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Transition systems and non-standard employment in early career: comparing Japan and Switzerland

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Pages 486-500 | Received 06 May 2016, Accepted 07 Sep 2016, Published online: 14 Oct 2016

Cite this article <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2016.1243234>

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Abstract

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This paper investigates how educational trajectories stratify the risk of non-standard employment for youth at labour market entry in Japan and Switzerland, two countries with distinctive education-to-work transition systems. Even though both countries have relatively low youth unemployment rates of 7–9%, school graduates face increasingly risky labour markets. In addition to increases in (youth) unemployment (Weber [2001](#); Genda [2003](#); Sacchi and Saivisberg [2011](#); Goodman [2012](#); Bolli et al. [2015](#)), jobs deviating from the traditional ‘male breadwinner model’ (Meier [2014](#)) of continuous, full-time employment have become an integral part of both economies (Inui [2009](#); Ecoplan [2010](#); OECD [2010, 2014](#); Yu [2012](#); Toivonen and Imoto [2012](#), 4).

With reference to the pioneering French approach of societal analysis (Maurice, Sellier, and Silvestre [1979](#); Maurice [2008](#)) – which provided the basis for further education and transition system research (see, e.g. Allmendinger [1989](#); Müller and Shavit [1998](#)) and which fed into the concept of transition systems (Raffe [2008](#)) – a coherent

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Abstract To help close this research gap, the aim of this paper is to gain an initial understanding and encourage further thinking about how different education-to-work transition systems may relate to recent labour market insecurities surrounding the establishment of newcomers. More specifically, we ask how non-standard employment relates to vocational vs. university education in the different transition systems of Switzerland and Japan. We use comparable youth panel data in our analysis in order to compare early labour market destinations of young school graduates. Our findings point to remarkably different patterns of non-standard employment among vocational and university graduates in the two countries. These findings are interpreted against the background of different transition systems, suggesting differential operational logics of non-standard forms of entry-employment.

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Investigating the stratifying impact of educational pathways on the risk of non-standard entry employment during one's early career in Japan and Switzerland, we briefly define non-standard employment and outline, in a first step, competing perspectives on the operational logics and consequences of non-standard entry work for youth as either 'stepping-stones' or 'dead-ends'. In a second step, we embed the operational logics of non-standard entry employment in the context of differential transition systems that structure the allocation of school graduates to their first jobs. Following this, the method and data used are introduced. Finally, the results are presented, followed by a discussion and conclusion.

Non-standard employment and school-to-work transition systems

Difference

In the context of non-standard employment, the operational logics of non-standard employment (or [2014](#)), some under the employment, has increased insecurities as advanced



Overall, different definitions of standard employment exist. Most definitions are based on aspects such as dependent employment, the contractual status (permanent) and regular working hours (full-time), which are in accordance with the definition applied in this study. Non-standard employment (also referred to as atypical work) is defined negatively against the standard employment relationship. Thus non-standard employment includes a heterogeneous conglomerate of different forms of work that deviate in one or several respects from standard employment, including part-time work, fixed-term employment, temporary agency work, or work on call (Ecoplan 2007; Meier 2014; ILO 2015).

Despite increased educational attainment, labour market entrants in particular are encountering increasing difficulties in finding stable employment across the OECD countries. In addition to increased unemployment risks, youth are disproportionately affected by non-standard forms of work, such as fixed-term work, part-time employment and temporary agency work (ILO 2012; Eurofound 2013; OECD 2014). This extends to labour markets that are otherwise characterised by low youth unemployment rates in international comparison, such as those in Switzerland or Japan (Ecoplan 2007; Inui, Masahiko, and Hiratsuka 2007; Standing 2011). As non-standard forms of employment have been found to be inferior compared to standard employment in terms of job security, wage level, promotion aspects, and occupational upward mobility, as well as continuing training possibilities (Booth, Francesconi, and Frank 2002; Giesecke and Groß 2003, 2004; Inui 2009; Yu 2012; OECD 2014, 2010), and they may prove to be traps evolving into unstable careers, concern has been raised about the increasingly risky and volatile labour market integration of youth in advanced economies.



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Scherer [2004](#); OECD [2014](#), 179 ff.).

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Rather than considering these two different perspectives on the operational logics and linked consequences of non-standard employment on the labour market integration of youth as competing, we argue that they need be assessed in the light of country-specific systems of school-to-work transitions. In short, such transition systems may be described as the relatively enduring features of a country's institutional and structural arrangements, which shape the transition from education to early employment (Raffe [2008](#)).

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The societal analysis approach (Maurice, Sellier, and Silvestre [1979](#); Maurice [2008](#)) - distinguishing between 'qualification space' (OLM) and 'organisational space' (ILM) - has strongly influenced international transition systems research (Raffe [2008](#)). It proposes country-specific relationships between the organisation of education (general vs. vocational education, type of degrees offered, the nature of competition, tracking and selection, etc.), on the one hand, and the labour market structures and processes (job hierarchy with regard to training and qualification, variation between the branches of industry, behaviour of firms etc.) on the other hand. Hence, different ratios of

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(2015), with a special focus on initial vocational education and training (IVET) systems, demonstrated that skill formation regimes matter with regard to youth unemployment and low-pay employment. The authors distinguished four different skill formation systems – statist, collectivist, liberal, and segmentalist – by taking into consideration the degree of public commitment to vocational training and the involvement of firms in IVET (Thelen 2004; Busemeyer 2009). In liberal skill formation regimes (e.g. the United Kingdom), both public commitment to and firm involvement in IVET are low, and the education system promotes academic skills. Whereas the involvement of employers is similarly limited in statist skill formation regimes (e.g. France, Denmark), the latter show higher public commitment to IVET. Within systems with a high firm involvement, collectivist systems (e.g. Germany and Switzerland), where a wider range of firms, including small and medium-sized enterprises, typically train ‘above need’, can be distinguished from segmentalist systems (e.g. Japan), where on-the-job-training is primarily offered by firms for their own recruitment and retention purposes. Busemeyer and Thelen. (2015) found that even though firm-based IVET in collectivist systems is more effective in reducing youth unemployment, school based IVET of statist systems seems to be more effective in mitigating labour market stratification through wage inequality. Liberal skill formation regimes, in turn, perform better than average with regard to the inclusion of young people in the labour market, but they seem to produce a higher risk of low pay. In the following, we ask how collectivist and segmentalist systems may differ with respect to relegating youth to non-standard employment by analysing the cases of Switzerland and Japan.

