

Between regulation and instruction: a cross-linguistic comparison of Swiss grammar school curricula exemplified by the subject “economics and law”

Nicole Ackermann^a, Thomas Ruoss^b

^aPädagogische Hochschule Zürich, Schweiz

^bEidgenössische Hochschule für Berufsbildung, Schweiz

nicole.ackermann@phzh.ch

Abstract

Due to the federal education system in Switzerland, grammar schools' curricula differ between cantons and even between schools. Such differences may become apparent in a curriculum analysis regarding a specific subject, in our case “economics and law”. This study focuses on economic education and compares curricular content between subject types and across language regions. We compiled a representative dataset and qualitatively analysed subject content in these curricula by a multidisciplinary coding system. The results show that the curricula of the introductory subject are heterogeneous and those of the major subject are rather homogeneous. In the German-language curricula the two subfields of “economics” and “business administration” are equally weighted, whereas in the Roman-language curricula, “economics” is more dominant. We conclude that the so-called “variants of a capitalist spirit” become evident across language regions and are reflected in grammar school curricula. Furthermore, schools use various conceptions of economic education, especially in the introductory subject. Our findings on cultural differences in economic education may be fruitful for curriculum analysis in other subjects and for future curriculum design.

Keywords

Economic education, grammar schools, curriculum, federalism, multilingualism.

Introduction

Grammar schools (*Gymnasium*, *lycée*, *liceo*) in Switzerland are characterized by considerable heterogeneity regarding entry requirements and graduation rates, which has evolved historically and is politically intended. At the same time, grammar schools' degrees are mutually recognized and serve as university entrance qualifications without a *numerus clausus* (EDK, 1995). In addition, grammar schools' curricula differ in form and content between the cantons and even between schools (Bonati, 2017).

Convergence/divergence in terms of curricular content may follow disciplinary paradigms and societal transformations in the long-term (Criblez et al., in print), whereas homogeneity/heterogeneity of curricular content may reflect the results of these developments between different language regions. Therefore, a corresponding curriculum analysis may disclose cultural “variants of a capitalist spirit” (Münnich & Sachweh, 2017), regional differences in “schools of thought” (Fourcade, 2009), and various subject-specific concepts of economic education (Hedtke, 2011). Switzerland, with its federal, multilingual education system of grammar schools, offers interesting analytical conditions that potentially allow for the comparison and theorization of diverse cultures of economic education. However, a comparative, cross-linguistic study of grammar schools' curricula in Switzerland is not yet available. Furthermore, few empirical curriculum studies have focused on economic education on the level of grammar schools to date (Ackermann, 2021a; Fridrich, 2018; Siegfried & Hangen, 2020).

Our study focuses on cultures of economic education at the level of grammar school curricula in federal, multilingual Switzerland. We intend to answer the following research question: how does the curricular content of economic education in Swiss grammar schools differ between subject

types (introductory subject, major subject) and across language regions (German, Roman)? Considering the subject structure of grammar schools, we take the multidisciplinary subject “economics and law” as an example and analyse the two subfields of “economics” and “business administration”.

Theoretical background and state of research

Curricula (*Lehrplan, plan d'études, piano degli studi*) have two main functions. The political-normative function of curricula is to guarantee the transmission of scientifically recognised and societally relevant knowledge and values to the next generation (Künzli, 2007; Young, 2014). The normative power of curricula is legitimised through political, participatory procedures for their development and enactment (Künzli & Hopmann, 1998). In their programmatic-descriptive function, curricula provide a framework for teaching and learning in schools: the structuring into subjects and timetables, requirements in each subject (e.g., educational standards, subject goals, subject content) (Criblez et al., 2006; Künzli, 2009). Curricula define “what, when and how teaching and learning should take place in school” (Horlacher, 2018, p. 1). Thus, curricula serve as a guiding instrument for teachers and as a governance instrument for education policy. This makes curricula highly relevant for an analysis of the idiosyncrasies of different educational systems and diverse cultures of thought within a discipline or subject.

Cultural differences in economics as discipline and the corresponding “cultures of thought” were examined for Europe and the United States (Fourcade, 2009). In France, “state engineer” economists had a relatively positive attitude towards state interventions (e.g., tariffs, minimum wages, exchange rates), whereas ordoliberal economists in Germany favoured price stability and a balanced foreign economy. It is concluded that “the shape of the educational system is extraordinarily important to understanding how people make jurisdictional claims to theorize about and act on the economy” (ibid., 2009, p. 250).

