

Motives for undertaking education degrees at the University of Huelva

Motivaciones para el ingreso en los grados de educación de la Universidad de Huelva

Motivações para a admissão a graus de educação na Universidade de Huelva

攻读韦尔瓦大学本科教育学位的新生学习动机

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Abstract

Several variables inherent to the profile of new university students affect their likelihood of achieving optimal adaptation and finishing the studies they embark upon. A cornerstone of this is the vocational factor as, to some extent, it influences the commitment and willingness of students to tackle the learning process with ambition and enthusiasm. The main aim of the present work was to identify student profiles based on their reasons for undertaking Early Childhood Education, Primary Education and Social Education degrees. The present study adopts a survey-type methodology and follows a cross-sectional, descriptive and associative design, in which the set of individuals that make up the sample are grouped using a hierarchical approach. To this end, data are processed according to multivariate statistical methods (clustering). The sample was selected incidentally and is composed of 376 first year students undertaking one of three degrees within the Faculty of Education, Psychology and Sports Sciences at Huelva University. Findings reveal the existence of three possible groupings in terms of the profile of students enrolled on degrees. Two of these groups pertain to variables that are linked with vocational aspects, although a smaller group also exists in which this is not the case. Moreover, degrees in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Social Education continue to be feminised, whilst the “wild card” entry option continues to be applied to Primary Education degrees.

Keywords: university student, profiles, vocational interests, decision making.

Resumen

Existen diversas variables asociadas al perfil del alumnado universitario de nuevo ingreso que inciden en el logro de una óptima adaptación y continuidad en los estudios que estos inician. El factor vocacional emerge como uno de los pilares fundamentales puesto que, en cierta medida, es garante de encontrar un alumnado universitario más comprometido y receptivo a afrontar un proceso de aprendizaje con ambición y energías. El objetivo principal de este trabajo consiste en identificar perfiles de estudiantes en base a los motivos de ingreso en los grados de Educación Infantil, Educación Primaria y Educación Social. El estudio parte de una metodología tipo encuesta, con un diseño transversal de tipo descriptivo y asociativo, desde el que se persigue hacer una agrupación jerarquizada con el conjunto de individuos que conforma la muestra. Para ello, los datos se tratarán con métodos estadísticos multivariantes (conglomerados o cluster). La muestra ha sido seleccionada de manera incidental y está compuesta por 376 estudiantes de primer curso de los tres grados de la Facultad de Educación, Psicología y Ciencias del Deporte de la Universidad de Huelva. Los resultados revelan la existencia de tres posibles agrupamientos en cuanto al perfil de los estudiantes que acceden a los grados, en dos de los cuales se atisban variables ligadas a lo vocacional, mientras que hay un grupo minoritario en el que esto no ocurre; además, sigue presente la feminización en los grados Grado de Educación Infantil y educación social o la atribución de “comodín” al Grado de Educación Primaria.

Palabras clave: estudiante universitario, perfiles, interés vocacional, toma de decisiones.

Received/Recibido	Nov 03, 2021	Approved /Aprobado	May 16, 2022	Published/Publicado	Jun 30, 2022
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Resumo

Existem várias variáveis associadas ao perfil dos novos estudantes universitários que afetam a obtenção de uma adaptação e continuidade ótimas nos estudos que iniciam. O fator vocacional emerge como um dos pilares fundamentais uma vez que, até certo ponto, é uma garantia de encontrar estudantes universitários mais comprometidos e recetivos para enfrentar um processo de aprendizagem com ambição e energias. O principal objetivo deste trabalho é identificar os perfis de estudantes com base nas razões de admissão aos graus de Ensino Infantil, Ensino Primário e Ensino Social. O estudo baseia-se numa metodologia de tipo topográfico, com um desenho descritivo e associativo transversal, a partir do qual se pretende fazer um agrupamento hierárquico do conjunto de indivíduos que compõem a amostra. Para este fim, os dados serão processados utilizando métodos estatísticos multivariantes (conglomerados ou clusters). A amostra foi selecionada de forma incidental e é composta por 376 estudantes do primeiro ano dos três graus da Faculdade de Educação, Psicologia e Ciências do Desporto da Universidade de Huelva. Os resultados revelam a existência de três agrupamentos possíveis em termos do perfil dos estudantes que entram nos graus, em duas das quais é possível discernir variáveis ligadas a aspetos profissionais, enquanto existe um grupo minoritário em que isso não acontece; além disso, a feminização ainda está presente nos graus de Ensino Infantil e Ensino Social ou na atribuição de “joker” ao Grau de Ensino Primário.

Palavras-chave: estudante universitário, perfis, interesse profissional, tomada de decisões.