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enrolment is considerably higher in Japan compared to Switzerland. While Japan has a tertiary graduation rate of 69%, the respective figure for Switzerland amounts to 47%.¹

The coherence of education and employment in 'collectivist' Switzerland

The traditional coherence of the education and employment systems in Switzerland is similar to that of Germany. In both countries, the way employees acquire labour market qualifications is centred on the concept of Beruf (professionalism or vocation), which has several dimensions: a formal knowledge base, mastery of practical skills, membership in an association, and formal recognition of IVET qualifications within the labour market.

The Swiss apprenticeship system is highly valued by the public and has a strong corporatist trait. The regulation of IVET is based on a complex collaboration between the state, industrial and professional associations (e.g. local chambers of industry and commerce or handicraft guilds), and trade unions. The adjustment of supply and demand is made through joint initiatives of the industry and the IVET system. The IVET system leads to recognised qualifications (Federal VET Diploma) that closely match the needs of an occupationally segmented labour market, both in terms of occupational skills and the number of jobs that are available. As a consequence, access to qualified employment is highly regulated by recognised occupational certificates within specific industries. Therefore, Switzerland represents a collectivist skill formation regime embedded in a liberal, but occupationally segmented, labour market ('qualification space').

In turn, higher education programmes, especially academic university programmes, are less occupationally specific and nationally standardised (Blossfeld and Skonek [2015](#)), which may lead to a mismatch between the skills acquired and the needs of the labour market (e.g. [Blossfeld and Wolter 2014](#)). For example, the number of students enrolled in higher education programmes follows an occupational structure that is not necessarily aligned with the needs of the labour market. This is particularly evident in the case of higher education programmes that are not directly related to the labour market (e.g. academic programmes). The IVET graduation rate is significantly higher than the graduation rate of higher education programmes (e.g. universities and colleges).

The coherence of education and employment in 'segmentalist' Japan

In Japan, post-World War II, the central actors in the development of workers' job skills have not been schools or the state, but rather the employers of private enterprises (Thelen [2004](#); Brinton [2011](#)). Training has been provided without state regulation in mostly large and medium-sized companies (Goodman [2012](#)). According to their own needs and demand, companies de facto took over vocational education to develop the skills of high school graduates who were supposed to learn on the job (Inui [2003](#); Maurice [2008](#)). Accordingly, public vocational education and training prior to employment was hardly developed and its lack has remained a distinctive characteristic of the Japanese education system (Inui [1993](#)). Based on the production of company-specific skills in the primary segment of the labour market, the Japanese transition system is referred to as a segmentalist system (Thelen [2004](#)). The (occupational) distinction between different jobs is of much less importance in this system than is the distinction between internal (primary) and external (secondary) labour market segments (Doeringer and Piore [1971](#); inui [1993](#)).

Up until today, the Japanese educational system has only provided some (mostly private) specialised training colleges and courses at vocational high schools in agriculture, fishery, industry, home economics, and commerce, which remain devaluated and aligned according to the needs of external markets (Brinton [2011](#)). Rather than promoting vocational education and training, the system has privileged general education (Inui and Hosogane [1995](#)), which led to widespread higher education (Maurice [2008](#)). The main function of education in Japan has been the development of

general senior high schools, which are aligned with the needs of the labour market. This system is very different from the one in the United States, where vocational training is provided through community colleges and technical schools. In the United States, vocational training is often provided through community colleges and technical schools, which are often aligned with the needs of the labour market. In the United States, vocational training is often provided through community colleges and technical schools, which are often aligned with the needs of the labour market. In the United States, vocational training is often provided through community colleges and technical schools, which are often aligned with the needs of the labour market.

From the perspective of societal analysis, Japan's highly examination-centred, intensely competitive education system is linked to the distinct organisation of the Japanese employment system (Maurice [2008](#)). The recruitment of young – especially male – workers was traditionally done through the high school graduate recruitment system, a quasi-institution of the employment system for Japanese high school graduates. Conceptually, the graduate recruitment system is part of a lifetime employment model (with permanent full-time employment as one of its central features) that offers social security and includes additional subsystems, such as a training system within the firm, a seniority promotion system and a retirement system (Inui [1993](#)).

In this segmentalist school-to-work transition system, schools, colleges and universities allocate their students directly to employers who sign informal job contracts with fresh graduates months before their graduation, based on academic criteria (Toivonen and Imoto [2012](#)). Schools traditionally recommend a selection of their best students to some companies that they have been in contact with for several years. The more academically successful the high school and university graduates, the better the chance to get hired by a company in the Japanese employment system, which offers stable forms of employment in the ILM. As Goodman ([2012](#), 164) stated, 'top employers drew their new workers from the top universities, which in turn took their students from the top secondary schools, which admitted their students on the basis of how well they had done on entrance examinations at the age of 15'. The Japanese graduate recruitment system covered nearly 80% of each cohort from the middle of the 1960s to the end of the 1970s, and the figure was still nearly 70% in the 1980s (Inui [2003](#)).

One should not be surprised that the Japanese employment system has experienced a significant change since the late 1990s. The number of young workers that fall into this category has increased, and the number of people in the employment pool has also increased (Inui [2003](#)). This change is linked to the Japanese transition from an examination-centred education system to a higher risk of non-standard employment for young Japanese adults.

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Against this backdrop of two differing – segmentalist vs. collectivist – school-to-work transition systems, we empirically investigate how vocational training and academic education promote entry into non-standard employment to different degrees for youth who enter the labour market in Japan and Switzerland.

