

International Academic Mobility, Social Mobility, Economic and Professional Mobility, and Expectations: Toward a Systemic Psychosociology of the Internationalization of Higher Education

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This article analyzes the relationship between university education and professional achievement, particularly from the perspective of professional mobility, a variable that is often problematic in contexts of abrupt change and uncertainty. It presents findings from a descriptive-comprehensive empirical study conducted with exchange students from Argentina and other countries participating in bilateral cooperation programs. The central theme explored here is the relationship between International Academic Mobility (IAM) and current Professional Mobility. The theoretical framework draws on the Bologna Process and related initiatives, in which International Academic Mobility was considered a fundamental strategy for connecting academic systems in different contexts with the world of work within a globalized framework. It also incorporates theories and findings from the 1960s in response to the educational boom and the limitations imposed by the market, particularly in the United States (human capital theories, the consumption-investment model), as well as other findings generated from the perspective of social reproduction in France. Interactionist paradigms versus hyperfunctionalist paradigms offer distinct interpretations of the phenomenon of education in relation to professional mobility, quality of life, and income growth (perverse effects, ceiling effects). A combination of quantitative-descriptive and qualitative methodologies was used. The central techniques were semi-structured surveys with open-ended questions, semi-structured interviews, hierarchical recall, and brief life histories. The results of the quantitative-descriptive section revealed the shared perceptions students have regarding the value of education at leading institutions, facilitated by academic mobility abroad, as a path to professional advancement. The findings unveil a widespread appreciation of education itself among university students as a means of social mobility: is this myth still prevalent? At the same time, they demonstrate a devaluation of the “tool” or policy of internationalizing higher education in relation to professional and socio-economic mobility. The analysis involves “subjects situated in situated contexts” and forms the basis for a proposed new micro-approach: the Psychosociology of Internationalization from a systemic perspective.

Keywords: International Academic Mobility, social mobility, professional mobility, expectations, Systemic Psychosociology of the Internationalization of Higher Education

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Introduction

Numerous interactionist and determinist theories (functionalist conditional models, Francophone reproductionist explanations) have been developed regarding educational and professional achievement, as well as regarding the issue of education as a privileged channel for sociocultural fulfilment or, conversely, as a device for reproducing the *status quo*.

The author has conducted complementary investigations with different populations that included educational and professional mobility among the central variables. First, intergenerational mobility was addressed, then career mobility in different populations (scientists, PhDs, professors, graduates, delayed university graduates, dropouts, among others). Later, taking into account the importance accorded to International Academic Mobility as an instance of the Internationalization of Higher Education, as well as the Internationalization of the curriculum, around 2017, research began with subjects who were participating in exchange internships in other countries, particularly in Paris, as a special intercultural center. The first research involved a historical survey of the International Academic Mobility of Argentine residents in Paris (undergraduate students, postgraduates, PhDs and professionals who have specialized in certain areas hoping to contribute to the country's innovation upon their return).

In this quantitative-qualitative study, the sample consisted of exchange students who voluntarily agreed to participate and who carried out their exchange during the pandemic¹. Through the set of techniques applied, the family history of the students and graduates was revealed in numerical terms (level of education, profession, living conditions, etc.), as well as their personal, academic, and professional histories. Their motivations and the perceptions that drove them to enter another culture were also explored, along with all that this change entails in terms of skills (linguistic, sociocultural, intercultural, and psychosocial/ management) See Aparicio 2024 b; 2025; CONICET link: scientific production, cit.

This issue of the skills developed by the university has always been central to the author's research on the relationship between education and work, given the disconnection observed at certain historical moments. Regarding the IAM, it has been a key issue since the 2000s and earlier, both globally and nationally².

In this article, we address in the relationship between International Academic Mobility (IAM) and Professional Mobility in Exchange Students who participated in the exchange during the pandemic, a unique moment in which to observe *in situ* the skills developed and the skills missing to face adversity. Given the situation, many of those who had competed for these exchanges had to withdraw before leaving for our country or while already here for various reasons. This caused the overall population to decrease. The exchange students' destination and departure

¹The application of qualitative techniques was of utmost importance: without this application, we would only have obtained a temporal and spatial "snapshot" of previous and current International Academic Mobility; however, we would never have been able to delve into the "deep reasons" – sometimes not so "rational," as R. Boudon (2003) says – that underlies such mobility.

²I already addressed this relationship in my first doctoral thesis (1995).

university was the National University of Cuyo, one of the Argentine universities that prioritizes internationalization and has it as the axis of its policy and strategies.

The Framework

The Cultural Factor in the Major Trends associated with University and Professional Achievement and Professional Mobility

Education has long been considered one of the most important factors associated with the progress of people. However, after the great boom, its value begins to be discussed. Anderson, in 1961, contrary to accepted thinking and general opinion, shows that the increase in the level of education is not necessarily accompanied by an improvement in living conditions nor by development in the world of work since the most educated people do not earn more than those who have a lower relative educational level. The Coleman Report (1966), for its part, confirms this situation in the Western world.

Taking stock, we could say that in the '60s - parallel to the phenomenon of school democratization and educational explosion, a phenomenon that will be followed by the mass university - a devaluation of diplomas occurs (Levy-Garboua, 1976; Jarousse, 1984). The "plafond" effect becomes evident: the more university graduates there are, the lower their positioning in the market is, relatively, because the educational evolution is greater than the evolution of the economy (Boudon, 1973, 1977).

