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Department of Sociology

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Attitudes, choices and inequalities in the
transition from compulsory to post-
compulsory school

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis presented as a compendium of publications applies an intersectional approach with longitudinal data to analyse the attitudes and engagement of students at the end of compulsory secondary education. Student engagement and attitudes towards the school have been of interest from the sociology of education to understand school processes, educational inequalities and students' trajectories.

The main objective is to analyse the relationship between student engagement at the end of compulsory secondary education (10th grade) and educational pathways followed by students. For this purpose, a review of previous literature is carried out and, based on the data from the International Study of City Youth (ISCY), a classification of attitudes towards school is presented. As well as a broader proposal of student engagement measurement instrument is presented. From this, individual factors, social and family background, institutional context and educational practices are examined in greater depth in order to better understand the phenomenon. Finally, the influence and changes of engagement and academic performance in the transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education are analysed; providing a dynamic vision that does not focus exclusively on school drop-out.

The dissertation incorporates different types of analysis that allow for an in-depth study of the different aspects of students' attitudes and engagement. First, a SEM analysis of modelling of latent variables is applied to validate the measurement instrument of engagement. Second, a multilevel analysis is carried out to analyse the school effect on student's engagement. Third, a cross-lagged analysis is applied to analyse behavioural engagement and school performance from a longitudinal perspective. Last, semi-structured interviews with students who participated in the ISCY panel are analysed using mixed methods in order to go deeper into some quantitative results.

Regarding the results, the analyses show that resistance or anti-school attitudes are not exclusive to the working-class students, and that migrant students and women are more engaged and have a greater attitude of adhesion towards school. Despite this, socioeconomic and family background and school performance are more important than students' attitudes and engagement in explaining educational pathways. Thus,

social inequalities play the most important role in explaining the transition to post-compulsory education.

Despite this, the school context appears to be an important element that should be considered when understanding and working on students' engagement. Elements such as the participation in non-curricular activities and the type of school have a weight in explaining student engagement. Students in schools that do not divide students into ability groups and have high participation in non-curricular activities within the school have higher behavioural engagement, lower absenteeism and less disruptive behaviour in the school. Finally, the results show that engagement and academic performance have differentiated effects depending on the post-compulsory educational track - academic or vocational.

In conclusion, the doctoral thesis contributes with greater specific knowledge to deepen the debate on the importance of student engagement in school and how this affects academic performance and educational trajectories. The results of this research make it possible to reflect on and improve the mechanisms for preventing school dropouts and for accompanying young people.

INTRODUCTION

Attitudes, behaviours, and engagement of students towards the school have been widely studied by researchers from different disciplines, trends, and traditions. It has been a subject of particular interest from the sociology of education since it has been directly related to school drop-out and student academic performance in relation to socioeconomical inequalities. In this way, there is a consensus that engagement and attitudes that students develop towards the school are of enormous importance when it comes to understanding school processes, educational inequalities, and students' careers.

Despite being a very well-studied subject, the previous research has various shortcomings, what has led me to dedicate my doctoral dissertation to investigating this topic. On the one hand, little progress has been made in the empirical dimension from sociology, so there is a lack of research into the relationship between engagement and family background. On the other hand, psychology has not addressed the matter of students' social and family background, an essential issue when it comes to understanding how engagement develops. We also find a lack of consensus in the definition and operationalisation of the concept. Therefore, despite being a relevant topic in education and one that has been widely studied, a conceptual order needs to be established to deepen the debate. In addition, there is a great distance between the quantitative and the qualitative research, with little tradition of studies that use mixed methods to delve into the subject. Furthermore, few studies on the topic incorporate a longitudinal perspective. Last, given that this is a politically relevant issue, there is a lack of connection between research and proposals for educational intervention in this field.

