

Experiences of the Socio-Professional Transition of Young Spanish University Students

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Abstract

The present investigation aims to know how young university degrees make sense of their situation of unemployment. The empirical analysis employed deep interview technique, using a sample of unemployed university young's or who had been unemployed for six months or more, with ages between 22 and 29 years. A discourse analysis was used for the analysis of data whose main study themes were: explanations about failure or success in the transition, the identity screening, future for work expectations, strategies of inclusion in the labour market, the perception of youth and activation policies. Finally the main conclusions are exposed.

Keywords: *Rituals of Transition; Unemployment; Youth; Activation Policies*

Hegemonic explanations on failure or success in professional transition

The perception of the university experience of young people has depended on the expectations they had in mind both at the level of intellectual learning and skills development as well as the possibilities of their future socio insertion. According to the approach of Bandura [1], two types of expectations were differentiated: the results and the efficacy. The expectations of the results were presented in the speeches of the subjects were those of which the subjects expected to obtain some benefit from the effort made in obtaining a university degree and of the investment carried out in the studies. The disappointments of young people to the problems of socio-labour insertion were mentioned in the speeches.

"I didn't think it would be so hard for me to find work, if I'm honest".

Some of them, however, have developed a more realistic view of the job insertion, depending on the studies. Thus in the speeches of the subjects, they differentiate those studies on which they consider that the young people have more difficulties of insertion. The main explanation for this problem lies in the shortage of jobs and the means through which the qualification of the professional is recognised with which to access the desired position.

"Uh, regarding criminology I saw it more complicated. Especially for my companions who had only done criminology. As a result of being a very new race, there are no posts, statewide there are no oppositions for criminologist, and it was more difficult".

Although there are also speeches in which the subjects show their disappointment with the idea that certain type of training would guarantee a greater number of professional outings.

"But having psychology thought it was going to be a lot easier, because by the way of psychology, some time was going to come out, although not for the moment the work of my life, but at least have a job at the moment".

The manifest problem of the difficulties of insertion is present both in regard to its own situation as to that of its group of belonging, that is to say its own companions. Among the main statements the main problem for them the situation of the labour market, that is, the predominance of temporary work with which young people try to survive. This problem has helped to destabilize the image of the young people from society and as result these young people coexist in a transitory state of labor instability. For this reason, the subjects that reside in unemployment are identified with the problem of their companions, and thanks to this they try to objective the problem.

“People in my reference group that have been the same. They ended the degree at the same time as me and they haven’t yet got to find work of his own. For example, one of my best friends who was working for a long time of his own, but on the subject of the crisis, broke the company, and has found nothing”.

In this way, the situation of instability of young people in the labour market, puts them in a position of vulnerability to society, in a social limbo, and as time goes by it becomes more difficult to get out of it and to conceive a clear projection about their position in the future. In the speeches of the subjects is present a feeling of frustration and a negative view of the sense of self-efficacy, in which the current failure projects them towards a future failure, and because of this they develop negative beliefs about their situation in the future and their capacity to overcome the situation.

“Because is that, it is a disappointment, you are more disappointed, and go through the months, and pass, and you do not want to take a résumé because you know that they will not call you”.

In this sense, they are in a state of learned helplessness, in which they do not feel able to control the situation around them. According to the position of Martin Seligman [2], these young people would inhibit their job-seeking behaviors at a time when they felt unable to modify the starting situation after repeated attempts. In principle, such a state of helplessness has not been detected, as young people have been willing to maintain their job-seeking plan or even develop a job or studies that allow them access to the desired job.

In general, they perceive that society judges and presses them to insert themselves as soon as possible into the labour market, to cover the need to define a social role once they have finished their studies. In the speeches it is observed that young people believe that society generally values those who have studies compared to those who do not. In this way they consider that the society urges them to form themselves, as a resource against the problems of labour insertion.

“Now it is said that in spite of the fact that you study, there is no work available, I think that it is more important to have a job than do not have it. If not, you are not going to be hired anywhere.”.

Among the main problems that are considered to be preventing them from access to the labour market, the improvement of the résumé, is the most important. This is considered as an excuse from the government to face the issue of the unemployment and at the same time the main requirement for the labour insertion.

“In spite of the fact that you have more titles, they do not serve you at all. The more popularity you may have could give you the impression that you will have more chances to enter in a company and that’s what it wouldn’t have to be, but unfortunately it is. And is indeed, in many companies.”.