摘要

存在众多与大学新生个人情况相关的变量用来反映他们在学业适应及连续性方面的成就。在这其中，最为重要的一项因素就是兴趣热爱。在一定程度上可以确定，对学业持有兴趣的大学新生对学习有更多的承诺，也更愿意付出精力，用野心面对学习过程中的种种挑战。该研究的主要目的是根据幼儿教育、小学教育和社会教育本科新生的入学动机确定学生的情况。该研究采用问卷研究法和描述性及关联性的横断设计，对样本群体进行等级分组。因此，我们使用多种统计学方法（整群抽样或聚类分析）处理数据。通过偶遇抽样得到韦尔瓦大学教育系、心理系和体育科学系的 376 名大一新生样本。研究结果显示根据大学新生的入学情况，有可能将其分为三大组。其中两组可以观察到跟兴趣紧密相关的变量，而另外的一组少数样本则没有观察到相同的结果。研究还表明本科幼儿教育和社会教育系仍然存在女多男少的情况，同时把小学教育学位当做“保底”专业的态度屡见不鲜。

关键词: 大学生、个人情况、兴趣热爱、决策

Are students undertaking education science degrees motivated by personal vocation? Existing literature reveals the vocational factor to be one of the main motives behind university course decisions (Cordón et al., 2012; Doña and Luque, 2019; Del and Fernández, 2019; Fernández, 2020; Skatova & Ferguson, 2014), however, it is unclear whether this is really true.

Cases are increasingly emerging in classrooms in which apathy resounds, with students talking in class, not paying attention to teachers, being disinterested in learning and lacking motivation students, etc. When students are asked why they are on the course when they are clearly disinterested, many reply: “I didn’t get onto the degree course I

wanted”; “This degree course was not my first choice”; “To study something”; “Because there is little work and you can make a lot of money”, etc. Given this situation, the need arises to dismantle myths or address realities about the reasons that lead students to pursue studies in education provision (Sánchez, 2009). Moreover, it will be useful to explore whether these reasons are related to certain sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, degree, scholarship, residence, professional activity) or to the entry profile (route of entry into university, length of time since finishing access studies, amount of knowledge about the degree, topic under study, etc.) (Azpeitia, 2020; Martínez et al., 2015; Said-Hung et al., 2017).

Knowledge of the characteristics and learning styles of students studying education provision may help to prevent early dropout or degree course changes and enable guidance to be better suited to student profiles (De Vries et al., 2011; Esteban et al., 2016; Garzón and Gil, 2017; Tinto, 2017; Vergara, Boj, Barriga and Díaz, 2017). The provision of professional training and/or guidance adjusted to motives for study may be a key factor for preventing or reducing professional apathy in the future and for creating more personalised provision for students lacking a vocational motivation (Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2019).

Motives and profiles of future teachers

Recent literature (Cupani et al., 2017; Del Pino and Fernández, 2019; Martínez and Vila, 2018; Vázquez and Blanco, 2019) based on the importance of vocation as a means to identifying the motives and profiles inherent to university students, reveals the existence of two streams of analysis. The first stream to emerge pertains to psychogenetics, which considers vocation to be innate to individuals from birth. The second stream, sociogenetics, pertains to the influence of external factors in shaping individual vocations. In turn, these streams are embodied by multiple theories that try to consolidate the process of “vocational development”. Examples of such theories are expectancy-value theory (the expectations of reaching a goal and the value given to this goal determine individual behaviour), social cognitive theory of career development (individual vocational behaviour is determined by variables such as self-efficacy, expectations, interests and goals) and self-determination theory (external motives prevail in individuals who are less committed to their profession), amongst others. All of these theories help increase understanding of the importance of the specific elements that characterise these processes.

Research works examining the motives and profiles of new university students undertaking teaching-related degrees exist, however, research in the Spanish context is scarce. A study conducted by Briones et al. (2021)

comparing motives for undertaking Early Childhood Education and Primary Education degrees at the University of Cantabria particularly stands out. Fernández-Molina et al. (2011) examined the profile and entry skills of students starting ECE degrees at the University of Málaga over a period of four consecutive academic years. A similar approach was taken by Herran et al. (2020), who also chose to focus on certain beliefs and attitudes in students undertaking the ECE degree course, according to gender and study background. Further, Polo et al. (2018), who also focused on this degree, examined the influence of background, experience, motivation, preconceptions and competencies on student degree choices at the University of Granada. Meanwhile, Pérez-Ferra et al. (2021) and Zapico-Barbeito et al. (2017) investigated the effect of different intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (vocational dimensions, influence of parents and relatives, etc.), including training and educating others, good working conditions, teacher influence, experience working with children and volunteering, dedication to service and selflessness, moral rewards, interaction with children, peer influence) on the decision to opt for Primary Education degree courses. In addition, Herrada and Herrada (2012) conducted a larger study of student motives for opting for a particular speciality as part of their teacher training.

With regards to the stage prior to university entrance, it is important to highlight relevant studies that have demonstrated the importance of several factors on decision making and, therefore, the vocational development processes of students:

a) Family: several recent studies point to the importance of family in the choice of academic study paths. Martínez and Vila (2018) and Fernández-García et al. (2016) explained that some parents are not entirely satisfied with the maturity shown by their offspring during the process of choosing a degree course. Other studies highlight important socioeconomic determinants. For instance Martínez and Zurita (2014) identified that students intending to attend university tend to come from families

with relatives who have university qualifications, managerial job positions and high incomes. In contrast, other studies, such as that conducted by Said-Hung et al. (2017), have reported that students wanting to access university tend to come from lower-middle class families.

