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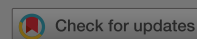
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Articles

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

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Abstract

Even though Japan and Switzerland are characterised by comparatively low youth unemployment rates, non-standard forms of employment are on the rise, posing a risk to the stable integration of young labour market entrants. Drawing on the French approach of societal analysis, this paper investigates how country-specific school-to-work transition systems stratify the risk of non-standard employment in early career

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graduates holding good career prospects in Switzerland, they may go hand in hand with social exclusion processes for the low-educated young entrants lacking bargaining power in the segmented Japanese labour market.

Keywords: Transition system non-standard employment early career Japan Switzerland

Introduction

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 Salvisberg 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; OECD2010, 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 intertwining of education and employment structures, which leads to smooth school-to-work transitions, needs to be viewed differently for Switzerland, which represents an Occupational Labour Market (OLM, or a ‘qualification space’) and Japan, where the Internal Labour Market (ILM, ‘organisational space’ [Müller and Shavit 1998]) is more



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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.

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

Different functions and consequences of non-standard employment

In the context of economic slowdown, globalisation, tertiarisation and technological progress (e.g. [OECD, 2014](#)), the establishment of newcomers under non-standard employment, has increased the labour market insecurities surrounding the establishment of newcomers. This has advanced the discussion on the need for policy interventions to support the establishment of newcomers in the labour market.

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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.

What complicates a uniform association of non-standard employment with job and employment insecurities (Chung [2015](#)) is that similar types of non-standard forms of

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a buffer stock of workers, which can be more easily adjusted to changes in demand. This clearly undermines the job security for those employed in such (more peripheral) work arrangements. From this perspective, atypical employment needs to be viewed as a trap, hindering stable labour market integration and professional development of youth who bounce back and forth between insecure work and unemployment (see, e.g. Scherer [2004](#); OECD [2014](#), 179 ff.).

School-to-work transition systems and non-standard employment

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](#)).

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 general and vocational education on the upper-secondary and tertiary levels have to be understood in a wider context of how the educational system and the employment system (the standard model of employment, its various categories of qualification and forms 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.

Contrasting school-to-work transition systems in Switzerland and Japan



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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 human capital based on strong academic competition in accessing senior high schools and higher education (Inui [1993](#)). The competition between students within the whole school system (including vocational education) is therefore almost completely aligned according to academic criteria, the main social and educational streaming

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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 note, however, that the segmentalist Japanese transition system has experienced increasing imbalance and disintegration in a changing, globalising labour market, with considerable expansion of the external labour market for young workers since the late 1980s. Temporary, part-time, and casual work (individuals that fall into

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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.

Data and methods

Data

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 conducted the YCSJ panel study, which was funded by the government’s academic research fund. All of the respondents were 20 years of age in April 2007 and were selected randomly from the national register of residents. The first wave of data collection occurred in autumn 2007, with subsequent annual waves until 2011 (five survey waves). The Japanese findings are based on the fifth survey wave in 2011, when the respondents were about 22 years old. The focus of the analysis is on the entry into non-standard employment for youth who are 22 years old or younger.

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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 degrees from universities of applied science, universities of teacher education, and professional colleges. Long higher education refers to four-year university studies in Japan and to academic study programmes at universities in Switzerland.

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents across the different educational levels. In all, 8% of the respondents in Switzerland and 12% in Japan have completed general education degrees, compared to 12% in Japan and 8% in Switzerland for vocational education. Short higher education is completed by 12% of the respondents in Japan, compared to 8% in Switzerland. Long higher education is completed by 76% of the respondents in Japan, compared to 80% in Switzerland.



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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 in Japan and Switzerland, log-odds and odds-ratios cannot be compared across countries. In order to compare the effects of educational attainment on the probability of non-standard employment, we will therefore report average marginal effects (AMEs) for the different levels of educational attainment. The AMEs represent the average change in the probability of non-standard employment for a one-unit increase in the explanatory variable, holding all other variables constant. The AMEs are calculated for each level of educational attainment, and the results are presented in Table 1. The AMEs for the different levels of educational attainment are not significantly different from each other, suggesting that the effect of educational attainment on the probability of non-standard employment is similar across all levels of educational attainment. (Long [2009](#))



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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.