Since Merton's theory (1938) of the non-conformist behaviours of some individuals, we can find Bernstein's proposal (1977) and his typology of students' instrumental and expressive identification with the school; and the first research on resistant students in school (Anyon, 1981; Willis, 1977a). Few years later appear the first models of student engagement such as the participation-identification model, which included behaviour and identification with the school (Finn, 1989); Newman's model (1992), which articulated an engagement theory based on Merton's classical theory (1968) and Connell's psychological theory (1989). From these early works, there have

been many approaches using different terms such as school engagement, school climate, school participation, teacher support, or school connectivity (Libbey, 2004), representing a wide range of research that includes or comes under school engagement or school identification which is, in short, part of students' relationship with the school.

The present project frames the previous literature that has focused on and analysed students' attitudes and engagement. It presents both a classification of attitudes following Bernstein's (1977) instrumental and expressive identification, and a wider proposal of students' engagement towards school (emotional, cognitive and behavioural (Fredricks et al. 2004)), which includes instrumental and expressive identification (Bernstein, 1977). In addition, this research includes the analysis of the influence of individual factors, socioeconomic and family background, the institutional context, and educational practices to understanding attitudes and student's engagement towards school.

The dissertation applies an intersectional approach with longitudinal data. The general objective is to analyse the link between student engagement at the end of Compulsory Secondary Education (10th grade) and the relationship between this engagement and the choices made and educational pathways followed by students. To this end, the dissertation reviews the previous literature and proposes an operationalization of the concept based on the data from the International Study of City Youth. Moreover, it delves into the factors associated with student engagement: individual factors, the institutional context, and educational practices. Last, it analyses the influence of engagement and academic performance on the construction of educational pathways and how engagement and academic performance is modified during the transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education. Therefore, the dissertation attempts to answer the following research questions:

- How is school engagement defined and characterized? What is students' engagement like at the end of compulsory secondary education (10th grade)? And how does it change according to social and family background?
- How does student engagement at the end of compulsory secondary school influence the educational transitions? And how does engagement interact with social background in this transition?

- How is the articulation between engagement, academic performance, and opportunities built into the educational pathways?

This dissertation contributes to the debate on the definition and construction of engagement based on school identification and provides the first classification of students' attitudes towards the school. In addition, it includes the effect of students' engagement on educational pathways, providing a medium-term and dynamic vision that does not focus exclusively on school dropouts. Moreover, this research provides the subject with methodological innovation since it incorporates different types of analysis that enable a deeper analysis of different aspects of students' engagement such as: SEM analysis of modelling of latent variables, allowing the engagement instrument to be validated; multilevel analysis, enabling the school effect to be analysed; cross-lagged analysis, allowing engagement to be analysed from a longitudinal perspective; and a qualitative analysis of the interviews, allowing us to go deeper into the quantitative results obtained. Last, and notably, an element of international comparison is incorporated into the validation of the engagement instrument.

This paper therefore contributes to the debate on the processes of transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education and how the transition is influenced by contextual opportunities and psychosocial determinants in the framework of school engagement.

The dissertation consists of 6 chapters. Each one which contains an academic publication (compendium). The first two chapters, Publications A and B, focus on the students' attitudes towards the school. It is based on an explanatory design of mixed sequential methods, which means first collecting quantitative data and then qualitative data to explain or elaborate the quantitative results. In the first and second chapters, the results of the quantitative phase and the qualitative phase are presented, respectively, the latter based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews.

The first chapter, corresponding to Publication A, reviews the literature on student attitudes towards the school. It also explores and analyses the attitudes of pupils in Barcelona in the last year of Compulsory Secondary Education (10th grade). The publication proposes a typology of attitudes towards school based on data from the

ISCY project, collected in Barcelona from a sample of 10th grade students (n=2056). The typology is used to analyse how certain sociodemographic characteristics affect the development of a specific type of attitude. Last, a logistic regression analysis is carried out to explore the role of students' attitudes in the educational pathways they follow after compulsory education.

In the second chapter (Publication B), the reasons why pupils have attitudes of adhesion or resistance at the end of Compulsory Secondary Education (10th grade) and how these attitudes influence their subsequent educational pathways are analysed. In addition, the sociodemographic characteristics of the interviewees such as social class, migrant background, and gender are considered. This chapter progresses from the qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews (n=23) to the quantitative results presented in the first chapter.