Various subject-specific conceptions of economic education can be found in literature and contrasted by, for instance, perspectivity (economics, economy), disciplinarity (monodisciplinary, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary) and target group (Ackermann, 2021b; Hedtke, 2011; Tafner, 2016). These conceptions have different normative presumptions and are thus controversially discussed in educational research and policy. Since the banking and financial crisis of 2007/2008, economic education has been attributed importance at all school levels in Switzerland and in Europe (Ackermann et al., 2018). This can be seen, for example, in a post-millennial boom of entrepreneurship education (Galvão et al., 2018) and financial education (Aprea et al., 2016).

Methodological approach

For this cross-linguistic curriculum study, we collected and indexed all 95 curricula of the state-approved grammar schools for juveniles in Switzerland. We compiled a representative dataset by selecting 47 curricula that cover all 26 Swiss cantons and the three official languages (German 77%; French and Italian 23%). In each curriculum, we focussed on two subject types of “economics and law”, the introductory and the major subject.

The subject content was qualitatively analysed by a multidisciplinary coding system for the subject fields “economics” and “business administration” (Ruoss et al., 2022). It encompasses 30 codes in total: three main categories and 17 codes for “economics”, four main categories and 13 codes for “business administration”. The coding system was deductively applied to the data (Mayring, 2015). In addition, a second coding system was inductively developed from the data, encompassing the following main categories: “interdisciplinarity” for explicit references to other subjects (e.g., geography, history, mathematics, languages) and “practice” for references to situations in various life spheres (e.g., private budget, private insurance, private investment). Data analysis was performed with MAXQDA2020 (VERBI, 2019). As each document had its own layout and structure, it was difficult to define general coding units, so each document was coded to consensus by two coders (Döring & Bortz, 2016). The final codings of each document were binarized and comparatively analysed by cross-tabling with document-related criteria, such as subject type and curriculum language.

Results

In the following, we present selected results on (1) the occurrence of subject content in the analysed curricula, (2) differences in subject content regarding curriculum language and (3) references to practice and interdisciplinarity in the analysed curricula (for details see Ruoss et al., 2022). Firstly, the introductory subject “economics and law” indicates a scattered pattern in contents and a heterogeneity between the curricula. This may be explained by a different and opposed understanding of the subjects’ contribution to the educational goals of Swiss grammar schools: general study skills (*allgemeine Studierfähigkeit*) and deepened societal maturity (*vertiefte Gesellschaftsreife*) (Eberle & Brüggenschrock, 2013). Conversely, the major subject “economics and law” shows a dense pattern of contents and a clear homogeneity between the German-language curricula, but most outliers are French- and Italian-language curricula. This could be explained by a presumable silent consensus on the conception of economic education in this subject type: the major subject contributes to specific study skills and science propaedeutics.

Secondly, in German-language curricula, both disciplinary fields, “economics” and “business administration”, are rather equally weighted. Conversely, in Roman-language curricula, “economics” has a descriptively higher proportion than “business administration”. Furthermore, the subject content of “business administration” is less differentiated in the Roman-language curricula than in the German-language curricula. This applies to both the major subject and the introductory subject but the difference is more pronounced in the latter.

Thirdly, in around 50% of the German-language curricula, explicit reference is made to practice and topicality (e.g., company visits, referenda), but only in around 25% of the Roman-language curricula. Explicit reference to other subjects is more frequently found in German-language curricula than in Roman-language curricula. In the introductory subject, such interdisciplinary references are (see Table 1): geography (German 28%, Roman 18%), history (German 22%, Roman 18%), philosophy/religion (German 19%, Roman 9%), and mathematics (German 19%, Roman 9%) and ICT (German 14%, Roman 9%). In the major subject, interdisciplinary references point to a wider range of other subjects.

Table 1. Interdisciplinary references in subject content of “economics and law”

Subject	Introductory subject		Major subject	
	German	Roman	German	Roman
Geography	28	18	39	9
History	22	18	44	9
Philosophy, Religion	19	9	36	18
Mathematics, Statistics	19	9	50	9
Local language, foreign languages	19	0	31	9
ICT	14	9	28	9
Biology, Ecology	14	0	19	0
Politics, Civics	14	0	17	0
Visual art	6	0	17	9
Pedagogy, Psychology	3	0	14	9
Others (e.g., Music, Sports, House economics)	12	0	12	9
Average codings	12	5	22	7

Note: Binarized codings, in percentage of total curricula in each language group (German #36, Roman #11).

