Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze whether socioeconomic inequality has any impact on pupils’ achievement in school. An equal distribution of welfare is not only desirable in terms of ‘social justice’ but also because of its beneficial impacts on other dimensions of individuals’ well-being generally, and, in particular, on education. A less unequal society tends to be, on average more and better educated. The present paper aims at pinpointing the mechanisms through which socioeconomic inequality affects the educational achievement of children in school. In particular, it studies the sorting of children across schools and pupils’ peer-group effects from different socioeconomic background.

The research questions are the following: Does neighborhood inequality influence school achievement? If so, how? Is it through a sorting of pupils across ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ schools? Is it, as well or on the contrary, related to the interaction of pupils from different socioeconomic background within the walls of the school?

This paper addresses these questions using data from Argentina. The main source of information is the standardized pupils’ test - Operativo de Evaluación Educativa - administered by the federal government to children in their sixth grade of primary school (10 or 11 years old approximately). Students are assessed in Mathematics and Spanish. I combine this information with the reported answers on level of education of their parents and household assets holding as proxies for socioeconomic status. The analysis is carried out using school fixed effects estimations. Preliminary results indicate that the sorting of children across schools can potentially have a negative impact on their overall educational achievements, while peer-group effects work through the dispersion rather than the average of the socioeconomic status of the peers.