Educational Aspiration and the Initial College Experience of High School Graduate Students in Aguascalientes, Mexico

La aspiración educativa y la experiencia de ingreso a la educación superior de los estudiantes que egresan de bachillerato en Aguascalientes, México

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the relationship between personal, family, and school variables, and educational aspiration, as well as expectations on transition to higher education in high school graduate students. It also examines their initial college experience. The theoretical framework based on key concepts related to educational aspiration, expectations on transition to higher education, and the experience of entering into higher education. The study was conducted using mixed methodology. First, a survey was administered to a statewide stratified sample made up of 2,113 high school senior students. Once they graduated and, based on the survey findings, Interviews with 40 students were conducted. They have different expectations for transition to higher education, different ages, and of varying academic achievement in order to analyze their transition from high school into higher education. The results show that high school senior students' educational aspirations and expectations on transition to higher education are associated with their academic achievement, socio-economic level, and their perception of family support. The initial college experience, for those who made the transition, is influenced by institutional efforts to involve the students and to support them to face the challenge represented by this level of academic study.

Keywords: high school students, educational aspirations, entry into higher education

Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objetivo explorar la relación entre variables personales, familiares y escolares y la aspiración educativa y las expectativas de transición de los estudiantes que egresan de bachillerato, así como profundizar en su experiencia inicial de ingreso a la educación superior. Como referentes teóricos se plantea una perspectiva de la aspiración educativa y las expectativas de transición, así como la experiencia del ingreso a la educación superior. Se utilizó una metodología mixta. Primero se aplicó una encuesta a una muestra estratificada por subsistema y representativa a nivel estatal constituida por 2.113 estudiantes que egresaban de bachillerato; una vez que egresaron y con base en los resultados de la encuesta, se entrevistaron 40 estudiantes con distintas expectativas de transición, edad y rendimiento académico, para profundizar en su experiencia de transición del bachillerato hacia la educación superior. Los resultados muestran que las aspiraciones educativas y la experiencia de transición de los jóvenes están relacionadas con su rendimiento académico, su nivel socioeconómico y la percepción del apoyo familiar. En el ingreso a la educación superior cobran relevancia las acciones realizadas por la institución para involucrar al estudiante, así como el hecho de que este perciba apoyo para enfrentar el reto académico que representa este nivel de estudios.

Palabras clave: estudiantes de bachillerato, aspiraciones educativas, ingreso a la educación superior

In Mexico, upper secondary education, which was declared obligatory in 2012, is made up of approximately 35 different subsystems, organized in three models: general, technological and professional technical baccalaureates. Just 53.0% of young people aged between 15 and 17 complete this level of education, with a graduation rate of 62% (Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación [INEE], 2013; INEE, n.d.; SEP, 2012). This data, together with the socioeconomic problems that exist in the country, explain why the transition to higher education is precarious. This is reflected in the consequently poor coverage levels, which reach 27.6% on national level and 34.9% in Aguascalientes (INEE, 2013).

As stated above, almost half of the population age-group to which the baccalaureate is addressed does not attend the course, and only 3 out of every 10 university-age youngsters are registered in higher education. Hence the importance of understanding the transition process from high school into higher education, with the purpose of including elements that may contribute to improving it. This is the central objective of the study here described.

This article, which reports a part of that research, intends to: a) recognize the educational aspirations and transition expectations of youngsters in the sixth semester of the baccalaureate in Aguascalientes, b) identify the relationship between educational aspirations and personal, family and school variables and c) describe the initial entry experience into higher education of this same group of young people.

Conceptual framework

Throughout this work, three central concepts are employed: educational aspirations, transition expectations and the initial experience of entry into higher education.

Educational aspirations

For the purposes of this study, *educational aspirations* are understood as the highest academic degree that the young people hope to obtain. According to García-Castro and Bartolucci (2007), these aspirations are the «result of an appraisal of what is appropriate and possible for an individual based on the specific condition in which they perceive themselves and their situation» (p. 1269). Therefore, it is possible to understand that educational aspirations come from different variables. According to these authors, two of the most significant variables are gender —differences continue to be identified between the aspirations of men and women— and age, since being 18 years old or less at the end of the baccalaureate can be considered more appropriate to continue studying.

Academic performance has also been associated with educational aspirations. In general, the willingness to enter into higher education is stronger among those who obtain better results (Program for International Student Assessment [PISA], 2012).