Discussion and outlook

Our study contributes to curriculum studies at upper secondary school level in the domain of economic education. The systematic qualitative analysis of subject content in grammar school curricula provides an insight into both cultures of economic education (e.g., weighing of subfields, differentiation of contents) and cultures of curriculum design (e.g., practice and interdisciplinary references) in federal, multilingual Switzerland. As economic education touches upon normatively contentious contents, this analysis may be relevant for a theorization of curriculum design. We conclude that grammar schools' curricula refer to various conceptions of economic education, especially in the introductory subject "economics and law". With regard to the Maturity Recognition Regulations (EDK, 1995) and the Framework Curriculum for Maturity Schools (EDK, 1994), these various conceptions of economic education found in the analysed school curricula are striking. Schools seem to have a different understanding of the contribution of "economics and law" to general education and deepened societal maturity. Furthermore, we conclude that the so-called "variants of a capitalist spirit" (Münnich & Sachweh, 2017) are reflected in grammar school curricula and become evident across language regions. With reference to the aforementioned functions of curricula, the analysed curricula may be understood as a reflector but also as an amplifier of diverse cultures of thought within a discipline or subject.

However, our study merely refers to the macro level of education and to the formal curriculum. Thus, these findings cannot be interpreted at the micro level of education, that is teaching/learning in the classroom – the "enacted curriculum" (Orlowski, 2012). There may also be cultural differences in teaching/learning across subject types and language regions (Marty et al., 2018). Nevertheless, our findings on cultural differences in economic education may be fruitful for curriculum analysis in other subjects and future curriculum design for grammar schools (EDK, 2018, 2020). In view of the current revision of the framework curriculum and the possible transformation of "economics and law" into a basic subject, this arbitrary heterogeneity in subject content may fuel a necessary subject-specific discourse.

References

- Ackermann, N. (2021a). Ökonomische Bildung auf der Sekundarstufe II in der Deutschschweiz: Eine vergleichende Lehrplananalyse hinsichtlich Fachstruktur, Bildungsziele und Lerninhalte. *Zeitschrift für Berufs- und Wirtschaftspädagogik*, 117(1), 14–41. <https://doi.org/10.25162/zbw-2021-0002>
- Ackermann, N. (2021b). Zum Bildungsideal des «mündigen Wirtschaftsbürgers»: Kompetenzmodell für ökonomische Bildung und Domänenanalyse des gesamtgesellschaftlichen/gesamtwirtschaftlichen Lebensbereichs. In C. Fridrich, U. Hagedorn, R. Hedtke, P. Mittnik, & G. Tafner (Eds.), *Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft und Politik: Sozioökonomische und politische Bildung in Schule und Hochschule* (pp. 147–178). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-32910-5_7
- Ackermann, N., Ruoss, T., & Flury, C. (2018). Warum fördern sie ökonomische Bildung? Aktivitäten, Argumente und Handlungslegitimationen von Akteuren am Beispiel der Schweiz. *bwp@ Berufs- und Wirtschaftspädagogik – online*, 35, 1–19. http://www.bwpat.de/ausgabe35/ackermann_et_al_bwpat35.pdf
- Apra, C., Wuttke, E., Breuer, K., Koh, N. K., Davies, P., Greimel-Fuhrmann, B., & Lopus, J. S. (Eds.). (2016). *International Handbook of Financial Literacy*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0360-8>.
- Bonati, P. (2017). *Das Gymnasium im Spiegel seiner Lehrpläne: Untersuchungen, Praxisimpulse, Perspektiven*. hep.
- Criblez, L., Gautschi, P., & Hirt Monico, P. (Eds.). (2006). *Lehrpläne und Bildungsstandards: Was Schülerinnen und Schüler lernen sollen*. hep.