In the relationship between Education and Employment, three major stages could therefore be distinguished.

First stage (1960s). Education, particularly higher education, previously inaccessible to some social classes, Black people, and women in the United States, is seen as a way to a higher quality of life, equal opportunities, and social equality. Expectations are reawakened (Bénéton, 1975, 1980; Girod, 1971; Perrenoud, 1970; Boudon, 1973).

Second stage. Since 1975, the scenario has been as follows quantitative expansion, at the educational level, constantly leads to a "qualitative degradation" of this same plan, as well as contextual effects. The crisis of the years 1973-1975 highlights a disparity between the educational offer (for all audiences, adults and workers included) and the demand of the productive system. The myth of education as a necessary and sufficient element for progress and socio-professional mobility begins to decline (Boudon, 1973). The theory of human capital, which maintained that increasing investment in education would lead to an improvement in the standard of living and income, is not confirmed by the facts (Becker, 1964, Thurow, 1972; Schultz, 1963; Jencks, 1972). The devaluation of diplomas will lead to a psychosocial decline in expectations, associated with a low return on diplomas in the job market. At the sociological level, this devaluation leads to reduced socio-professional mobility. The distance between the educational structure and the socio-economic structure increases (cf. Aparicio 2005 a).

The years '70, in fact, have marked the point of inflection in the USA and in France. Two paradigms are important: on the one hand, the Cultural Reproductivism (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1968, 1970, Bertaux, 1969, 1970; Thélot, 1972; Baudelot & Estabiet, 1971; Bisseret, 1968; Giroux, 1982) and, on the other hand, Interactionism, with new models (Crozier, 1963; Olson, 1965; Aron, 1962; Lagneau, 1980). Among them “methodological individualism” is included (Boudon, 1973, 1977). The hyperfunctionalist perspective will give rise to “super role” of the socio-cultural origin in order to explain the achievement of the subjects. The past explains and determines the future professional and, in what concerns us, the school is a powerful machine for the reproduction of social classes through the imposition of dominant values in the Burgundy society. In this framework, the school loses its place as a privileged instrument for the realization of individuals and peoples, as Anglo-Saxon theorists, and especially the theorists of “human capital” had shown us (Becker, 1964). In contrast, “methodological individualism” proposes a non-deterministic and comprehensive approach (Weber, 1920) whose axis is “limited” rationality. Its axes are the subject and the structure, both in interaction. This is a particular individualism, not atomic but structural. Behaviors, which were always determined by prior factors within the reproductivist paradigm, leave room for freedom in human action, without ignoring structural limits. Decision-making will take center stage, and the cause-effect relationship will be mediated by the presence of intermediate or intervening variables (systems of beliefs and social representations, ideas, values), from which the “meaning” of the action will emerge. This approach recovers the “macro-social” level and the “micro” level, allowing us to understand the macro and meso-institutional effects (sometimes dysfunctional, such as the “perverse effects”) on the subjects and vice versa (Boudon, 1977; Olson, 1965)³.

The devaluation of diplomas will constitute precisely one of these perverse effects of the well-known democratization, combined with the growing difficulties in the labor market. Education, Boudon would say, is not what the world had expected of it. As far as we are concerned, it has ceased to be the central factor of professional mobility.

Graduates, faced with the structural framework, will seek other solutions, for example, extending their studies and working in view of a gratification that is not immediate but deferred in relation to obtaining a diploma (cf. Lévy-Garboua, 1976, Eicher & Lévy-Garboua, 1989; Aparicio, 2009 a and b)⁴.

New micro-theories attempt to explain the phenomenon.

We cannot limit ourselves to all types of central paradigms. Both interactionism, in the broadest sense, and deterministic reproductivism encompass different approaches.

In the first case, we can refer to micro-theories that explain achievement (including professional achievement) by different factors: a) for preferences devoid of their character as independent variables (I.V). (Lévy-Garboua's “eligibility”

³The author addresses the issue at the theoretical and methodological, in her second doctoral thesis, Université Paris V, Sorbonne, 2005 a /2009 c. Indeed, the author extends Boudon's methodological perspective to other fields of the social and human sciences, working with it at the inter- and transdisciplinary level.

⁴Cf. Aparicio, M. 2009 a and b.

model, 1976)⁵; b) by elements prior to the variable to be explained and/or understood (here, Professional Achievement), including factors that are not determining but rather conditioning factors (Kahl, 1957; Chinoy, 1955; Girard, 1961); c) by the system of values and cultural handicaps or gaps (Hyman, 1973; Lipset, 1953; McClelland, 1961,...); d) by the relative social position that the subject occupies in the social system (Keller & Zavalloni, 1964); e) by the aspirations of the parents and the influence of the family environment on achievement (Girard, 1961); f) by the “bias” linked to the structure of family relationships (Krauss, 1964; Elder, 1965); g) by the effect of cultural codes (Bernstein, 1975).