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Our analysis draws upon data from two comparable longitudinal surveys: the Swiss youth panel survey Transition from Education to Employment (TREE) and the Youth Cohort Study of Japan (YCSJ). TREE surveys the post-compulsory educational and labour market pathways of a school graduates' cohort in Switzerland, based on a sample of approximately 6000 young people who participated in the PISA survey for the year 2000 and left compulsory school the same year, at the age of 15 or 16. This sample was followed up by TREE by means of seven waves in an annual rhythm between 2001 and 2007 and an eighth one in 2010. The Swiss findings are based on the eighth survey wave in 2010, when the respondents were about 26 years old. At that time, 54% (N = 3424) of the 2001 sample were still covered by the survey (TREE [2013](#)). Panel weights were used to compensate for sample bias and to maintain the representative nature of the sample (Sacchi [2011](#)).

A research project group from the Japanese Educational Research Association

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highest level of educational attainment. This amounts to a sample of N = 1979 young workers in Switzerland, of which 1122 are female and 857 are male. For Japan, the final sample consists of N = 687 young employees, of whom 384 are female and 303 are male. In the case of Japan, non-standard employment, our dependent variable, is defined with regard to an individual's main job (self-reported, according to the most hours worked) and captures self-reported part-time work, fixed-term employment, jobs through employment agencies, self-employment, work in family businesses, and artisanry in private households. In the Swiss case, non-standard employment is defined with regard to the main job (which is the job encompassing the most hours worked per week) and includes part-time work (<30 h per week, which is less than 70%), fixed-term employment, self-employment, work on call, work in family businesses and private households. Based on these measurements, we found that 31% of Japanese respondents were employed in non-standard jobs compared to 24% of Swiss respondents (weighted).

Independent variables

The attained type of education is categorised into general education, vocational education, short higher education, and long higher education. General education refers to workers with completed general studies at the upper-secondary level (Japan: senior high school level), holding neither a vocational nor a tertiary degree. Vocational education (IVET) refers to the completion of vocational education at the upper-secondary level. Short higher education in Japan encompasses degrees from junior colleges, specialised training colleges, and colleges of technology. In the Swiss case, we

compare vocational education, short higher education, and long higher education, and professional studies in Japan.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the samples. In all, 8% of the samples are vocational education compared to 12% of the samples in Japan, especially in the Swiss data).³

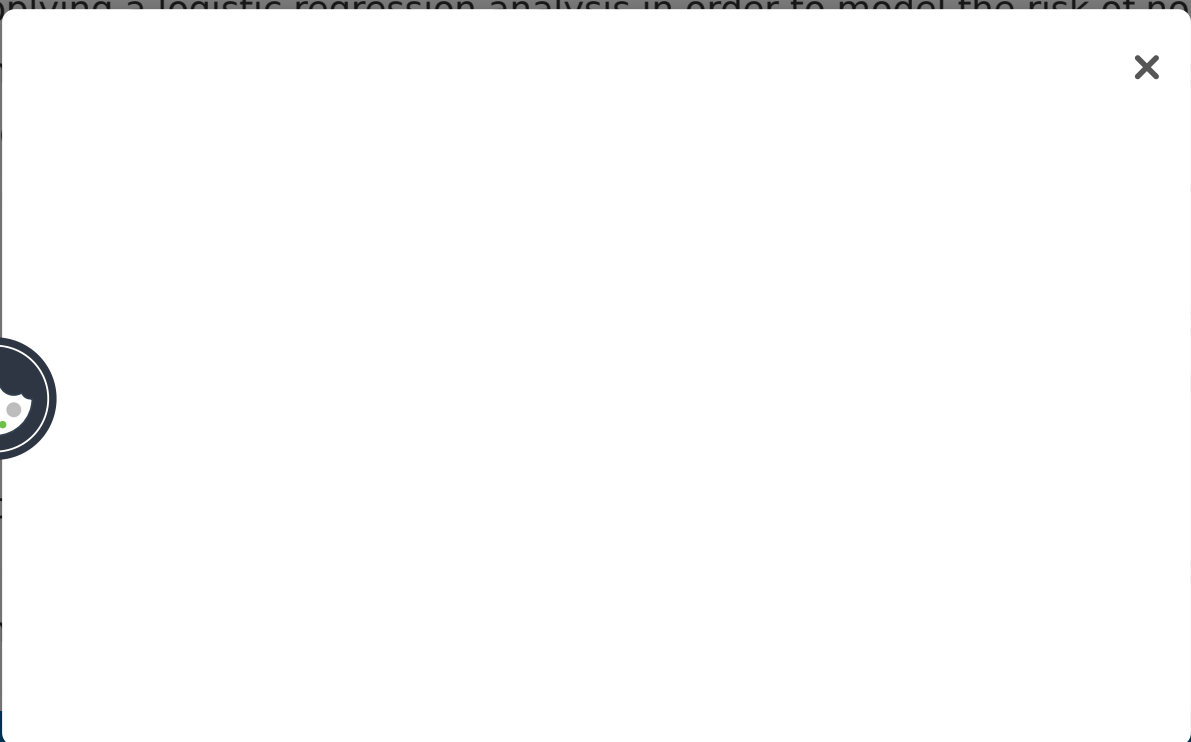


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In our analysis, we controlled for the duration of time that a respondent has been out of school (duration), which is measured in months and captures the time span between the date of the survey and the completion of a case's highest educational degree. Parental higher education is a dichotomous variable that is coded 1 if at least one parent completed a (short or long) higher educational degree and is coded 0 if no parent graduated from higher education. Gender is a binary variable that is coded 0 for female and 1 for male workers. We further included a variable capturing the firm size, which is classified as small (headcount: 0-99), medium (headcount: 100-499), and/or large (headcount: 500+). In addition, we included industrial sectors, classified as manufacturing, construction, sales, finance and real estate, transportation and electricity, restaurant and hotel, information and communication, education and research, medical and welfare, government, primary and others, and various services. Region of living is a dichotomous variable that is coded 1 if the young workers' geographical origin is a rural area and is coded 0 if they lived in an urban area when they enrolled in upper-secondary school.

Method

The comparison of groups in non-linear regression models is complicated, as regression coefficients reflect residual variation, which is likely to vary across models and groups (Long 1997; Mood 2010; Best and Wolf. 2012; Karlson, Holm, and Breen 2012). Thus, when applying a logistic regression analysis in order to model the risk of non-standard employment compared across countries on the probability of non-standard employment, the marginal effects (the different average exposure to labor market risk or not) are not significant. The risk of non-standard employment is higher in countries with higher unemployment rates (Long 2009)



adjust for disproportionality due to the sampling design of the PISA/TREE survey and panel attrition (Sacchi [2011](#)) were applied in order to allow for a generalisation of the results regarding the target population of young employees in Switzerland.