Results

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.

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

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We did not find significant gender differences with regard to non-standard employment in either country. However, we found parental educational background to be significant. Young workers with higher parental education are less likely to be attaining non-standard employment. In Japan, young adults with lower educational attainment are more likely to attain non-standard employment. In Switzerland, young adults with lower educational attainment are more likely to attain non-standard employment. In Japan, young adults with lower educational attainment are more likely to attain non-standard employment. In Switzerland, young adults with lower educational attainment are more likely to attain non-standard employment.

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Institutional discrepancies

Figure 1. Predicted probabilities comparing Switzerland and Japan.

Category	general education	vocational education (IVET)	short higher education	long higher education
Category 1	0.57	0.18	0.13	0.43
Category 2	0.68	0.42	0.33	0.19

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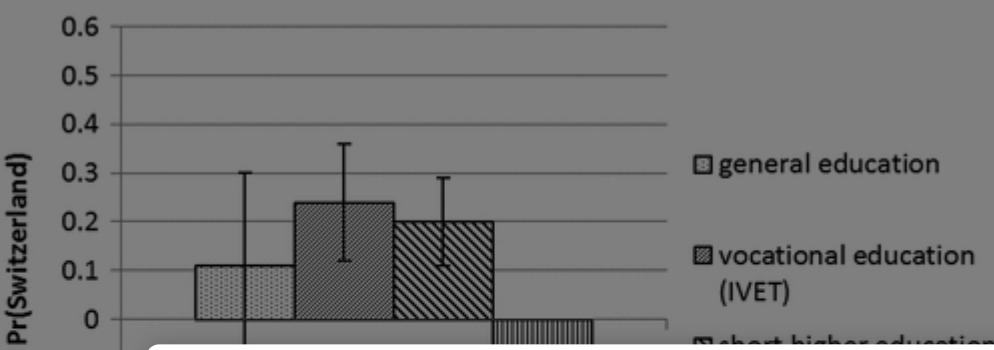
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exposure to non-standard work for young employees with vocational or short higher education is about 0.42 and 0.33, respectively, in Switzerland, these educational groups are least at risk of non-standard work, with an estimated probability of 0.18 and 0.13, 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).

Significance testing of differences in predicted probabilities that compares young adults with similar educational credentials across countries suggests that in Switzerland, young adults that hold higher educational credentials have a significantly higher 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 vocational and short tertiary degrees in Switzerland are less likely to be in non-standard work compared to young workers with similar credentials in Japan. These results hold true when controlling for gender, parental educational background, industry sector, firm size, and region of living at their means (see Appendix 1).

Figure 2. Differences in predicted probabilities.

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.





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Conclusion

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 different institutionalised modes of allocating school graduates to jobs. While in the wider international context, both countries show low youth unemployment rates, and 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 increasingly facing non-standard entry jobs. Against the background of the increasing risk for school graduates of not being able to find stable employment, we were 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.

Based on comparable youth panel data, our results suggest there are remarkably different patterns of non-standard employment among vocational and university graduates across both countries. In Switzerland, those who pursued a vocational 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 for standard employment upon labour market entry. Leaving school with only a general education results in pronounced disadvantages in job security upon labour market entry in both countries. All in all, our findings suggest that educational tracks stratify the risk of exposure to non-standard forms of employment in the early career period

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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. Accordingly, recruiters from top Japanese employers draw graduates from top universities (Goodman [2012](#), 164). However, as a consequence of the flexibilisation of the Japanese economy and the respective expansion of the secondary labour market segment, transitions from school to work have become more risky for Japanese youth,

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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.

