"Weakened Expectations Syndrome" in the Face of Professional Futures. A Study on Exchange Students in the Framework of the Internationalization of Higher Education

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Abstract:

The research, developed in the field of the Education and Social, Work, and Organizational Psychology field, analyzes what we call "Weakened Expectations Syndrome" in exchange students in relation to their positioning in the world of work and, more broadly, to professional achievement. It was made with advanced university students undergoing international academic mobility (IAM). High expectations regarding future professional would be expected in the group, considering that they have attained the highest levels of education. In all of them, expectations play a central role. Methodologically, this is a descriptive and, fundamentally, qualitative study. The techniques used were a semi-structured survey and interview. It also included hierarchical evocations and or short life stories, which allowed for an understanding of the deeper meaning of the actions and shared representations of the actors involved. The results show burnout/hopelessness due to low expectations about the future of work (at the micro level) and high levels of anomie in a macro-national context marked by uncertainty.

Keywords: Employment Status, Expectations, Weakened, Expectancy-Valence, Anomie and Burnout Theory, Exchange Students

Introduction

In this article, we will focus on concepts in which Expectations are central in relation to professional futures and employability, both at the micro and macro levels.

Different theories (psychological, sociological, educational, political-economic) developed in the last century shed light on the importance of Expectations in relation to their determinants and derived effects. While many of these theories are broad in scope – not limited to the expectations placed on higher education in relation to employment – they help us understand the perceptions that university students, and more specifically, exchange students, have regarding their professional futures in a context of globalization and uncertainty.

The theoretical framework consists of two parts. In the first, we refer to theories linked to the Expectations of individuals induced by contexts; in the second, we briefly address the political and educational framework following the Bologna Process, which placed high expectations on the internationalization of higher education (including international academic mobility) as a tool that would promote employability (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998; Bologna Declaration, 1999; Cassidy, 2006). We will then analyze the expectations of exchange students and governments and their levels of agreement or divergence.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. International Academic Mobility and Exchange Students' Expectations for their Professional Future: Regarding Associated Theories

In this article, we will focus on concepts in which Expectations are central in relation to professional futures and employability, both at the micro and macro levels.

Different theories (psychological, sociological, educational, political-economic) developed in the last century shed light on the importance of Expectations in relation to their determinants and determinants.

Education has been considered a factor in the growth of individuals and nations, although its importance has not been linear, varying according to time and space.

In the last century, university education acquired special value. We witnessed an educational explosion and an awakening of expectations regarding higher education as the key to personal, professional, and even national progress. Mass universities began to spread, and equal opportunities became the motto of the last five decades (Aparicio, 1983).

n-ach (achievement needs) and Expectations began to take a central place in theories and in life. Like education itself, the relationship between Expectations and Professional Achievement was not linear, but rather varied over time.

Different approaches, and even paradigms of different kinds, have analyzed this issue.

A brief historical review, starting with the last century, reveals key concepts linked to the issue at hand: the relationship between Expectations and Professional Future. All of them contribute to the interpretation of the findings of this study.

From a sociological-educational perspective: the 1960s saw the "boom" in education in northern countries. Governments made large investments expecting to see consequences in terms of national growth and personal/professional development (Becker, 1964). During this time, high expectations emerged, especially in disadvantaged sectors. However, the "myth" of Education as a channel for socio-professional advancement is soon shattered when Anderson (1961) and Coombs (1968) show that, after the great educational boom, the economy does not grow at the same pace as education (Jencks, 1972). New skills need to be developed and transformed into in-situ competencies in order to solve the problems that the world of work and every learning situation entails (Perrenoud, 1970; Argyris & Shon, 1978-1957).

In the 1970s and 1975s, expectations were further shattered by global structural crises. Opposing currents emerged: the hyperfunctionalist/reproductivist ones, which considered that education does not contribute to development but, on the contrary, helps to reproduce the social structure (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970), and the interactionist ones, which broke with this determinism, considering "subjects situated in situated contexts, with limits that condition actions but do not determine them" [1].

They maintain that there is no linearity: achievement combines and feeds back into micro-individual, meso-institutional, and macro-social factors. This trend highlights what is known as methodological individualism (Boudon 1973, 1977), in which intermediate/intervening or psychosocial variables (values, beliefs, expectations, aspirations, decision-making capacity, etc.) acquire special importance. The individual is recovered, but in a "contextualized" form.

Multiple approaches or micro-theories emerge within these paradigms, which we cannot dwell on here (Aparicio 2005 / 2009; 2025 b).

On another level – and always keeping Expectations as a key variable in a sociological framework – we find other theories that we will address at their core, such as Anomie and Anomic Conformism. These theories are very interesting because they shed light on a phenomenon we have long investigated and that concerns us due to its current level of concern (cf. Clinard, 1969; Heintz, 1970; Germani, 1965; Merton, 1962–1938). Associated with Anomie and psychiatric Conformism, as Heintz (1970) calls it, are the theories of Identity, if we keep in mind, with Dubar (2000), that identity is a construction between the biographical and relational planes, between the history of each subject and the context in which they are inserted (Kaddouri, 2008; Lipiansky, 2008; a summary in Silva and Aparicio, 2015; Aparicio, 2012, 2015 d. Also see multiple recent articles by the author on Identity in relation to Mobility and Professionalization, CONICET link). Finally, among other micro-theories, we cite the theory of status inconsistency, associated with anomie and the theory of sociocultural uprooting (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918; Aparicio, 1978, 2009 a and b).

