education have been estimated with respect to several pecuniary and non-pecuniary externalities such as workers' productivity, adoption of new technologies, intra-family productivity, crime reduction, and

social cohesion (refer to Lange and Topel (2006) for a review). On the other hand, rigorous evidence related to the non-pecuniary factors does not seem to be available for the SEN group.

In order to identify rigorous estimates of the opportunity cost- both public and private- of low achievement among SEN students in the European context, an extensive search was carried out. The search focused on international peer reviewed journals. It included journals related to the economics of education, journals related to development and inequality, top 10 economic journals, as well as journals related to labor economics. Moreover, consultations with the EENEE Experts and other leading scholars were carried out. Part B of the bibliography presents the studies identified in the context of this search. None of the studies that were identified focuses on the estimation of the costs associated to the low educational achievement of the SEN group. It is important to also mention that in addition to this material, background reports were reviewed but are not discussed given that they do not provide a rigorous estimation of the costs associated with the low educational attainment of SEN.

### **Appraisal and Concluding Remarks**

There is still limited research on individuals with special education needs in the field of the economics of education in the European context. The existing research in this area has mainly focused on different aspects related to the identification of SEN students, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of programs that target this group of students. In the European context, the evidence currently available does not include rigorous and reliable estimates on the opportunity cost -both private and public- of low achievement or early school leaving among persons with SEN. As a result, given the current state of the research on this topic and the limited rigorous evidence available, an analytical report seems premature at this stage.

## **References**

### **Part A – Papers cited in the Text**

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Stern, Steven (1989), Measuring the effect of disability on labor force participation. *Journal of Human Resources* 24:361-95.

### **Part B- Additional References focusing on Special Education Needs**

The references that are presented in the following pages were located while carrying out a background search for research related to the cost of low achievement and early school leaving for SEN students in the European context. They are organized as follows:

1. Journals related to the Economics of Education

2. Journals related to Development and Inequality
3. Top 10 Economic Journals
4. Journals related to Labor Economics
5. Selected Statistics and Indicators: OECD Reports

## 1. Journals Related To The Economics Of Education

| Journal Name  | Bibliography  |
|---|---|
| <b>Economics of Education Review, Elsevier</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keslair, Francois, Eric Maurin, and Sandra McNally. "Every child matters? An evaluation of "Special Educational Needs" programmes in England." <i>Economics of education review</i> 31.6 (2012): 932-948.</li> <li>- Feng, Li, and Tim R. Sass. "What makes special-education teachers special? Teacher training and achievement of students with disabilities." <i>Economics of Education Review</i> 36 (2013): 122-134.</li> <li>- Dhuey, Elizabeth, and Stephen Lipscomb. "Disabled or young? Relative age and special education diagnoses in schools." <i>Economics of Education Review</i> 29.5 (2010): 857-872.</li> <li>- Parrish, Thomas B. "Restructuring special education funding in New York to promote the objective of high learning standards for all students." <i>Economics of Education Review</i> 19.4 (2000): 431-445.</li> <li>- Lewis, Darrell R., et al. "A note on the use of earning functions and human capital theory in assessing special education." <i>Economics of Education Review</i> 8.3 (1989): 285-290.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Education Economics, Taylor &amp; Francis Journals</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Iversen, Jon Marius Vaag. "School accountability reforms and the use of special education." <i>Education Economics</i> 21.3 (2013): 264-280.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>International Journal of Inclusive Education</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nilsen, Sven. "Special education and general education—coordinated or separated? A study of curriculum planning for pupils with special educational needs." <i>International Journal of Inclusive Education</i> (2016): 1-13.</li> <li>- Chitiyo, M., Hughes, E. M., Changara, D. M., Chitiyo, G., &amp; M. Montgomery, K. (2016). Special education professional development needs in Zimbabwe. <i>International Journal of</i></li> </ul>  |

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& Francis Journals**

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**International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, Taylor & Francis Journals**

- Vlachou, Anastasia, Panayiota Stavroussi, and Eleni Didaskalou. "Special Teachers' Educational Responses in Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the Domain of Social Skills Development." *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education* 63.1 (2016): 79-97.
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## 2. Top Journals Related To Development and Inequality

| Journal Name   | Article  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Journal of Development Economics, Elsevier</b></p>                                   | ----   |
| <p><b>Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, Taylor &amp; Francis Journals</b></p> | <p>- Mutanga, Oliver, and Melanie Walker. "Towards a Disability-inclusive Higher Education Policy through the Capabilities Approach." <i>Journal of Human Development and Capabilities</i> 16.4 (2015): 501-517.</p> |
| <p><b>World Development, Elsevier</b></p>  | ----   |
| <p><b>The Journal of Economic Inequality</b></p>   | ----   |
| <p><b>Journal of Development Studies, Taylor &amp; Francis Journals</b></p>                | ----   |
| <p><b>Economic Development and Cultural Change, University of Chicago Press</b></p>        | -----  |



### 3. Top 10 Economics Journals

| Journal Name  | Article |
|---|---------|
| The Quarterly Journal of Economics, Oxford University Press   | -----   |
| Journal of Political Economy, University of Chicago Press     | -----   |
| Econometrica, Econometric Society                             | -----   |
| Journal of Economic Literature, American Economic Association | -----   |
| Journal of Economic Growth, Springer                          | -----   |
| Journal of Financial Economics, Elsevier                      | -----   |
| Journal of Finance, American Finance Association              | -----   |
| Review of Economic Studies, Oxford University Press           | -----   |
| Review of Financial Studies, Society for Financial Studies    | -----   |
| Journal of Monetary Economics, Elsevier                       | -----   |

## 4. Journals Related To Labor Economics

| Journal Name  | Article   |
|---|---|
| <b>Journal of Labor<br/>Economics, University of<br/>Chicago Press</b>  | -----   |
| <b>IZA Journal of Labor<br/>Economics,<br/>Springer;Forschungsinst<br/>itut zur Zukunft der<br/>Arbeit GmbH (IZA)</b> | -----   |
| <b>IZA Journal of Labor<br/>Policy,<br/>Springer;Forschungsinst<br/>itut zur Zukunft der<br/>Arbeit GmbH (IZA)</b>    | ----  |
| <b>Journal of Labor<br/>Research, Springer</b>  | ----  |
| <b>Labour Economics,<br/>Elsevier</b>   | - Cornaglia, Francesca, Elena Crivellaro, and Sandra McNally. "Mental health and education decisions." <i>Labour Economics</i> 33 (2015): 1-12. |

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IZA Journal of  
European Labor Studies,  
Springer;Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der  
Arbeit GmbH (IZA)

IZA Journal of Labor  
& Development,  
Springer;Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der  
Arbeit GmbH (IZA)

## **5. Selected Statistics and Indicators: OECD Reports**

1. **Students with Disabilities, Difficulties, Disadvantages - Statistics and Indicators for Curriculum Access and Equity (Special Educational Needs)**
  - [www.oecd.org/edu/equity/sen](http://www.oecd.org/edu/equity/sen)
  - <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/26527517.pdf>
  - <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/26527561.pdf>
  - <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/26225020.pdf>
  - <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/50325299.pdf>
  
2. **Greville, Eamonn. "Including Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Schools in Ireland." (2009).**
  - <http://www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/centreforeffectivelearningenvironmentscele/42168831.pdf>
  
3. **The Reform of Education for Students with Special Educational Needs in South Eastern Europe: Lessons and Experiences from Finland's Bilateral Support**
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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264076860-7-en>