Moreover, there are family-related variables that have been associated with young peoples' aspirations. Havighurst (1964), as cited in Wahl and Blackhurst (2000), indicates that children identify themselves with the adults who work within their context. For this reason, their occupational aspirations are strongly related to those of their parents, especially with those of their mothers, who are closest to them. In this way, variables such as parents' education level and occupation, the interaction between parents and children, and parents expectations and aspirations regarding higher education gain relevance, to mention just a few (Altamirano, Hernández, & Soloaga, 2012; Ochoa & Diez-Martínez, 2009; Portes, Aparicio, Haller, & Vickstrom, 2011; Silas, 2011). In particular, Jiménez (2004) provided a description of the variables involved in the formation of pathways associated with aspirations: a) social conditions: social context or economic territory, social class, family origin and gender; b) public and private offers of training and employment, vocational integration mechanisms and policies; and c) the individual's abilities, attitudes and strategies: family microclimate, peer group, etc., with regard to construction of self-image, value system, attitudes and expectations (p. 2).

Transition expectations

According to Figuera, Dorio and Forner (2001) the transition to higher education is defined as «a process that depends on a range of environmental and contextual factors» (p. 4). Walter (2004) and Gómez (2013), reported that transition to higher education is not always continuous or lineal; there are a wide range of options for young people, such as, studying, working and then studying, or studying and working at the same time.

In relation to this, Gómez (2013) refers to the transition to higher education as:

The period of time in the schooling-path of an individual which begins in the last year of the baccalaureate, considering that during this time students are provided with a series of elements which allow them to take the decision of whether to continue professional studies or not. It concludes when the student is able to enter and remain for at least one year into a higher education institution, as well as the set of variables that are linked to the resolution of this process (p. 26).

Therefore, this works starts from this conception, mentioning that the options that young people have

planned upon finishing the baccalaureate are considered as *transition expectations*, on the understanding that these could materialize or not. Transition expectations are also associated with a similar set of variables to those described for aspiration.

Entry into higher education

As part of that transition process, the experience of students who enter into higher education is considered the beginning of a new phase. It can be relatively simple or difficult to handle, depending on the characteristics of the institution and the degree program chosen, making sense of experiencing a new setting (Ramírez, 2013). Finishing the baccalaureate gives students the possibility to access higher education. This is relevant because students, who abandon the school face greater difficulties finding employment, as well as a greater probability of being involved in a criminal or violent conduct and drug abuse. Furthermore, this discontinues the formation of young people as participative citizens, and limits their sense of having a life project (Rumberger, 2012).

The choice of institution and the degree program are not a simple task, given that young people must make this decision in a context in which a wide range of options exist. Additionally, they have misconceptions about different degrees, and there is a lack of information available about them (Camarena, González, & Velarde, 2009). This choice involves the young person's integration in academic communities, and as such their permanence can be derived both from academic and social systems. And it reflects both the student's personal and intellectual integration in the institution, with the difficulties that he/she will need to overcome (Tinto, 2012).

Different authors have undertaken the task of exploring students' experiences during their first year of university studies. This moment is recognized as crucial, given that if the young person fails to adapt successfully during the first year of university, it is highly probable that he/she will have subsequent difficulties, even abandoning his/her studies (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, & Kinzie, 2008; Schrader & Brown, 2008).

Authors such as Gairín, Muñoz, Feixas and Guillamón (2009), Brinkworth, McCann, Matthews and Nordström (2009), Gibney, Moore, Murphy and O´Sullivan (2011) and Silva (2011), refer to the transition from high school into higher education as a challenge for the students. It represents a change in which they must adapt themselves to different practices from those that they were used to in previous educational levels, such as time administration, greater autonomy and more responsibility for their studies. Silva (2011) adds other factors such as the inconsistency between students' expectations and the reality of university life, and the lack of information about the new educational level. Silva also notes a lack of motivation due to not having entered into their first-choice career, and the lack of commitment by the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to successfully integrate new students, to mention just a few.

Gairín et al. (2009) recognize that making an effort for this transition to be as gradual as possible for the students has special importance because, among other reasons:

> … it has a positive effect on students' self-esteem, their academic performance and their socialization process, and at the same time it has an impact on the prevention of falling behind and dropping out of studies. The student population is increasingly heterogeneous due to the diversification of access routes, cultural diversity, prior professional experience, transversal competences, etc. Social and academic integration of the student are the key to their formative success (p. 29).

The adoption of new behaviors and norms requires a change and adjustment of previous behavior patterns, adapting to those of the community in which one is inserting, and in turn, adjusting one's own behavior to those of the new community. Ramírez (2013) indicates that in this phase, the students know where they come from, but not where they are going. Ramírez also assumes that this experience of change is reflected in continuity between what is known and the new circle to which they are arriving, but also in other situations where there is a discontinuity or a big difference with regard to previous experiences. Ramírez adds that this transition phase can be more or less difficult depending on the linkage that mediates between aspirations and expectations that the students and their families have about higher education, and with the meaning that the students give to this new setting.