This theory is also useful for interpreting the results linking Expectations and Professional Achievement and their change in meaning in different socio-political and economic periods in the country. Briefly, inconsistency refers to the presence of statuses that are not at the same level in the individual and in society, which generates conflicts. Thus, during the period of great growth in Argentina with the arrival of the flood of immigrants due to the wars (late 19th and early 20th centuries), immigrants generally had a low social status. However, they were able to achieve high (relative) educational levels among their descendants and high economic growth (Panettieri, 1970, 1982, 2000; Aparicio, 1978, 1981, 1984, 2001, 2009a, 2009b, 2015d). The author conducted research with three real generations: university graduates, their parents, and their grandparents (Aparicio, 1995). Inverse results were found in subsequent research, always conducted with university students from two national universities in the Cuyo region of Argentina. This inconsistent situation is beginning to present a different profile: the grandchildren of immigrants, although already highly educated (because they are university graduates) and have a somewhat higher social status than their parents and grandparents, are unable to achieve a level of job placement commensurate with their training. On the one hand, the market is becoming more rigid and imposing new norms; on the other, the saturation of graduates generates a perverse or "ceiling" effect: the more graduates there are, the more difficult it is to obtain

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[1] "The fact that an action takes place within a context of limits does not mean that its behavior can be made the exclusive consequence of its limits. Limits are only one of the elements that allow us to account for individual action" (R. Boudon, 1979. *La logique du social*, p. 53).

a job in the market or to be promoted (Boudon, 1977).

From an economic-sociological-educational perspective:

The theory of status inconsistency is thus linked to that of the devaluation of diplomas in the labor market (Lévy-Garboua, 1976; Jarousse, 1984; Eicher & Lévy-Garboua, 1989). Previously, the issue of social mobility and stratification had been studied from a structural-functional perspective (Parsons, 1959, 1970, 1971). It has an impact on the decline in expectations placed on higher education as a channel for professional advancement. Among the most widespread models of devaluation is Lévy-Garboua's (1976) "eligibility" (deferred gratification patterns). In this model, preferences must be explained. Analyzing this from an expectation perspective, if I can expect very little from higher education in terms of economic and professional advancement in the broadest sense, I choose not to obtain my diploma in the short term (delayed gratification), prolong my studies, and enter the labor market because a position is a scarce commodity (see, in particular, Aparicio's research on Delay in College, 2009 a and b). Finally, still within an economic perspective, it is important to note that this approach was preceded by other theories such as the aforementioned theory of human capital (Becker, 1964), the cost/benefit theory, and the consumption/investment models (Gramlich & Price, 1991): all of them view education as an investment and place all expectations of advancement on it. For example, in "investment" models, if a lot is expected from higher education (in terms of prestige, money, power, etc.), one is willing to invest more in effort, time, and difficulties in pursuit of a better future (this is generally the case for university students enrolled in the exact and natural sciences). The opposite occurs when little is expected in terms of improved quality of life (humanities and social sciences). As we can see, expectations influence courses of action, having multidimensional consequences at the social, economic, and educational levels.

From the perspective of psychological/psychosocial theories

Here, at least the following should be distinguished:

a) three groups of theories that we will focus on because they comprise the majority of international publications: motivational, attributional, and shared social representations theories (Moscovici, 1961). The latter are important because they refer to the social imaginaries and beliefs that influence the way we perceive reality as well as socio-professional change and progress. In this article, it is strictly applied to the value placed on Higher Education by populations of exchange students who engage in international academic mobility (IAM). As noted above, IAM was conceived in the Bologna context as a strategy to preserve employability and promote mobility. In this article, we explore how IAM is perceived by the same university students who participate in these internationalization programs.

We will then examine the findings – repeated in the three studies conducted with exchange students from Argentina and Brazil – that invite us to rethink the generational shift in beliefs in the face of a scenario of marked uncertainty, particularly in the professional field due to the consolidation of automation and AI. We will also consider whether this internationalization –beyond representing a contribution recognized by exchange students in terms of interculturality and the achievement of cultural rather than disciplinary learning – continues to fulfill its role of preserving employability.

Regarding psychological-motivational concepts, here we outline some axes of the Expectancy/Valence theory (McClelland, 1961; Atkinson, 1964) and the Self-Efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). [2]

b) In another order of things, we believe it is important to revisit the Burnout Theory (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach, 1976; Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Pines and Aronson, 1988; Brill, 1984; among the "founding fathers"). We outline its central axes and components – among which are Expectations – because they shed light on our findings and allow us to highlight some convergences and divergences between classic burnout syndrome and the syndrome, we have called Burnout due to Fragilized, Diluted, and Weakened Future Professional Expectations.

Let us outline the central axes of three psychological/psychosocial theories and the sociological theory of anomie.

