NEED-ACHIEVEMENT, EXPECTATIONS AND LIFE PURPOSE: A FRENCH-ARGENTINE STUDY OF PHDS IN EDUCATION

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Key words :

Need-Achievement;

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Abstract

Here we present a comparative research study of doctoral programs in the social sciences in Argentina and France (2009-2017). The focus is to analyze professional pathways and their relationship to base, socio-cultural, psychosocial and structural conditioning factors. The perspective of analysis used is macro-meso-micro-macro in sustained interaction, in light of the author's systemic theory *sui generis*: *The Three-Dimensional Spiral of Sense.* The methodology used was both quantitative and qualitative. In this paper we focus on the qualitative and on only one of its components: Expectations and Need achievement as they relate to a feeling of achievement and personal/Professional Satisfaction. The technique used was hierarchical evocation. This allows us to distinguish which aspects are found in the nucleus of representations shared. We worked with three samples, from three doctoral programs in Education. Our findings reveal that in this disciplinary field– historically devalued – is linked to Satisfaction, Life objectives and Achievement more than with economic benefits (investment model).

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A person's motivational drive to act is determined by his/her success or failure expectations and the subjective valences attributed to success or failure. This theory is applied, in general, to achievement behaviors, broadly speaking.

In this study we are precisely positioned before professional "achievements". Atkinson [1] states that Achievement Motivation is the result of the tendency to approach success and the tendency to avoid failure. Both are determined by *the probability of success or failure, the cause for success or failure and the perceived value of success or failure*[2].

Weiner [3] completes Atkinson's theory stating that success or failure expectations on achievement behavior are determined by the attributional processes, i.e., they depend on the individuals' achieved status and beliefs as regards the result of a specific achievement. Such causes for success or failure are defined along two dimensions: instable-stable and internal-external. Upon combining both bipolar dimensions, the result of a specific achievement may be attributed to effort (unstable and internal), to ability (stable and internal), to chance (unstable and external) or to the difficulty of the task (stable and external).

For Weiner depressive individuals show low achievement motivation. They attribute failure to stable internal factors and *success to external unstable factors*. Whatever the case may be, depression is determined by attributing failure to stable factors, and therefore, to *low achievement expectations*.

García Rodríguez[2] contributes some important information.She maintains that helplessness among youngsters "… is channeled through aggressive behaviors towards society; among adults a type of personal or individual helplessness(could develop)" (*Ibid,* p. 177).

As regards the *Expectancy-Valence Model*, expectations and values combine to determine the intensity with which a certain act is performed.

Among the unemployed, the motivational drive to look for a job is a multiplicative function of the success or failure expectations and of how attractive or unpleasant such job is for the

individual. Those unemployed who maintain high expectations of success in finding a job and are positively valued show higher motivation to look for a job. When the actions aimed at achieving the goal do not produce the desired results, a feeling of distress appears. The intensity of such progressive distress will depend, according to the authors, on the subjective value given to the job.

As regards the feeling of depression and pessimism appearing after failure, the more attractive a job looks to a person and the greater his/her expectations for professional success are, the deeper such feeling will be. Using the author's words, failing to achieve a goal means the loss of the benefits that success provides and so the discomfort increases as the goal becomes more attractive, i.e., such loss becomes greater.

The underlying hypothesis is as follows: the negative feeling of depression and pessimism subsequent to the failure to get a job (for example) will be deeper among those who consider the job attractive, who have great expectations in getting a job, and who are highly motivated to look for it compared to those who have lower valence, expectations and motivation values. This prediction applies to every stage in the job search.

This revision leads us to draw some conclusions and be aware of the consequences of the different positioning's within the market at the psychosocial level. Thus, the issue of the structure-individual interaction implicitly appears: the expectations system of the individual combined with the structural scene. As can be seen, the *leitmotiv* of this theory proposed by the author – the *Three-Dimensional Spiral of Sense* – is rooted in time, and it alreadyformed the base of this study.[4], [5].

2.The relationship between the Expectancy-Valence Theory and Feelings ofSatisfaction and Distress(Burnout or Occupational Weakening)

This occupational Weakening syndrome has been associated, since the beginning, with Health and education workers and later with others. The clinical picture was described in 1974-1975 by Herbert Freudenberger [6].The author could see that, after the first year at work, the employees started to show symptoms of loss of energy until they got stressed out due to demotivation to

work, along with anxiety and depression symptoms. He stated that such patients tend to become less sensitive, less understanding and even aggressive in their relationship with patients, and to blame the patient. Later on, Social Psychologists[7],study the syndrome with professionals who help people and, especially, with lawyers from California. They describe the gradual process of loss of professional responsibility and lack of interest, and Maslach decides to adopt the same denomination as Freudenberger, for she notices it did not make the individuals feel stigmatized. This helped the term to be accepted and very much used in describing the working conditions of social workers, nurses, police officers and directors.

