

Socially Selective Allocation of Curriculum Modifications in Mainstream Classrooms

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Background and Research Question

Over the past 25 years, the **integration of learners with special educational needs into mainstream education** has steadily increased. To address the specific needs of these learners and to support their inclusive schooling, **several integrative measures** exist. Among the most widespread are **curriculum modifications (CM)**.^{1, 2, 3}

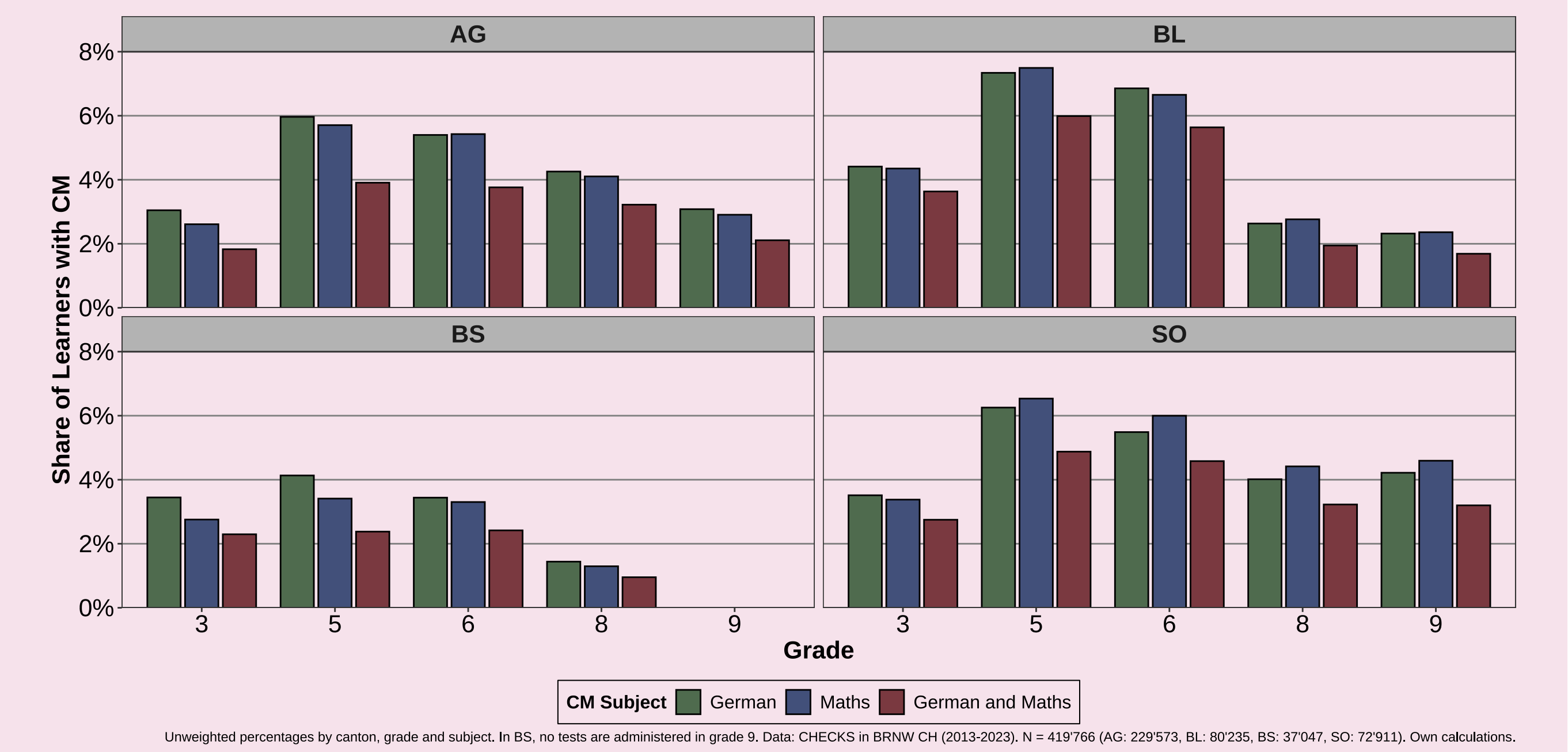
Drawing on effects of social origin, social reproduction theory and labelling theory, this study examines **whether and to what extent the allocation of CM is socially selective** by household income, language spoken at home and gender.

Curriculum Modifications

- CM (such as *individuelle Lernziele* or *projet pédagogique individualisé*) involve **individualised adaption of learning contents and reductions of learning objectives**.
- CM target **learners who are unable to meet the regular learning objectives**.
- CM are **subject-specific** and are mentioned in learners' school reports instead of regular grades.
- CM serve **within-classroom ability grouping** → conceptual parallels to external differentiation.
- CM are **regulated differently across cantons** (e.g. in terms of expert involvement, review interval or implementation).

Prevalence of Curriculum Modifications

Across Switzerland around 6-7% of learners receive CM in at least one subject.⁴ The **prevalence of learners with CM varies considerably between educational contexts**.