1.1.1. Expectancy-Valence Theory

It falls within motivational theories. Needless to say, motivation is linked to achievement (obtaining something, achieving a certain performance, positioning, recognition, etc.). Historically, over the last 70 years, motivation theories have offered partial answers, placing drive, willpower, causal attributions, expectations, and the valence (value) given to certain objects/goals at the center. Mechanistic, cognitive, and socio-cognitive models have been developed successively. Let's dwell on some concepts.

Motivation is the driving force, the psychic energy of behavior that drives action. In achievement motivation, from a cognitive perspective and not merely a mechanical one, there is always a degree of voluntarism or intentionality: an individual is driven toward a personal goal (the driving force is motivation, and the "fuel" is intentionality).

It is an active, voluntary process, linked to adaptive needs, directed towards a goal and involving cognitive and affective aspects.

Essential in this process are: a) intentionality, which is the representation of what we would love to experience, what we wish to achieve in the future; b) expectations, which are the hope or probability of seeing what we love fulfilled, of achieving the goal, which can have different values (hence the term Expectancy/Valence, hereafter, E/V). Everything is linked, in turn,

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[2] See Bandura (1995); Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli (1996), Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli (2001). The author places Self-Efficacy Expectancies and Outcome Expectancies at the center. There are other theories included in the motivational ones, such as Feather & Davenport's theory on learned helplessness (1981, 1982; Feather, 1986; Feather, 1992; Feather & Barber, 1983), Seligman's theory (1981, 1991), the Aspirations theory (Lévy Leboyer, 1971), as well as the coping theory (Lazarus, 1994, 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the theories on Coping Strategies (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1996). Finally, theories of another kind place expectations as the axis, as a factor that gives meaning to action (V. Frankl, 2004 (1946). However, we will not go into detail here because it does not directly link Education and Work.

to the degree of commitment to achieving the goal.

Strictly speaking, the Expectancy-Valence theory (Atkinson, 1964, and McClelland, 1961) links the expectation of achievement to the valence or subjective value assigned to something, to an object (in one example, obtaining a diploma). Commitment depends on the combination of the two (E/V) (in this example, the student who yearns to obtain their diploma is more committed to the goal). In turn, expectations are modulated by: a) attributions or causal explanations and b) by beliefs regarding possible outcomes (achievement).

McClelland's theory went through different stages, being first classified as reactive (if the goal is clear, the transition from intention to objective achievement is automatic; an aspect for which it was criticized) and then as active. In this theory, what stimulates are internal, mental, and anticipatory goals. It is important to emphasize that this approach embraces a rational view of human beings: intention is central; in turn, intentionality has two axes: expectations and valences. Based on the E and V – or the two anticipatory parameters – the decision-making processes and the greater or lesser persistence of motivational tendencies are explained; these aspects are important for understanding the significance of our findings. Let's take as an example the case of the unemployed person, who usually retains the hope of obtaining a job. The more they value work, the higher their motivation to obtain that job and, therefore, to achieve their goal. In this framework, the feeling of failure (depression, helplessness, hopelessness) depends on the strength of the expectation and the value assigned to the job (valence).

In our case, wear due to low future expectations in the face of an uncertain professional world, according to theory, could induce a certain feeling of failure and lack of commitment.

However, in this regard, we wonder if a change has not already occurred here in light of what university students observe in the context. We wonder if there is no longer a certain tacit acceptance of this low probability of seeing the impact of their excellent training materialize in the workplace. Over-adaptation. We will return to this point.

1.1.2. Self-Efficacy Theory

A. Bandura (1977) contributes to E/V Theory by expanding the explanatory parameters of human motivation.

He distinguishes between efficacy expectations, or the perception of one's own ability to conduct behavior, and outcome expectations, or the belief that an action will produce a result.

It is based on triadic reciprocity: behavior, personal factors (cognitive and others), and environmental factors interact with each other (feedback). He recognizes the existence of causality (an act can be determined by causes independent of the individual) and also chance.

For the author, individuals have basic capacities: symbolization, anticipation, vicarious capacity (modeling), self-regulation, and self-reflection. Among these, anticipation, self-reflection, and self-regulation are central to expectations for the future.

The capacity for anticipation and self-reflection refers to the principle that behavior is regulated by foresight, that is, by the future. Individuals "predict" the possible consequences of their actions in the future, set goals, and plan courses of action. In doing so, they give meaning to their actions in advance.

The capacity for symbolization allows images of expected future events to favor behavior with a strong likelihood of becoming reality. Thus, anticipated representations can become the driving force of future behavior and have an effect on present behavior, helping the individual to plan.

The self-regulatory capacity, for its part, is central because foresight translates into self-regulation mechanisms. It is defined as the ability to generate judgments about one's own abilities, experiences, and thoughts that allow us to assess operational capabilities and act as drivers of behavior.

As can be seen, expectations are the basis of our actions and the planning of our actions.

According to these theories, uncertainty regarding one's professional future, coupled with the sense of immediacy in a "liquid society" – by modifying university students' perceptions and their "professional hopes" – could impact their present and future, also perceived as "liquid."