Methodology: approaches, instruments and participants

As Creswel (2003) indicates, it is difficult to explore social science phenomena from a single approach. Mixed approaches allow to capture in great detail its complexity. This study choose this type of approach for that reason. Hernández, Fernández and Baptista (2010) define it as «The systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study in order to obtain a more complete image of the phenomenon» (p. 546).

The mixed approach in this study followed a sequential *quantitative/qualitative* implementation. That is to say, the dominant approach, is the quantitative perspective, and this is subsequently complemented by the qualitative approach. This design type is focused on exploratory research, with quantitative data and qualitative analysis classified by Pereira (2011) as type VI. The quantitative data was obtained in the first phase, and in the second stage, which was derived from the first one, the qualitative data was collected. In the first phase, this methodology captures the transition expectations for higher education and educational aspirations, as well as the relationship of both with other variables that, according to the literature, are related to them. In the case of this article, preliminary results, about educational aspirations of students and how they relate to a set of variables, are observed. Based on the results from the first phase, it was considered important to monitor some students following them from their graduation of high school (sixth semester). Hence individual interviews were conducted in the second phase. In this report, preliminary results of students' experience who aspired to attend higher education and achieved it, are presented.

The quantitative phase

With respect to the quantitative component, a correlational design using surveys, by random and representative sample of the 10 high school subsystems in the state of Aguascalientes was employed. The unit of observation was sixth-semester students.

A questionnaire, which was submitted to students in the sixth semester of the baccalaureate, was designed and validated. This instrument explored the transition expectations, educational aspirations, school record and context of the students. It was compounded of 39 questions distributed in 7 sections: *Rapport,* personal details, family details, school records, information provided by the school about the baccalaureate, students' options about the baccalaureate, future plans and contact details. Two versions were designed: the first printed and the other one in electronic format.

For sample selection, the 2012-2013 school year was considered. In this period the total enrollment of students in the sixth semester of the baccalaureate in Aguascalientes was 12,090, distributed in 13 different subsystems. Based on this information, a statewide subsystem stratified sample was designed, with a confidence interval of 95.0%.

It was decided to work only with the classroom-based school subsystems, six of which are public, and to group the private baccalaureates in two categories, based on the fees charged, those that aim to absorb existing demand and those of elite. The public subsystems were: Technological and Scientific Education Centers of Aguascalientes (CECYTEA, according to its Spanish acronym); The National College of Technical Professional Education (CONALEP, according to its Spanish acronym); the General Direction of Baccalaureate (DGB, according to its Spanish acronym; only for public baccalaureates); the General Direction of Agricultural and Livestock Technological Education (DGETA); the General Direction of Industrial Technological Education (DGETI); and the Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes' baccalaureate (UAA). The adjusted sample included 2,552 students. A total of 2,149 responded questionnaires were received, of which 2,113 were useful for this analysis.

To process the data the computer program SPSS 19.0 was used. The relationship between the variables was established using the Chi-squared test.

The qualitative phase

According to Hernández, Fernández and Baptista (2010), the qualitative design is phenomenological. It aims to understand phenomena from the point of view of each participant, and the meanings assigned

to their experience through semi-structured individual interviews (as cited in Salgado, 2007). Interviews with 40 students were conducted who were intentionally selected from those who responded to the questionnaire in the first phase and, represented different profiles.

From the results of the survey, 18 different student profiles were constructed, based on transition expectations (study, find work, combine both studying and working or another option), age and academic performance. The selection of the students to be interviewed was carried out taking into consideration that respondents had already graduated from the baccalaureate and were entering into higher education.

Four interview scripts were designed with the purpose to gain in depth knowledge of the students' experiences upon transitioning from the baccalaureate to different directions: higher education, the combination of higher education with a work activity or another type of activity. As a whole, these scripts explored different issues, including the activity that the students were undertaking when the interview was carried out, the transition process (background and description), entry into higher education in terms of their perception of the degree course, institution, professors and classmates, aspirations and plans. The scripts also analyzed the students' position in other types of circumstances, aspects associated to the decision to find a job, employment characteristics and perceptions about work activities. Furthermore, the level of congruence between how they answered to the questionnaire upon graduating from the baccalaureate and their reality at the point of conducting the interview was examined. Inquiries about the adaptation process into higher education and their future plans were also made.