In the second case – the reproductivist paradigm – appealing to the explanation of achievement based on cultural or social capital (cultural origin and social origin), we can refer back to Cultural Reproductivism (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970; 1985; Bisseret, 1968); to the reproductivist model of the hegemonic State (Apple, 1979) and also to Economic Reproductivism with its various perspectives: the Correspondence Theory (Bowles and Gintis, 1981); the Theory of Ideology (Althusser, 1969); the Theory of Domination (Baudelot & Establet, 1987); among others. To all of them, we must add from the psychological perspective, attributional models in relation to the world of work (Atkinson, 1964; Merllié, 1975; Weiner, 1985; Feather & Davenport, 1982; Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1987; Ortiz Zábala, 1985; García Rodríguez, 1993; Beauvois, 1986, 1994; Dubois, 1988, 1991).

Third stage (since the 1985s). Unemployment, including structural unemployment, and underemployment are increasing. Furthermore, incomes increasingly fail to match educational attainment, due to the saturation of graduates in some fields. This impacts career paths and levels of achievement in the marketplace. Growth opportunities associated with education are decreasing. From a psychological perspective, there is a decline in expectations associated with education.

The problem has been analyzed by the author over time in various investigations (cf. Aparicio, link CONICET). In them, the impact of the educational level on academic and professional achievement varied according to the socioeconomic contexts.

Indeed, in the first central investigations (Aparicio, 1995, 2005 a) we worked with 3 real generations in the line (the university graduate, his father and his grandfather). The studies gave rise to two doctoral theses and were carried out with graduates from two Argentine universities (UNCUYO and UTN), constituting the first research on Intergenerational Mobility carried out with three (3) real generations. The predictive models used included sociological, psychosocial, pedagogical-institutional and structural variables. The findings showed that among grandparents, with a low educational level it was possible to achieve high levels of economic achievement. On the other hand, among university graduates (their grandchildren), the relationship was reversed: a university educational level was not always accompanied by high income. Higher expectations were no longer associated with a higher level of professional achievement (cf. Aparicio, 2005 a/2009 c, 3 volumes, 854 p.)

⁵This model proved to be explanatory of the reality of our universities, particularly in our research with subjects who delayed their university studies (2009 a and 2009 b) covering many cohorts and careers: Why do they delay their studies? Because they choose to work if they find a job in a restricted market and in view of unclear benefits in relation to the diploma obtained?

The central question in the framing of this article on Internationalization of Higher Education seen from International Academic Mobility (IAM) is: Do Exchange students associate excellent training abroad, made possible by the IAM, to a greater professional achievement and to a greater Professional Mobility, taking into account the current context of abrupt changes and uncertainty?

The IAM and the Bologna Process: Its Consequences in Terms of International Mobility and Competency-based Training

IAM is essential to facilitate Professional Mobility in a changing world, which demands new skills and ways of doing things; in “fluid” scenarios, in the words of Bauman (2003) and uncertain according to Ehlers & Kellermann (2019). Scenarios in which the market demands permanent training and professionalization if employability is to be preserved (Aparicio, 2013, 2015 a and b. Also see CONICET link, articles related to Professionalization and OECD documents). It is not only about incorporating knowledge (disciplinary - know-how) but also knowledge for doing and for action (procedural - know-how) as well as knowledge for life, for coexisting, for living together (Delors, 1996; Aparicio, 1999)⁶.

Two aspects seem essential to us here: a) the role of International Academic Mobility from the Joint Declaration for the Harmonization of the Design of the European Higher Education System, by the four ministers representing France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom; Sorbonne Declaration, Paris (1998), to the Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education meeting in Bologna on June 19, 1999 (Bologna process) and the Prague Declaration (2001) in conjunction with the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). And b) the place occupied by the development of competences required by new contexts. For the first aspect, we refer to the respective Declarations, to González & Wangenaar (2003) and to Bergan (2019), where the entire Bologna process and its objectives are made explicit. Among them was facilitating Academic and Professional Mobility. We read at the beginning (p. 240):

“Today, the EHEA web site describes the Area as:

... an unique international collaboration on higher education and the result of the **political will of 48 countries** with different political, cultural and academic traditions, which, step by step during the last twenty years, built an area implementing a common set of commitments: **structural reforms and shared tools**. These 48 countries agree to and adopt reforms on higher education on the basis of common key values, such as freedom of expression, autonomy for institutions, independent student unions, academic freedom, free movement of students and staff. Through this process, countries, institutions and stakeholders of the European area continuously adapt their higher education systems making them more compatible and strengthening their quality assurance mechanisms. For all these countries, the main goal is to **increase staff and students’ mobility and to facilitate employability**”⁷.

⁶Conference Closing Speech. 2nd International Congress of International Education, Integration and Development, UNESCO/FEEID, 1999, 28-30 July.

⁷Refers to European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process, accessed April 29, 2019, <http://www.ehea.info/> Accessed by the author April 2, 2025.

Regarding employability, we developed a specific project involving four UNCuyo faculties, PICTO 2016-2022, entitled “Social Competencies, Employability, and Professionalization” which has led to publications (see CONICET link, articles related to the three axes). The author was also the foreign project leader for the international project carried out in Paraguay (Glavinich, Aparicio, Duarte et al., 2020). This project was based on the Tuning Latin America Project (2007).

