

The expectations-intention binomial in academic decisions in high school

Amparo Romero Valseca

M.A. in Educational Technology

amparo.romero@upaep.edu.mx

Popular Autonomous University of the State of Puebla, Mexico

Martha Leticia Gaeta González

PhD in Psychology and Learning from the University of Zaragoza, Spain

marthaleticia.gaeta@upaep.mx

Popular Autonomous University of the State of Puebla, Mexico

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Abstract

This work focuses on two constructs that intervene in the construction that high school students do about themselves, concerning their academic decisions. The first is expectations, as an essential element, in terms of what students want to do in their academic activity and in which several personal and context elements affect, which will help (or not) to achieve it. From this, we believe it is necessary also to consider the intentionality, to generate concrete actions towards the achievement of the academic goals. The objective of this study is to reflect on the joint contribution that expectations and intentions have in the academic decisions of high school students. With this purpose, we revise different theoretical approaches and research advances on the subject through a documentary review. The preceding hopefully will let us contribute, in our role as educators, to the understanding of the decisions that students take to face challenges and take better advantage of the opportunities of this educational level towards academic success.

Keywords: Aspirations, expectations, intention, academic decisions, high school.

Introduction

Like many countries, one of the biggest challenges facing Mexico in education, in terms of coverage, is to expand access and reduce drop-outs, especially at the upper-middle level. In this educational stage, due to its characteristics, it is fundamental in making

decisions for the future life of the students. Completing high school studies, in any of the different modalities offered in the National Education System, is expected to contribute to young people having better opportunities to enter the labor market or to continue their academic training at a higher level.

Attending to these conditions represents a complicated situation since several factors determine the success or failure of young people in school. In this regard, Carbajal and Cruz (2015), cite the director of the OECD cabinet, who says that, in Mexico, 40 percent of young people get lost in the transition from higher education to a college education. From this stage, the percentages of academic training are getting drastically lower, reaching only 12 percent of young people between 20 and 29 years of age and four percent from 30 to 39 years who study.

In this regard, Urrutia and Martín del Campo (2015) warn that, in Mexico, there is talk of school drop-out and rejection during the 2012-2018 term predominantly referring to Higher Secondary Education, an educational level with the most severe indicators. Within this framework, it is appropriate to cite Blanco (2014) who points out that in Mexico the

figures for access to the upper-middle level are relatively low, even when compared to other countries in the region, given that coverage of about 79.8 percent in high school drops to 51.9 percent in higher secondary education. These figures mean that four out of ten young people between 15 and 17 years of age do not enroll in the education system.

In the 2000-2001 school year, higher secondary education reported enrollment of 56.7 percent; twelve years later, it was 62.7 percent. Specifically, the growth from 2006 to 2013 was practically zero. In addition to these figures, it is necessary to consider in the last documented school period (2012-2013) a 15 percent drop-out rate between and during cycles. Likewise, we should consider the regional and socioeconomic factors in order to obtain a more reliable picture of the situation presented by higher secondary education in Mexico.

With the purpose of evidencing elements that favor the conclusion of the studies of young people, several researchers have focused their attention on the student. The results obtained present evidence about the implication of expectations and intention in their academic achievement. That is why in this paper, we seek to expose, in a reflexive way, different advances on expectations and intention in academic involvement and also argue about their joint involvement for the academic success of high school students.

The conceptualization of expectations

Expectations represent the perceptions of individuals about the possibility of succeeding in some activity or task (Schunk, 2012), on which they forge their projects; that is, the formulation of ideas about how well they will do in an undertaken task. It should be noted that this construct is not synonymous with perceived competence, but represents the beliefs of achievement and the value that a task represents.

It is important to note that some research raises expectations and aspirations interchangeably. However, Andreu and Daza (2017) raise the difference between these constructs and point out that aspirations get established in the long term and expectations in the short term. They also mention that the configuration of expectations can initiate from the influence of internal and external elements of the person, where context factors influence internal elements. They also suggest that the normative pressure exerted by social groups, as well as the assessment that others have on their person, represent the fundamental factors in the process of forming expectations, which are a primary factor from which they make a decision.

According to Pérez and Pesántez (2017), the expectations get constituted throughout the daily experience, through which subjects evaluate a set of conditions that highlight their perception, their situation, and the elements they have to reach their goals. They also propose that expectations contribute, in the first instance, to the fulfillment of future objectives.

In this same sense, Pérez-García (2013) exposes the contributions of Rotter, Chance, and Phares. They warn, from the theory of social learning, that expectations formulate taking into account the type of situation (internal/external); after succeeding in a given situation considered as capacity (internal) capacity, expectations would be increased to a greater extent, than after succeeding in a circumstance of luck or chance (external). Likewise, they resume the contributions of Rotter, Liverant, and Crowne, who suggest that after the failure of an external event, expectations are preserved or can even increase. In contrast, after the failure of an internal situation, future expectations of success can be reduced. These considerations suggest that the degree of internality has causal effects that determine the formulation of the expectations of a person in similar situations,



which would add to the assessment of the positive results, as well as the perception that subjects have regarding their resources to deal with tasks and situations, respectively.

