

Role Effects in Intergenerational Education Transmission

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Abstract

The present research is concerned with the widely studied problem of measuring the effect of family background on educational achievement, taking into account individual unobserved heterogeneity. We are interested in particular in the roles of mothers and fathers in education transmission, upon which contrasting evidence reported in recent studies calls for reflection.

By using the unique features of the English NCDS dataset, which contains information on a rich set of variables taken from very early age, together with a rather novel use of the ‘finite mixture’ (latent class) approach, we are able to control for the child’s unobservable ability endowment and obtain a consistent estimate of the direct effect of parents’ education on children scholastic achievement.

The natural interpretation of this effect emerges by asking why, among subjects with a given level of unobserved endowments, those with more educated parents should end up with more schooling. The answer is that they might have stronger *social motivation*, which is what the effect reflects. We estimate both the direct effect and the total effect of parents educations on children attainment, and argue that they are substantially different for sons and daughters.

From the econometrics point of view, the novelty of our approach rests in the exploitation of recent advances in the theory of marginal modelling (see e.g. Bergsma and Rudas (2002), which allows identification and estimation of finite mixture models where not only the response variables may depend on covariates, but also some residual association between them is permitted (an application to the capture-recapture problem along the same lines of our model is contained in Bartolucci and Forcina (2006).