More strictly, to the extent that managing anticipatory (future) scenarios helps execute actions in the present, control events, and manage prospective situations, if these scenarios cannot be anticipated, according to the theory, it would be difficult to efficiently manage one's life and professional life. In fact, the model combines intention, the tendency to execute action, and action, along with the readjustment of processes to achieve anticipated goals or expected results.

Furthermore, beliefs are linked to aspirations. If beliefs in the value of higher education, which we would dare to call "generational," have been diluted or liquefied in a liquid society (Bauman, 2003), we would also expect a change in their aspirations, all of which would have medium- and long-term consequences in the professional field. This is no small issue, given that we know that beliefs underlie our actions and that "people act more on what they believe they are than on what they are" (Boudon, 2003; 1989 and 1990).

1.1.3. Anomie Theory and Its Relationship to Professional Future Expectations

Anomie is a factor studied by pioneers in European and American contexts, first by Emile Durkheim (1917-1958) and then by Robert Merton (1962-1935).

In the Argentine context, it was already addressed by Germani (1964) and Heintz (1970). It is a serious problem because it involves deviant behavior, largely due to the perceived distance between the goals aspired to and the lack of sufficient institutionalized means to achieve them.

In our study with exchange students, the issue of anomie is relevant precisely because their future expectations could be affected by the difficulties, they face in achieving an acceptable level of achievement, due to the gap between "possible" goals, as portrayed by the media and networks ("display effects"), and the institutionalized means to achieve them, at least at the economic level.

Indeed, they live in an underdeveloped country, and Heintz (1970, p. 29) defines underdevelopment precisely by the presence of "...growing expectations or consumption aspirations that are highly divergent from the existing standard of living." This gap is associated with the category of anomic tension.

And Argentina fell again in the international classification as an underdeveloped country, having previously been considered "emerging" after decades of great prosperity in the last century.

During these decades, development policies and the open structure of our society encouraged individuals to "move up" socially, and this rise materialized, both socially and educationally, as well as economically. However, this phenomenon of abrupt growth followed by periods of marked stagnation generated structural imbalances with different profiles over time, or status inconsistencies (Heintz, 1965; Hollinshead, Ellis, & Kirbb, 1954; Jackson, 1962; Jackson and Burke, 1965; Jackson, Burke, & Curtis, 1972; Benoit-Smullyan, 1969; Lensky, 1954; also Murillo & Azaretto, 2017; Aparicio, 1993, 1994 a and b).

As far as we are concerned, this inconsistency persists today. Furthermore, the increase in anomic behavior in recent years in the country is striking, although it was expected given the situation of uncertainty and successive macrostructural crises, coupled with rising inequality (observed in terms of rising poverty and unemployment or underemployment rates). This has led in recent years to a marked exodus of professionals abroad (Aparicio, 2023). This situation presents us with a relevant sociological phenomenon. On a different, epistemological level, the presence of these opposing profiles of status inconsistency – always in conflict – would reveal the sustained interplay of micro-meso-macro-micro factors in the observed effects. The axes of the author's theory (2015 a and b) are thus observed on the empirical level.

1.1.4. On the Burnout Syndrome

The term burnout means "being burned out." The term was used in the aerospace industry to describe the depletion of rocket fuel as a result of excessive heat. It was also used to refer to the psychological consequences of prolonged drug use. Freudenberger (1974, 1975) linked this concept to work, understanding it as exhaustion, leading to extreme exhaustion in the workplace. Studies on burnout syndrome began with nurses and other healthcare professionals, educators (teachers), and social workers (social workers, police officers). In 1976, Maslach also conducted research with helping professions. Over the years, its use has spread to other work settings. According to Maslach (2001), the history of burnout research can be distinguished between two phases: exploratory (since its emergence in the mid-1970s in the United States) and empirical (which includes systematic empirical research). Freudenberger (1974) defined the syndrome as the state of fatigue or frustration that results from dedication to a cause, a way of life, or a relationship that does not produce the expected reinforcement. People over-dedicate themselves to work to achieve a positive opinion of themselves. This, from a positive perspective, can lead to high motivation and personal commitment, but from another perspective, it can lead to poor work performance and low self-esteem if their ideals are frustrated. The condition is characterized by exhaustion and exhaustion in coping with work demands. The individual has difficulty controlling their emotions, feels overwhelmed by the demands, and begins to become more rigid and cynical.

As early as 1986, Maslach and Jackson defined the syndrome as the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low personal accomplishment that occurs in individuals who work with people. The authors propose a triadic construct that includes three dimensions: burnout (loss of emotional resources), dehumanization (negative attitudes toward those around them and the beneficiaries of the services they provide), and lack of personal accomplishment (they evaluate themselves negatively at work, feel they have not been able to achieve their goals, and experience low self-esteem and energy levels).

Pines and Aronson (1988) extended the syndrome to professions other than helping ones, since the exhaustion that burnout entails – mental, emotional, and physical – represents an excessive and chronic commitment, and can be observed in other fields. Emotional exhaustion leads to widespread hopelessness, both at work and in life itself. However, for our purposes here, Brill's (1984) contribution is important. The author places the lack of recognition and the absence of expectations at the center of the syndrome, considering that without the presence of this last factor and negative beliefs about oneself and what one's work entails, one cannot strictly speak of burnout (cf. Aparicio 2009 c).