b) Peers, classmates and friends: as was the case with the previously discussed social factor, several research studies show the importance of peers at different moments. For instance, at the time of decision making (Briones et al., 2021; Martínez et al., 2015; Pérez-Ferra et al., 2021 and García-Martínez et al., 2017), peers are key to offering opinions. Further, after the decision has been made (Rodríguez et al., 2016) peers provide essential support for the process of consolidating the choice.

b) Gender: studies such as those conducted by Cordón et al. (2012), Martínez et al. (2015), Navarro-Guzmán and Casero-Martínez (2012), Rodríguez et al. (2016), Ruiz-Gutiérrez and Santana-Vega (2018), and Vázquez and Manassero (2015) agree that social trends exist in which women opt for care-related and humanistic degrees (for instance teaching and pedagogy), whilst men opt for careers linked to engineering and those that are more technical in nature.

c) Outcome expectations: Finally, a large amount of existing research has grouped outcome expectations according to material (economic retribution, job stability, working hours, etc.), social (prestige, power, hedonism, influence, status, parental approval, security, etc.) and personal (satisfaction, altruism, self-realisation, etc.) factors. Based on this grouping, Álvarez et al. (2011), Avendaño and González (2012), García et al. (2013), Gratacós (2014), Martínez et al. (2015), Pérez et al. (2018), Rosser et al. (2013), and Said-Hung et al. (2017) have argued that the following priorities emerge, in the following order: altruism, security, hedonism and, lastly, prestige-power. Personal taste has also emerged as a reason behind degree choices (Rodríguez et al., 2016).

On the other hand, other work (Martínez et al., 2016; Vaillant, 2013) take a somewhat different stance, in which professional teaching degrees are arrived at as an access route to the later study of other degrees by students with low qualifications who are not initially able to access their preferred choices. This argument is corroborated by the findings of research works such as those conducted by Cordón et al. (2012), Corrales et al. (2018) and Cortés (2017), which found that an increase in the choice of certain options was motivated by subsequent job opportunities or social value, in addition to hesitation when making study choices (Álvarez and López, 2019).

In the university setting, several works taking a sociological standpoint exist that provide a broad overview of the motives and profiles inherent to university students in Spain. Studies span the 1980s to the present day (Azpeitia, 2020; Mesa and Mingorance, 2006) and are hugely important due to the large scope of bibliographic analysis carried out. In addition, readers are directed towards work conducted by García-Poyato et al. (2018) in order to gain an international perspective of the topic. This study presents a detailed review of studies published in the 21st century that analysed the different motivational factors behind university study choices linked with degrees in the educational sciences framework. The most consistent evidence at an international level to emerge from the aforementioned study pertains to the determination of three groupings: extrinsic (economic income, working conditions and social status), intrinsic (teaching children and specific liking for a school subject) and altruistic (perception of teaching as a socially valuable and important vocation). At the same time, the study concluded that the influences of the family and social context, gender (feminisation) and socioeconomic status (diversification, etc.) were hugely important.

Turning attention to the Spanish setting, factors inherent to the profile of Spanish students studying degrees belonging to the educational sciences can also be included in the aforementioned grouping. In general terms,

a shared profile based on the evidence extracted from different studies can be detailed. According to Doña and Luque (2019), in general, the decision to pursue certain studies over others is due to a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motives (of which vocational and professional opportunities prevail) in the case of specialties linked to the field of education sciences. This being said, in accordance with Del Pino (2016), García-Ripa et al. (2018), Gratacós and López-Jurado (2016), López-Justicia et al. (2008), Sánchez, (2015), Sánchez-Lissen (2009), and Urbina-Cárdenas and Ávila-Aponte (2013), the intrinsic motives of vocation and knowledge sharing most commonly emerge. Research points to four types of students based on the prevalence of motivational types. The first two types are the “*helpful*” and the “*competent*”, with this type seeking out intrinsic vocational fulfilment. The latter two types are the “*ambitious*” and the “*independent*”, with this type seeking extrinsic vocational fulfilment. These four types assist in defining the vocational profile, although the “*helpful*” and “*competent*” profiles seem to more closely align with the “*ideal*” teacher profile, whilst the “*ambitious*” and “*independent*” profiles are less closely aligned (Del Pino and Fernández, 2019, p.140).

Camina and Salvador (2007) indicated that the most common access route was via baccalaureate studies, however, they also highlighted meaningful access via vocational courses, especially ECE and Physical Education. In addition, Bertomeu et al. (2007) argued that professional teaching courses are not usually enrolled on as single preference majors but, instead, tend to form a part of a set of preferences (Camina and Salvador, 2007; Polo et al., 2018). An exception to this is seen in the case of Primary Education, which tends to be opted for as a single major but not as a first-choice course. In this sense, in specialisations in which intrinsic motivations are more deeply rooted (ECE, Physical Education or Music Education), students are more likely to show greater commitment,

engagement, satisfaction and self-determination (García-Ripa et al., 2018; Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2019).

It is also of interest, as highlighted by Del Pino (2016) and Del Pino, and Fernández (2019), that other factors related with teaching and the teaching vocation have also emerged as key to degree course choices, such as gender, social class, family, the job market (accessibility) and social networks (word of mouth regarding universities). With regards to social class, Mesa and Mingorance (2006) noted that the students usually come from middle or lower-middle class families. With regards to gender, these same authors also stated that females predominantly make up the profile of teaching course students, especially in the case of the ECE speciality (Fernández-Molina et al., 2011). In contrast, males predominate on physical education courses. Such findings have been reiterated in recent studies such as that conducted by Zurita et al. (2016).