In the third chapter, corresponding to Publication C, a review of the theoretical and empirical literature on students' engagement is carried out. From the review, a conceptualisation and operationalisation of the concept is proposed based on the data collected from the student's sample of the ISCY Barcelona (n=2056). To this effect, a multidimensional construct of engagement - emotional, cognitive and behavioural - is proposed from an exploratory and later confirmatory factorial analysis. Last, based on a MANOVA analysis, the effect of sociodemographic variables on school engagement is analysed.

The fourth chapter of the dissertation, Publication D, validates the engagement construct presented in chapter 3 at a comparative level, using data from the cities of Barcelona, Ghent, Bergen, and Reykjavik. In addition, another construct is validated, namely that of academic behavioural skills, which according to the literature are also important in explaining student achievement. In this way and based on Item Response Theory, the reliability and validity of the two measurement instruments - engagement and academic behavioural skills - are explored in relation to aspects such as academic performance and the sociodemographic characteristics of students. The analyses are made using the data from the ISCY project in the four cities mentioned above (n=8520).

The fifth chapter, referring to Publication E, introduces the school effect into the student engagement analysis. Furthermore, it incorporates other important elements, such as non-curricular activities, when explaining and understanding student engagement. This publication presents linear hierarchical models that allow the differences between schools (n=27) to be measured with reference to the engagement of their students (n=2056) in 10th grade, using ISCY Barcelona data. These models enable us to analyse the impact of students' participation in non-curricular activities and the effect of certain school characteristics, including complexity, comprehensiveness, public/private status, and level of participation in non-curricular activities, on the different types of student engagement.

The sixth chapter, which corresponds to Publication F, incorporates the longitudinal perspective. This chapter analyses the relationship between academic performance and behavioural engagement depending on whether the student has chosen to take the academic track or the vocational track after 10th grade. A cross-lagged analysis of two waves of the panel is carried out to know the interactions between grades and engagement over time.

Last, the global results of the dissertation and its conclusions are presented. Furthermore, some limitations of the research, future lines of research, and proposals for policymakers and stakeholders are pointed out.

Compendium of publications

This dissertation is a compendium of publications in which different researchers have collaborated. It is therefore a compilation of papers that are the result of collective work with GRET researchers and international researchers within the framework of the ISCY project.

Publication A:

Valls, O; Sánchez-Gelabert, A.; Troiano, H (2020, Under review) La actitud del alumnado frente a la escuela. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*.

Publication B:

Valls, O (2021) Resistencias y adhesiones escolares: la importancia del origen social. *RISE - International Journal of Sociology of Education*, 10(2). (Forthcoming, June 2021)

Publication C:

Valls, O. (2020, Under review) Multidimensionality of High School students' engagement. *European Journal of Education*.

Publication D:

Siddiq, F., Gochyyev, P., & Valls, O. (2020). The role of engagement and academic behavioral skills on young students' academic performance—A validation across four countries. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100880>

Publication E:

Valls, O.; Palou, A.; Merino, R. (2020) Más allá del currículum. ¿Qué papel juegan las actividades no curriculares sobre el *engagement* del alumnado? *Revista Bordón*, 72(4), 133-155. (Forthcoming, December 2020)

Publication F:

Valls, O.; Sánchez-Gelabert, A.; Merino, R. (2020, Under review) Transition into postcompulsory education and educational tracks: a longitudinal cross-lagged panel analysis on behavioural engagement and achievement. *Educational Studies*.

International Study of City Youth (ISCY)

This dissertation is part of the International Study of City Youth (ISCY) research in which the Grup de Recerca en Educació i Treball (GRET) has participated by collecting data for the city of Barcelona. Research teams from Australia, Norway, the United States, Canada, Poland, Iceland, Finland, France, and Belgium have also participated.

For this dissertation, the data collected within the framework of the ISCY project in the city of Barcelona (ISCY Barcelona) have mainly been used. However, one of the chapters of the dissertation also incorporates the international approach, with a

publication using data collected within the framework of the ISCY project in the cities of Ghent (Belgium), Bergen (Norway), and Reykjavik (Iceland). The data from these four cities were used as they were the ones that collected longitudinal data.

