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School teachers – best of the best, or too weak to work outside school?

Verifying myths on the teaching profession in Poland

Abstract

1. Background

Self-selection to teacher profession is subject of an ongoing debate among the experts, policymakers, and researchers in many countries. The quality of teachers is commonly recognized as a crucial determinant of students' educational achievements. In the absence of reliable research on the self-selection to the teacher profession, the Polish debate is built upon the two independent myths. First, many educators and politicians involved in the debate tend to applaud the high quality, and devotion of teachers. Second, some experts point out that for many years the selection to the profession was negative, and this rule will unlikely change in the near future.

2. Aim

Our goal is to verify the existence of self-selection to the teaching profession with respect to some characteristics of the students that are about to enter the labor market after graduating from tertiary education

3. Method

We use the student register from the largest Polish university (University of Warsaw). We apply logistic regression to predict the choice of the teacher profession by the students conditional on their individual characteristics, past achievements, field of study, and type of the program. We then calculate the probability contrasts for the hypothetical students with certain characteristics.

4. Results

We find the evidence for the negative selection to the teaching profession. Students with lower achievements in the high school and those performing worse during the university courses are more likely to become teachers. The observed self-selection refers both to studying on the Faculty of Education, and to another faculties, graduates of which may become teachers. There are however significant differences between the faculties when it comes to the nature of the selection.

5. Conclusions

Despite some measures taken by the policymakers and the efforts of the university faculties, the teaching profession is still considered rather unattractive, and it tempts mostly students from lower part of the ability distribution.

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