Another important aspect lies in the apparent contradiction in the demand for work experience on the part of the companies in front of the insertion problems in which young people are not suitable for jobs because they have not had the opportunity to work previously.

“Especially in Psychology asks you for certain training in certain positions, if you get on the Internet and you see job offers, the first thing required is experience, and how they want us to take experience if they do not give us the opportunity to start anywhere?”

According to this discourse, the alternative is the voluntary work, although they do not believe that it is significant at the time of the recruitment nor the academic specialization to which they consider that it includes a motive of discrimination among young people who do not have access to the same economic resources.

“You can only take volunteering, but how much does it count?”

“Another thing you are asked is if you have a specialty of some kind study that implies a master’s degree and What happens to those who do not have the opportunity to afford a master’s degree but have taken a career? What happens to that person who does not have the possibility to work? And that’s how things are today”.

In this sense, they consider that there has been a change in the dynamics of recruitment due to the crisis, in which companies which previously looked for employees and selected them according to their merits, however at the present time it is people who is looking for companies.

“I remember years ago, when I had quite old friends who told me that companies went to universities to catch people with the highest profiles and used to take them to their companies. I mean, they were the ones who were looking for you, not you who were looking for them, like nowadays. I am referring to six years ago or seven”.

The crisis situation in which young people live, coupled with the difficulties of finding a job have changed the expectations of success that young people initially had. This situation has an impact on the self-concept [3]. Failed attempts at the job search process have favored the feeling of frustration.

“I got tired, I got tired and... and I do not know, what I am doing is that, form and wait for the opportunity to arrive; it is no longer to aspiring to great things; You don’t even want to send a résumé because you know they will not call you”.

In general, some of the young people who live in this situation of unemployment have a distorted image of those who have managed to insert themselves into the labour market. In the explanations of the situation that predominate in the speeches of these young people, external locus of control is present, that is to say, they raise attributions that the employment or unemployment situation is due to external factors that do not depend on the control of the subjects, but rather they rely on factors other than their own control, more related to luck or greater opportunities. In this way, some of the young people interviewed consider that the cause for which young people currently have a job is because the situation has been more favorable to them, to the possibility of mobilizing social capital. Major verbatim highlights include:

“However, Yes I have some friends that have had more luck or have a job with more outputs or recently changed jobs”. “But well, I do see that in general, the crisis and unemployment are affecting a lot. At least the people I know are more unemployed than employed”.

In the analysis of the crisis situation, they have detected a set of causes that in their opinion have contributed to the maintenance of the unemployment situation. The deficit in job creation, the authority of enterprises to dismiss workers, the management problems present in small and medium-sized enterprises that prevent them from responding to job demands, and political interests in the employment programs are among the most mentioned causes to the situation of young unemployment. In the speeches it is perceived that there is an accusation towards a latent ideology and status quo which is considered as a limit to the universal guarantee of opportunities to the unemployed. They consider that this ideology transmitted in the political actions, leaves the unemployed in a situation of helplessness, which obliges them to adapt to the bureaucratic procedures present in LOS Partner Insertion Professional Program. On this last issue, they maintain a sceptical and delegitimizing attitude towards the political world, by stating that behind all this process there is a lucrative interest from political figures, whom are accused of maintaining the levels of social inequality and of even contributing to increase them. These manifestations are present in the following verbatim:

“By politicians, either PP or PSOE or anyone, if everyone here do wrong, that’s why you see so much corruption, and there’s so much robbery and greed. Because we do not really have a policy that is in the interest of youth, we have a policy that is in the interest of politicians and is already, to be enriched, and that the rich are richer and the poor are poorer. Then the job is not promoted, they have been saying that the crisis was going to end for two or three years and this is not over yet. I think it all boils down to politics, it’s not okay at all now”.

In this type of speeches the figure of large companies is also represented as responsible for the vulnerability of the people, and of the small and medium-sized enterprises, as entities that initially were characterized by the hiring of personnel, due to the crisis, have experienced a change in their freedom of action in terms of hiring people. An example of the latter is found in the following verbatim:

“It is a bit of everything, the crisis, in general, is what is most affecting, due to no more jobs are created as well as it has been promoted the ease of dismissal, the lowering of dismissal, on the other hand there are no good opportunities to create jobs, I think especially the small and medium businesses are having problems because they don’t allow them to hire people, and they’re even having trouble subsisting themselves and they can’t allow rise to create jobs. So I think it’s all over there, right? Above all, I think that it has more to do with the political and economic situation and above all the interests of the richest figures”.