From a clinical perspective, it involves a state of generalized dissatisfaction as a response to chronic stress; from a social perspective, it implies a process in which multiple factors converge. Gil Monte (2005) argues that the syndrome must be addressed from both perspectives, taking into account both the individual and the stressful context and organizations.

Three lines of research can be identified depending on the factors emphasized: individual/personal factors (the individual's biography, their expectations of themselves and the world of work, their self-perception of their competencies, their overvalued or undervalued self-image, cf. Pérez Jauregui, 2005); group factors where interaction plays an essential role (attitudes, prejudices, alienation); and organizational factors that may favor the emergence of the syndrome.

There are several explanatory models for burnout. However, to place the notion of expectations at its core, we are interested in: a) the social competence model (Harrison, 1983), in which individuals have very high job expectations but encounter barriers that prevent them from achieving their goals. As a result, they become frustrated (cf. studies by Gil Monte & Peiró, cit. infra). b) Cherniss's model (1980, 1993), based on Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, which emphasizes perceived self-efficacy and the value of individuals' beliefs about their ability to control situations and achieve their goals. When this is not possible, they become frustrated and "burn out." c) The self-control model, also proposed in 1993 by Thompson, Page, and Cooper. The authors establish four axes to explain the emergence of burnout: the gap between the resources available to the individual and the requirements of the task, their level of self-awareness, their sense of self-confidence, and their expectations of success. d) The social comparison and exchange model (Bunk & Schaufeli, 1993). The authors work with nurses. They consider that among the stressor variables are uncertainty due to not knowing clearly how to act in front of patients and lack of control over one's own actions.[3]

Finally, burnout has generated numerous studies in different contexts given the importance that the syndrome continues to have in current work settings. What we are interested in highlighting here is that the Expectations factor plays a central role (cf. Aparicio, CONICET link, particularly 2009, 2013 b. Also, Aparicio, 2003, 2007 b, 2009 a, b, c, 2010, 2014; 2015 a and 2015

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[3] Other models can be seen in Mansilla Izquierdo, 2009.

b; 2016, 2021. In 2004 a and b there is an interesting synthesis. Consult there for the most important advances since the "founding fathers": Maslach, 1976; Maslach & Pines, 1977; Harrison, 1993; Thompson, Page & Cooper, 1993; Bunk & Schaufeli,1993; Cherniss 1980, 1993; Gil Monte & Peiró, 1997, 1999; Gil Monte, 2002; Golembiewski, Munzenrider & Carter, 1983; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; 1986; Pines, 1993; Pines & Maslach, 1978; Pines and Aronson, 1988; Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996; Moreno Jimenez, Bustos, Matallana & Miralles, 1997; Pines & Kafry, 1981; Pines, 1988, 1993; Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach & Jackson, 1996; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2001; Salanova 2009; Salanova, Martínez, Bresó, Llorens & Grau, 2005; Salanova, Bresó & Schaufeli, 2005; Salanova, 2006, 2009; Rabasa, 2007; Langballe, Falkum, Innstrand & Aasland, 2006; Salanova & Llorens, 2008; 2011; Pérez Jáuregui, 2005.

2. International Academic Mobility and Government Expectations for Employability

The question is: Do the expectations of governments and stakeholders coincide? In higher education internationalization programs, governments' expectations focused on the idea that it would be an employability strategy, but is it a strategy for students, according to their perspectives?

Our reference here is the Bologna process, with all the associated declarations (Sorbonne Declaration, Prague Declaration, 1998, 1999, 2001).

In Latin America, the reference is the Alfa-Tuning Latin America Program (2007) (see Glavinich, Aparicio, Duarte, 2020). The internationalization of higher education is the central theme in all of them. The promotion of International Academic Mobility (IAM) is one of the objectives, as stated by Bergan (2019), to facilitate employability in a globalized and uncertain world (cf. Aparicio PICTO 2016-2022, 2025 b sent).

Skills development also plays a central role, following Kallionen's (2010) definition. In Latin America, Beneitone's (2007) approach to inequalities in the internationalization of higher education is interesting. The topic has been widely developed in Aparicio, 2020, 2024, 2025 a. Also see articles on link CONICET.

Regarding developments made by international organizations, we have referred to documents and reports from UNESCO, the OECD (2018 a, b and c; 2022 a, b; OECD 6 ILO, 2018, and the World Economic Forum. Also see references Aparicio, 2024, 2025 a.

Hypothesis

In this group of advanced students who undertake International Academic Mobility, it would be expected that they will have high expectations regarding their future employment and factors linked to Professional Achievement (position achieved, income level, satisfaction with developing in their professional field, acceptable socioeconomic level, and upward professional mobility).

2. Method

A quantitative, but primarily qualitative, methodology was used.

