

DISCUSSION

We used the introduction of the German Dual Educational System for vocational education in our country as a quasi-natural experiment to test our hypothesis concerning the impact of education on non-cognitive skills. For this purpose we conducted a 2-wave short-term longitudinal study of a set of personality characteristics in 32 Bulgarian adolescents who entered educational programs that employed this model. It is important to note that all participants in this study had dropped out or were expelled from school and were unemployed before beginning these programs.

The results confirmed our assumptions concerning the effects of the educational system on the personality traits of adolescent students, providing evidence that school experience and education contribute to personality changes at this period of age. These results confirmed the findings of previous studies regarding the impact of education and school experience upon the students' personalities (Bierman et al. 2010; Dahmann and Anger 2014; Jackson 2011; Heckman et al. 2010). Our finding clearly showed that education in accordance with the German Dual Educational System of vocational education and training increased students' self-control and social potency while making them more dominant and less anxious and depressed. This could be observed even within the course of one academic year.

We assume that the significant positive personality change we observed, which occurred within a period of only 7-8 months, is primarily a result of the interaction between the specifics of the educational model used and the characteristics of the students themselves, as noted above. It is highly probable that the specifics of the education program, together with the related changes in the students' lives, brought about a sense of security, meaning in life, and future perspectives that lead to positive changes in their personality.

A limitation of the present study is the relatively small sample size insofar as it impacts the statistical power of the comparisons. Replications with larger samples are thus needed

to ensure the validity of the current findings. Nevertheless, the present study lends further support to the assumption that educational contexts can constitute a powerful factor in the development and shaping of the personality during adolescence.

CONCLUSION

We have provided the first evidence in Bulgaria of the malleability of personality characteristics in adolescence through education, and have thereby contributed to the literature concerning the impact of education upon non-cognitive skills. Our results indicated that the educational system plays a role in shaping the personality traits of adolescents, even in the short-term. This finding draws attention to the need for the effective implementation of educational policies that take into consideration the impact of educational changes upon personality traits.

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