All these problems have changed the social image of young people in terms of their ability to insert and act, which in some measure could have an impact on their self-concept. This can be explained by the Theory of Lacan [4] in which the individual (the self) is built from a similar one, so that the image that other has about is the same as the individual assumes and from which he builds his own identity.

In this sense, we find a feeling of disappointment in young people when they have to face the labour market, in which the difficulties of insertion have changed the image they had of themselves projected in the future. In the speeches, young people feel frustrated given the dissonance between their preparation and their employability problems, as can be seen in the following verbatim:

“In regard to qualifications I think I have plenty, and not only that, but my academic record is increasing because as there is no work, what is done now, is if you are lucky enough to cost, expand your studies, expand and expand, but I would like to reconcile the two things, not having to be limited only to study because I can’t find work”.

In these speeches we also see the importance for the students to work for their independence, this refers us to the reflections raised previously by Zárraga [5] which alluded to the transition process ending with several achievements including: economic independence and personal autonomy. In this way, the subjects are limited to achieve these objectives because the precariousness and lack of resources obliges many of them to a situation of dependence on the family home. Although they intend to overcome this situation and achieve their insertion goals, they felt obliged into less-qualified jobs that will allow them to finance their subsequent studies. These intentions are present in the following verbatim:

“I am trying to work so that it provides me with some money to do the master’s degree of Infant-Juvenile that I want or even educational or training in a small cabinet or whatever it comes”.

Another question is to analyze the experiences and interpretations that these young people perform on the role of educational institutions and vocational training in the socio transition. Some speeches show and criticize the mismatch between the training achieved and the work needs.

“I was hoping to access a more open perspective and what I have found is that there is a tremendous bureaucracy in the world of psychology, and that’s the reason for the existence of the COP, and if you do not pay the COP you cannot do psychotherapy. And psychotherapy that is imparted is based on academic doctrines, and as I’m not interested in them, I’m not interested in paying a penny. My job expectations encompass more than what is taught in the degree. In the degree they teach you two basic things, and therefore you have to open your vision to other things, and study by other branches, and learn by other means that are not academics”.

When asked about the university experience, some of the speeches pertaining to young people who have experienced the first year of university degree studies, reflect a sense of frustration regarding the role that is given to the subject in the learning process, limiting their sense of autonomy with which to build their social identity as adults. They criticize the conditioning with respect to the organization of their studies, that is to say the low level of autonomy exerted on their own organization of the work in the university. For this reason, they consider that this has been one of the factors that has impacted on its current problems related to the socio-professional insertion. This feeling can be seen in the following verbatim:

“It was good, but it was so overwhelming regarding to the assistance, with the work, and everything to me is not me... I felt a bit like in school, I did not feel college instinct as they told us or at least I was told” The university is also supposed to be a little bit to get you organized and administer a bit like you believe. And if you go to college and you’ve got a job or something I don’t know how I didn’t see or something I don’t know how I don’t think you can reconcile it properly”.

In other speeches they try to adapt to when they establish a relative comparison with the undergraduate students as in the following verbatim:

“It is also that we were the first promotion and noticed the mismatch. In addition to the agenda and, the undergraduates have gone out knowing more than us”, “Now I am realizing that there are issues that we can address that we can learn from them and that we have not given in the degree”.

However, the satisfaction with the training and the role that conform this as a factor of social insertion is very disparate. Other young people are satisfied with the opportunities of their university career, possibly due to the success achieved in their insertion so the valuation that they carry out of their studies is of success, and among other factors emphasize the value of social relations during the study period. The following verbatim shows satisfaction with the studies:

“I got into a career that I liked and I had great studies capabilities, especially for the people I met, and what is academically my career lasted four years and a final project, I had to invest five years to finish my studies”.

According to the reasons of the importance of the job, some students underestimate the conditions of some jobs, and in other cases, it is manifested the legitimacy of being able to choose from those works that are considered socially or individually as worthy.

“I had an interview, they offered me something, but I did not want to take it because the conditions were not good.”.

In the analysis of the construction of the role of employment policies in the socio transition of young people, we can study to what extent we consider the responsibility of the State or of the subject in order to cope with these difficulties of insertion and the problematization or naturalization that one can make of these. In general, speeches have an impact on the fact that the main problem lies in the system’s inability to solve the problem of unemployment. They accuse the government of not generating enough jobs to absorb the whole of the young population, and to use the demagoguery as the main instrument of defence. The main people responsible for this problem point to both the government and the enterprises, this can be seen in the following verbatim:

“No, there are not many opportunities, yes the government argues that there are many opportunities but that is not real, what solutions are they giving?”.