In any case, as discussed by García-Poyato et al. (2018), the teaching profession is currently experiencing a global crisis (changing teaching degree courses, the job market and working conditions) that makes it an increasingly less attractive option. This makes it necessary to conduct studies that examine the motivations held by students opting for a teaching profession in order to better understand this changing landscape (De Besa-Gutiérrez and Gil-Flores, 2019).

Objectives

The main aim of the present work was to identify student profiles based on their motives for undertaking the degree courses of ECE, Primary Education and Social Education. The following specific objectives are proposed:

Establish clusters based on motives behind degree study.

Describe the main characteristics inherent to established groups.

Examine the relationships between identified groups, sociodemographic variables

(age, gender, previous university study, timeline of the course on which the student is enrolled, student habitual place of residence, job activity and scholarships or grants received to finance studies) and university entry characteristics (route of access to the university, length of time for study completion, extent of knowledge about the degree being studied and whether the degree being studied was a preference).

Method

A survey-type methodology with a descriptive and exploratory cross-sectional design was employed. Specifically, the aim was to conduct hierarchical clustering of the set of individuals that made up the sample. To this end, data were processed using multivariate statistical methods (clustering). The procedure followed to apply these techniques is described in detail in the following sections.

Sample

Sampling was incidental and resulted in the recruitment of a total of 376 students (20.7% male and 78.5% female) undertaking different degree courses within the Faculty of Education, Psychology and Sports Sciences (27.9% ECE, 48.9% Primary Education and 23.1% in Social Education) at the University of Huelva (Spain). Mean age was 20.7 years (SD= 3.2), with ages ranging between 18 and 41 years.

A total of 90.4 % of students had not previously undertaken a university degree. 52.4% were enrolled on the morning degree timetable, 30.6% had an exclusive afternoon timetable and 17% undertook modules imparted in both the morning and the afternoon.

Around 47.6% of the sample resided in their family home, whilst 48.7% lived in rented accommodation.

Further, 86.7% did not engage in any paid work activity. Of the 13.3% who did, 5.6% were working in a job that was related with their studies.

A total of 85.1% of the sample had applied for some type of scholarship/support in order to finance their studies.

In terms of the academic characteristics of students, it was found that 56.1% of students accessed university via baccalaureate studies and 39.9% did so via other higher education courses. Only 1.3% gained entry through specific entrance exams for those aged over 25, 40 and 45 years of age, respectively, whilst 1.1% did so following the completion of other university degrees and another 1.1% by transferring their school records. Of those with prior university studies, 77.7% had completed these studies within the last year, whereas 14.9% had finished these studies between one and two years prior to their enrolment on the present course. Knowledge about the degree course being undertaken at student outset received an average rating of 4.4 on a 7-point scale, pointing to an average level of knowledge. For 78.7% of participants, the present course represented a first preference, whilst for 18.6% it was a second preference.

Instruments and variables

For data collection, a questionnaire was drawn up that was named the *orientation needs of new university students questionnaire (Necesidades de Orientación en Estudiantes Universitarios/as de nuevo Ingreso - NOUNI)* (Delgado-García et al., 2021). This tool consisted of four scales pertaining to sociodemographic and academic factors of new students (14 items), motives behind study course choices (10 items), academic orientation needs (10 items) and career guidance needs (10 items). The first scale is composed of 14 categorical variables, whilst all remaining variables are measured on a Likert-type scale (1=totally disagree and 7=strongly agree). A Cronbach's alpha of .81 was found for the full scale. Alpha values for the separate scales were as follows: motives behind study choices (alpha= .61); academic orientation needs (alpha= .79); career guidance needs (alpha= .77).

Distribution of the data was also analysed, in addition to skewness and kurtosis

(recommended value ± 1), with outcomes being acceptable. Item-total correlations were produced for each of the dimensions, with all items correlating significantly. Finally, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed and the following model fit indices were obtained: RMSEA = .052 (acceptable value $< .07$); chi-square statistic = 2.02 (acceptable value between 2 and 5); IFI (incremental fit index) = .89 (acceptable value $\geq .90$); NFI (normalised fit index) = .81 (acceptable value close to 1); CFI (comparative fit index) = .89 (acceptable value $\geq .90$); HOELTER = 216 (acceptable value > 200). These outcomes suggest the instrument was valid and reliable.

In order to address the research aim, a cluster analysis approach was taken in which the variables making up motives behind study choices were selected and entered as a means to identifying existing groups (Table 1). Secondly, in order to define the relationships between identified groups and sociodemographic and academic entry characteristics, the following variables were also included: age, gender; previous university degree; university of current study, degree course under study, course timetable, place of residence during the academic year, engagement in paid activity, scholarship/grant to finance studies in the current academic year, university access, knowledge about the degree at study outset and time at which the decision was made to pursue current undergraduate studies.

