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The Relation between Experiences and Expectations with University Dropout

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to contribute for the understanding of psychological issues that are involved in the transition to higher education, and that can explain the problems of earlier school leavers. A sample of 1121 students of the University of Coimbra was assessed and divided in two groups of analysis: successful and unsuccessful students. It is necessary to take into account the student's study skills, work habits, time management, use of library and others facilities. This assessment may highlight the need for institutional interactions focused on interdisciplinary professionals and the resources of institutions.

Keywords: School Dropout; Academic Failure; Expectations; Experiences; Academic Involvement.

1. Introduction

To deal with the permanence in a school institution and to prevent the early dropout, it takes some attention to the student, without neglecting other issues and other actors in the educational process. For a better understanding of a school leaver, we must take in to account some variables, not only personal, but also familiar, sociocultural, economic and institutional, beyond attending to a very important factor, academic failure (Ferraz & Ferreira, 2005).

This study intends to lead us to perceive which variables are involved in school leaving, characterizing the experiences and expectations, and also explore the causes of dropout in higher education. Prevention must start from the institution in order to reshape and evolve towards providing a quality education at higher level, where students

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have a decisive role to extent that better conditions can move away the dropout spectrum, and getting better results among the unsuccessful students (Wayman, 2002).

1.1. The Transition to a new stage: the University

Analyzing some studies in Portugal, Simão, Santos and Costa (2002) show us that the university should be assumed as a source of a better thinking and analysis, to monitoring and forecasting the major social and economic issues, anticipating problems, contributing to solutions and influencing policies. Higher education should contribute to the preparation of citizens with a critical and free mind, to live and work in a society that reflects criticism and freedom. According to these, it is necessary "introduce a multiplicative factor in the ability of critical thinking and prospective exercised by citizens fully integrated into the new society learning" (Simão, Santos, & Costa, 2002, p. 39). A field of action in which the institutions of higher education hold a dominance is the formation of highly qualified human resources, and may even be said that the most significant contribution to the expectations is taking place with the quality levels that performs the training and dynamic insertion of highly qualified staff in organizations. So is necessary that the newcomers make a positive transition to the university.

The transition can only be seen as an action if is it felt like a change. It is the view of the subject, the way he understands the transition process, which can lead to a situation with positive or negative aspects, so the important aim is the impact that causes a transition in our daily lives (Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman, 1995). In the transition we must take into account the direction of the evaluation to understand it, not only the reference of the period of transition (the before, and the after). Thus a positive transition to the university could bring a successful way along the degree, avoiding the dropout. Personal, Interpersonal, Familiar, Institutional and Academic dimensions are important factors to study in a transition, concerning the problem of a successful career and early schools-leave.

1.1. The Success as a predictor

For Smyth and Hannan (2007) a successful adaptation in higher education is related to general academic efficacy. So, studying the success of the students in the university and consider theirs expectations and experiences could get us some conclusions about the earlier dropout, once the academic failure is one important factor of leavers (Quillen, 2010). This failure constitutes a major shakeup in the moral, human and social terms, emerging to situations of exclusion (Delors, Mufti, Amagi, Ram, Chung, Geremek, Gorham, Kornhauser, Manley, I, Savané, Singh, Stavenhagen, Suhr & Nanzhao generator, 1996). Students who experienced situations of failure will fall into personal disrupt, not valuing their skills and their qualities. The failure has an effect of "snowball" and if not stopped in time, can lead to dropout. With the experience of failure, sometimes comes discouragement, missing classes and discredit by colleagues, homesickness and the prospect of leaving higher education (Ferraz & Pereira, 2005).

2. Methodology

In this research it was used two questionnaires, one of academic expectations, QEA - Expectations version (Soares & Almeida, 2001) and another of academic experiences, QVA-r (Almeida, Soares & Ferreira, 1999). The QVA-r is a questionnaire that displays opinions and feelings about different situations and academic experiences. The instrument is a self-response questionnaire consisting of 60 items in a Likert format of five levels. This questionnaire is intended for students of University and Polytechnic, although the majority of studies have focused on college students of the first year of the degree (Almeida, Soares & Ferreira, 1999). The QEA express what is expected as a student at the University on issues related to their course, with teachers and with their peers (Almeida, Gonçalves, Salgueira, Soares, Machado, Fernandes, Machado, & Vasconcelos, 2003). It is a self-administered questionnaire response that seeks to assess what young people expect to find / deliver in institution of higher education (It was used the Version A - expectations). The QEA is based on a multidimensional conceptualization of academic expectations of 38 items on a Likert response scale of four levels (Soares & Almeida, 2001).

A sample of 1121 students of the University of Coimbra was assessed and separated into two groups of analysis: "successful (n=1004)" and "unsuccessful (n=117)" students concerning the degree situation (failed / not failed).