The ISCY project made an innovative methodological commitment by performing a 4-year panel study on a representative sample of young people in the 10th grade in the different cities mentioned above. In the specific case of Barcelona, the sample consisted in young people born in 1998 who were either in the 10th grade (4^o ESO in Spanish educational system) or were in lower grades due to repetition, in 27 schools in the city during the 2013/2014 academic year. The sample also included students who were in 10th grade but were older due to having repeated some years of primary or secondary schooling, or having had a late schooling. They were followed up with surveys during the subsequent three years until the 2016/2017 academic year.

Regarding the selection, the following criteria were considered: (1) A two-stage stratified sample was developed taking into account the selection of schools and the number of students required to achieve statistical significance for the whole of the city of Barcelona. (2) The construction of the sample was based on two fundamental stratification criteria: type of school -state or private with state funding- and the complexity of the school – socioeconomic status (SES), composition of the school, and neighbourhood in which the school is located. In relation to the first variable, independent private institutions were excluded from "type of school".

Table 1. Schools sample

	State schools			Private schools (with public funding)			TOTAL		
	Schools	Students	% Students	Schools	Students	% Students	Schools	Students	% Students
High complexity	4	316	15	4	163	8	8	479	23
Medium complexity	6	517	25	8	782	38	14	1299	63
Low complexity	2	93	5	3	185	9	5	278	14
Total	12	926	45	15	1130	55	27	2056	100

Furthermore, the ISCY Barcelona project gave me the opportunity to incorporate a qualitative aspect into my research. To this effect, a mixed methodology (López-Roldán & Fachelli, 2015) with a qualitative part based on semi-structured interviews

with young people who participated in the panel is used. These interviews (n=46) enabled a deeper analysis of the results obtained from the quantitative analyses. The sample of interviews was made based on sociodemographic characteristics - gender, migrant background, and family educational level - and the educational pathways in post-compulsory education.

Thus, it is an explanatory design of sequential mixed methods consisting in collecting first quantitative data and then qualitative data to explain or explore the quantitative results. The quantitative data provide an overview of the research problem and the qualitative data enable this general framework to be extended and explained (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

I personally, together with the other members of the GRET research group, participated in all the phases of the project from collecting the data from the first wave of the project in the academic year 2013/2014 to the last wave in the academic year 2016/2017. I also participated in the fieldwork conducting qualitative interviews to young people of the sample. To this effect, I have participated in all the processes, design, collection, preparation, and analysis of the data.

CHAPTER 1. Students' attitudes towards school

Valls, O; Sánchez-Gelabert, A.; Troiano, H (2020, Under review) La actitud del alumnado frente a la escuela. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*.

CHAPTER 2. Resistance and adhesion at school: the importance of social origin

Valls, O (2021) Resistencias y adhesiones escolares: la importancia del origen social. *RISE - International Journal of Sociology of Education*, 10(2).
(Forthcoming, June 2021)

CHAPTER 3. Multidimensionality of High School students' engagement

Valls, O. (2020, Under review) Multidimensionality of High School students'
engagement. *European Journal of Education*.

CHAPTER 4. The role of engagement and academic behavioral skills on young students' academic performance – A validation across four countries

Siddiq, F., Gochyyev, P., & Valls, O. (2020). The role of engagement and academic behavioral skills on young students' academic performance—A validation across four countries. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 66.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100880>

CHAPTER 5. Beyond the curriculum: What role do non-curricular activities plays in student engagement?

Valls, O.; Palou, A.; Merino, R. (2020) Más allá del currículum. ¿Qué papel juegan las actividades no curriculares sobre el *engagement* del alumnado? *Revista Bordón*, 72(4), 133-155.

CHAPTER 6. Transition into postcompulsory education and educational tracks: a longitudinal cross-lagged panel analysis on behavioural engagement and achievement.