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Our multivariate results reveal significant differences in the effects of educational attainment on the risk of non-standard employment within both countries, even if gender, duration since leaving school, parental educational background, type of industry, firm size, and region of living were controlled (Table 2). Furthermore, our findings suggest that educational tracks differ in their effect on future labour market insecurities across institutional settings. In Switzerland, those who pursued a vocational education or a short higher education are, on average, 22–25% less likely to be exposed to non-standard work compared to those who pursued a long higher education (reference group). In contrast, in Japan, young adults who pursued a short higher, vocational or general educational track are, on average, between 13 and 39% more likely to attain non-standard work when controlling for further covariates that were included in the model. Therefore, while long higher education protects youth from non-standard work in Japan, the reverse seems to be true for Switzerland.

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Findings suggest that educational tracks differ in their effect on future labour market insecurities across institutional settings.

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Table 2. Non-standard employment: average marginal effects (AME).

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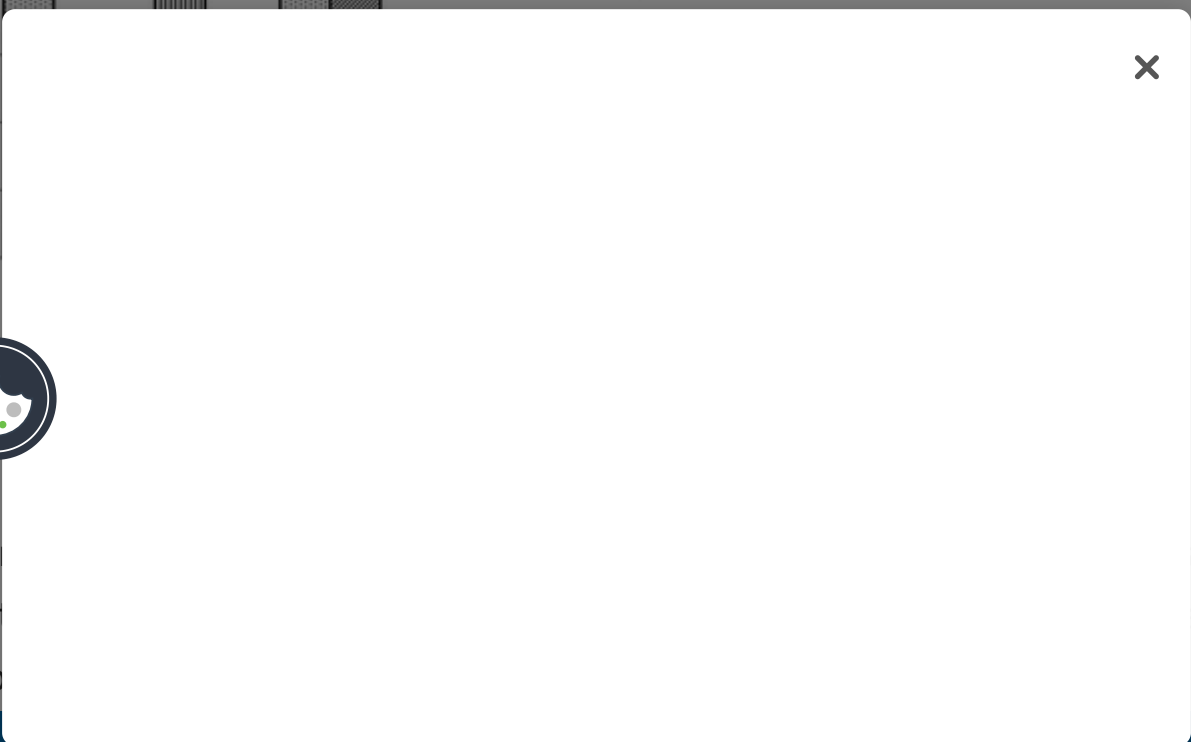
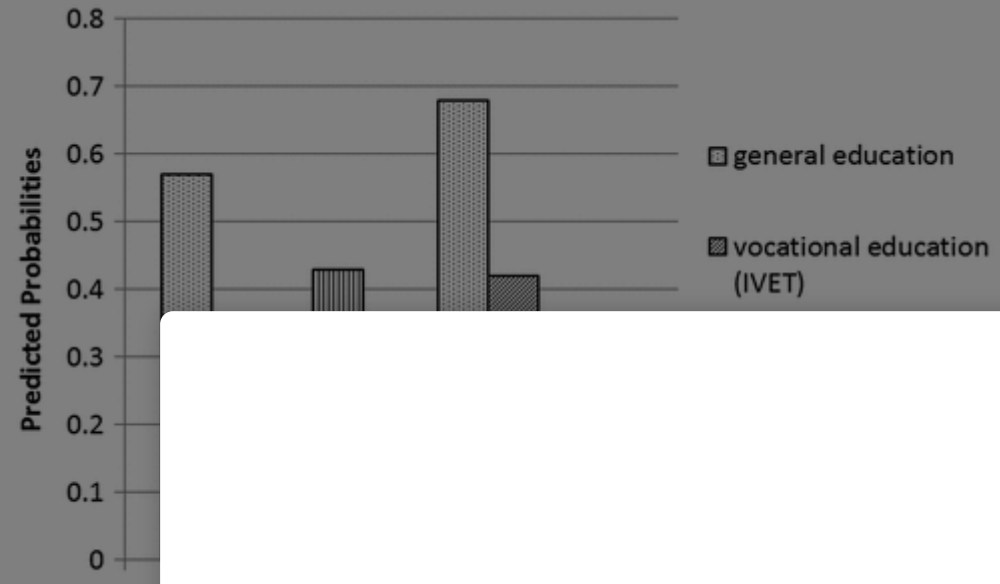
Industries matter considerably. In Switzerland, young workers in the manufacturing (reference group), finance and information/communication sectors show the lowest risks of attaining non-standard work, whereas the risk for those in the transport/electricity, restaurant/hotel, medical/welfare, government, primary/others, and various services sectors is considerably higher. In Japan, the sectors where workers face the highest risk of non-standard work are sales, transport/electricity, education/research, government, and primary/others. In contrast, the finance sector offers a high degree of regular employment, followed by the medical/welfare, information/communication sectors, and the reference sector manufacturing.