Data analysis

Cluster analysis was performed to examine gathered data with a view to identifying student profiles based on motives for undertaking degrees in ECE, Primary Education and Social Education. This approach was chosen as it is a multivariate

technique that enables the grouping of elements according to an optimal number of homogenous features. A hierarchical approach was taken as this is suitable for determining the optimal number of existing clusters and, in this way, reveals the features that define student groups based on their reasons for undertaking courses. Cluster analysis responds to the fundamental question guiding the present research, i.e. whether students undertaking degrees associated with education sciences are motivated by vocational desires.

Analyses were performed using the SPSSv23 statistical program. Given that study choice is a quantitative variable, the proximity measure used was the Euclidean distance. Ward's classification method was also used as this approach is the most appropriate for generating discrete groups. As a further step to validating the groups found, ANOVA was performed to compare group differences.

In order to analyse the relationships between identified groups and sociodemographic and academic characteristics, chi-square analysis was performed. This analysis is appropriate for examining the relationship between two or more groups when using qualitative variables.

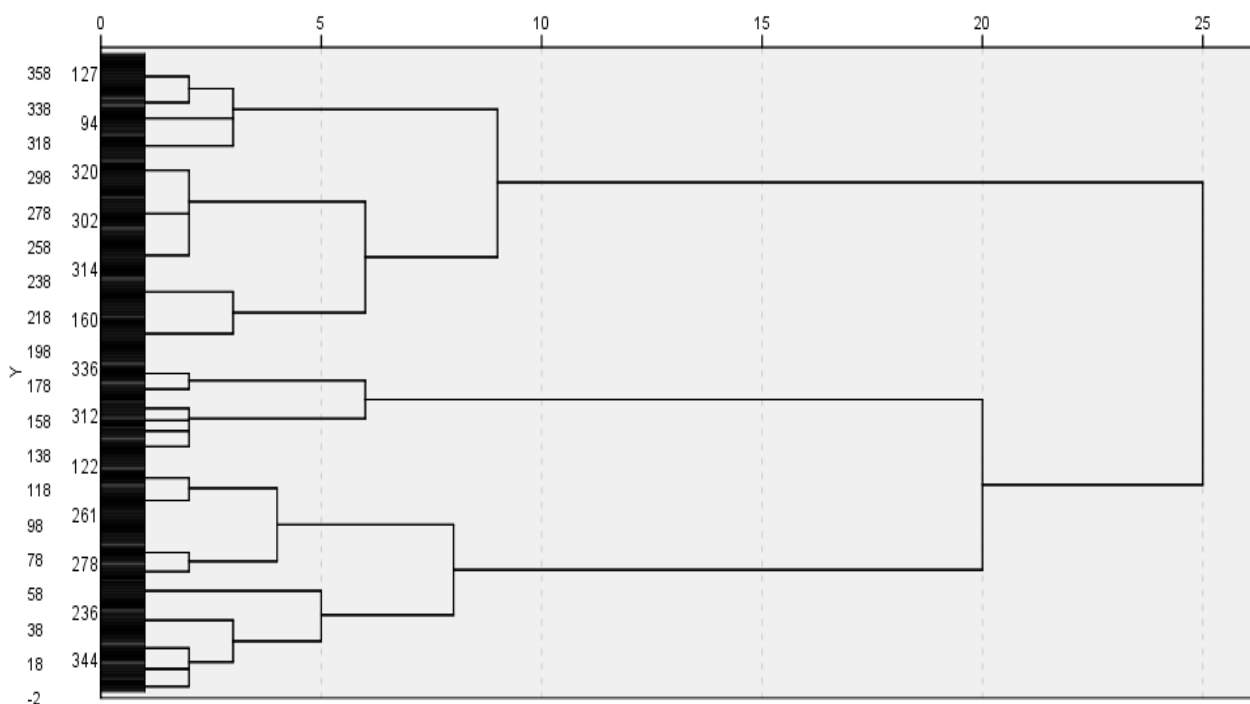
Results

Hierarchical cluster analysis

First, a graphical representation of obtained data, via a dendrogram, was examined. This was produced using SPSS v23 (Figure 1).

The first column of the graph presents cases (university students) and the upper part of the graph presents distances. The further to the right the lines joining different blocks together are found, the greater the distance and less similarity between different cases.

Figure 1. Dendrogram using Ward's linkage
Combination of rescaled distance clusters



As the aim was to group students according to their motives for undertaking degrees in ECE, Primary Education and Social Education, the linking process was halted once horizontal lines passed a certain length as shorter lines represent more homogeneous groups. In this sense, it was decided to stop the process when a distance of 10 was reached (parallel dashed lines). This produced three clusters containing 129 (34.3%), 179 (47.6%) and 60 students (16%), respectively. Mean comparison according to the ANOVA statistic provided further confirmation and validation of the

existence of three student profiles pertaining to motives for undertaking degree courses.

Table 1 presents analysis of the characteristics inherent to each profile. Dispersion of scores from the mean, using standard deviation (SD) as a reference, are also presented, alongside the highest and lowest scores for each item. As shown, sufficient variability was seen for all items, indicating acceptable discrimination amongst students. ANOVA outcomes were significant in all cases, confirming the existence of three profiles.