Companies are on the same track, what I’ve found in every cabinet that I’ve gone, has been that instead of telling me, well we’ll see, they don’t tell me anything”.

One of the reasons why it is initially perceived to be more difficult to insert is the non-availability of higher education to university students. However some subjects have other means of insertion but without specifying them:

“As now is difficult because I am not studying a master’s degree, and after being graduated is advised to have a master’s degree, I’m looking for a library or some place to get into a site”.

On many occasions, the goal is not so much the insertion in the job market, but the approach to the world of the work. The role of work as a central articulator of modernity is characterized as the source of identity and social recognition. This can be seen in the speeches of the young people, in which the presence of an opportunity of unpaid work, is accepted, because despite not making money with it they consider that it structures their time and keeps them in a previously acquired learning:

“I’m in the neighborhood association, where they work with other psychologists assisting people who do not have access to the psychologist, in a room that raises the problem they have and we try to help, that helps me to not lose the contact of the practices”.

In other speeches they raise alternatives to the current employment system to reduce the level of youth unemployment:

“The promotion of employment, what it would do and take enchanted is that it does not offer very high salaries, but perhaps a salary of 100 euros a month, which is nothing, but if it gives you the opportunity, to stick your head, and get you into the work environment. And there as you were valuing to go up”.

In an exercise of reflexivity, these subjects express the role that the level of confidence in their own knowledge and skills plays to fit in certain jobs. In the following verbatim can be seen as the search for employment is influenced by the confidence of young people on their suitability for the job:

“Last Wednesday I went to an interview in a toy library to see if they could catch me, their intention is to make a series of workshops. In another one I was learning to relax, so that the children could learn to express their emotions, which was one of the things they told me in advanced, but they I haven’t been called”.

When asked about their professional career, they carry out on their unemployment situation is both external and internal. Among the external attributions they emphasize the organization of the studies by the university of which were expected something different regarding to act with greater autonomy and consider that they have been harmed in comparison with other companions:

“We were so overwhelmed with the attendance, with the works, and everything to me has not been... I felt a bit like in school, I did not feel college instinct as they told us or at least to me they told me, it was not a bit like being in school where you cannot miss a lesson”.

Among the internal attributions believe that they do not meet the requirements enough to access the desired position, especially is highlighted the lack of professional experience or the role of the crisis as could be seen in the following verbatim:

“What happens us is that when I have done some veterinary technical assistant, my practices were like “I’ll have you in training” and I’m not going to have a contract, then it’s like that from there to people, of course is also normal, my CV is thrown back because I have no experience and the practices that I had were not valid for a veterinary clinic assistant”.

Unlike the results of the study of Vidal and Ortega [6], when individuals performed internal attributions they did not consider that they could have done more effort, because they are considered sufficiently qualified to access to a job position in line with their training. Although in one of the speeches is present the importance of contact with professionals in their environment:

“I could ask teachers that I’ve had throughout the race, but I would prefer to those in which I have felt more comfortable in their classes”.

Identity projection and future expectations at work

The main professional expectations have been directed towards that sector in which conceived that they had more possibilities of access, and therefore they have developed activities that fomented that first option. Among the main activities are: searching for information about the sector, gain knowledge of the needs of the client, search for the methodology used, and the recognition of the social work. This has allowed them to acquire a realistic view about the conditions of the sector nowadays, in order to fit with their knowledge.

“Many things related to, for example psychomotor I have also been informed, which is a field that we can address issues related to teamwork in which we can work together with educators. But now it all seems to be related to suicide stuff”.

On the other hand, they have a very realistic and adaptive view on the labour market: they know the situation of employment and want to be incorporated as soon as possible in some position that allows them to develop their activity in order to be useful for accessing the desired position in which to be able to conform to the demands of its work:

“When I was an undergraduate I opened to all the options that I could have and now they tell you “I will call you”. I would like to insert in something related to Psychology and if I manage to do it, it will be because I decided to open my possibilities”.

However, young people perceived themselves to be in worse conditions in comparison to other generations who opted for other work sectors related to their training:

“As now is difficult because I am not studying a master’s degree, and to be graduated a master’s degree is advised. I’m seeing a toy library or some place to get into a site”.