Institutional discrepancies

Comparing differences in predicted probabilities of non-standard employment across educational groups and countries reveals distinct patterns regarding the impact of educational tracks on the probability of non-standard employment (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Predicted probabilities comparing Switzerland and Japan.

Note: Probability of non-standard employment for young employees by educational attainment across countries.



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exposure to non-standard work for young employees with vocational or short higher education is about 0.42 and 0.33, respectively, in Switzerland, these educational groups are least at risk of non-standard work, with an estimated probability of 0.18 and 0.15, respectively. In both countries, the risk of non-standard work is highest for young employees who completed upper secondary general education without labour market orientation (CH: 0.57; JP: 0.68).

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Significance testing of differences in predicted probabilities that compares young adults with similar educational credentials across countries suggests that in Switzerland,

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young adults that hold higher educational credentials have a significantly higher

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probability of being exposed to non-standard employment compared to young adults

with comparable credentials in Japan (Figure 2). In contrast, young adults that hold

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vocational and short tertiary degrees in Switzerland are less likely to be in non-standard

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work compared to young workers with similar credentials in Japan. These results hold

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true when controlling for gender, parental educational background, industry sector, firm

size, and region of living at their means (see Appendix 1).

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Figure 2. Differences in predicted probabilities.

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Note: Differences in the probability of non-standard work by educational attainment, across countries. Tick marks indicate 95% confidence intervals: significant differences in predicted probabilities ($p < 0.05$) at the levels of vocational, short higher and long higher education across countries.



Conclusion

Abstract

Introduction

In this paper, we asked how educational trajectories mediate the risk of non-standard employment for young people in Japan and Switzerland, two countries that have

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different institutionalised modes of allocating school graduates to jobs. While in the wider international context, both countries show low youth unemployment rates, and

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from this point of view, can be seen as good places in which to be progressing through the respective transition system, the labour market entrants are nevertheless

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increasingly facing non-standard entry jobs. Against the background of the increasing

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risk for school graduates of not being able to find stable employment, we were

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Interested in finding out whether different types of (general, vocational, higher)

education have a differential impact on non-standard employment of young workers in countries with differing transition systems.

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Based on comparable youth panel data, our results suggest there are remarkably

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different patterns of non-standard employment among vocational and university

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graduates across both countries. In Switzerland, those who pursued a vocational

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education or a short higher education are much less likely to be exposed to non-standard employment compared to those who pursued a long higher (academic)

education or other forms of general education. In contrast, in Japan, young adults who

pursued a short higher, vocational (or a general) educational track are more likely to

become exposed to non-standard work. Therefore, while long higher (academic)

education protects youth from non-standard work in Japan, the reverse seems to be

true in Switzerland, where vocational and short higher education offer the best chances

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constitute a major sorting criterion upon labour market entry, with occupation-specific credentials (primarily gained in iVET) qualifying individuals to take up work in the respective occupational segments of the Swiss labour market. In this context, the operational logic behind non-standard forms of employment, which mainly affects academically-educated entrants, seems to be one of 'initial screening' and an opportunity for the latter to gain some initial work experience. While IVET graduates have already proven their occupation-specific skills and motivation in standardised 'on-the-job' training schemes, university graduates first need to prove themselves as suitable for specific occupations by entering less secure and less standard forms of employment as a transitional phase. Hence, in the Swiss case, non-standard jobs of young academics may be viewed as stepping-stones rather than as dead-ends (Greppi [et al. 2010](#)) and may be combined with further training. Indeed, findings from the Swiss graduate survey highlight a considerable decrease in fixed-term employment within five years after graduation, whereas part-time employment remains unchanged (BFS [2015](#)). Furthermore, Switzerland has a relatively low proportion of graduates who do not find a suitable job compared with other countries. In all, 1 out of 11 people with a university degree are unable to find a job in their field of education in the medium term and face a job-education mismatch (overeducation), which is associated with a wage penalty (Diem and Wolter [2014](#)).

In contrast to Switzerland, employers have traditionally guaranteed the development of skills in the segmentalist Japanese transition system, without notable state intervention, through on-the-job training. In their hiring decisions, the latter value academic credentials, which signals the highly valued general learning potential of graduates from top universities. The Japanese labour market has experienced a process of flexibilisation of the Japanese labour market since the late 1990s. These youth, who lack the academic credentials of university graduates who were able to secure a job in the senior high school sector, are often forced to accept jobs for stable employment. Hence, overeducation may have increased the risk of unemployment, where



an increased allocation of labour market entrants holding little bargaining power in the Japanese labour market to non-standard jobs in the secondary labour market segment, the operational logic of non-standard entry level employment does not coincide with an integration logic. Non-standard entry-level employment in Japan, rather, seems to mirror 'exclusion' processes of those who lack an institutionally paved way to work in the ILM segment. With non-standard work mainly present in secondary segments, where a logic of numerical flexibilisation prevails, non-standard entry level employment for youth in Japan goes hand in hand with employment insecurities, manifesting itself in a 'precariousness' that infects the future course of their lives (Yu [2012](#); Inui, Higuchi, and Hiratsuka [2015](#)).

To conclude, contrasting the skill-related composition of youth in non-standard employment in early career in Japan and Switzerland suggests country-specific relationships between educational trajectories and non-standard entry-level employment, which relate to different (collectivist vs. segmentalist) transition systems governing the allocation of youth to jobs. With regard to the differing levels of bargaining power of youth that are allocated to non-standard jobs in the respective labour markets of Japan and Switzerland and the distinctive sorting criteria of a 'general learning potential' compared to 'professionalism', different operational logics of non-standard entry level employment seem to prevail in the two countries. Viewing non-standard entry work against the background of differential skill formation regimes allows for going beyond a competing conception of non-standard employment as either stepping-stones or dead-ends for youth. Rather, distinctive operational logics of non-standard employment can be considered as something that characterises different school-to-work transition systems in the two countries.