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[4] To observe data processing using this latter

technique, see, to take a few cases, Aparicio and

2.1. Population: We have conducted three studies with exchange students (cf. Aparicio, 2024, 2025 a, 2025 b). Here, we worked with the population of the third study, which focuses on the internationalization of higher education and, in particular, International Academic Mobility (IAM), which was carried out during the pandemic. These were exchange students who traveled abroad from the National University of Cuyo (UNCUYO), Argentina, and those who arrived at this university from abroad. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent. Therefore, the study was primarily qualitative and relied on the social representations shared by this group regarding their expectations for their professional future, using closed-ended items, open-ended items (in which they openly expressed their desires), and items constructed using the hierarchical recall technique. Because it was conducted with groups of exchange students who traveled during 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the population was significantly reduced, as many decided not to participate in the exchange or decided to cancel it and return home. It is also important to note that, although UNCuyo's institutional strategy is internationalization through academic mobility, it receives small groups of students. In this case, given the special circumstances, the group addressed represents 20% of the population for that year. Finally, it should be noted that the interviews were conducted later via Zoom/WhatsApp given the impossibility of working with them in the same year as the exchange.

2.2. Techniques: A semi-structured survey, semi-structured interview, short life stories, and ranked recall were used (hierarchical evocations technique, Abric, 2001). This allows us to observe the shared representations of the exchange students and the order of priority assigned to some of them.[4]

Regarding the short life stories, these were voluntary: some subjects expressed interest in explaining certain situations that influenced their international academic mobility. Others focused on the effects produced, highlighting both positive and negative aspects.

2.3. Variables: The study included baseline, psychosocial, pedagogical-institutional, organizational, and psychosocial variables (See Aparicio, CONICET link, Scientific Production, multiple articles presenting models involving these variables). Here, we focus on the variable "Expectations," particularly linked to Professional Positioning, Future Employment, and Weakening due to the Fall in Expectations Regarding the Future in a country with a high level of anomie (cf. References from Argentine newspapers about Anomie, Social Mobility, Intergenerational Mobility, Professional Mobility, the Situation of the Middle Classes in Recent Years, its Impact on Health, among other aspects).

3. Results

Núñez, 2021, 2024.The technique has been widely

used by the author, especially since 2009 d.

We present the results in two parts.

First, and for the sake of brevity, we only report the findings related to the Aspirations/Expectations expressed by exchange Students their professional future (D.V.).

Second, we compare the findings with those obtained from another study with extensive temporal and spatial coverage conducted at the UTN with graduate and postgraduate students.

3.1. Results Exchange Students (IAM)

Exchange students were first asked if they saw education (considered globally, and higher education in particular) as a channel for advancement, and the answer was positive. The "myth" about the value of education persists in a country where education has always been free (including university education) and where immigrants placed all their hopes on the growth they sought.

When asked about their short-term growth expectations associated with having undertaken academic mobility abroad and participating in excellence programs, the vast majority responded that this exchange period would not influence their level of future professional achievement, considered globally. Specifically, they were asked if they thought it would influence increased income, quality of life, career mobility, and the opportunities for faster and better job placement (always linking these future effects to the mobility period, the special training received, and, presumably, the new skills acquired). The majority stated that participation in this internationalization program would not have a major impact on their professional life, globally considered.

However, when asked about their belief in the advancement of their professional field relative to other professional fields, they were somewhat more positive. The same occurred when asked about their belief in the possibilities for long-term advancement (the next 10 years) (cf. Dalle, 2015; Dalle, 2016; Murillo & Azzaretto, 2017).

Given their responses, a question arises: What meaning did this mobility abroad have for them? What were they fundamentally seeking?

Analyzing the stories, the vast majority sought to participate in internationalization programs to access other cultures, to experience new worlds; only secondarily did some subjects express interests linked to acquiring knowledge (for example, learning another language) or accessing other know-how, procedures, and methodologies. A special place was occupied by what we called intercultural competencies and psychosocial competencies, such as listening and communication, despite the challenges they entail, and integration in environments where inclusion and diversity are not always widespread. Several reported feelings discriminated against. Academics interested them only insofar as participating in other academic programs implies immersing themselves in other ways of learning, learning new ways of operating institutions, and approaching theoretical teaching differently than practical teaching, accessing new technologies, consolidating and/or prioritizing competencies other than those related to the discipline.[5] In other words, they did not express expectations regarding the

variables that measured economic development or possibilities for better job placement or faster career progression. Many referred to the influence of a conflictive and uncertain global environment, coupled with a national context in which expressions of anomie are increasing (Aparicio, 2023; Sidicaro, 2015; Hernández, 2018; Cabot; Durán Barba, 2023). Finally, they did not display high expectations (short stories) because they noticed a strong disconnect between the institutional context (universities) and the organizational context (businesses, the State), and between the competencies developed and the competencies required. What they highlight is related to what is observed in reality: the university is far from training the skills required by the working world, to the point that, despite unemployment, many companies cannot hire university graduates due to the quasi-vacancy of essential skills to perform these positions (especially at the procedural level, know-how) and the lack of psychosocial skills, which go beyond theoretical knowledge (Brangier & Tarquinio, 1997, Aparicio, CONICET link).