On the other hand, González and Valenzuela (2016), point out that realistic expectations and aspirations correspond to a process of psychological and social character where subjects make an objective assessment of the sense of competence they possess, from which they want to act towards a goal, near or far. Thus, expectations are decisive because they will assign meaning to an educational purpose that will, in turn, provide the reason for the action.

Academic Expectations in High School

From the elements described in previous paragraphs, we will have a further look into the academic expectations that students build in high school to guide their academic future. In this regard, Beal and Crockett (2014) have found that the goals and expectations of the students are linked and predict the educational level they

can achieve. Along these same lines, Andreu and Daza (2017), based on a longitudinal study on students' decisions to continue their studies, indicate that aspirations and expectations nourish academic goals. However, based on the theory of expectations in their analysis, they point out that expectations get support from the assumption that people choose actions that, in their opinion, will lead them to the results they believe are attractive. In the same way, González (2015) formulates that people feel motivated when they believe they can fulfill a task, be it school or work, and, therefore, the rewards they receive will be proportional to the effort made.

In this same sense, Sepúlveda and Valdebenito (2014), state that expectations are a complex arrangement that circumscribes reflective procedures and senses of possibilities about the future, which place the actors' work concerning their feasible options in the educational field. Thus, students' action decisions frame according to the projection of what they intend to achieve, based on the means available at the time.



Therefore, the subjective perception that students have about their future educational opportunities has its basis in the construction of educational expectations. Thus, students establish their personal decisions to enroll in a school program. In this regard, Corica (2012) suggests that previous experiences are a reference for academic expectations. From this perspective, past events are taken as a starting point, and the horizon for what is desirable is constructed; what is expected as possible without necessarily having the certainty of fully achieving it. That is why it tends to adjust as the possibility of achieving it increases, perhaps because the awareness of the problems in between becomes acute.

The concept of intention

The intention towards a specific action has been considered fundamental in the actions of people. In this regard, Millán-Puelles (2015),

takes up Brentano's theory of intentionality, defining it as the property of psychic phenomena (intention) versus physicists (action). From this approach, the psyche is always intentional, which leads to immediately establishing a conscious character, that is, it always constitutes an attitude towards something. In this process, awareness of an object, which must be framed through a conscious reflection of a future action/activity.

Montero (2007) suggests that actions and thoughts are in a constant process of transformation that, through a reflexive turn, guides the tendency towards something around consciousness. However, it incorporates some elements of Husserl's theory of intentionality, which places consciousness as the foundation (characterized by its tendency towards something), which operates in a mediating way between the world and men.

It is equivalent to the alignment between intentionality with the concrete experience, which alludes to an intentional path that implies a conscious period.

Gaitán (2009) refers to Bratman's theory of intention, which states that our immediate intentions are formed from a complex structure of future-oriented purposes and a set of norms linked to those structures: norms of consistency, coherence, and stability. From this approach, standards have the function of enabling the ability to achieve the highest number of objectives, sequentially, in temporarily extended stages, taking into account cognitive limitations, as well as the appearance of circumstances to deliberate. In this way, when a plan based intention is conveniently implanted in one of these structures, realization provides the person with a high degree of an intrapersonal organization towards the attainment of his/her ends. This process allows us to observe that previous intentions and further embodiments involve a reference to the other. According to this theory, there is a mental state different from desires and beliefs defined as a plan, which in turn will be equivalent to the intention.

From an attitudinal perspective, López (2012), takes up the proposal of Ajzen, for whom the intention is the decision to execute a behavior or an action, this element will be decisive in the behavior of people; Subjects will determine the appropriate time and opportunity at which they will attempt to translate the intention into action. Thus, the subject will define their ability to carry out intentional actions or intentions to act. In this sense, Morales and Correa (2015) affirm that the intention is an indicator of the willingness of the subject to carry out a specific behavior, and is the immediate antecedent of the behavior.

Based on the above considerations, the intention will be based on the attitude towards the behavior, the subjective norm,

and the perceived behavioral control, where each behavioral predictor will weigh for its importance concerning the specific behavior and the context of interest. In other words, depending on the phenomenon, attitude, rule, control, or a combination of these variables can affect more significant measures intended directly and, therefore, somehow on behavior.

Based on the three-dimensional model mentioned in previous lines, the attitude consists of three elements: cognitive, affective, and conative-behavioral.