Valls, O.; Sánchez-Gelabert, A.; Merino, R. (2020, Under review) Transition into postcompulsory education and educational tracks: a longitudinal cross-lagged panel analysis on behavioural engagement and achievement. *Educational Studies*.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Students' attitudes towards the school: Incidence of social and family background

Based on the instrumental identification towards the school presented by Fernández Enguita (1988) and the expressive identification proposed by Bernstein (1977), a typology of student attitudes towards school is presented (Chapter 1). Five attitudinal types are distinguished - attached, disassociated, accommodated, inhibited and resistant - corresponding to the theoretical approach proposed by previous literature.

Once the students in the sample (n=2056) have been classified according to their attitude towards school, the incidence of the students' sociodemographic characteristics on the adoption of a certain attitude is analysed. With this analysis we observe how the profile of the resistant students is associated to a greater extent with men and native young people. This profile is very similar to that of students with an attitude of inhibition towards school. Despite this, inhibition is also associated with native students, and young people whose parents are entrepreneurs or professionals and have university studies. On the other hand, the accommodated students are more associated with young people of migrant background, of parents without studies or with compulsory studies and unskilled manual jobs. The attached attitudinal type is associated more with girls of migrant background whose parents have no studies or compulsory studies and unskilled manual jobs. Las, the dissociated students are mostly associated with women, but other sociodemographic characteristics do not stand out.

Based on the results of the descriptive analysis, we observe that certain sociodemographic characteristics of the individuals affect to the fact of having one attitude or another towards school. The results show, from an intersectional approach, that gender, social class and migrant background are factors that can condition the development of specific attitudes towards school. The quantitative results (Chapter 1) show that girls are more predisposed to study and better adapted to the school environment. Contrary boys are more likely to develop resistant attitudes towards school. Despite this, in the analysed interviews (Chapter 2) no differentiated discourses between boys and girls can be observed when explaining their attitudes.

Only in the case of the resistant girls interviewed, they show a stronger anti-school discourse than the resistant boys.

Furthermore, students from migrant background have more positive memories of school and more attachment than native students. Students with a migrant background identify themselves instrumentally and expressively towards school. Especially migrant girls.

Regarding social class, it is observed that attitudes of resistance are no longer primarily associated with the working-class students as other studies have suggested. Despite this, the middle-class resistant boys interviewed did not have a clear discourse of opposition towards school. The influence of age and the effect of personal maturation on school identification emerges in their interviews. Some resistant boys refer to immaturity during adolescence to justify their attitude during compulsory secondary education.

Finally, the results show that some individual or family situations such as critical events have affected some of the attached students at school. Mainly students of migrant background had complex personal and family situations, showing a great feeling of gratitude to the school and the teachers for helping them.

Students' attitudes towards the school: school context and educational pathways

The results show the importance of the institutional context and school practices in explaining the school experience and attitudes towards school of the students (Chapter 2). Thus, in the case of resistant students, demotivation and lack of interest, boredom and poor relationships with teachers stand out. On the other hand, the students with migrant background who have an attached attitude towards the school emphasize the welcome they had in the school. They appreciate the help and support of the teachers during their learning process and the help in obtaining the secondary education certificate. The results of the chapter 2 show that teachers play an important role, both in terms of their expectations and the accompaniment they provide to students. Also, the forms of reception, adaptation capacity and guidance of the schools are key elements in understanding attitudes.

The quantitative and the qualitative results show that sociodemographic variables

have the greatest impact on the post-compulsory educational pathways (Chapter 1, 2 and 6). Despite this, the quantitative results in chapter 1 show that the attitudes of resistance and accommodation are significant in explaining the educational pathways. So, the results show that the adoption of these attitudes gives less probability of continuing towards academic pathways. For these two attitudinal types -resistant and accommodated-, bad behaviour and academic performance act as a mediation to explain the later results. However, the qualitative results (Chapter 2) show that the middle class students interviewed who had resistant attitudes towards school, with poorer school performance and were following vocational studies, university is their objective. Thus, middle-class boys who develop resistant attitudes are aware that regardless of their attitude and behaviour they will go to university. Therefore, resistance attitudes are not a marker of future trajectories or school failure in the case of middle-class students. Instead, the resistant girls interviewed show more connection between resistance attitudes and school dropouts regardless of social class.