The first publications by Maslach, focused on personality or individual differences (perfectionism, idealism, excessive implication at work) rather than on the objective conditions of coping. With time, the concept of *Burnout* lost precision, emphasizing also the legal aspects, and it became a "bag of tricks"[8], [9],[10],[11],[12],[13],[14],[15],[16],[17],[18],[19],[20],[21],[22],[23],[24],[25],[26],[27],[28], [29],[30],[31], [32].

Notwithstanding, it has always involved three dimensions: *emotional breakdown, depersonalization (dehumanization, negative attitudes and cynicism towards the service recipients) and low personal fulfillment*, construed as a tendency to evaluate one's own work in a negative way [33].

Let us continue with this Burnout syndrome in the individuals/contexts interplay so as to later interpret out findings.

As far as we are concerned, it is a multidimensional phenomenon. From the cognitive-social perspective,it consists of interactive development in an individual with low positive effort expectations and high negative effort due to excessive demands at work, which leads to a low perception of the active control of the resources for personal emotional competence and to frustration and pessimism in relation to his/her environment.

Towards 1984, Brill [34],makes another contribution, and links it to inadequate salaries and the lack of recognition in relation to *expectations*.

We should point out here that Work Recognition or, even better, the lack there of, has become more notorious. The latest comparative studies carried out in France by the author reveal that this issue appears centrally. It is, in fact, a principal issue, or the most referred to by PhDs or PhD Courses in the sample under study. It is, in other words, in the core of the shared representations, associated with the problem of a sense of achievement as relates to expectations. It is also associated with the current issue of identities fractured by demotivation and the demands of the system (Professionalization on the part of the Educational Institutions and Work Organizations) [35],[36],[37],[38],[39], [40].

2. Methodology

2.1. Population

We worked with PhD students and PhDs in Education in Argentina (UNCuyo, PhDs in Education) and France (one university located in Paris and one located in the provinces). We took as our sample students who had entered starting in 2005 and later.For each of the three cases, the samples were representative. In this paper, we refer to results found in both the Argentine and French contexts.

2.2. Techniques

Among the quantitative techniques used was a semi-structured interview of PhD students and PhDs (2005-2014). Among the qualitative techniques utilized were a semi-direct interview, word association [41], [42],[43] and hierarchical evocation. In this paper, we will focus on the findings that put this last technique in the "Life Purpose" Nodes as relates to "Expectations".

2.3. Procedure

Before beginning to analyze and interpret what the PhDs expressed regarding, on the one hand, Expectations they have related to their professional futures and the education provided by the program and, on the other hand, what they express to be "Objectives or Goals to achieve during their lifetimes", we first present a description of our chosen technique: hierarchical evocations.

This technique was applied by Abric[44]and later adopted by Aparicio [45], who made some modifications which allow one to arrive at the heart of the representation and at the periphery. She combines the frequency of words cited by the subjects in relation to each dimension or Node with an order of importance assigned to these words (from first to fourth). It is important to note that in

the semi-structured survey applied, open phrases were included at the end that allowed the participants to express themselves regarding multiple dimensions. The following table shows four compartments: letters correspond to the frequency of the words evoked while numbers correspond to the order of importance given to said words. Such a representation allows one to detect the "nucleus" of the representation (high frequency-high importance) (P2), the least significant portion (low frequency-low importance) (P3), the so-called elements "of contrast" which tend to show marked differences among different populations (P1) and the portion surrounding the nucleus, which does not make up part of the essence of the representation (P4).

P 1	P 2
P 3	P 4

Here we will carry out a more global analysis in order to compare that which we found in the three institutions considered in relation to expectations, life objectives and a sense of achievement among PhDs of Education. This degree program present notables differences with respect to other programs.

Our objective is to study the importance of Expectations – from our perspective, a central variable – as they relate to the Satisfaction found in the practice of the profession, keeping in mind that general discontent tends to increase in institutions. Our research demonstrates that this discontent is linked to the conditions of practice and to a lack of adequate educational offerings. In other words, to a discrepancy between abilities taught and the competencies required by the current workplace, competencies which go beyond the disciplinary field and extend more and more into "know how", "know to be", "action" and generally, life.

More precisely, the shared representations, « reasons » and « sense » underlie representations of the professional pathway carried out and have consequences at the Personal Achievement level and Professional Satisfaction level, according to the degree program. This perspective – which joins movements at the macro-micro-meso-macro – has allowed us to discover common

characteristics, similarities and differences between the degree programs at the three institutions and two countries, without losing sight of the individual and his/her biographical pathway in relation to the n-ach (achievement needs, central goals and conformity/wellbeing).

