

School track choice, low performing and job expectation: an analysis of the chain effect

Marialuisa Villani (University of Bologna) Orazio Giancola (University of Rome La Sapienza)

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the educational paths of students globally. In Italy, the pandemic has exacerbated educational inequalities (Volante et al., 2024). This new situation has worsened traditional factors contributing to educational disparities, such as social background, gender, immigration status, and disabilities, due to new health, economic, and digital conditions, which has accelerated the process of inequality (Giancola & Salmieri, 2024). Scholars have noted an increase in educational poverty and learning loss in the post-pandemic educational landscape (Volante et al., 2024). Research has shown a connection between social background, school performance, educational tracking, and job expectations. In Italy, social background and family expectations strongly influence early school selection (Giancola & Salmieri, 2022). Many scholars also discuss school performance and the recent issue of learning loss (Contini et al., 2022). Researchers have emphasised the impact of social and occupational role models on school choices and how these factors affect decisions made by students and families regarding the educational path for young people (Hägglund & Leuze, 2021). The societal perception of a profession also plays a role in shaping students' expectations regarding future jobs. In this paper, we will analyse the connection between students' academic performance and their job career expectations and how these are influenced by their social background and academic path. We will use data from the latest wave of the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The most recent PISA survey took place in 2022, and the data was released in December 2023. The 2022 PISA survey includes various questions related to students' career expectations, allowing us to explore the relationship between social background, academic track, and career aspirations. The analysis will be divided into three steps. We will begin by using Ordinary Least Squares regression (OLS) to analyse how social background, academic track, gender, immigrant status, and geographical location influence students' academic performance. Furthermore, we will utilise the proficiency levels set by OECD PISA to create a variable that compares low performers to students with higher proficiency levels. We'll also use logistic regression to understand the risks associated with being among the low performers. In the second part of the analysis, we will perform a binary logistic regression on the SISCO item, which measures a student's clarity about their future job. In the final part, we will conduct an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) analysis on the BMSJ index, an OECD index that indicates a student's expected occupational status. This analysis will help us understand the link between low academic performance, social background, and career expectations. In this study, we will examine the "chain effect" (Giancola & Salmieri, 2022) that connects factors like background, school track, and academic performance to students' job expectations. We will then investigate how Italian students' career aspirations are influenced by their academic performance, social background, and educational path. Additionally, we will explore how traditional factors such as gender, immigration status, and social background interact with these elements,

contributing to educational disparities. Drawing on previous research (Lee, 2014; Pensiero et al., 2019), our aim is to provide an overview of the Italian educational landscape post-COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: low performing; tracking effect; occupational expectations; employment imaginaries; social inequalities