- Criblez, L., Giudici, A., Hofstetter, R., Manz, K., & Schneuwly, B. (in print). *Die schulische Wissensordnung im Wandel: Schulfächer, Lehrpläne und Lehrmittel*. Chronos.
- Döring, N., & Bortz, J. (2016). *Forschungsmethoden und Evaluation in den Sozial- und Humanwissenschaften (5., vollständig überarbeitete, aktualisierte und erweiterte Auflage)*. Springer VS.
- Eberle, F., & Brüggelbrock, C. (2013). *Bildung am Gymnasium*. EDK.
- EDK. (1994). *Rahmenlehrplan für die Maturitätsschulen vom 9. Juni 1994. Empfehlung an die Kantone gemäss Art. 3 des Schulkonkordats vom 29. Oktober 1970. Mit Handreichung zur Umsetzung*. Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren (EDK).
- EDK. (1995). *Reglement über die Anerkennung von gymnasialen Maturitätsausweisen (Maturitätsanerkennungsreglement, MAR) vom 16.01.1995 bzw. 15.02.2015, SR 4.2.1.1*. Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren (EDK).
- EDK. (2018). *Weiterentwicklung der gymnasialen Maturität: Mandat für Projektphase I vom 06.09.2018: Auslegeordnung zu den Referenztexten*.
- EDK. (2020). *Weiterentwicklung der gymnasialen Maturität: Mandat für Projektphase II vom 30.01.2020: Projektorganisation*.
- Fourcade, M. (2009). *Economists and societies: Discipline and profession in the United States, Britain, and France, 1890s to 1990s*. Princeton University Press.
- Fridrich, C. (2018). Sozioökonomische Bildung an allgemeinbildenden Schulen der Sekundarstufe I und II in Österreich. In T. Engartner, C. Fridrich, S. Graupe, R. Hedtke, & G. Tafner (Eds.), *Sozioökonomische Bildung und Wissenschaft* (pp. 81–108). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-21218-6_4
- Galvão, A., Ferreira, J. J., & Marques, C. (2018). Entrepreneurship education and training as facilitators of regional development: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 25(1), 17–40. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSBED-05-2017-0178>
- Hedtke, R. (2011). *Konzepte ökonomischer Bildung*. Wochenschau.
- Horlacher, R. (2018). The same but different: The German Lehrplan and curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 50(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2017.1307458>
- Künzli, R. (2007). Kanon des Lernens. In M. Göhlich, C. Wulf, & J. Zirfas (Eds.), *Pädagogische Theorien des Lernens* (pp. 23–41). Beltz.
- Künzli, R. (2009). Curriculum und Lehrmittel. In S. Andresen, R. Casale, T. Gabriel, R. Horlacher, S. Larcher Klee, & J. Oelkers (Eds.), *Handwörterbuch Erziehungswissenschaft* (pp. 134–148). Beltz.
- Künzli, R., & Hopmann, S. (Eds.). (1998). *Lehrpläne. Wie sie entwickelt werden und was von ihnen erwartet wird. Forschungsstand, Zugänge und Ergebnisse aus der Schweiz und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Rüegger.
- Marty, L., Venturini, P., & Almqvist, J. (2018). Teaching traditions in science education in Switzerland, Sweden and France: A comparative analysis of three curricula. *European Educational Research Journal*, 17(1), 51–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904117698710>
- Mayring, P. (2015). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse (12. Auflage)*. Beltz.
- Münnich, S., & Sachweh, P. (2017). Varianten des kapitalistischen Geistes im Wandel? In P. Sachweh & S. Münnich (Eds.), *Kapitalismus als Lebensform? Deutungsmuster, Legitimation und Kritik in der Marktgemeinschaft* (pp. 3–26). Springer Fachmedien.

- Orlowski, P. (2012). The Purpose of Schooling: Ideology in the Formal and “Enacted” Curriculum. In P. Orlowski (Ed.), *Teaching About Hegemony: Race, Class and Democracy in the 21st Century* (pp. 55–74). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1418-2_4
- Ruoss, T., Ackermann, N., & Stadelmann, T. (2022). Cultures of economic education: Grammar school curricula in a multilingual comparison. *European Educational Research Journal*, 00(0), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041221099379>
- Siegfried, C., & Hangen, J. (2020). Formelle Lerngelegenheiten zur Ausbildung ökonomischen Fachwissens: eine bundesweite Lehr- und Modulplananalyse. *bwp@ Berufs- und Wirtschaftspädagogik – online, Profil 6: Berufliches Lehren und Lernen: Grundlagen, Schwerpunkte und Impulse wirtschaftspädagogischer Forschung, Digitale Festschrift für Eveline Wuttke*, 1–22. https://www.bwpat.de/profil6_wuttke/siegfried_hangen_profil6.pdf
- Tafner, G. (2016). Die Unterscheidung von Ökonomie und Ökonomik als die Crux der Ökonomischen Bildung. In H. Arndt (Ed.), *Das Theorie-Praxis-Verhältnis in der ökonomischen Bildung* (pp. 30-42). Wochenschau. http://degoeb.de/index.php?page=_2015
- VERBI. (2019). *MAXQDA 2020*. In VERBI Software. <https://www.maxqda.com>
- Young, M. (2014). What is a curriculum and what can it do? *The Curriculum Journal*, 25(1), 7–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2014.902526>