The *attitude towards the behavior* represents the assessment that the person makes (positive or negative) of behavior on which he/she will have to decide and in which a favorable condition will be associated with a more significant intention to carry it out. Thus, the attitude will be determined by the various beliefs that the person possesses towards the object (activity, task, person, or institution) and the evaluation that people make of themselves. This value is the attitude's affective factor, which, in turn, defines the motivation and strength of the intention of the behavior. We agree with Morales and Correa (2015) that different beliefs can be possessed, but these, by themselves, do not lead to action, so the weighting of the expected results will define the performance of a given action.

The *subjective norm* is based on the perceived social pressure towards a particular behavior and reflects the effect of social values. That is, the model's social component determines the norm and it shows the influence of significant people, as well as the perception of his/her beliefs, the behavior to be carried out, and motivation to meet his/her expectations (Fonseca, 2015).

Behavioral control refers to the belief in one's ability to control the existing difficulties to control conduct. This component includes both internal and external elements of the

person. Among the former are physical and psychological skills, and in the latter time, opportunity and means, in addition to the dependence of third parties. It can be said that behavior control involves beliefs about the presence or absence of resources, opportunities to conduct behavior, and perceptions of being able to control the factors that facilitate or hinder behavior. This element is established with a direct determinant for both intention and behavior (Huéscar, Rodríguez, Cervelló and Moreno, 2014).

The academic intention in high school

In search of the academic objectives of the students, a determining element is observed, framed as the intention, which suggests a future activity in whose essence the intervention of the reason is distinguished. In this regard, Walton (2016) mentions that the intention is based on reason or awareness that is related to practical action and effectively enables the configuration and achievement of a future goal. In this subjective process, the intention guides the subject's actions towards the best possible objectives among the available ones.

For Moya (2017), the intention constitutes a compass that guides the subject's action concerning the proposed objectives, based on the representation that he grants to the cognitive act. It is oriented to that specific purpose. With the basis of this complex perception, for purposes of academic goals, students build on the momentum intention to direct their educational activity, which involves mobilizing the brainpower they have intending to achieving academic goals.

Once the reasoned intention traits are established, it is necessary an adjustment to the corresponding behavior. For that purpose, it will be necessary to consider different elements such as the planning of a behavior that glimpses possible obstacles, the assessment of the resources to be mobilized,

as well as the necessary strategies on behavior control (Bermúdez, 2013). The conscious articulation of all these elements will promote the achievement of the academic goals of high school students.

In sum, upon understanding, the student will configure a plan that will direct his/her actions towards academic goals. Therefore, his/her actions will expose an educational intention in the full sense. Under these conditions, the conformation of the academic life of high school students will include as an intention the culmination of their studies of upper-middle level. The assessment and discernment of the student (attitude, values, and perception of ability to achieve it) would lead to actions, as well as the mobilization of intellectual capitals available to them. These resources are expected to be aligned towards the achievement of the projected goal, based on concrete actions in the short term. The student will regularly attend classes, move the resources available to pass the subjects such as homework, exams, projects, among others, to complete his/her studies.

The expectations-intention binomial in the academic decisions of high school students

With the review of the contributions described in previous paragraphs, we allow ourselves to present an approach to the configuration of the expectations-intention binomial in the academic decisions of high school students. As we have pointed out, expectations are considered as reflective processes and judgments of possibilities about the academic future of students, which implies the mobilization of resources to carry out short-term actions. The intention is the student's assessment regarding the achievement of his/her studies and the corresponding consequences. In this way, by linking these, a specific behavioral action is configured through a reasoned, conscious, and reflective plan.

This condition can be exemplified with the following future academic scenario for a junior high school. Taken as the basis, student's expectation of accessing university studies will contribute to his/her intention to complete studies satisfactorily. So, with a more positive attitude towards academic involvement, the student will assess his/her ability and resources to achieve it, as well as the personal and social consequences of his/her action.

The recognition of the elements that allow the configuration of the expectations-intention binomial suggests the formulation of actions aimed at identifying, promoting, and strengthening students' academic abilities. Which in turn, serves as a guiding thread for the formulation of future academic expectations, followed by a process by which the student can be guided to establish a structured plan in which reason or conscience, control of their attitude, as well as the opinion of certain people who have importance to them. If these conditions are met, it will help students to realize their expectations in intentions.

Conclusion

From the reflections expressed in this paper, the complementary impact between expectations and academic intention in of students' plans is evidenced by their academic achievement and decision making, based on the reasoning, the implication, and the commitment assumed. Based on the arguments presented here, we propose for future investigations to study of the link between these two constructs, considered as the determining factors within the configuration of the student's training path. As we have mentioned, expectations are not sufficient for the achievement of the concrete action, if there is no intention, based on reasoning and commitment to the achievement of the action. Emphasis is placed on the need for academic actions to be implemented and strengthened in high school that promote in a

better way the intentionality of the students to continue their formative journey in high school and beyond, based on the generation of better expectations.

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