In this way, the results show that school attitudes do not have a clear impact on educational pathways. Sociodemographic and family background have a greater impact on the educational pathways followed by young people.

Expansion of the concept: student engagement

In chapters 3 and 4 the concept of attitudes is extended to that of engagement. Using exclusively data from Barcelona in chapter 3 and using data from Bergen, Reykjavik, Ghent and Barcelona in chapter 4. In the engagement measurement instrument the dimension of identification with the school – used to create the typology of attitudes- is maintained as emotional engagement. Two more dimensions are incorporated: behavioural engagement and cognitive engagement. In both chapters, the results confirm the multidimensionality of the instrument for measuring engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Fredricks & McColskey, 2012; Wang, Fredricks, Ye, Hofkens, & Linn, 2019). In the chapter 3, six dimensions are identified - effort, conscientiousness, attendance, discipline, expressive identification and instrumental identification –. These dimensions are finally grouped in three - cognitive, emotional and behavioural. Moreover, the results show that the final instruments obtained in both chapters for measuring engagement are invariant across gender, origin, family

educational level -and city in chapter 4-. Therefore, it is possible to carry out analyses and compare groups with this engagement measurement instrument since it operates equally among different groups of young people.

The results show that women have a higher engagement in all dimensions. The same for young people from migrant backgrounds but to a lesser extent. Students from migrant backgrounds identify more with school than native students, except in the dimension of school attendance. Finally, the educational family level is only significant for behavioural engagement - attendance and discipline-. Students whose parents are not educated or who have attended primary school are those who have less behavioural engagement.

Chapter 4 also validates the measurement instrument of academic behavioural skills - self-efficacy, collaboration, communication, and self-management-. The relationship between the different dimensions of engagement and academic behavioural skills in different academic outcomes is analysed: (1) Reading and mathematics grades; (2) how their teachers would evaluate their competence; (3) their interest in school work; and (3) what results they expect to get this year in their studies.

The results show that behavioural engagement is the strongest predictor of grades in reading and mathematics. In contrast, with respect to the student's expectation of their teacher rating, it is cognitive engagement that has the greatest effect. But the other two dimensions - emotional and behavioural - also have a significant but small effect. The same for the students' rating of their interest in schoolwork and expectations from studies for the year, the main predictor is cognitive engagement.

Students' engagement: school effect and participation

As the results of the first chapters have shown, the attitudes and engagement of students can be influenced by socioeconomic and family factors. But it can also be influenced by the characteristics of the school (e.g., percentage of ethnic minority students, public or private). For this reason, chapter 5 applies a multi-level approach to analyse the relationship between individual and contextual variables. The results show an important incidence of sociodemographic characteristics in explaining the intra-school differences in engagement as already shown by the results of the previous chapters.

The results show that non-curricular activities act as mediators, attenuating the differences by educational family level, especially in emotional and cognitive engagement. The significance of the educational family level disappears when the participation on non-curricular activities are introduced, and in the case of behavioural engagement, the significance diminishes. Furthermore, the results show that participating in student organizations, community services or organising activities with classmates increases school engagement. In contrast, participating in artistic activities within the school does not show any effect on engagement.

In reference to non-curricular activities that students participate outside school, the one that has the greatest positive impact on engagement is attend regularly to a private academy. On the other hand, we find activities that have a positive influence on only one dimension of engagement, such as carrying out associative or religious activities outside school that increase emotional engagement or having a private teacher that increases cognitive engagement.

Regarding the school variables, the comprehensiveness variable is significant for behavioural and cognitive engagement. In both cases, the schools that divide students into ability groups have students with lowest engagement. On the other hand, the complexity of the school appears as significant for the three dimensions of engagement, with higher levels of engagement in the most complex schools. Especially accentuated in the case of young people of migrant background. Last, public/private variable is not significant for any type of engagement.