Our processing of words the participants associated with said Variables/Dimensions and, especially, with "their highest life aspirations" revealed the following results.

3. Results

The following results were obtained for Argentina (National University of Cuyo, PhD in Education); we will briefly highlight those results obtained at the French provincial University (PhDs in Adult Education and Education Sciences).

Of the words mentioned by all participants, five (5) subcategories were identified: "organizational", "educational", "economic", "relational" and "socio-affective".

We identify those aspects which show differences and similarities between the national groups by degree program (A detailed analysis of the methodology found in [35],[36],[46].

At Cnam, objectives circled back to the values, reasons and sense found at the core of each choice, of each pathway.

Two dimensions entered into the nucleus of the representation: "socio-affective" y "relational".
At the "socio-affective" level, the representations of the population studied show strong convergence. The most common objectives expressed by PhDs and PhD candidates at Cnam son personal development, achievement, love, happiness, respect and balance between personal and professional life. The need for "recognition", "balance" and "love" were the most commonly noted (also among other degree programs at Cnam).

In Cuyo (Argentina), the goals/values that are found at the core of each pathway are richer than those found at Cnam. Nevertheless, upon analyzing the words in detail, their central focus

coincides. The PhD candidates/PhDs especially seek "personal achievement", "happiness", "health" and "balance". Other words cited were "freedom", "love", "respect". In Rouen, the most important and most mentioned words were the same.

Similarities with the French group are obvious. The nucleus of shared objectives reveals common representations among the national groups; objectives which have guided both academic and professional choices, and even personal choices.

If we now compare the main objectives and life goals at the "**relational/interpersonal**"level which weremanifested by both the French and Argentine groups, we observe that the French group (Cnam) has two main focuses: "family" and "recognition", which are of course complemented by other objectives. The Argentine group has prioritized "family" and "solidarity" more than the French group. On the other hand, a "lack of recognition" – applicable to many of the organizations/institutions studied in France – emerges as less dominant for Argentines, almost as a factor that becomes lost among others.

The "**economic"**dimension is very weak. In other words, PhDs in education do not expect money or workplace benefits. On the contrary, they expect personal achievement and, more generally, at the level of subjectivity. Words such as "money" and "work" appear very little, both in Cuyo and at Cnam and Rouen.

The "**educational"** dimension rises weakly, with terms such as "knowledge", "transmission", "formation" and "research" (Cnam, UNCuyo and Rouen). At all three institutions they are located in P2, showing that all of the PhDs/PhD candidates identify with these objectives. One word stands out, "research", which is, effectively, what distinguishes a doctoral program (other words related to research, such as "publications" also arise.)

The other dimensions practically do not exist.

4. Conclusions

Two dimensions are located at the heart or nucleus of the representation at all three institutions and respective programs : the "**socio-affective**" dimension and the "**relational**"dimension (P2),

close to P1 in Cuyo (Argentina). This shows that these individuals have been privileged when defining the goals orienting their lives and when choosing what to study, and this has had consequences at the professional level (pathways).

The other two dimensions – the "**economic**" **and the** "**educational**"– remain in the periphery of the representation.

The choice to pursue a PhD in education is not associated with the pursuit of lucrative goals, but rather with where individuals place their achievement needs and with the values that they prioritize: personal achievement and the relational and affective dimension. The words "speak for themselves" as do the "silences". In effect, we carried out an interview with individuals incorporated in this study, some quite old, others about to retire and some even retired. They clearly stated: finishing a doctoral degree was a life goal for what it represents at the achievement level and has given us enormous satisfaction, beyond the economic return. The "investment" model is not predominant. They were not explicitly looking for better opportunities in the workplace at a time when there is a certain devaluation of diplomas, even more so in more developed countries. When deciding whether to get a PhD, it was to fulfill "pending" life goals. Thus, for the most part, they are satisfied.

In France, the Cereq and national statistics show that while the PhD does indeed enjoy a higher position in the workplace, today he or she has uncertain goals, particularly in the fields of social sciences and humanities. They are likely to be working in the public sector (researching) or waiting for a profession position in the scientific-academic system.

Finally, if we analyze our findings in light of the Expectancy-Valence Theory, we see that the fact that PhDs do not gain prestige, power or large incomes does not impact their level of satisfaction, as their lives are oriented towards other objectives; such is also the case at the level of *burnout* or professional wear. Thus we also understand why, knowing that PhD expectations are low from the economic point of view, individuals continue to choose Education as a degree program, along with all that a Doctorate implies (effort, commitment, motivation, competencies,

among others). From the Expectancy-Valence Theory, he "who expects nothing, does not become desperate"[47], [48],[49].

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