In this report, the results of 23 interviewees, whose expectation was to study or study and work are presented. The rest of the interviews corresponded to other young people's profiles, will be published at a later article. The interviews were recorded mostly in an enclosed room.

Results

Characteristics of students graduated from baccalaureate

Of the 2,113 students surveyed, 57.2% were female and 87.3% studied the baccalaureate within the designated age range. A socioeconomic variable was defined based on three questions: if the student had worked or not during the baccalaureate, parents' educational level and parents' occupation. 36.3% of students were identified as being from low Socioeconomic Status (SES), 24.3% from high SES, and the remainder from medium SES.

Regarding educational aspirations, 27.9% of the respondents aspired to study a doctoral degree, 32.5% to master degree, 27.0% to undergraduate degree and only 12.5% mentioned that the baccalaureate would be their highest academic degree.

In relation with transition expectations, 26.5% of the students declared that they would continue studying upon finishing the baccalaureate, 61.1% reported that they would study and work, while the rest said that they would not study. Additionally, it was revealed that a higher percentage of female aspire to study both undergraduate degrees (27.5%), as well as graduate specialization courses, or master degrees (34.7%). In contrast, a greater percentage of male aspired to study a doctoral degree (28.1%). However, the highest percentage of young people said they would study only to the baccalaureate degree were male (15.8%) (Chi-squared, p < 0.001).

The educational aspiration also varied significantly depending on the baccalaureate placement subsystem (see Table 1). In the DGETA subsystem, which is oriented towards an agricultural and technological education, whose baccalaureates are located in rural areas, one out of every four students (23.3%) indicated that they would study up to baccalaureate or technical professional level. Furthermore, this subsystem had the greatest proportion of students who reported that they would not continue to study (21.5%), with regard to transition expectations. In a similar situation, it was found that 18% of students from the two other public technological subsystems, CONALEP and CECYTEA, do not plan to continue studying. Like the CECYTEA subsystem, the most of DGETA institutions are also located in rural areas. CONALEP, in turn, is a subsystem that originally offered technical training without the possibility of continuing to higher education, and despite the fact that this changed more than a decade ago, it could still have an effect on the type of students that enter into this subsystem.

It is worth noting that this trend is also seen among students of private baccalaureates that aim to absorb existing demand (15.9%), which clearly contrasts with that reported by the students of elite private baccalaureates (0.5%). Then it could be the case that students of these four subsystems, which are also those that present lower transition expectations to higher education, do not have the economic means, required the academic level, or the personal and family conditions which would allow them to have greater aspirations and transition expectations to higher education. This interpretation requires further research.

Table 1
Educational aspiration and its relationship with education subsystems (N = 2113)

		Educational aspiration upon finishing the baccalaureate				
	N	Baccalaureate/ Technical training	Undergraduate degree	Graduate: specialization/ master	Graduate: doctorate	Total
Subsystem***						
CECYTEA	334	17.7	33.5	26.0	22.8	100.0
CONALEP	244	18.4	32.8	29.5	19.3	100.0
DGB	142	7.7	28.2	37.3	26.8	100.0
DGETA	180	23.3	40.6	22.2	13.9	100.0
DGETI	371	7.8	23.2	38.0	31.0	100.0
UAA	107	0.9	9.3	40.2	49.5	100.0
Private (demand absorption)	471	15.9	31.0	28.0	25.1	100.0
Elite private	219	0.5	8.7	43.8	47.0	100.0
Total	2,068	12.7	27.4	32.1	27.8	100.0
Chi-squared, ***p < 0.001						

Educational aspirations of students graduated from the baccalaureate and their relationship with different variables

School records. For the construction of the *academic achievement* variable, a summation index was implemented. This index considered the grade average until the fifth semester of the baccalaureate, the number of subjects failed in high school and the number of subjects failed in the baccalaureate. All of which were recoded and scored. Based on the sum of the different scores, three categories were obtained: outstanding (from 10 to 11 points), average (from 7 to 9 points) and low (from 6 to 3 points). As can be appreciated in Table 2, outstanding performance is associated with high academic aspirations, since a higher percentage of young people with this performance level aspire to study a graduate degree (p < 0.05). This information coincides with Altamirano et al. (2012) and Ochoa and Diez-Martínez (2009), who recognize the influence of aspirations on educational experiences.