Table 1. Descriptive data and cluster analyses

FACTOR	ITEM	CLUSTER (Ward method)			ANOVA	
		1 N=129	2 N=179	3 N=60	F	
REASONS FOR ENTRY	Preference or liking for degree course	M (SD)	1.26 (.72)	1.30 (.66)	2.61 (1.29)	66.36**
		Maximum	6	4	6	
		Minimum	1	1	1	
	Prior degree	M (SD)	2.19 (1.41)	6.32 (1.15)	4.61 (2.17)	303.98*
		Maximum	7	7	7	
		Minimum	1	1	1	
	Has abilities and aptitudes for the degree	M (SD)	1.37 (.76)	2.70 (1.89)	2.55 (1.40)	31.26***
		Maximum	6	7	7	
		Minimum	1	1	1	
	Social standing	M (SD)	3.17 (1.68)	2.64 (1.61)	3.32 (1.66)	5.76 ***
		Maximum	7	7	7	
		Minimum	1	1	1	
	Employment opportunities	M (SD)	4.05 (1.72)	3.64 (1.78)	4.27 (1.56)	3.78***
		Maximum	7	7	7	
		Minimum	1	1	1	
	Lack of financial resources to study a different degree outside of city/locality	M (SD)	1.98 (1.79)	1.35 (.96)	2.40 (1.88)	13.96***
		Maximum	7	6	7	
		Minimum	1	1	1	
Advice from close associates	M (SD)	3.35 (2.08)	2.72 (1.85)	3.72 (1.94)	7.45***	
	Maximum	7	7	7		
	Minimum	1	1	1		
Not gaining a place on the desired degree course	M (SD)	1.24 (.76)	1.12 (.45)	6.23 (.90)	1454.1***	
	Maximum	4	4	7		
	Minimum	1	1	4		
Study difficulty	M (SD)	2.48 (1.70)	1.70 (1.12)	3.23 (1.85)	27.21***	
	Maximum	7	7	7		
	Minimum	1	1	1		
Duration of study	M (SD)	2.95 (2.07)	1.62 (1.09)	2.7 (1.80)	28.03***	
	Maximum	7	7	7		
	Minimum	1	1	1		

Notes: (*= $p < .05$; **= $p < .01$; ***= $p < .001$)

The first cluster is characterised by a large group of students (129) whose main motive was job opportunities. They had also followed the advice of people close to them and were intent on gaining social prestige.

The second cluster is the largest and includes students (179) whose main motive was to gain a degree qualification and, to a lesser extent, improve their employment opportunities.

Finally, the third and smallest cluster groups students (60) whose main motive was failing to secure a place on their desired degree, followed by gaining a degree and improving their job opportunities.

In order to plot the dispersion of the student profiles, principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation examined a two-factor structure. KMO and Bartlett's sphericity statistics supported the suitability of factor analysis.

Table 2. “Reasons for entry” factor structure

Item	Factor	
	1	2
Duration of studies	.726	.182
Study difficulty	.671	.442
Prior degree	-.645	.054
Social standing	.619	-.087
Advice from close associates	.524	.035
Employment opportunities	.506	-.187
Lack of financial resources to study for a different degree outside of city/locality	.436	.210
Preference or liking for degree course	.018	.838
Not gaining a place on the desired degree course	.195	.736
Has abilities and aptitudes for the degree	-.378	.506
Explained variance %	26.77%	18.20%

Notes: KMO: 0.709; Bartlett, $\chi^2 = 708.295$; $df = 45$; $P < 0.000$

Analysis of a two-factor structure explained 44.97% of overall variance. Factor 1 grouped together variables related to social conditions that involve a certain degree of flexibility in the process of studying (ease, duration, prior degree, social prestige, advice from peers, lack of resources) and to having a vision for the future (job opportunities, etc.). On the other hand, factor 2 grouped variables related to vocation (career preferences, and skills and attitudes for the degree) and study access routes (not getting a place on the desired degree course).

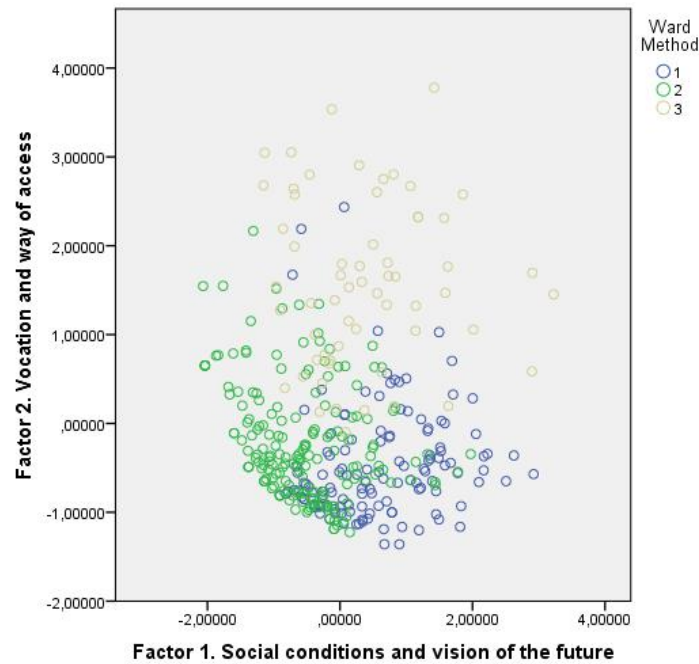
Figure 2 plots these factors, with F1 being plotted on the horizontal axis and F2 on the vertical axis. Each point depicts a variable found in the three clusters.