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Non-standard employment and school-to-work transition systems

Christian Imdorf holds a SNSF Professorship at the University of Bern, Switzerland. His

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research projects focus on education systems and school-to-work transitions from a comparative perspective, pathways to higher education, insecure employment of skilled young workers, and new organisational forms of vocational training.

Results

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Conclusion

Research and Methodology Group. Her PhD research focuses on school-to-work

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transitions and job and employment insecurities in early career.

Funding

Akio Inui is a Professor Emeritus at Tokyo Metropolitan University. His speciality is

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Education and research focuses on school-to-work transition, especially about

precarious youth. His comparative studies with Japan include the UK, Switzerland, and

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1. Total number of tertiary types A and B programme graduates according to OECD (2013) (author's calculation).

2. This includes the self-employed. With respect to the Swiss sample, young adults who work more than 10 hours per week are included in the tertiary programmes anymore.

3. The re-estimated number of tertiary graduates (including tertiary education) derived from the OECD data on tertiary graduates in the OECD countries in the cohort 2000-2004 (aged 26 and over) is 1.5 million.

4. This data is derived from the OECD report on tertiary education in the OECD countries (Survey of Adult Skills) and the OECD report on tertiary education in the OECD countries (Survey of Adult Skills). The report is available at <https://www.oecd.org/education/skills-surveys/> and <https://www.oecd.org/education/skills-surveys/>.