Table 2
Educational aspiration and its relationship with selected school records (N = 2113)

		Educational aspiration upon finishing the baccalaureate				
	N	Baccalaureate/ Technical training	Undergraduate degree	Graduate: specialization/ master	Graduate: doctorate	Total
Academic performance index*						
Outstanding	872	10.2	24.7	34.7	30.4	100.0
Average	924	14.3	28.6	31.1	26.1	100.0
Low	304	13.8	29.3	30.6	26.3	100.0
Total	2,100	12.5	27.0	32.5	27.9	100.0
National High School Admissions Examination (EXANI, according to its Spanish acronym) average by performance level***						
Outstanding (1,150 to 1,300)	166	0.6	12.0	42.2	45.2	100.0
Satisfactory (1,000 to 1,149)	959	5.4	22.7	40.3	31.6	100.0
Unsatisfactory (700 to 999)	526	16.7	37.8	23.8	21.7	100.0
Total	1,651	8.5	26.5	35.2	29.8	100.0
Chi-squared, ***p < 0.001; *p < 0.05						

Another variable which could be examined was the score on the National Examination for Admission to Higher Education (EXANI II, according to its Spanish acronym), applied by the National Center of Evaluation for Higher Education (Ceneval, according to its Spanish acronym). These results were grouped as outstanding, satisfactory and unsatisfactory (see Table 2), and they allowed to identify that students with an outstanding level had a significantly higher percentage in terms of their aspiration to study a graduate degree, compared to those that obtained unsatisfactory scores (p < 0.001). This information is congruent with the results presented by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2012), in which it is mentioned that students with better school performance usually have higher expectations of studying at university.

Family variables. Authors such as Altamirano et al. (2012), Portes et al. (2011) and Ochoa and Diez-Martínez (2009) refer to family as one of the greatest influences on the educational aspirations of young people. A relationship demonstrated in the group surveyed. As can be observed in Table 3, higher educational aspirations are found to be associated with a family high valuing for studying and with the perception of having a large amount of support to study for a degree (p < 0.001).

Other findings that reinforce the importance of family background in the conformation of educational aspirations include having brothers or sisters who study or have studied in higher education (p < 0.001), the active participation of parents in studies (asking the young people about their school performance, solving doubts, providing school materials, attending meetings) and having technological and academic support at home are also important (p < 0.001).

Table 3
Educational aspiration and its relationship with selected family variables (N = 2113)

| | N | Educational aspiration upon finishing the baccalaureate | | | | |
		Baccalaureate/ Technical training	Undergraduate degree	Graduate: specialization/ master	Graduate: doctorate	Total
Perception of support to study for a degree: ***						
Does not perceive support from anybody	63	36.5	33.3	15.9	14.3	100.0
Perceives little support	797	11.4	29.1	31.5	28.0	100.0
Perceives medium support	536	7.1	28.2	35.8	28.9	100.0
Perceives a large amount of support	545	4.0	21.8	39.6	34.5	100.0
Total	1,941	9.0	26.9	34.5	29.6	100.0
Do you have brothers or sisters who study, or have studied in higher education? ***						
Yes	815	8.5	25.2	35.1	31.3	100.0
No	1,283	15.1	28.2	30.9	25.7	100.0
Total	2,098	12.5	27.0	32.6	27.9	100.0
In what way do your parents or tutors participate in your studies? **						
None or little participation	324	17.6	33.0	28.4	21.0	100.0
Active participation	685	12.7	27.9	33.1	26.3	100.0
Very active participation	1,084	11.0	24.4	33.6	31.0	100.0
Total	2,093	12.6	26.9	32.6	27.9	100.0
Chi-squared, ***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01						

Socioeconomic status. As can be observed in Table 4, a higher percentage of students originating from higher socioeconomic status aspire to study a graduate degree, whether a specialization course, master degree or doctorate (p < 0.001). Likewise, those who graduated from baccalaureates located in less-urbanized areas presented higher percentages of low aspirations, mentioning that they would study just the baccalaureate and an undergraduate degree. In contrast, young people originating from baccalaureates located in the capital city aspired to obtain higher-level academic degrees (p < 0.001). Institution location is related to young people socioeconomic status, since those institutions located in less-urbanized areas serving a higher percentage of young people from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Based on the previous statement, it is possible to agree with Altamirano et al. (2012) and Ochoa and Diez-Martínez (2009), who recognize socioeconomic status as a variable associated with aspirations.