Finally, regarding competencies, this is a problem that the author has addressed in her research since the 2000s. In them, the importance of the formation of social competencies in relation to university and work achievement emerges in their articulation.⁸

The concept of competencies that most closely matches our understanding is that of Kallionen (2010), who defines competencies as the ability to solve cognitive, practical, personal, and social problems⁹. This topic has been recently developed in Aparicio, 2024 b and 2025, p.226. Finally, we have worked in light of the OECD Reports: 2000, 2015 a, b, c and d; 2016 a and b; 2017 a and b, (PISA); 2018 a, b and c; 2022 a, b; 2023 a and b. See also Mo (2018) and Grayling (2017).

Given the close – sometimes symbolic – relationship between education and socio-professional mobility, the following assumption was made, especially considering that this is a form of training of excellence, to which proportionally very few university students in the world and even fewer in emerging countries have access.

Hypotheses / Research Questions

International Academic Mobility is associated with Social Mobility.

International Academic Mobility is associated with Professional Mobility.

Intergenerational Educational Mobility is associated with International Academic Mobility (IAM).

Many other operational hypotheses guided this research, but here, we wish to focus on the relationship between education/training acquired in another context, internationally, and the Professional Mobility variable. This includes associated factors such as increased income, achievement of a higher socioeconomic status, status in the labor market, and expected job placement in the short term¹⁰.

⁸See *in extenso* Aparicio, Conicet link. Also <https://hal.science/hal-05044215>.

⁹Here, you can find numerous authors and conceptions regarding competencies, which we will not repeat for the sake of brevity.

¹⁰In the author's second PhD thesis (2005 a / 2009 c), developed in 3 volumes, these variables, among many others, were analyzed within the framework of a predictive model. Four (4) core variables were addressed as D.I. or Intervening Variables: base variables (Age, Level of education of the graduate, his/her parents and grandparents, Intergenerational educational mobility, Labor sector where graduates and their family work,...); psychosocial (n-Ach or Achievement Needs; Internality/Alignment; Social Representations about the value of education); socio-cultural variables (Social origin, Cultural origin) and Other variables (among them, University entry cohort, Public or private sector of activity,...). The dependent variables (D.V.) were Academic Achievement (UA) and Occupational Achievement (PA). In turn, Occupational Achievement (PA) was observed through five variables: Objective Occupational Achievement, Subjective Occupational Achievement or Job Satisfaction, Professional Status,

The questions that guided the research were: Is IAM associated with Social Mobility? Is IAM associated with Professional Mobility? Is Intergenerational Educational Mobility associated with IAM?

Method

We worked with quantitative and qualitative methodology.

Population

This sample consisted, on the one hand, of exchange students completing their exchange program at UNCuyo, from different countries and with different programs, who were hosted by this university in the programs closest to their studies in their countries of origin. On the other hand, university students from UNCuyo traveled to different Latin American and European countries. Our sample consisted of those who voluntarily agreed to participate in the research, after being contacted by the university officials. It covered approximately 20% of the total population for 2020 (although the semi-structured survey and interview were administered retrospectively, once the institutions had normalized their activities). It should be noted that, given the situation, many of those who had applied to participate in these exchanges had to withdraw before leaving for our country or while already here for various reasons. This caused the overall population to decrease. 60% were UNCuyo students who traveled to other countries, and 40% were exchange students from other Latin American countries who completed their exchange program at UNCuyo. 65% of those who responded voluntarily were women and 35% were men. The sample is not representative because participation in the study was voluntary.

Techniques

A semi-structured survey was used, including open-ended questions to allow the actors to speak. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted via WhatsApp or Zoom, as the exchange students were no longer in the province. As a special technique, small life stories and hierarchical evocations were used (Abric, 2001). This technique allows for an ad hoc observation of the shared (social) representations of the actors involved, in our case, the exchange students (Moscovici, 1961; 1986; Jodelet, 1986; Aparicio, 2023, 2025). In the scientific production, see CONICET, there are many articles that refer to this qualitative methodology¹¹.

Socioeconomic Level Achieved, and Socio-professional Mobility. It should be noted that the Mobility variable was observed in various complementary studies from different angles: intergenerational educational and professional mobility, career mobility, and the last one addressed International Academic Mobility within the framework of International Cooperation programs. In the 2005 a /2009 c study referenced here, bivariate and multivariate analyses were performed. See Operationalization and Results. Also see Annexes.

¹¹The evoked words – ranked by frequency of occurrence (number of times they were mentioned by the subjects) and importance (the place of relevance they assigned to each of these words in relation to each item) – allowed us to observe which were the most salient group representations

However, for the sake of brevity, we will briefly present, from a descriptive perspective, the results linking Education, the IAM, and the representation of Higher Education as a channel for Professional Mobility and promotion; a path to achieving a better quality of life, better working conditions, greater satisfaction, and higher income (factors linked in the international literature to Professional Achievement).

Finally, it should be noted that there was an option to voluntarily write short recitations about what the IAM meant to them and whether there were any “marking” events in their lives that prompted them to participate in this exchange. Many exchange students did so, highlighting strengths and/or weaknesses related to the exchange stage (organizational, institutional, legal, assistance, pedagogical-educational aspects). Some volunteered to write short life stories, recitations that were extremely enriching because they allowed a deeper understanding of the motives and ideas underlying this exchange, their goals, aspirations and frustrations, their shortcomings linked to social belonging but linked to a strong desire to excel and break down social barriers. Many also alluded to the strength and clarity of their life plans, the importance of clear goals, and the impact of family models of effort and commitment¹²

Variables

Regarding the variables incorporated into this study, many were included in previous models of Academic and Professional Achievement in their linkage. This facilitated intergroup comparisons from different contexts and across institutions. The model included baseline, sociocultural, pedagogical-institutional, organizational, psychosocial, and structural variables.