- The **odds of receiving CM vary substantially between schools**. ICCs of 0.369 (CM in German), 0.353 (CM in Maths) and 0.410 (CM in German and Maths) indicate strong clustering. Many schools do not enact CM at all.
- CM are **most common in lower secondary education with basic requirements** - and nearly absent in lower secondary education with high requirements.

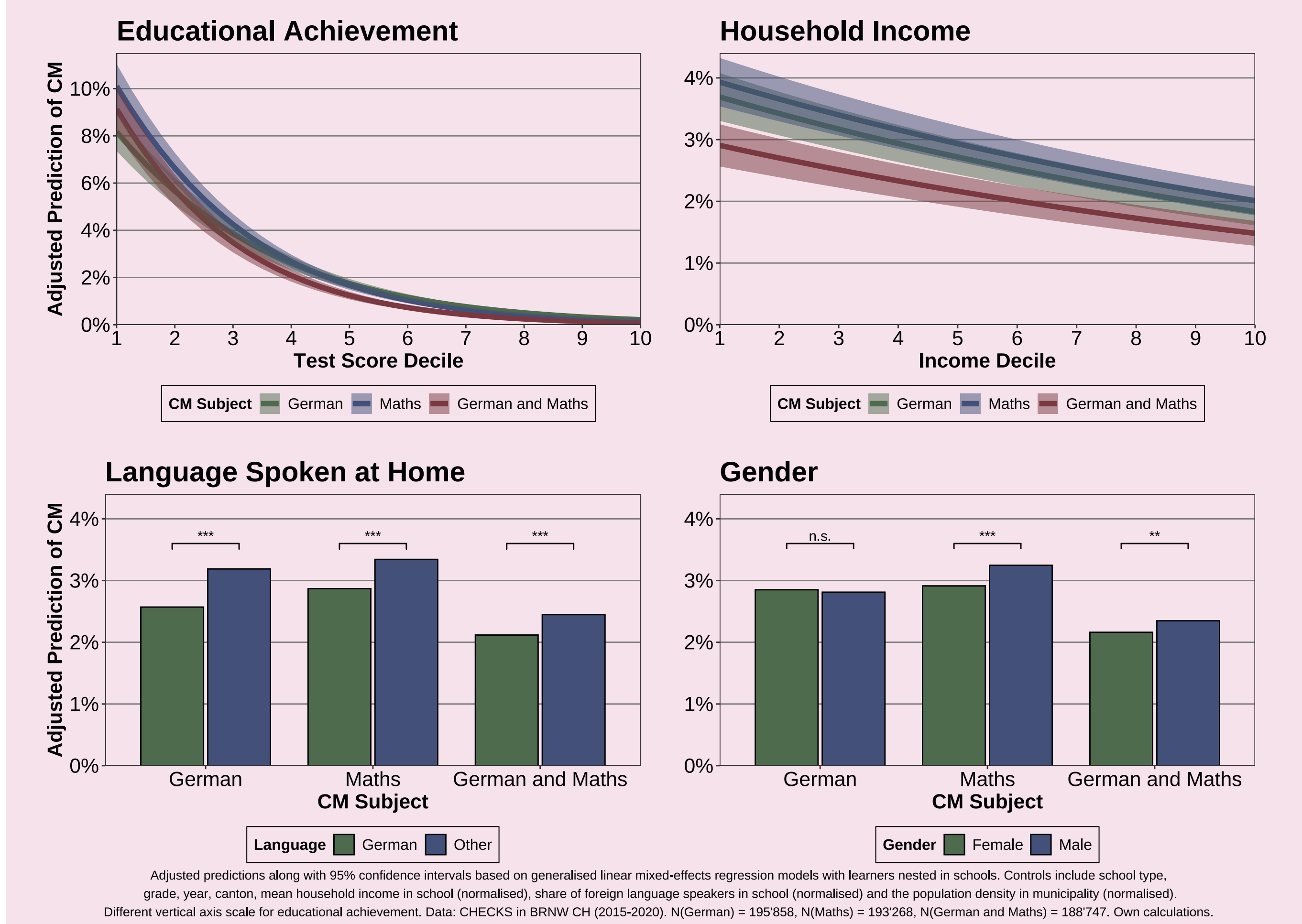
Data and Methods

The analyses draw on data from the **Checks BR NWCH**, covering the entire student population in Northwestern Switzerland.⁵ The test score data are **linked with register data**. Allocation of CM is analysed using **generalised linear mixed-effects regression models** in combination with **mediation analysis**.⁶