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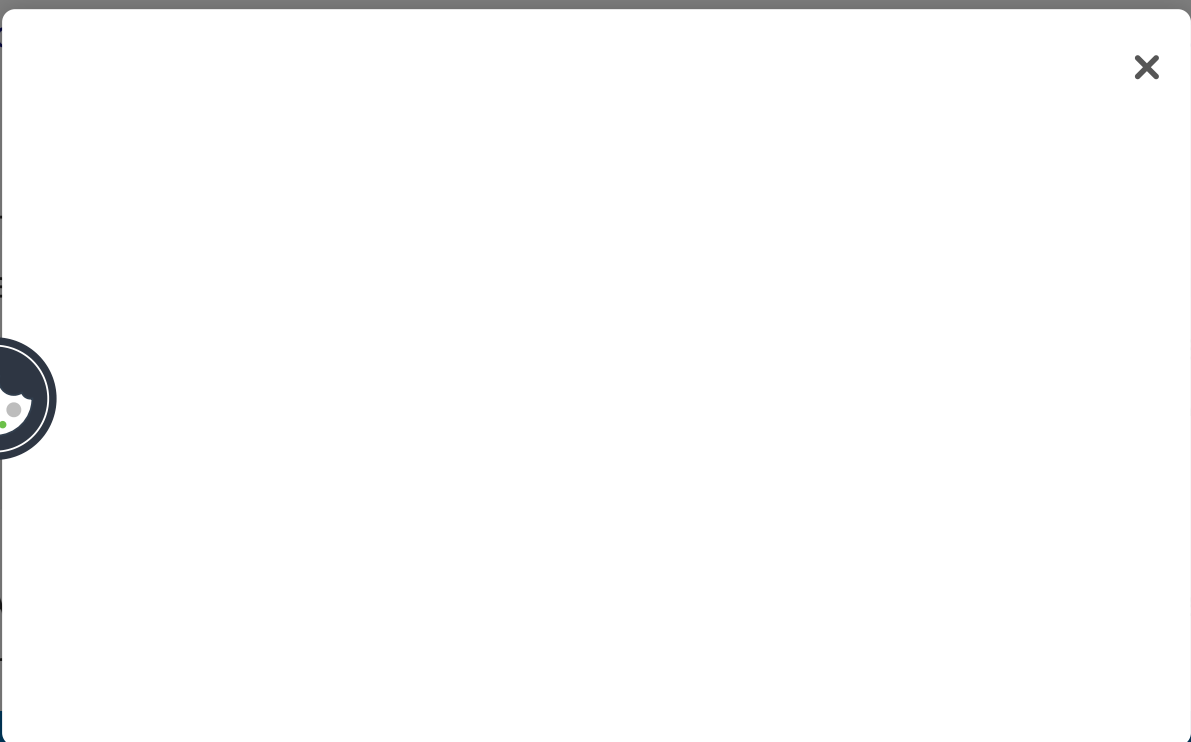
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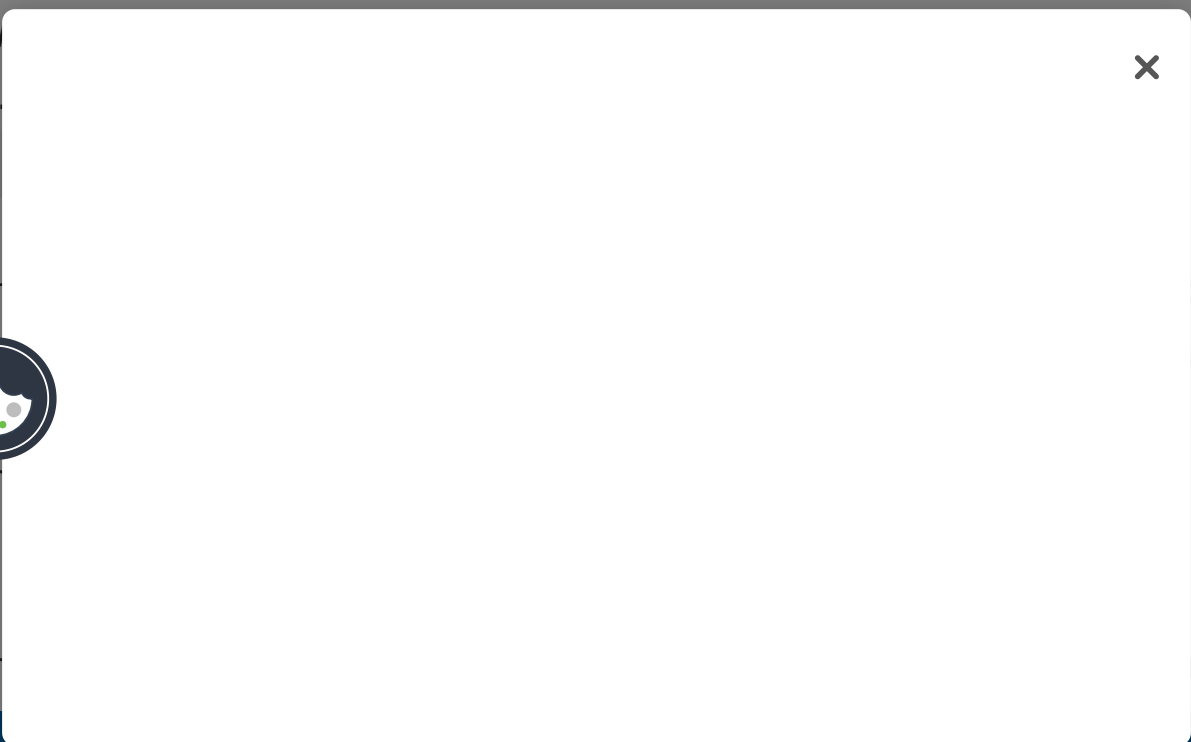
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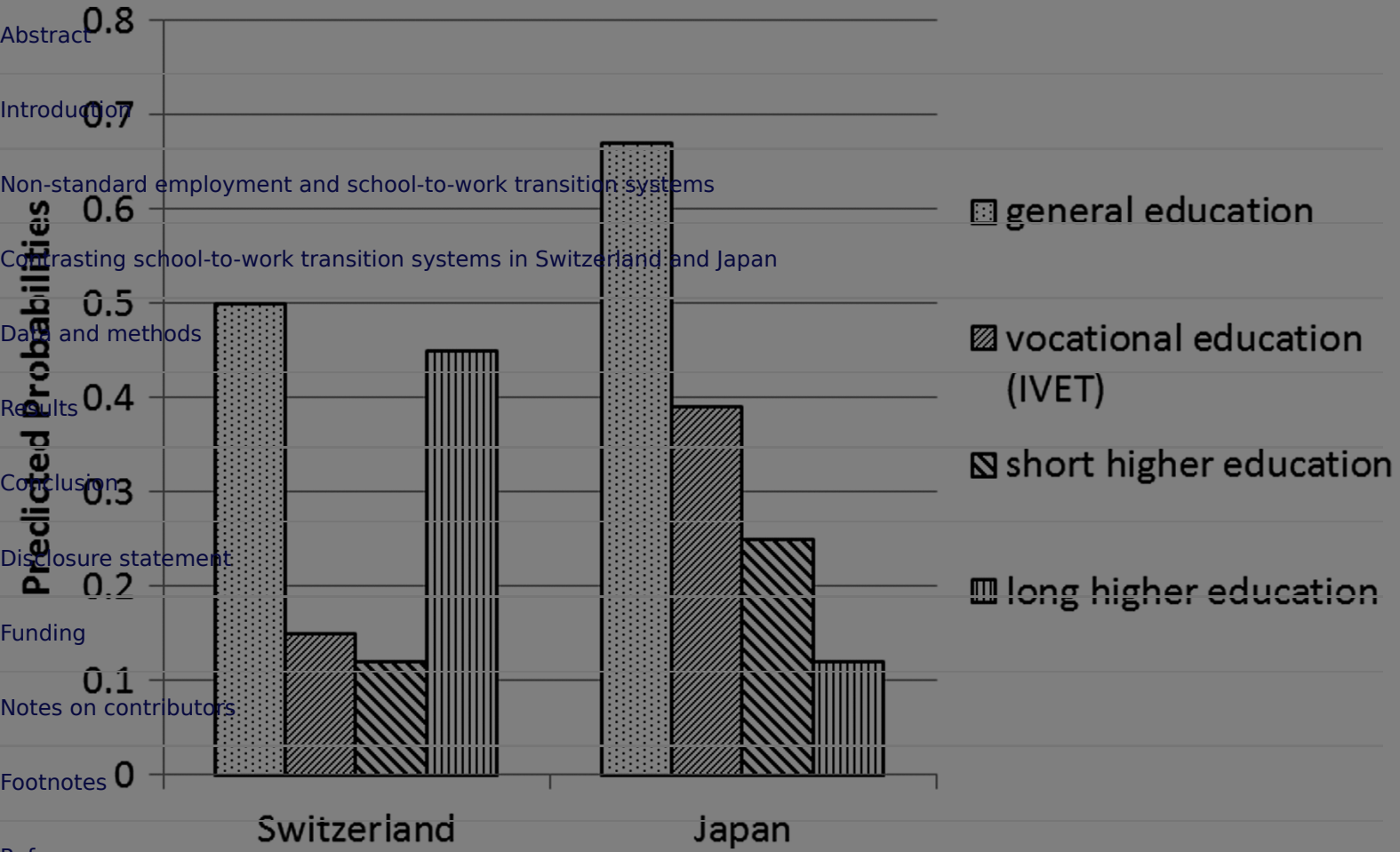


Figure A1. Predicted probabilities comparing Switzerland and Japan/controls.

Note: Probability of non-standard employment for young employees by educational attainment across both countries, holding gender, duration since leaving school, parental education, industry, firm size, and region of living constant at their means.