In this article, we offer some results obtained from a quantitative-descriptive perspective and linked to variables that were decisive in understanding how students perceived the relationship between IAM and Professional Mobility in the current context marked by uncertainty.

for each question posed and which aspects were considered secondary. The categories developed from the total number of words for each item (generally four) revealed which were the priority and secondary aspects depending on whether they were located in quadrant P2 (core or heart of the representation) or P3, P4, and P1. The least frequent and least relevant categories were located in quadrant P4; the infrequent but most relevant categories were in quadrant P1. This quadrant usually brings together the “opinions” of innovators and/or minorities, and is of great interest for interpretation.

¹²The power of psychosocial factors, considered globally in different models and, in particular, in models on Socio-Professional Mobility, has already emerged in previous research. As an example and summary, see Aparicio (2003) with a representative sample of university graduates; Aparicio (2012 b), with a sample of university dropouts; Aparicio (2005 a) with a sample of university students but in relation to the filtering of information according to field of affiliation and psychosocial characteristics within the framework of the Agenda-Setting hypothesis. Comparative studies were also carried out between the findings that emerged between samples from different universities in Mendoza and from French universities.

Results

Mobility Variable

IAM and the Social Mobility

85% of Exchange students responded that IAM will influence their Social Mobility (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Is Training Abroad a Factor of Social Mobility?



Does the myth of education as a channel for social mobility persist?

IAM and Educational Intergenerational Mobility¹³

Exchange students have a history of significant intergenerational educational mobility (from graduates to parents and from parents to paternal and maternal grandparents). Hypothesis 3 is corroborated.

Table 1. Intergenerational Educational Mobility (Exchange students, their parents and their grandparents)

| | Father | Mother | Paternal Grandfather | Paternal Grandmother | Paternal Grandmother | Maternal Grandmother |
|--------------|--------|--------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| No education | 0 | 0 | (10%) | 0 | (5%) | (10%) |
| Primary | (10%) | (15%) | (35%) | (40%) | (35%) | (40%) |
| Secondary | (25%) | (15%) | (10%) | (20%) | (20%) | (15%) |
| Tertiary | 0 | (20%) | 0 | 0 | 0 | (5%) |
| Universitary | (55%) | (45%) | (45%) | (40%) | (40%) | (30%) |
| Posgraduate | (10%) | (5%) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Source: own elaboration.

¹³For the sake of brevity, tables and graphs are not included. We only refer here to a Table 1 showing the Intergenerational Educational Mobility of the exchange students' family group.

Intergenerational Family Educational Mobility Abroad (IAMFAMILY) Variable

Exchange students (IAM) report a history of family IAM abroad (IAMFAMILY), generally from the father. This demonstrates the power of cultural models (cf. the theories cited above related to cultural codes and the valorization of education as a channel for progress).

40% indicated that one of their family members completed a study or advanced training internship abroad.

Cultural factors influence Academic or University Achievement (UA), as measured by the AIM earned after passing through selection processes¹⁴.

Intergenerational Educational Mobility Variable vs. Professional Mobility

The relationship, as seen from the perspective of exchange students, is not corroborated. More precisely, these exchange students who come from families who experienced intergenerational educational mobility and, many also carried out mobility outside, do not perceive prospects for high professional mobility linked to the fact of having excellent training abroad.

International Academic Mobility (IAM) vs. Achievement in the World of Work and Professional Mobility

Let us now analyze the impact of IAM on the World of Work and, in particular, on Professional Mobility (companies, scientific-technological sector, among others), analyzed from the perspective of the actors. Although the percentages vary depending on the item (experience, skills, etc.), in general there is no high expectation of positive impact of IAM in the world of work and especially in terms of income. The percentages also show differences according to sector (business, scientific).

Plan of professional experience: 20% said that the IAM will not influence by providing experience and 80% said Yes.

Skills training plan: 20% said that IAM Yes will contribute to skills training and 80% said No. This aspect is central to our approach

Plan of job placement: 55% said Yes it will influence, 40% said No and 5%% did not answer.

Plan of Job Status or Positioning, 35% said that the IAM Yes will influence by facilitating a better job status, 55% said No and 10% did not answer. In other words, the majority thinks that IAM is not a decisive factor in achieving a better position in the hierarchy.

Scientific level (Insertion or Promotion in CONICET - National Council for Scientific and Technical Research), 90% said No. This shows the difficulties

¹⁴This relation emerges clearly in the multivariate analysis model (Aparicio, 2005 a/2009c). In contrast, psychosocial factors particularly influence Professional Achievement (PA) (multivariate model), along with variables such as Age, Cohort, and Sector of activity (Public or Private).

that Exchange students and, in general, graduates have to enter the scientific world through a scholarship and then pursue a career as a *researcher*.