Cluster 1, shown in blue, corresponds to factor 1 (social conditions and vision of the future) and shows that most points are clustered around job opportunities. Cluster 2, shown in green, comprises a number of scores

located on the negative axis of factor 1 at the factorial level (having a degree) and with factor 2 vocational motives (preferences and attitudes). Cluster 3 is plotted in the upper area of the graph. It shows more dispersed scores, although all cases share in common the fact that they did not gain a place on the degree they originally wished to pursue.

In short, the greater number of points found in the lower left area of the graph, the more the cluster they belong to is associated with vocational motives and social conditions. In contrast, the greater number of points found in the lower right area of the factorial plane, the more motives are associated with social factors and having a future vision, although vocational aspects are also present. Finally, the more scores are dispersed in the upper area of the graph, the more motives are associated with not getting a place on the degree course of choice.

Figure 2. Factorial plane of clusters



Chi-squared analysis was performed to explore the relationships between the three identified groups and sociodemographic and academic characteristics.

Table 3 presents obtained outcomes and reveals the strength of associations. For example, a significant association was found

between the degree course being undertaken by students and profile. In this sense, as shown in Table 4, profiles 1 and 2 seem to have a balanced distribution of the different examined degree courses. In contrast, Group 3 is basically made up of students on the Primary Education degree course.

Table 3. Associations between variables derived according to Chi-square analysis

Variables	Statistics	
	Pearson's chi-square	Asymptotic (two-way)
Degree	10.51	.033
Moment	52.256	.000
Schedule	13.733	.008
Study option	183.8	.000
Gender	16.487	.002

Table 4. Association between profile and degree being undertaken

	Degree course undertaken		
	Early Childhood Education Degree	Elementary Education Degree	Social Education Degree
Profile 1	41 (31.8%)	58 (45%)	30 (23.3%)
Profile 2	56 (31.3%)	88 (49.2%)	35 (19.6%)
Profile 3	7 (11.7%)	36 (60%)	17 (28.3%)

With respect to the moment at which students made their degree choices, profiles 1 and 2 are made up of students who had always planned on studying their current degree,

whilst profile 3 has a much greater presence of students who arrived at the decision to study for a bachelor's degree just prior to entering university (Table 5).

Table 5. Association between profiles and the timing of decision making

	At what point did you decide to pursue your current undergraduate studies?				
	<i>Has always been my decision</i>	<i>Since compulsory secondary education (ESO)</i>	<i>From secondary school/baccalaureate</i>	<i>Just before entering university</i>	<i>Other</i>
Profile 1	58 (45%)	17 (13.2%)	30 (23.3%)	14 (10.9%)	10 (7.8%)
Profile 2	82 (45.8)	26 (14.5%)	25 (14%)	19 (10.6%)	25 (14%)
Profile 3	7 (11.7%)	9 (15%)	15 (25%)	24 (40%)	5 (8.3%)

With regards to timetable (Table 6), profiles 1 and 2 include a higher proportion of students with just a morning timetable, whilst profile 3 contains more students with afternoon timetables.

Next, with regards to degree preferences (Table 7), profiles 1 and 2 are made up of students for whom the present degree was a first preference. Profile 3 consists of students

for whom their present university degree was a second option.

The last of the sociodemographic variables for which strong associations were found as a function of the identified profiles is gender (Table 8). Profiles 1 and 2 have a greater presence of women than group 3, which shows a more balanced distribution of men and women.

Table 6. Association between profile and timetable

	Timetable on which you are registered		
	<i>Morning</i>	<i>Afternoon</i>	<i>Morning and afternoon</i>
Profile 1	78 (60.5%)	30 (23.3%)	21 (16.3%)
Profile 2	97 (54.2%)	52 (29.1%)	30 (16.8%)
Profile 3	20 (33.3%)	28 (46.7%)	12 (20%)

Table 7. Association between profile and degree course preference at the time of choosing

	The degree course you are currently undertaking was		
	<i>Your first choice</i>	<i>Your second choice</i>	<i>Your third (or lower) choice</i>
Profile 1	117 (90.7%)	11 (8.5%)	0
Profile 2	165 (92.2%)	12 (6.7%)	2 (1.1%)
Profile 3	9 (15%)	45 (75%)	6 (10%)

Table 8. Association between profile and gender

	Gender		
	<i>Man</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Other</i>
Profile 1	21 (16.4%)	107 (83.6%)	0
Profile 2	34 (19%)	145 (81%)	0
Profile 3	22 (36.7%)	37 (61.7%)	1 (1.7%)

Discussion and conclusions

The following the student profiles were identified as a function of motives for undertaking ECE, Primary Education and Social Education degrees:

The first profile pertained to students whose main motives revolved around social conditions and having a vision of the future. The main motive of this group was to improve job opportunities and to achieve a certain social prestige, with this group also having followed the advice of people close to them. These motives align with the outcome expectations indicated by an abundance of research (Álvarez et al., 2011, Avendaño & González, 2012, García et al., 2013, Gratacós, 2014, Martínez et al., 2015, Pérez et al., 2018, Rosser et al., 2013, Said-Hung et al., 2017) as a key factor of degree course choices. In the case of the present study, outcomes expectations were linked to material expectations (economic retribution, job stability, working hours, etc.), although the importance of family and the social context was also highlighted in relation to study choices. This has been shown to be another motivational factor that influences degree choices (García-Poyato et al., 2018, Zapico-Barbeito et al., 2017) and emerged, in the present study, through the fact that students in this group indicated that they followed the advice of people close to them. With regards to degree type, a balanced distribution of degrees was found, whilst, students in this group also reported always having a clear intention to study this degree as their first option. Finally, the majority are enrolled on a course with a morning timetable and are women.

The second profile contained the largest number of students who shared many of the sociodemographic and academic features of profile 1. The main difference was that their main motive for studying their present course was to gain a degree qualification and, to a lesser extent, find a job. This indicates that social expectations (prestige, power, hedonism, influence, status, parental approval, security, etc.) (Álvarez et al., 2011, Avendaño

and González, 2012, García et al., 2013, Gratacós, 2014, Martínez et al., 2015, Pérez et al., 2018, Rosser et al., 2013, Said-Hung et al., 2017) are hugely important.

In any case, in both profiles, personal taste predominates as a main motive (Rodríguez et al., 2016). This is manifested through the fact that students with this profile reported always having a clear intention to undertake this course as their first option of study. This reveals a certain vocational factor at the time of deciding their academic path. This finding strongly coincides with recent work such as that conducted by Briones et al. (2021) and Llorent-Bedmar et al. (2019).

Finally, the third profile pertains to students whose main reason for undertaking the present degree was their failure to secure a place on their desired degree and whose second reason was to gain a degree qualification and improve their job opportunities. There is a large presence of Primary Education degree students, who arrived at their decision to study shortly before beginning university (they lacked previous analysis and reflection about their academic future). These students are mostly enrolled on studies with an afternoon timetable, chose their university degree as a second option and were fairly evenly mixed between men and women. This profile also differs from the previous profiles in terms of some other aspects. Findings were in line with those reported by previous studies (Martínez et al., 2016, Vaillant, 2013), in which it was found that the teaching profession was a popular choice as a means to gaining future access to other degrees and by students with low qualifications who were unable to access their preferred options. Moreover, this outcome is also corroborated by recent literature (Cordón et al., 2012, Corrales et al., 2018, Cortés, 2017), in which a degree of indecision regarding decision making around study choices was noted (Álvarez & López, 2019).

In conclusion, present findings agree with Doña and Luque (2019) in that decisions to pursue certain studies are due to a combination

of intrinsic (first preference, clear long-term intention) and extrinsic (material and social reasons) motives. However, in contrast to that concluded by other studies (Pontes et al., 2011), in the present study, interests related to material conditions of the profession were prioritised, with interest in teaching being relegated to taking a backseat.

Further, feminisation is still present in early childhood education (Fernández-Molina et al., 2011) and social education (Fernández-Molina et al., 2011). These findings coincide with the social predisposition shown by women towards care-related degrees (Ruiz-Gutiérrez and Santana-Vega, 2018).

With regards to Primary Education degrees, present findings coincide with research conducted by Camina and Salvador (2007) and Polo et al. (2018), in that it is a speciality that is often chosen as a part of another wider course. This can lead to weaker intrinsic motivations and, consequently, lack of commitment, insecurity, dissatisfaction and lack of autonomy.

Given the situation described, it is necessary to provide effectively cater for entry motives. This can be done through training and/or counselling, which could serve to prevent future professional apathy. Individualised study plans targeting students with non-vocational motives (Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2019) should also be developed as a means to favouring adaptation and academic performance.

It is also necessary to address degree course choices at earlier educational stages (primary, secondary, baccalaureate/high school), taking a gender egalitarian approach that breaks with classic stereotypes associated with gender roles. Such roles lead to horizontal segregation due to sex in which women continue to be concentrated in the care and humanistic professions.

Finally, it is necessary to give a boost to the teaching profession, especially at the primary education level, as well as to redefine its role and highlight its importance in society. It is necessary to break with the stereotype of being

“an easy career consisting of very basic content, where most of jobs are cut, paste and paint, and teachers are paid for doing nothing, etc.”. An information campaign aimed at future university students is required where myths and legends are debunked. This could prevent many cases of premature university dropout and changes to degree courses.

Present results were produced through a phenomenological approach via a local study conducted at the University of Huelva. Nevertheless, we believe that it is a reflection of what may be happening in other universities, so it would be interesting to extend the research to other (autonomous) university settings allowing us to further our understanding of the phenomenon and study of this reality.

Funding

Educational research project financed by the Vice-rectorate for Innovation and Employability through the “Grants for teaching innovation and educational research for the improvement of teaching at the University of Huelva for the 2018/2019 academic year”. Code PIE005.

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Revista ELectrónica de Investigación y EValuación Educativa
E-Journal of Educational Research, Assessment and Evaluation

[ISSN: 1134-4032]



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