Zusammenfassung

Führen höhere Kompetenzen zu größerem Erfolg? Unglücke Effekte von Kompetenzen für Männer und Frauen


Schlüsselwörter
PIAAC, Grundkompetenzen, Geschlechterungleichheit, Arbeitsmarktdiskriminierung, Einkommensungleichheit

Summary

This paper looks at men’s and women’s positions in the labour market and relates them to their basic skills. In a meritocratic society, higher skills are supposed to relate to higher outcomes. We question whether this relation is equally true for men and women. Using data for 13 countries from the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), an international large-scale assessment, this paper examines monthly wages and a person’s probability to be in a managerial position. Our analyses show that, on average, men with higher skills get higher wages and have a higher probability to be in a managerial position than women with equally high skills. We show that the relation between skills and outcomes is more proportional for men than for women and that the gender pay gap does apply to women and men with similar skills. In addition, the results highlight a gap in managerial positions between men and women with the same basic skills.

Keywords
PIAAC, basic skills, gender bias, labour market discrimination, income inequality
1 Introduction

Women and men in the workplace often face different challenges. Much has been written about phenomena such as the gender pay gap (e.g. Auspurg/Hinz/Sauer 2017; Goldan 2019; OECD 2017b), suggesting that the labour market provides different chances for men and women to have their skills acknowledged. However, the mechanisms underlying gender equity in the labour market are complex and subject to debate in numerous disciplines and worthy of further analysis. This paper aims to contribute to the extant literature by focusing on actual competencies, a factor which has received little attention in the literature. We examine the influence of basic skills on success in the labour market for men and women across a range of countries. In meritocratic societies as ours, skill is expected and claimed to be a determining factor for labour market outcomes. We challenge this assumption by analysing how basic skills relate to two key outcomes: monthly income and hierarchical position.

2 Gender

The labour market represents a key life situation in which people are confronted with specific gender-biased expectations. Examples of women who have rebelled against these expectations can be found everywhere and at various points in history. Women like Simone de Beauvoir are often regarded as the founding generation for a theorization of women, gender and later on queer studies (Babka/Posselt 2016: 31). It has become increasingly accepted that “being a woman” is a product of social power relations or social manipulations (Wittig 1992 [1981]: 246) rather than biologically or psychologically determined. Probably one of the most prominent elaborations of these thoughts was conducted by Judith Butler who claimed that not only social gender but also sexes are socially constructed as they are determined by power relations (Butler 1990). The way a system addresses people determines their social position (Butler 2013).

Mainstream labour markets tend to address people as one of two genders. To analyse potentially discriminating mechanisms we use the terms ‘male’ and ‘female’, not necessarily referring to gender identity but to the way people are being addressed by society and by a hegemonic discourse. When we talk of women in the workplace, we talk about those who are deemed female by their (workplace) environment.

The unequal positioning of men and women in the labour market is more complex than any single discriminatory mechanism. A multitude of different mechanisms are disadvantaging women. In the following sections, we will give a brief overview of research on specific moments of differentiation and gender-based exclusion in the labour market. These are, among others: (1) keeping women outside of the labour market, (2) the devaluation of women’s labour, and – next to these structural, often invisible, discriminatory mechanisms – (3) women being faced with direct and indirect workplace discrimination.
2.1 Gaps in employment and division of labour

In meritocratic societies, one might expect that success in the labour market is awarded according to performance and proficiency. Regarding gender, a variety of mechanisms influence and determine economic outcomes. One explanation of different monthly incomes is the division of labour. Men are more likely to be in paid work and in full-time jobs (OECD 2017a). Even if both partners have paid jobs, a cross-national study showed how gender expectancies still influence the division of housework and disadvantage women (Aassve/Fuochi/Mencarini 2014). Polacheck (2004) showed that married women with children earn less than married women without children and that married women who space their births widely apart receive even lower wages, compared to married men. This shows that it is not the number of children but the social construction of gender and parental roles which influence the worktime/pay distribution (Prietl 2015). The bigger economic dependencies and difficulties are, the more pronounced is gender inequality regarding division of household labour (Aassve/Fuochi/Mencarini 2014).

Such phenomena are not restricted to domestic labour: A qualitative British study by Theresa O’Keefe and Aline Courtois (2019) showed that women in academia often work in precarious situations and take care of the necessary reproductive work. This allows those in higher positions to further follow their own career paths without remunerating or acknowledging the women’s labour and achievements.

2.2 Pay gaps, segregation and devaluation

Pay gap issues have been discussed by many scholars and advocacy groups (Auspurg/Hinz/Sauer 2017: 184f.). Gender employment gaps have been narrowing over the past decade (OECD 2017b: 142) but the gender pay gap among full-time workers has remained unchanged at just below 15 percent since 2010 and is especially large in favour of men among higher income earners (OECD 2017a). Similarly, women with a PhD benefit less from their high educational attainments in terms of income or their probability to be in a managerial position (Goldan 2019). Generally, men and women have different chances of being promoted in hierarchical structures. The glass ceiling is a term firstly introduced in the mid-1980s to describe an “invisible barrier for women and minority groups, preventing them from moving up the corporate ladder” (Weyer 2007: 483). This ‘ceiling’ might be based on different (gender) expectations, a gender bias in competence evaluation or the difficulty for women to combine a managing position with family life (Weyer 2007; Cotter et al. 2001).

In addition, more men than women seem to work in higher paid occupational fields of work (occupational segregation; Charles 2003). For example in Nicaragua, where women on average have higher educational attainments, gendered occupational segregation showed to be “an important phenomenon for understanding the persistence of income differences” (Herrera/Dijkstra/Ruben 2019: 21). Men working in predominantly female-oriented fields have significantly higher chances of being promoted and better paid (Dill/Price-Glynn/Rakovski 2016; Price-Glynn/Rakovski 2012). Women who work in highly segregated labour markets often experience even higher devaluation of their labour (Cohen/Huffman 2003).