Professional Mobility Plan (Companies) 55% said Yes, 25% said No, 20% did not respond. The perception of the Exchange students here is more positive than in relation to the scientific plan.

Level of Income: 75% said that the IAM does not influence the level of income, 10% answered yes and the rest did not answer.

The findings are in line with those found in the research cited (2005a /2009c) only now from a quantitative-descriptive, rather than explanatory, methodological approach, and with the added benefit of training abroad, provided by the international exchange.

That is, even though they haven't completed the training corresponding to their degree program, completed in the national context, these exchange students have high expectations regarding their market positioning and related aspects.

Therefore, IAM is not linearly linked to Professional Mobility (analyzed from their shared representations). We will return to this issue in the conclusions.

Social and Cultural Origin Variable

Regarding the cultural context of origin, it is emphasized, on the one hand, that many exchange students' parents are already university students and graduates.

Furthermore, the social context may have influenced or accompanied this process toward IAM. This is clearly evident in the first research conducted on IAM (2017), based on complete historical lists: a mapping of areas of origin reveals that they come, in particular, from privileged areas, both in terms of geographic location and access to information and the influence of the university institutions of origin. Federalization is still a long way from this area.

However, there are also cases of very low cultural and social origin, even cases of extreme poverty, among those who reached this exchange stage, which is the subject of analysis here. The life stories were extremely illustrative for delving deeper into these cases, reaching the meaning of the behaviors underlying the exchange. These highly illuminating findings, which can only be achieved through the application of qualitative techniques, confirm what we previously argued: there is no linearity or determinism. On the contrary, there is a complex interweaving of individual, underlying, and sociocultural variables with other psychosocial variables that induce International Academic Mobility (IAM) (referred to here as D.V.).

Psychosocial Variables

Let's now address psychosocial variables (many of which relate to processes).

The exchange students referred to several important variables, addressed in the international literature in their connection with Achievement (see the Founding Fathers cited).

The Aspirations of the Exchange Student's Family and their Hope in Education as a Factor of Personal/professional Development¹⁵

Almost all of them referred to family aspirations regarding excellent education abroad for their children. Few subjects emphasized that their family's attitude had been one of "indifference" toward their decision to apply for this mobility. Some also emphasized in the short life stories that, although their family had not encouraged or supported them to pursue this mobility (financially and psychologically), they already felt independent enough to make the decision. Therefore, they linked this exchange with their own decisions and aspirations, disassociating themselves from the family.

Personal Expectations of Exchange Students regarding Education - Globally considered - as a Channel of Social Mobility

100% responded "Yes," many pointing out that it was the only channel, even though the market was increasingly demanding.

Does the myth persist? They emphasized, however, in another question, that theoretical university education, as offered in some universities and/or colleges, is not enough today. While they valued the quality of the content and the excellence of their professors, they suggest incorporating more practical training (highly emphasized in Latin American universities, in particular). They also noted the absence of courses aimed at developing or strengthening social and management skills 10% said "Yes," and 90% indicated their absence.

Expectations for Medium and Long-term Professional Development in their Field and in Relation to other Fields

They were more optimistic about this.

100% estimated that there are opportunities for growth in the field.

Are there opportunities for growth in your professional field in the next 10 years?

100% of respondents felt there were opportunities for growth in the field.

In relation to other professional fields, assess the growth opportunities in your field

80% estimated that they would be greater than they are now, and 20% that they would be the same. No one said they would be worse. In this sense, they were optimistic.

¹⁵Cf. the psychological models cited above: McClelland and Atkinson in the Anglo-Saxon context; Girard, Girod, Lévy-Leboyer, and Merllié, among other "founding fathers" in France, who linked Education and Values to Mobility. Also see Aparicio, articles that refer to n-Ach (Need Achievement) and its relationship with Achievement in different populations. Cf CONICET Link.

Satisfaction Variable

It was observed at the personal, social (generated bonds), and institutional levels.

Satisfaction with having achieved the Exchange Objective

75% said Yes and 25% said No. However, it is important to emphasize that many participants clarified in the short life stories that achieving the IAM objectives was linked to the skills previously developed in family or other related contexts. This is in line with the demands made at the institutional level, even though the exchange took place at a time of unique emergency, in which all communication channels were affected, as well as pedagogical and technological strategies.

Personal Satisfaction

This variable was affected by the emergency circumstances imposed by the pandemic¹⁶. However, this served to strengthen bonds, build resilience, and strengthen integration, driven by necessity. Thus, resilience, which in other IAM studies did not emerge strongly, in the midst of an atypical context such as the pandemic, was shown to exist through the actions taken to address the situation.

When evaluating this variable, Personal Satisfaction (Performance Level), 90% said Yes, 5% said No, and 5% did not respond.

Discussion

The results show that a privileged level of intercultural training abroad does not influence a very high expectation of achieving a better job placement. Nor do they show very strong expectations regarding career mobility.

