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## Longitudinal analysis using NEPS data

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In the early 2000s, a broad discussion arose in Germany among politicians, academics in the area of education, and the general public, relating not only to state schooling but to education across the whole life course. It became clear that gaps in the research on students' competence development, its causes and consequences, were hampering the development of evidence-based policies. In the light of longitudinal studies in other Western countries (e.g., the British Longitudinal Studies, the ECLS—Early Childhood Longitudinal Studies, and the NELS-88—National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 in the United States), these gaps became even more glaring. After extensive preparatory work by a nationwide and cross-disciplinary network of leading researchers led by Hans-Peter Blossfeld, and two successful reviews by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, the NEPS—National Education Panel Study was set up in 2009, funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The NEPS design builds on international knowledge and expertise on longitudinal studies in educational research, but is further characterized by its multidisciplinary approach; representativity; focus on competence development throughout the life course in formal, nonformal, and informal learning environments; coverage of various dimensions of social disparities and returns to education; and the almost simultaneous launch of several longitudinal studies focusing on different educational

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phases throughout the life course. To allow findings from these starting cohorts to be compared, the NEPS design has an overarching framework, including core concepts and foci, that enables excellent research across different age groups and on various topics.

This volume provides insights into work that has been made possible by these unique qualities of the NEPS. Each contribution harnesses these features to produce findings that can inform evidenced-based policies, from pre-primary to adult education. The volume presents ten articles on recent NEPS analyses, two on early childhood education (Brosch et al.; Möwisch et al.), four on general schooling (Gnambs & Lockl; Hunker & Schotte; Lorenz et al.; Olczyk et al.), and four on areas beyond formal education (Holtmann & Solga; Kleinert & Zoch; Kohl & Martin; Ordemann). The articles are preceded by a general overview of the scope and design of the NEPS (Artelt & Sixt).

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