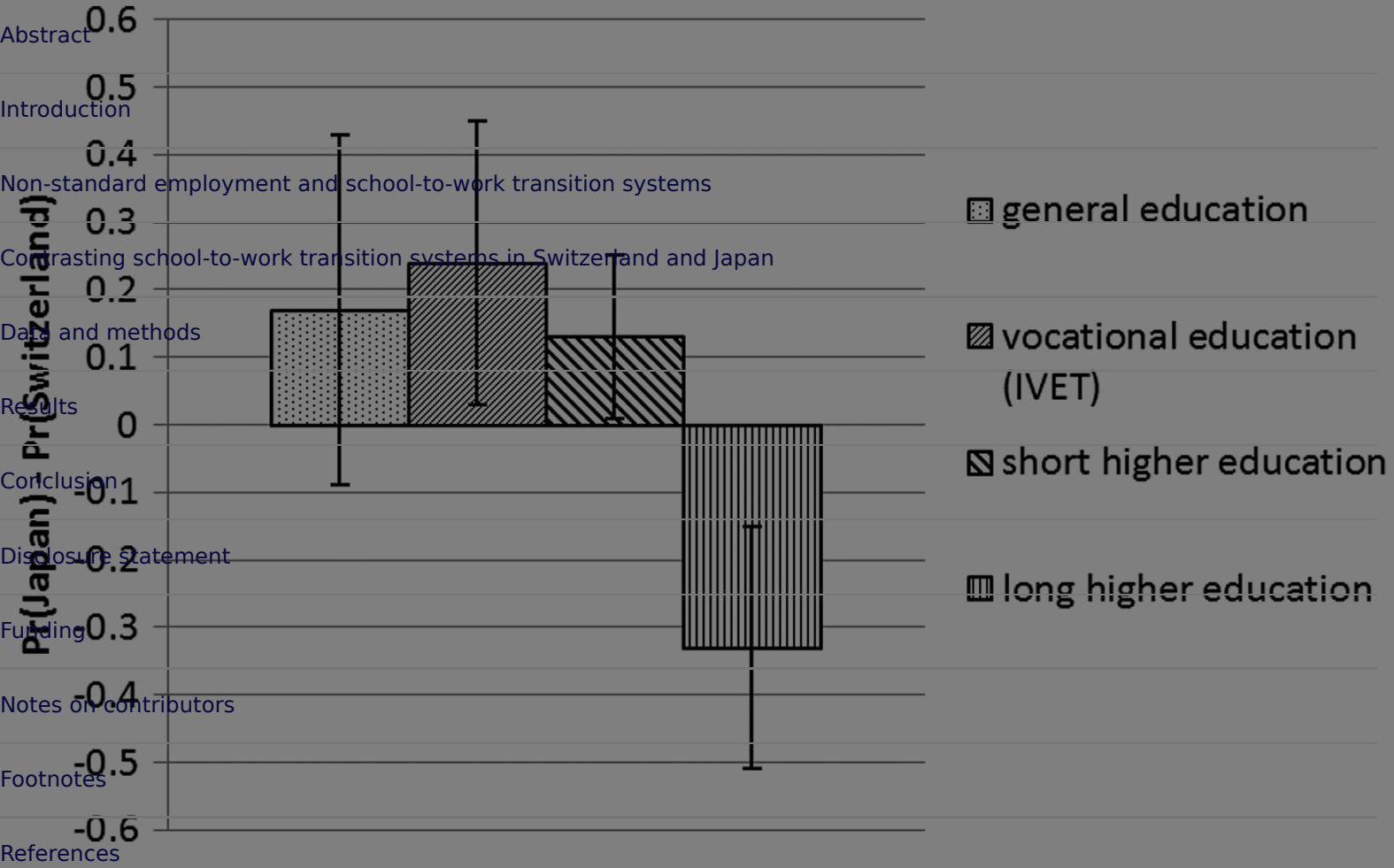
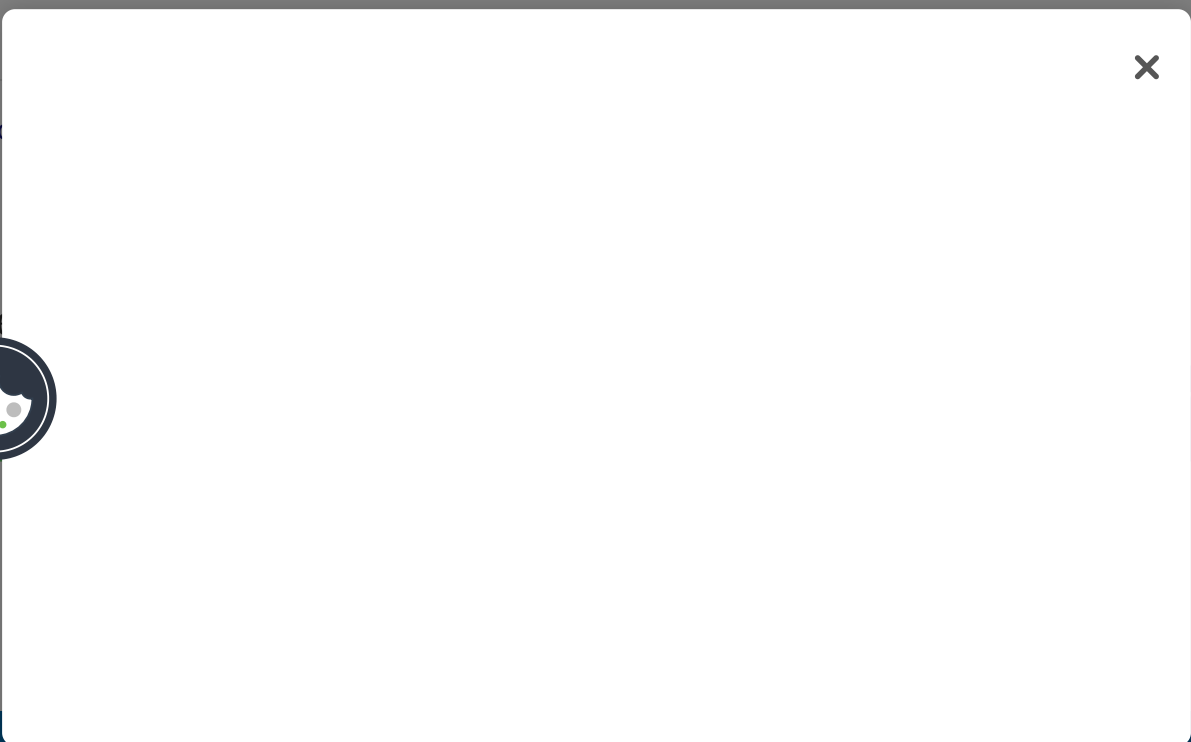


Figure A2. Differences in predicted probabilities/controls.

Note: Differences in the probability of non-standard work by educational attainment across both countries, holding gender, duration since leaving school, parental education, industry, firm size, and region of living constant at their means. Tick marks indicate 95% confidence intervals: significant differences in predicted probabilities of non-standard work ($p < 0.05$) for the educational levels of vocational, short, and long higher education across both countries.



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