The inconsistency of status (high educational status/relatively low status in the world of work) clearly emerges (Lensky, 1954; Jackson, 1964; Heintz, 1970; Germani, 1965; Aparicio, 2015 c). However, their profiles are different from those of previous generations (especially grandparents), who experienced extremely high growth expectations that allowed them to achieve high levels of socio-professional and economic growth despite having low educational levels (Cf. Aparicio, 2005 a / 2009 c). Two factors undoubtedly influenced this: on the one hand, Argentina's cultural "ethos": a new and open society, in which public policies prioritized education as a channel for social and professional mobility (particularly among the numerous European immigrants who arrived during the last century) (Panettieri, 1965, 1967). On the other hand, there are the limits imposed by the current situation for young people, immersed in a changing and uncertain world, in which technological development is growing at unprecedented rates and professionals are increasingly being replaced by machines. The results in a decline in jobs, with consequences for the possibilities of job placement, job tenure and professional growth.

¹⁶Other psychosocial variables were addressed, but their analysis is beyond our scope here.

Moreover, these outcomes are in line with the interactionist conception rather than the reproduction approach, since the observed scenario arises from the interplay between the subject/person/professional and the characteristics/demands of the context. The unit of analysis is the “contextualized, situated” individual, who is less hopeless when it comes to relating the education attained with his or her chances of professional growth. Specifically, during the country’s period of economic growth, education had a positive impact on professional growth. Today, however, belonging to a family with high levels of education or achieving a special level of training individually does not guarantee successful incorporation into the world of work (Aparicio, 2011 b, 2012, 2024 b).

However, the “myth” about the influence of Education on Social Mobility persists, as is seen in research with exchange students. Indeed, they still believe in social mobility and continue to attend university, despite the observed devaluation. Regarding the phenomenon, various interpretations have been made since the 1990s that remain relevant today.

Lévy-Garboua, using an interactionist approach, explains the phenomenon through her preferences/choice model (“modele d’elegibilité”)¹⁷. The relationship between economic and social expectations and educational attainment is clear. In other words, additional education does not, to the same extent, lead to additional social advantages. One must invest in education to expect increasingly less well-paid work (at least relatively). This would impact the type of socioeconomic decisions: forgoing a job to “educate” would entail high costs. The scenario leads to the extension of studies: students work and extend their careers because they only expect “deferred” benefits from them.

Jarousse, along the same line, argues that the attraction or “spell” that the University has continued to exert on students, despite the devaluation of the degrees it awards, is explained by the method of certification it provides. He argues that whatever the value of the degree in the job market, diplomas are unconditionally valid as certificates of the cultural value of the people who hold them. Passeron, from a very different perspective (the hyperfunctionalist paradigm), also interprets it based on the advantages associated with the degree, despite the decrease in its social (status) and economic profitability. The author maintains that students are victims of a perceptual error: they act as if obtaining the diploma brings the same advantages as before. From their perspective, diplomas would essentially be an effective protection against difficulties in the labor market and would allow for an improvement in one’s relative position in the job market. Not obtaining them would entail a significant change in position or “social fall” (“déclassement”),¹⁸ becoming a “nobody,” falling outside one’s socio-cultural class: into the class of the non-university graduates.

Finally, other functionalist authors argue that university, particularly in accordance with the “ethos” of the middle classes, is “the thing to do,” the norm for avoiding “marginality.” Furthermore, individuals would continue to go to university because – as international studies show – no matter how poor the position of a graduate in the market is, it is always better than that of a non-graduate.

¹⁷This is the name of the model in French.

¹⁸“Déclassement” in French.

Conclusion

Empirical Level

From the responses provided in relation to the hypotheses linked to Professional Mobility (PA), it is inferred that IAM has a scarce importance in Professional Achievement (measured by indicators used in the literature), including Professional Mobility or Promotion. However, they continue to view it as a channel for Social Mobility. Myth?

The results are in line with those of the study cited.

The market, today and in the past, seems to demand skills other than those specifically related to the discipline, skills other than those that, in many universities, are still taught by universities. It requires other learning to solve problems *in situ* and new skills that are not yet fully developed, with the exception of the countries at the top of the learning rankings (Ehlert & Kellermann, 2019; OECD/PISA, op. cit.). In this regard, national education statistics show a notable decline in the quality of learning in recent years, contrasting with the high quality that characterized education in the country during the last century (both in education and economics).

The findings invite us to consider reviewing university academic training, which is very strong in theory but weak in the development of psychosocial and self-management skills (cf. Aparicio, 2004 b, 2004 c. This dissociation between theory and practice was already emerging at this time.

Theoretical-Methodological Level

The findings of the different investigations (oriented towards specific and complementary objectives) showed the author the rich interactive, non-linear and non-deterministic game between the variables that link subjects with contexts. In this game there is a place for decision and freedom (micro-psychological level) although limited by meso-institutional-organizational (universities-companies) and macro-structural (socio-economic and political) characteristics (Aparicio, 2005 a, 2009 c, 2012 a, 2015 a and b, 2016)

All of this became the theoretical and methodological pillars of the elaborated theory: a *sui generis* systemic theory (Aparicio 2015 a and b)¹⁹.

Over time, working on an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary level, several micro fields have emerged (cf. HDR, 2007 a and 2007 b, 2016).