Table 4
Educational aspiration and its relationship with socioeconomic status (N = 2113)

| | | Educational aspiration upon finishing the baccalaureate | | | | |
	N	Baccalaureate/ Technical training	Undergraduate degree	Graduate: specialization/ master	Graduate: doctorate	Total
Socioeconomic status***						
Low	754	19.4	34.4	25.9	20.4	100.00
Medium	818	12.2	27.5	32.9	27.4	100.00
High	506	2.0	15.4	42.3	40.3	100.00
Total	2,078	12.3	27.0	32.6	28.0	100.00
Chi-squared, ***p < 0.001						

Guidance received in the baccalaureate. Another issues investigated were the vocational guidance activities offered by the baccalaureates. In that regard, it was revealed that students originating from institutions that provided individual or group vocational guidance had greater educational aspirations (p < 0.05). Furthermore, the variable *receive information about costs, scholarships and financing* was shown to be related to educational aspirations (p < 0.01).

Regarding entry into higher education. The students were asked about 12 criteria which could be taken into account in their choice of university. In this regard, it was identified that those who had higher educational aspirations would take into account the following elements (p < 0.001): the reputation of the institution, whether it has good professors, whether it has state-of-the-art technology (p < 0.01) and whether it has well equipped facilities.

With reference to the subject area chosen, the students with aspirations to study a doctorate decide on a degree course within disciplines such as health sciences, physical, exact, natural and agricultural sciences. On the other hand, those who aspired to study for a degree in social sciences, humanities and arts obtained the highest percentages in specialization courses or master degrees (p < 0.001).

Students' transition from the baccalaureate to higher education. The initial experience

In this section, the experience that graduates from the baccalaureate have had is shown. It corresponds to those that were able to make the transition and enter into higher education.

The analysis that is presented here is focused on one of the categories defined in the interview, which is the *experience of students who have recently entered into higher education*. For this category, the following relevant factors were identified: a) perceptions about the institution and chosen degree program, as well as about professors, classmates, friends (peers) and relatives and b) what the institution does to attract students.

The experience reported by students in the transition process from the baccalaureate to higher education is part of their life journey. It is a step towards adult life that supports and prepares their future. This reflects a search for meaning and diverse learning experiences in this new setting (Ramírez, 2013), and shows evidence of their capacity to insert themselves and manage in a different context from the baccalaureate. It reflects a search for improvement, even though they come from different school backgrounds.

What students report in the process of entering into higher education is focused on the following areas. The first area refers to selecting an institution in which they could study for their degree program of interest. In this regard, the students indicate that they received information from the school in which they studied the baccalaureate, and from other institutions which visited them in their school or which sent letters to their address with educational offerings. Particularly if they studied at a public baccalaureate.

They also took into account information received in events to which they were invited, so they could get to know other institutions, such as the university fair organized by the state government or events which they attended on their own initiative. Furthermore, they carried out their investigations on the internet, and listened to and analyzed comments and advices they received or requested from teachers, relatives or friends about the quality of institutions.

> Well, my brother had an influence on me a lot. He studied here too. And because he also said that it was a very demanding school and that if you wanted to study in this way you should study here, since it was very strict. Not like in other universities, which must also be good, but they told me that here it was very demanding, and that there was a good study level (Male student with the following profile: will continue studying and working, of required age, high academic performance /16-P07Hes).

The cost of the institution's tuition fees and official registration so the studies could be recognized were relevant factors. Another element for institution selection was the admission without entrance exams, which is relevant for students with low academic performance, or, on the other hand, having to prepare for exams, in those who have outstanding performance. Finally, institutions were also selected due to their low demand as this gives students a greater chance of entering. However, for some students this is not a priority issue; rather they prioritized the recognition of institutions' quality. That is to say, in the interviews it is clearly identified that both youngsters´ socioeconomic status and academic performance have an effect on the direction which they choose to take.

Students' strategies for entering into the most demanding institutions range from taking courses to studying all the possible issues for the exam, with or without the help of relatives, friends, classmates or teachers, or with the support of print or online material. The feeling of having entered into higher education is satisfaction and motivation. For them it is an evidence that they are capable of studying and going to college, because many others did not have access.

The second area is selecting a degree program. The students demonstrate certainty in their chosen degree program and high levels of motivation, even though on occasions this has been a sinuous process. This is based on the knowledge of their area of study, the subjects, the quality offered by the institution, the years of education. Their choice is also found on the cost implied in having to request a loan, or evaluate the possibility of having a scholarship to pay tuition fees and expenses. This decision, which transcends and impacts on their future lives, is based on a vocation which originates from their family.