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Notes

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 seven hours per week and are not in education or training programmes anymore are regarded as working.
3. The remarkably lower tertiary graduation rates (short and long higher education) derived from the TREF sample compared to the official Swiss statistics on tertiary graduation rates in the cohort in 2013 are 26 and 27% respectively. The report therefore underestimates the actual reports on Education and Welfare.
4. The report (Survey on the Labour Market) shows that the number of graduates in the tertiary sector is 1.5 million. The report

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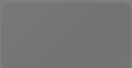
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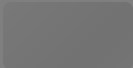

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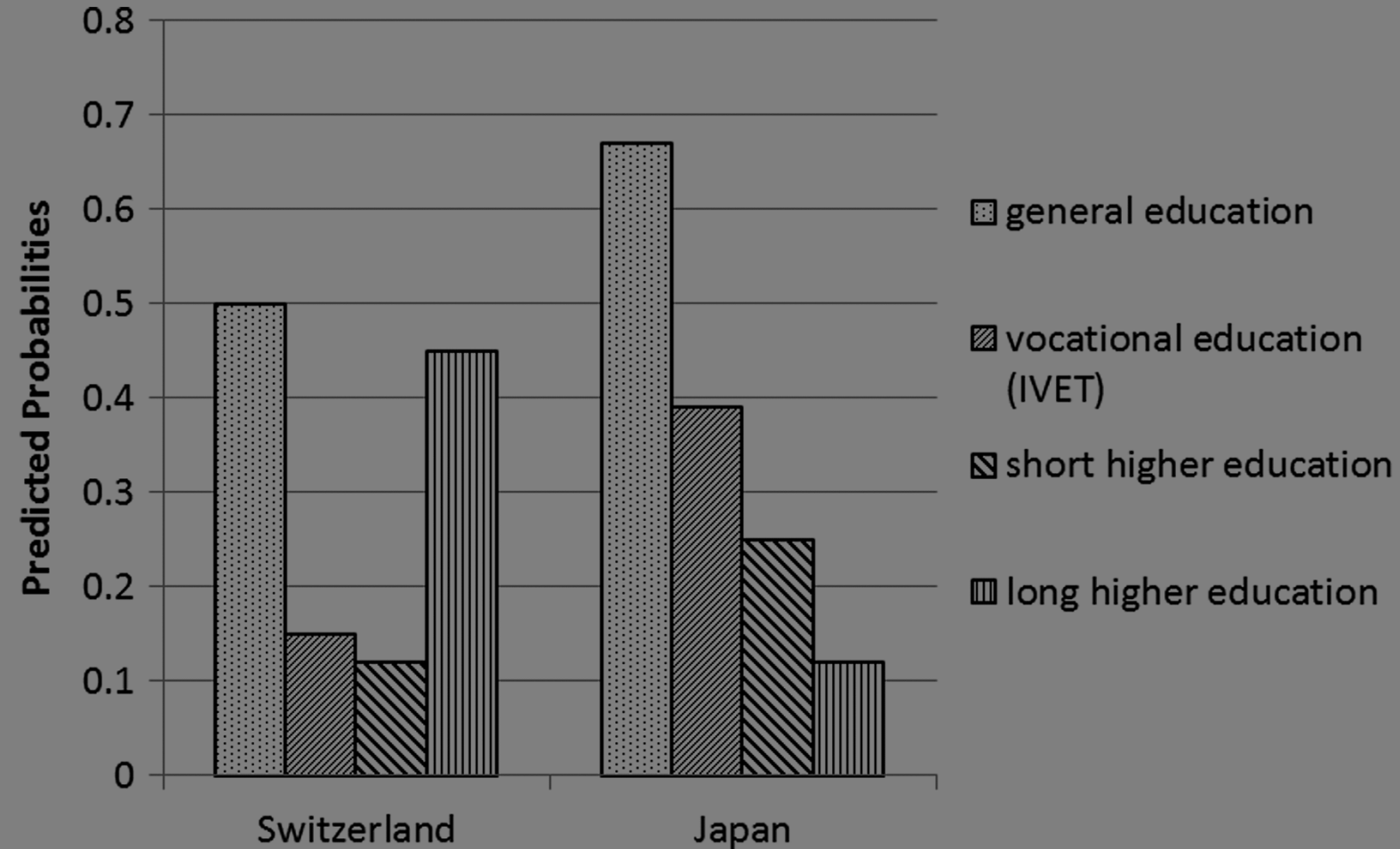


Figure A1. Predicted probabilities comparing Switzerland and Japan/controls.