¹⁹This has gone through various stages: the interactive game observed was called “Man/World Dialogue” in 2005; in 2010, it was called “Complexity Theory in Action”. Finally, in 2015, “The Three-Dimensional Spiral of the Sense” to demonstrate the interplay of three levels that allow us to explain and/or understand human and social behaviors (seen as I.V. or Intervening V): micro-meso-macro-micro, with positive and negative (perverse) effects (Boudon, 1973, 1977; Olson, 1965; Aparicio 2015 a and b). In an interview close to his death, Boudon made clear to the author the importance of resorting to intervening variables, both psychosocial and at the micro level, to understand the meaning of human action, despite coming from a background in the hard sciences and a crass positivism, being a mathematician, economist, and sociologist, a neo-Weberian. His interview with Leroux (2002) was also enlightening. He left the author a latent legacy: to extend this comprehensive analysis to related fields of the humanities and social sciences.

The empirical findings on IAM also combine factors of different nature, with psychosocial factors acquiring a place of relevance in order to capture the deep reasons underlying the strategy of the Internationalization of Higher Education. This now allows us to lay the foundations for a new micro-field: the **Systemic Psychosociology of the Internationalization of Higher Education**.

Viewed as a process (I.V and intervening variables) and as a result (D.V.), IAM within the framework of Internationalization involves the confluence of different types of variables (basic, sociocultural, psychosocial, pedagogical-institutional, and structural). Only by analyzing the interplay of the three levels involved – macro/micro/meso/macro – can this complex reality be understood (Aparicio 2015 a and b).

Summarizing the findings:

In the previously cited research, cultural factors influence university achievement (UA) (multivariate analysis), that is, at the cultural level, but Intergenerational Educational Mobility is not associated with Professional Achievement, nor with Professional Mobility (Upward Career). The same can be said of the relationship between University Achievement (UA) and Professional Achievement (PA).

The disconnection between university education and work emerges clearly in the context of a unique crisis: the survey coincided with the country's greatest economic crisis in terms of unemployment and hopelessness (2001).

In this recent research focused on the IAM, conducted at another historical moment – at the level of collective representations, that is, from a descriptive perspective, not from regression models – education is still considered a channel for social mobility. In contrast, International Academic Mobility (IAM) is not very strongly associated with Achievement in the world of Work or with Professional Mobility.

The collective representation, typical of the Argentine cultural “ethos”, which saw education as the ultimate means of social mobility, seems to live on, even if it is only a *status symbol*.

However, exchange students are clearly aware of the current distance that exists between education and professional progress and requesting from the university a recognition of the demands of the labor context (Laukonen, Biddel & Gallagher, 2018); they also demand that theory be brought closer to practice, generating skills for problem-solving *in situ*, along with the development of other psychosocial and action-oriented competencies. Overall, within the framework of all research, the appreciation of IAM is evident not so much from an academic perspective – such as Education or Training – but rather from the opening and/or development of other competencies, which will henceforth be referred to as intercultural.

To finish:

In this article, we wonder how exchange students perceive professional achievement (PA) in its various facets, in relation to education as a whole, and specifically in relation to the International Academic Mobility (IAM) they have experienced, which provides them with an added advantage in their training. More specifically, we ask what expectations they have regarding their professional future and their opportunities to experience career mobility after participating in a cutting-edge training program abroad.

The hypotheses were: a) International Academic Mobility is associated with Social Mobility, b) International Academic Mobility is associated with Professional Mobility, c) Intergenerational Educational Mobility is associated with International Academic Mobility (IAM).

From the investigation it is concluded that:

- Education, globally considered, is still conceived as a channel for Social Mobility. In contrast, International Academic Mobility (IAM) is not specifically nor linearly associated with Achievement in the World of Work (PA) or with Professional Mobility.
- A privileged level of intercultural training abroad, made possible by International Academic Mobility (IAM), does not influence a very strong expectation of achieving better job placement (PA). Nor do exchange students show marked expectations regarding career mobility.
- Expectations for future economic growth in relation to IAM are very low: 75% of exchange students said that IAM does not influence income, 10% responded that it does influence it, and the rest did not answer.
- The devaluation of diplomas and education also impacts exchange students, who perceive that they must invest more and more in education to obtain a relatively lower return. A corresponding increase in social and professional benefits is not expected from additional training.
- There exist a strong awareness of the current gap between education and professional achievement, between training and work. The exchange students demand that the university fit to the requirements of the work market and bring theory closer to practice, generating skills for problem-solving *in situ* alongside the development of other psychosocial skills, for self-management and for action.
- The disconnection perceived by Exchange students between IAM and Professional Achievement/Mobility invites us to revisit the specific functions fulfilled by university education in the face of the challenges presented by the world of work, and particularly by International Academic Mobility (IAM), conceived as a strategy to promote Employability and Professional Mobility.

From an epistemological and sociological perspective:

- Internationalization of Higher Education (IAM) is a complex and dynamic reality that includes political-organizational levels (macro and meso) and interacting individuals (micro level). These exchange students, on the one hand, bring their own histories and aspirations for achievement. On the other hand, they are the ones who experience abrupt changes and anticipate the impact that IAM will have on their progress and market positioning. Therefore, while from a macro perspective IAM was conceived as a strategy to preserve employability and career mobility (Bologna Process), the individuals do not harbor strong expectations regarding these two pillars.

The interplay of individuals and contexts emerges clearly, moving away from reductionist and linear (deterministic) interpretations.

The findings are framed within the author's systemic interactionist perspective and lay the foundation for a micro-theory of the ***Systemic Psychosociology of the Internationalization of Higher Education***.

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