Educational transitions and educational inequality: A multiple pathways sequential logit model analysis of Finnish birth cohorts 1960-85

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Abstract
Intergenerational inequality of educational attainment—typically measured by the association between parental socioeconomic characteristics and filial educational attainment—is of major research interest among sociologists and economists alike. Starting from the seminal work by Mare (1981), sociologists have often analyzed this association as a weighted sum of the associations between parental background and the likelihood of passing each transition that make up the educational pathway. Despite the popularity of this conceptual model, empirical research applying it has generally focused only the inequalities in passing the separate transitions but not assessed the importance of the weights that link the inequalities at each transition to inequality in completed education. Recently, Buis (2017) built on the Mare-model and proposed a decomposition of inequality in educational attainment into inequalities at each transition and the associated weights, and gave these weights a substantive interpretation.

We extend the Mare-Buis model to allow for multiple destinations at each educational transition point, as well as multiple pathways into the same educational destination, and use this multiple pathways sequential logit model to estimate trends in intergenerational educational inequality in Finland over cohorts born from 1960 to 1985. Like Buis, we pay particular attention to importance of the weights in accounting for educational inequality and trends therein. We find that intergenerational educational inequality has increased, particularly among women, mainly because of the increasing importance of the transition from compulsory education to academic upper secondary education. This has been driven both by increasing inequality in the transition to academic high school, but also by an increase in the corresponding weight, which captures changes in the volume of education. Changes in academic upper secondary education have likewise changed the share of each cohort eligible for university education, thus increasing the importance of this transition for population-level educational inequality. We also report on how the expansion of post-secondary vocational education has contributed to educational inequality among men by expanding educational opportunities among vocational school graduates, and reduced the importance of academic high school for post-secondary educational attainment. Our results show how changes in educational inequality are driven by inequalities in educational transitions as well as changes in the structural features of the educational system (changes in the volume of education and its distribution across the educational system).