The expectations of efficacy present in the speeches of the subjects are positive and negative. The positive ones are those in which the subjects perceive that they will be able to access to the job that they had in mind initially, since they conceive the situation of crisis like a passing stage, to which they must adapt developing works that are below to their qualifications but will allow them to get into job market. In this way, some of them have decided to expand their training to access the sector in which they perceive that there are more opportunities for insertion:

“There are some courses I’m doing. Such as: a course to help disabled people that lasted two days and I did. I am doing the online post-graduate in Human Resources, which involves several topics: how to organize a company, coaching, which I have not yet arrived, types of companies or even the types of leadership”.

However, this adaptive attitude does not necessarily implies giving up the main sector for which they were initially oriented:

“When I finish, I have the intention of applying to new positions in Human Resources, because it is supposedly the sector of psychology where there is currently more work, I will intend to work there and allow me to save some money to do the master’s degree in Infant-Juvenile that I want or Educational or even to set up a small cabinet”.

The negative conceptions are related with the disappointment with their situation, in which they consider that the efforts made do not represent what they thought and perceive a situation as unfair and unequal:

“The current situation is a waste, and what you are doing is that qualified people for a given position are working in supermarkets, in stores and in places for which they have not trained”.

“My brother made a higher module before, and thanks to the top module found a job, which is the one that is allowing him to take the job because he is affording him alone, because my parents now cannot afford it, and as it is in a public university where he can organize his assignments as he wants, and if you have to miss some lessons it does not cause a great disorder”.

This situation can induce a feeling of frustration:

“You get excited in the degree, you go out with your preparation well done, with your four years or with your six, what you took, waiting to leave to work, and what you find is that you almost have to pay to work. They do not give you the opportunity to be interviewed.

“You have more chances to win the lottery than to find a job”.

In this case, they try to adapt to the job offer and to be inserted as soon as possible in a job, with the objective of obtaining a salary to contribute to the family economy or to their independence, although at the same time they feel dissatisfied with this type of actions because it confronts their initial expectations as well as consider themselves to be overqualified. In this sense, they feel the need to expand their studies due to the lack of jobs: to perform those jobs.

The current demand for adaptability is accepted (under a feeling of impotence). However, it is perceived as unfair to have to accept any job because they do not have the conditions to achieve what was part of their expectations. In this sense, expectations of positive efficiency are more predominant, where young people, in spite of the difficulties still believe that they will be able to achieve their goals in the future:

“I’m not going to throw away the towel, I’m not going to leave the psychology work in my life. What I am going to do know is to get into Clinic, by how General Health Psychology is on demand, but we (the youngsters) have it difficult”.

In these circumstances, young people develop a style of informative identity characterized by the search for information and the coping focused on the problem that requires active exploration:

“I search for the College of Psychologists and websites that publish some courses, workshops, conferences, there are many places”. “I am doing an online course of postgraduate in Human Resources, in which you have several topics such as: how to organize a company, also coaching, to which I have not yet arrived, types of companies or types of leadership”.

Conclusions

These hegemonic explanations about the factors that influence and explain their professional transition articulate the strategies they consider legitimate to face their professional insertion. The main actions are oriented towards the improvement of training, the search for information on sectors in which to be inserted, the search for individual and collective support, and accepting the risk of making decisions that contribute to the improvement of their situation present the search for new opportunities abroad, even if they do not stop feeling a state of exile from their present.

In this way, young people show an attitude of readiness to perform a job with the objective of fulfilling society’s expectations, either through the performance of unremunerated or unpaid activities or through the extension of their studies in the job market in the future.

Young people, on the other hand, intend to insert themselves in less qualified jobs with the aim of contributing to the needs of the family home, but they do not renounce their professional aspirations, so that this situation is conceived as a transitory state, after which they expect to meet their objectives.

The conditions of work and the predominance of temporary hiring has generated a state of frustration, in which young people are caught performing jobs which are inadequate to their training, and before which resides a feeling of discomfort due to the loss of power to protest the de-legitimization of the trade union association, on which a spiral of distrust has been established, among other reasons for the manipulation of the media in relation to the power of protest their expectations.

Finally, the young people manifest a deep distancing from the social policies set in motion, in which an ideology is present, From their point of view, private interests are protected at the expense of the precariousness of young people. They greatly problematize the interventions put in place, and the construction that these policies make of the youth collective as objects of deficit alluding to their attitudes to justify their actions. In this way, they consider that an alliance has been established between companies and policies to block young people's opportunities and turn them into junk contracts, on which young people try to build new goals of prosperity and future. This skepticism with which they perceive the role of the social state and social policies further reinforces their feeling of powerlessness, despite the fact that, paradoxically, these policies are built on the principle of empowerment.

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