CultureCase

Playing a musical instrument increases educational attainment

This research was conducted by **Philip Yang** at **Eberhard Karls University, Germany**

Summary

This research used a survey of German teenagers to investigate the relationship between educational attainment and playing a musical instrument, either in early childhood or during one's teenage years. The survey asked a sample of 17 year-olds a variety of questions relating to their parents' education, their family and home life and their outside interests. It gathered detailed information about their musical lives: whether they played an instrument, how much they did so, whether they played music with friends and whether or not they had received paid tuition. Overall, the research showed that playing a musical instrument in childhood did increase educational attainment, although other factors were also important.

Start early for maximum benefits

The German survey captured a large amount of data on the lives of teenagers who were asked to look back over a period of seven years. It asked about when they began to learn a musical instrument. The study found that the sooner the child began music lessons the greater the impact was on their subsequent educational attainment.

Other factors were important

It didn't seem that the quality of music tuition received (measured by whether or not it was paid for) made much of a difference. What did count was the intensity of musical practice (a daily routine was necessary to get the largest benefit). The paper points out that parental education and the sorts of other

non-music related hobbies the child partakes in also make a difference to educational outcomes.

The causal mechanisms remain a mystery

The author is confident about the causal relationship between music playing and educational attainment, however they suggest more research is needed to unpick exactly how this operates and which mechanisms can be supported to best exploit it.

Keywords

music **teenagers** **education** **Germany** **survey**

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