> Well, I believe that since I was a small child, I realized that my parents are people who study. My dad has three master degrees and a doctorate and my mom has two masters. I'm the fourth of five children; I'm the fourth and my older siblings have always been students. I think that since I was a little child I paid attention to the fact that my brothers and sisters are all studying. I was going to do the same, but when you're a little older, like in *prep* or even at the end of secondary school, you start to analyze things. You start to see things from another point of view and realize that if you don't study, many other things will be more difficult for you. You don't have to study, you can keep living well and everything, but studying opens a lot of doors everywhere (Male student with the following profile: will continue studying and working, older-age, high academic performance/ 10P04Hese).

Selecting a degree program is also carried out according to the abilities which the student believes to have identified in him or herself, based on experience with a relative or teacher, having taking a subject in the baccalaureate or taken a personality, interests or aptitude test. Additionally, a degree program is chosen based on the image that the student has of the professional which they want to become.

> Well, I've always liked law, because people were recently telling me that trials are conducted orally. That is to say, as discussions have always attracted my attention, I don't know why but I like to have discussions, to get to the heart of a certain issue. There are people who discuss and discuss and they don't get to the heart of the issues that they are discussing, they go in another directions or simply say no… I like to have conversations, because there are so many [issues]… there

are so many. Because I am the youngest, everyone attacks the younger ones, right? [Laughs]. I have always liked to talk and talk things through, and for that reason. They say law is a lot of talking, defending yourself, teaching yourself to live or defend yourself and that's it. I have always liked to defend myself [laughs] (Male student man, will continue studying, older age, low academic performance / 15-P6-Hese).

Students declare a favorable opinion regarding their chosen degree program, but also a degree of uncertainty facing the unknown, and the need to see the chosen profession as a means of obtaining possible economic resources.

Yes, yes, I was in the «¿what do I do?» plan. That is to say, «¿what do I do?» For me, I think that yes, it's good to study this or that degree program, but you must think about the fieldwork. That is to say, you can study what you want, but if there aren't going to be any jobs, how does it benefit you? I realized that there are a lot of lawyers working as taxi drivers, so, I say, it's better to look for a degree program where I'll have more job opportunities. And they told me that in social work you can work anywhere from a prison to a high school, even here. That is to say, there were a lot of options, you extended your options, and also, I'll tell you, I like it (Female student, will continue studying and working, older age, average academic performance / 30-P11Mese).

Most of all for economic and family reasons, right? One of my sisters wanted me to go to Normal School and I didn't get in. As she is the person who supports me economically, she said to me...what did she say to me? «No, I'm not going to help you anymore, if you get into Normal School well good, and if not then thanks». And that was when I said to one of my sisters, «No, she doesn't want to help me anymore. I think that I'm going to work», and my sister said, «No, I mean, let's go and talk with her». They gave me insomnia for about a month because they made me struggle; they were making me believe that I wasn't going to study. Then, deep down inside me, I was thinking, «Well, I'm not going to study, so I'm going to work. And then if I want to continue studying? How will I do it?» Until the last days for enrollment, and then they said to me: «Let's go and enroll you», and was when I said: «Gosh, you gave me insomnia, you almost made me cry every night because you told me that you weren't going to put me in a school and now, you are!» That was it (Female student, will continue studying, required age, low academic performance / 08-P03-Mese).

The third area on which the study is focused is the perception that students who entered into higher education have about their teachers, subjects and classmates. Upon entering into the institution, they try to understand several aspects. The first is a general impression about the institution, its size, its facilities and services, and in particular its academic standards. The second aspect that perceive as important is the academic work. They experience different levels of difficulty in understanding the content of the subjects, following the teaching methods and the characteristics of the work requested by their professors.

The students recognize their professors as having a different level of teaching performance, with the intention of delegating the responsibility for learning onto them. This generates a positive reaction in the students, and at the same time uncertainty, as well as an incentive to be freer, but also with the commitment to be more responsible and autonomous.

In addition to this, they also consider relevant to review their own study habits in order to respond to the academic demands and learn to be more self-educated, as well as use the resources and services available at the institution in an optimal way. This experience is influenced by the type of baccalaureate from which they come.

Interviewer: Do you think that the way that you studied in the baccalaureate is different to the way that you are taking classes now at university?

Student: Well, right now yes and no. I see it more different because now the subjects are more in depth, and in *prep school* they were more superficial. The subjects are taught all together here, and that makes me think that it was the same in *prep*, but easier, not so heavy in terms of quantity. For example, in my baccalaureate, the evaluation criteria was the same with a minimum of seven. When I compare myself with those from other baccalaureates, it is more difficult for them, and they are studying almost every day. I am more or less used to it, so I already know what I have to do.

Interviewer: But these difficulties, although you say that they are not very tough, have you noticed them? Have they represented challenges for you?

