

PhD Thesis Outline

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Occupational Preferences and Vocational
Transitions in Switzerland

Milan Stocker

milan.stocker@unifr.ch

University Fribourg

Department of Social Work, Social Policy and Global Development

Supervisor: Prof Dr. Andreas Hadjar

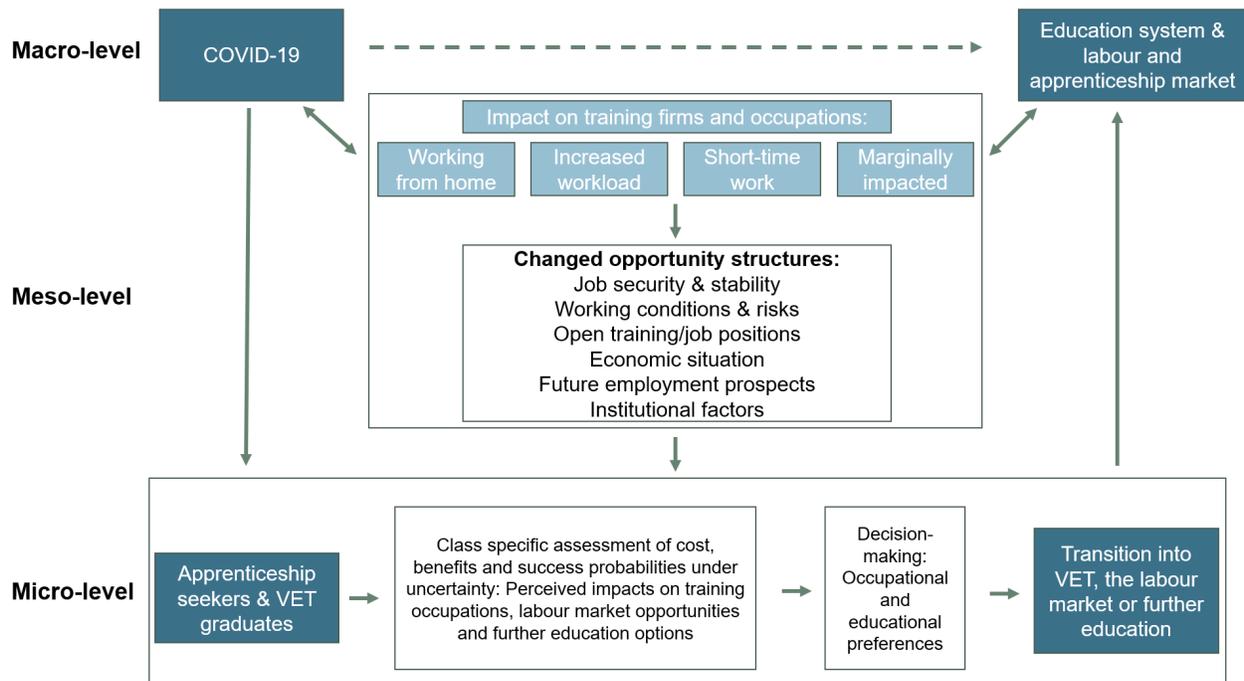
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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in spring 2020 and the resulting public health measures disrupted education systems and labour markets worldwide, including vocational education and training (VET). In Switzerland, where dual VET-programs play a central role in school-to-work transitions, the pandemic led to uncertainty for many of its actors: vocational schools, training firms, apprenticeship seekers, current apprentices and VET-graduates (Hummel et al. 2020).

This PhD thesis focuses on the pandemic's impact on Swiss vocational pathways at different crossroads. To assess the pandemic's impact, all analyses are conducted in a longitudinal perspective to recognise changes across the pre-, during, and post-pandemic periods. Further, to situate potential changes within their structural context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the studies link training occupations to four groups that experienced different pandemic-related impacts: working from home, increased workload, short-time work, and being marginally impacted. These groups reflect distinct opportunity structures and labour market signals relevant to apprenticeship seekers and VET graduates navigating heightened uncertainty in their decision-making. To explain these decision-making processes, the thesis primarily draws on Rational Choice (RC) and Subjective Expected Utility (SEU) approaches (Boudon 1974; Erikson and Jonsson 1996; Breen and Goldthorpe 1997; Esser 1999). Because the COVID-19 pandemic constituted a system-wide shock that simultaneously affected education, labour markets, training firms, VET-graduates and apprenticeship seekers, the theoretical approaches considered are integrated into a macro–micro framework in Figure 1 based on Coleman's (1990) model and its later applications (e.g. Hadjar and Becker 2006; Becker 2019)

Figure 1 Theoretical Framework



The thesis has three main research foci. First, search queries of apprenticeship seekers on a national apprenticeship platform are analysed to study short- and long-term changes in occupational preferences. Second, the transitions from compulsory school into the different training occupations are examined using administrative register data (LABB), which provide detailed, person-level information on educational trajectories and qualifications of all individuals enrolled in education in Switzerland since 2011. Lastly, transitions of VET graduates into the labour market or different types of further education are analysed with the same register data. Besides the differential impact of the pandemic on training occupations, the second and third studies also distinguish between individuals of different social backgrounds to assess the pandemic's impact on educational inequalities.

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