Results from Mixed-Effects Regressions

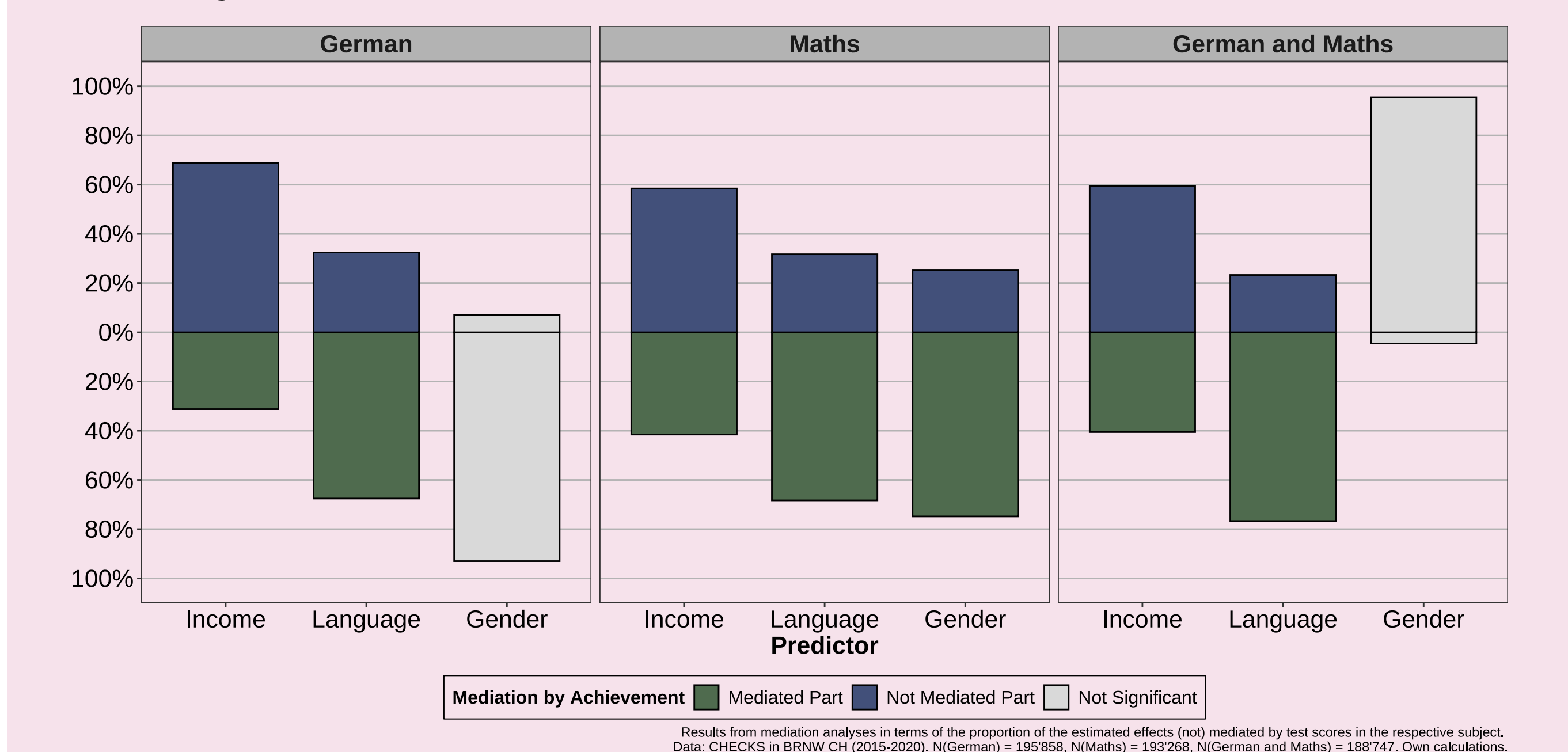
Even when learners' educational achievement is accounted for, **modest but statistically significant gaps in CM allocation by gender, language spoken at home and household income** remain.

- Gaps are most pronounced for household income and least pronounced for gender.
- The findings are consistent across different subjects, subsamples and model specifications.



Results from Mediation Analyses

Mediation analyses reveal that inequalities in CM allocation by ascribed characteristics are **only partly mediated by educational achievement**. Overall, this finding suggests a socially selective allocation of CM.



Further Information

References

¹ Sahli Lozano, Stefania Cramer, and Dshamilja Adeifio Gosteli. 2021. Integrative und separative schulische Massnahmen in der Schweiz (InSeMa). Bern: Edition SZH/CSPS.

² Harrison, Judith R., Nora Bunford, Steven W. Evans, and Julie Sarno Owens. 2013. "Educational Accommodations for Students With Behavioral Challenges: A Systematic Review of the Literature." Review of Educational Research 83(4): 551-597.

³ EASIE. 2024. European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education: 2021/2022. School Year Dataset Cross-Country Report. Odense: EASIE.

⁴ BFS. 2025. Lernende der Sonderpädagogik: Basistabellen 2023/24. Neuchâtel: Bundesamt für Statistik.

⁵ BRNWCH. 2025. Checks im BR NWCH 2013-2024 [Dataset]. Universität Zürich – Institut für Bildungsevaluation.

⁶ Imai, Kosuke, Luke Keele, and Dustin Tingley. 2010. "A general approach to causal mediation analysis". Psychological Methods 15(4): 309-334.

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