3.2. Results related to previous research with university graduates and postgraduates

Results similar to those found among exchange students were found in a study by the author (2004b), which analyzed the psychosocial responses of university graduates from the UTN, Mendoza Region, who entered the university from 1987 (15 cohorts from five engineering-related programs) to 2002 (the first phase of the study), and a population of graduates who completed a postgraduate degree (Specialization or Master's degree) at the same university during this extended period (extended in a second phase) and who arrived from different universities in the region.

The population consisted of 253 subjects, of these 200 were employed, suffering from unemployment (20% of the total), a figure that was quite consistent with that of graduates from the later cohorts. The postgraduate population was N=92.

The study combined quantitative and qualitative methodology. A semi-structured survey was administered, covering a broad range of variables and more than 300 indicators that allowed for the analysis of academic and occupational achievement, and their interrelationship. Items indicative of expectations were included according to the area of performance and occupational situation. In addition, specific tests were administered and interviews were conducted with each graduate, with the managers of consulting firms recruiting personnel for large companies in our area, and with the HR directors of companies recruiting UTN graduates and postgraduates.

The results were presented in two sections: 1) Graduates and 2) Postgraduates. Regarding Employment Expectations, in both cases, the relationship between the achieved Employment Status/Strate, Expectations (Attrition), and Sector of Employment (Public or Private) was analyzed.

Overall, among graduates:

- Those working in the lower echelons of the workforce appeared more fatalistic and burned out. This is in line with what much of

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[5] The qualitative analysis of the testimonies will be presented in an article related to the internationalization and valuation of intercultural and eco-citizenship competencies.

the literature indicates (particularly from hyperfunctionalist perspectives).

- Those working in the public sector were more burned out in terms of expectations. The findings coincide with those of another study conducted with graduates who worked solely for the State (Aparicio, 2013 b). This seems to be a constant: the State does not appear to be a space that favors fulfillment and development seen from an autonomous perspective: promotion is not based on competencies but on seniority and, in line with results, also on alignment with superiors.

Individuals in the higher echelons of the workforce, primarily employed in the private sector, showed higher expectations regarding their future employment (i.e., lower levels of burnout), even more so when they associate these expectations with themselves rather than with the country's policies. In summary, it was concluded that the level of Burnout seen from the Encouraged Expectations varies significantly according to Labor Stratum and according to Area/Sector of Performance, being more optimistic those who are in higher positions in the occupational scale and in the private sector.[6]

Furthermore, both graduates and postgraduates were quite optimistic about their position in the next two years, that is, in the short term. In other words, they had encouraging expectations; even more so considering that the country was experiencing one of its worst economic crises, with a significant drop in employment levels. The situation, while showing a certain level of wear and tear and anomie, also allowed for a certain level of hope.

Regarding postgraduates, a rather positive picture was observed.

It was striking, first of all, that there was no unemployment in the sample (only one subject), compared to the 20% unemployment rate cited among graduates. This would indicate that an additional higher education, such as a postgraduate degree, already influences a better position in the labor market and even employment at a time of high unemployment in the country. Excellent education influenced a better real market position. Although diplomas have been devalued, as Passeron (1982) said with a diploma you're not much, but without a diploma you're a "nobody". A master's degree or PhD seems to protect against unemployment.

Furthermore, the majority of postgraduates worked in the public sector. However, they were not fatalistic: 63% believed the employment situation would improve in two years, 70% expressed hope for future employment (which would improve), and although they have hope for personal growth in the short term, they do not believe in growth when it is associated with national policies. Anomie had been emerging for more than 20 years.

The table allows us to ask a question in light of the syndrome described by Perez Jauregui (2005) in relation to burnout, which he calls "over-adaptation." In other words, one might wonder whether this response, surreptitiously, does not contain a certain tendency toward adaptation in order to "survive" in complex work environments and in macro-conflict contexts.

The scenario is interesting. In these studies, the first of their kind in the country, fatalism did not prevail.

In the recent research with exchange students, before entering the market, they no longer had short-term or long-term economic expectations.

If we compare the findings and observed trends, this leads us to believe that we are in the presence of a "pre-employment" syndrome, distinct from burnout as described by the founding fathers, although it also has Expectations as a central component. Indeed, the level of expectations, comparing recent results with those of 25 years ago, shows a deterioration, a decline, a weakening, a liquefaction. Immediacy and uncertainty combine in this new syndrome, which, having been found in several studies with exchange students, leads us to believe that it could be a generational aspirational phenomenon.

In fact, different populations of exchange students approached by the author within the framework of higher education internationalization programs display the same characteristics: little confidence in being able to achieve their original goals due to the severe limits imposed by a constantly changing market with much more specific demands in terms of skills.

And as with burnout syndrome, we wonder if it might not be a kind of "over-adaptation syndrome," a "tacit acceptance" of market conditions and, even more so, of the international situation we are witnessing, which is increasingly uncertain and changing for everyone, not just young people. This acceptance could facilitate a certain adaptation and/or "survival" in a context adverse to personal/professional development, despite having received excellent training from which very few benefit worldwide. In the terms of Gramlich & Price (1991), the "over-adaptation syndrome" would favor life within the system and protect against fatalism.

Furthermore, this situation would be evidencing a change in the system of beliefs and shared social representations regarding the value placed on education as a channel for professional advancement (career mobility) (Dubar, 2000).