Student: Well I'd say yes, now I have to study much more and take responsibility for what I'm doing, and what I want to do in the future (Female student who will continue studying, required age, outstanding academic performance / 03-PE01-Mes).

Another relevant element is establish social interactions both with classmates to form friendships and networks for studying, and with professors. The importance of the connection between economic or motivational support from family is also identified as important to endure this initial phase of insertion in higher education.

A fourth area aimed to identify young people's perceptions about the induction activities carried out by the institution where they were studying. In this regard, the most of students reported that they had received, although in different ways, some type of induction from their institutions. These activities ranged from a visit of the director in their classroom or the introduction of a tutor to conducting workshops and special courses in which they were told about the degree program, administrative procedures and career options upon finishing university. Some received a tour inside the facilities, introduced to them the administrative staff and evaluation methods, etc. An important, although not universal detail, is promoting the sociability with classmates who are in more advanced semesters, who gave them some advice or *tips* about the degree program.

> We had three days of induction to the degree program, in which we met tutors. I think that those three days of induction were good with regard to confidence or the relationship that a group should have with the people closest to it, such as the tutors. Thus, we were told about the subjects, schedules, the approach and the philosophy of the institution. I believe this allows you to be able to distinguish between the options that exist, and get to know both the professors and the degree program here at the university. You start to analyze if it is really what you want, and the three induction days seemed pretty good to me in order to continue. The groups and professors were good (Male student, will continue studying and working, required age, high academic performance / 20-P07Hes).

In this regard, it is important to highlight the absence of a homogeneous induction strategy. Apparently, the design of activities does not only varies between different higher education institutions, but also within each of them. However, the guidance and support that the institution provides are fundamental.

Discussion and conclusions

In this article, which is focused on educational aspirations and transition expectations, a significant relationship between these variables and the academic performance, and the importance that families attribute to studying was found. A linkage with variables such as the perception of family support and socioeconomic status, as well as the guidance that the school provided to the young people was also found. In this sense, the theory that educational aspirations are composed from different variables related to the students' context is reaffirmed. Having studied a baccalaureate, as well as having a certain SES and some type of family support, can make a difference between the young people that continue studying and those who do not.

The baccalaureate placement subsystem also made a difference, although this could overlap socio-familiar variables that interact with school variables. The information obtained until now must be analyzed using multivariate techniques that permit the identification in a more refined way of how the variables studied interrelate.

Students crystalize their educational aspirations in the transition and incorporation process into higher education, demonstrating recognition and adaptation to the school environment, and then to the social environment. In this process students faced academic, economic or family difficulties, which they solve in some way, in order to continue their higher education studies. Furthermore, the students show initiative in the search for autonomy, combining their studies with some type of work that allows them to continue studying; even if the latter is not fundamental to sustain their studies. These findings put the students in a situation of learning and understanding the new setting and their role in it upon entering into the institution. In this situation, their educational aspirations and transition expectations gain meaning, and become, in part of the anchor of their future life.

On the other hand, the findings allow to identify that one important aspect of the transition expectations declared by the students is that continuing to study in higher education is a permanent challenge. Achieving this process does not guarantee that they will remain in, and graduate from, higher education. This variable, along with educational aspirations and others such as those that have been described previously, highlight the complexity of the phenomenon that has been explored here. However, it seems that educational aspirations based on a certain environment offer more favorable conditions for the students' motivation regarding continue studying. Those environmental variables that are significant also provide the opportunity to outline or reinforce strategies that can be strengthened in schools. Other strategies focused on family can also be encouraged, although they are outside of schools' authority, can be operated to some degree within schools.

Finally, methodological considerations for the development of the study must be noted. The application of the questionnaire to students upon graduating from the baccalaureate was difficult, since during this time there are several end-of-year school events. Therefore, the questionnaires were sent with as much anticipation as possible in order to avoid delays or alterations in its application. This resulted in a good response rate. On the other hand, locating the students for interview was also difficult, due to the fact that providing personal details such as telephone number and address was optional. Most of them indicated a telephone number but did not answer the calls, and it seems that several numbers were no longer active. Locating some of the students was complemented to some extent through Facebook.

Continuing from this study, knowledge of the transition of baccalaureate students to higher education must be deepened, taking into account modalities that were not considered, such as distance-learning baccalaureates or in the open preparatory subsystem. It is also necessary to research about what occurs in certain school subsystems, such as violence and school environment in a scientific and technological baccalaureate center in Aguascalientes. Further study is also required regarding the future projects of graduates from diverse baccalaureate subsystems, and the life learning experiences that students perceive as learned from their experience throughout the baccalaureate.

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