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.

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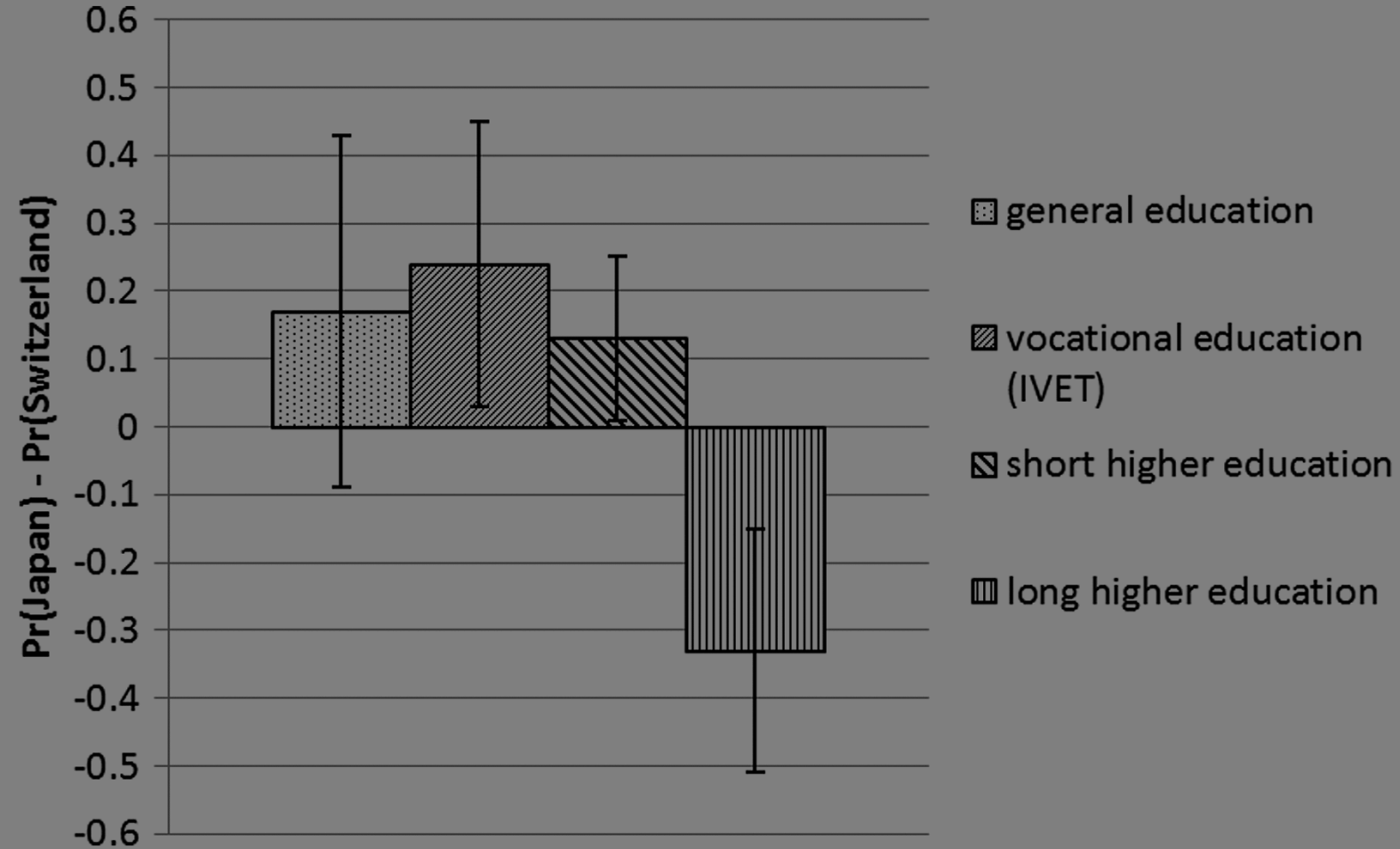


Figure A2. Differences in predicted probabilities/controls.

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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