The importance of the theories we have referred to clearly emerges when trying to understand how context impacts the levels of expectations for the future and how these expectations might influence the professional future of these exchange students. Feedback from the micro, meso, and macro levels emerges clearly (Aparicio 2015 a and b). See also Lens, 1993; Simon et al., 2004; Luykx et al., 2010; Nuttin, 2014; Aparicio & Cros, 2015 c for motivation and future prospects).

To conclude:

The presence of unstable expectations, a decline in hopes of positioning oneself in the market and improving one's quality of life, is important not only from an economic perspective but also because of its impact on identity and what work represents for many: self-realization, dignity, achievement, creativity (Jahoda, Lazarsfeld & Zeise, 1971; Jahoda, 1987; Dubar, 2000; Lipiansky, 2008; Aparicio, 2012, 2013a; 2014b; Silva & Aparicio, 2015. See also several publications related to identity linked to professionalization at CONICET link).

Furthermore, if we consider the support provided by motivational, attributional, and burnout theories, the decline in expectations does not facilitate the achievement of goals or self-realization for individuals, making the workplace a frustrating experience (at the micro level). Insecurity and insufficient income, inadequate for one's abilities, therefore contribute to existential emptiness and psychosocial disintegration.

At the societal-macro level, this leads to anomie, a lack of hope,

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[6] The relationships were significant (p<0.001).

credibility, and life plans.

The feedback from both systems – macro and micro, mediated by institutions – with the visible effects, should become a focus of concern and innovation for national education and employment policies.

Finally, why compare the results with those obtained in university populations almost 25 years ago?

There are common aspects and two different aspects that we wish to highlight.

As common aspects, we point out: a) these are studies conducted with subjects who have achieved the highest level of education and who, to that extent – if education continues to be associated with personal, professional, and occupational achievement – would be expected to foster expectations of achieving a certain level of occupational achievement; b) they address expectations regarding their placement in the world of work in the short, medium, and long term as a key variable; c) at the time both studies were conducted, a large exodus of professionals abroad was observed in the country. The accounts of those who emigrated, reported by the main media, based their decision on low expectations of professional advancement in conflictive political and economic contexts.

As different aspects, exchange students show greater negativity regarding the possibilities that would open up linked to their particular training. We would be witnessing an underlying change in the shared representations of these groups regarding the expectations placed on their education versus professional advancement.

However, there is a central difference that would allow us to speak of another syndrome. Indeed, in the previous research, the focus was on university graduates already in the workforce, which made it possible to describe certain levels of burnout observed based on their expectations (a component of burnout).

In contrast, in the case of exchange students, these are university students who have not yet entered the workforce and who already express low expectations regarding their immediate professional future. This could also be influenced by the lack of sufficient social models of achievement, according to Bandura's theory: young people emigrate in search of a future, even though they know that uprooting entails other types of conflicts.

Everything seems to indicate that there would be a more widespread hopelessness among university students, seen from their perceptions or social representations.[7]

For this reason, we called this condition "Pre-Occupational Hopelessness Syndrome or Fragile Expectations due to Uncertainty about the Future."

The components of both syndromes change. In burnout, we referred to three components. In these young people, there is a common factor: expectations, but they are comparatively fragile.

Finally, this scenario – in our initial opinion – has two aspects; it would be an ambivalent scenario. On the one hand, it is negative if one considers that expectations are the basis of our actions and the planning of the steps to follow. To that extent, they could be impacting young people's future planning.

On the other hand, and from a "positive" perspective, the perception of everyone sharing "liquid goals" in "liquid" and globalized environments could be generating a certain tacit acceptance... In the face of uncertainty, there are not many dreams left to pursue, no matter how hard they may take. And this tacit acceptance facilitates the "survival" within the current system. However, this widespread attitude could indicate the existence of "anomic conformism."

The evidence supports the interpretation of the observed phenomenon in light of theories linking Expectations and Achievement (psychological and sociological).

Finally, in light of the findings and taking into account educational policy theories, it can be argued that the disconnect between Higher Education and Employment, which already appeared in our initial research (1995) and which continued to emerge clearly in light of predictive models (2005a/2009a and 2007a and b), remains present today. The university is not responding to the needs of the context; the relevance factor, one of the four central factors within the conception of quality, should be strengthened (Sander, 1994). In other words, if education were a crucial factor in professional development, it would be unlikely that almost 100% of exchange students would detract from their future market position.

Also, from the perspective of international education policies, and particularly since the Bologna Process and all its implications, the Internationalization of Higher Education, conceived as a tool that would facilitate employability along with mobility, is failing to fulfill that role, at least in the social representations of these primary actors: exchange students. This does not mean that it has ceased to be a highly valued tool in other aspects of a globalized world, including interculturality.

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[7] They are not addressed here from linkage analysis (Aparicio, 1978, 2001) or from predictive models (Aparicio 2005 a / 2009 a).

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La Nación. Soledad Vallejos. Universidad: a los alumnos de menos ingresos no solo les cuesta más acceder, sino también llegar a recibirse [*University: lower-income students not only have a harder time getting into college, but also graduating*]**.** 20 January 2022

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Data

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