Finally, the results show that schools with a high participation in non-curricular activities within the school have students with a higher behavioural engagement than schools with a low participation. Furthermore, the level of participation in non-curricular activities diminishes the significance of the variables of comprehensiveness and complexity in this dimension of engagement.

Students' engagement: effect on educational tracks

The results of chapter 6 show that there are differences in the profile of the students that chose one or the other of the post-compulsory educational options – academic or vocational track. The results show that more boys and students with migrant

background, and less students whose parents have a university education and have professional positions or are employers, enter the vocational track.

Furthermore, the students that enter the vocational track are lower achieving academically than those who enter the academic track, while there continue to be differences within the two tracks in terms of gender, socioeconomic and family background and parental educational level. This differential situation among students on the two tracks, however, is balanced out in the transition to post-compulsory education. The average academic marks decrease, and the vocational track results increase. On the other hand, the marks obtained at the end of the compulsory stage did not influence engagement in the first year of post-compulsory education in either track.

Regarding the evolution of engagement over time, the analysis indicates that there is a general increase in behavioural engagement among students, which is even more marked in the case of students in the vocational track.

Finally, the results show that engagement in the last year of compulsory secondary education has an effect on the achievement of students in the first year of the academic track. Therefore, the academic results of students that choose the academic track appear to be conditioned by previous achievement.

CONCLUSIONS

As commented at the beginning of this dissertation, the previous literature on the subject showed that little progress has been made in the empirical analysis of this field. Thus, this research, based on a lack of consensus in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the concept of engagement, has contributed conceptual, analytical, and methodological knowledge on the subject. A theoretical review of the literature referring to the first studies on student attitudes in school has been made, which in recent decades has led to the different proposals for engagement.

Based on this theoretical review and the available data from the ISCY project, a proposal for attitudes towards school is made. From this proposal, a first approach is made by creating a typology of identification, or attitudes towards the school. This typology allows us to understand the influence of the sociodemographic characteristics of individuals when it comes to identifying with the school. From these analyses of mixed methods (Publication A and B), we can conclude that resistance or anti-school attitudes are not exclusive to the working-class students, and that migrant students and women are more engaged and have a greater attitude of adhesion. Moreover, attitudes have limited impact on the resulting educational pathways of the students. Sociodemographic variables and school performance are more important than the level of identification with the school. Therefore, as was to be expected, social inequalities play the most important role in achieving post-compulsory studies.

Based on these first two publications, it was also concluded that the analysis instrument needed to be expanded to focus not only on identification with the school. For this reason, it was proposed to expand the instrument of analysis and analyse school engagement in three dimensions: emotional (identification with the school), cognitive, and behavioural. Given the lack of consensus regarding the construct, it was important to delve deeper into how to define and build it, given that it is a widely studied topic and one that is considered to be of great importance when it comes to explaining academic performance and school dropout.

Thus, this research makes different methodological contributions. The first is by using mixed methods in the analysis of attitudes students' attitudes towards the school. This

type of method, which has been found to allow for a more in-depth and better understanding of the results, has been little used to analyse students' attitudes. The second is in relation to the operationalisation and construction of the instrument of engagement. This dissertation contributes to the debate on how to build and validate the concept. It also contributes to the analysis of the invariance of the construct in relation to gender, migration origin, SES, city and time. Few studies that analyse engagement make this validation and it is extremely important to be able to make reliable comparisons between different groups of students. Additionally, this dissertation provides a longitudinal perspective that has been little used in previous studies on the subject. However, despite the methodology of analysis used allowing for a deeper analysis, the data available prevented us from doing so. Nonetheless, relevant knowledge and results regarding the transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education in terms of academic performance and school engagement was produced.

Another conclusion drawn from this dissertation is that engagement cannot be analysed as an individual phenomenon. In this regard, this research has deepened the relationship between engagement and students' socioeconomic and family background. It was also observed that the contextual framework must be taken into account. The socioeconomic background of the students must be considered by incorporating their sociodemographic profile. Moreover, the school context must also be considered. Since engagement is not an individual aspect, in this way it can be modified or worked on.

It was shown that, despite the importance of the sociodemographic variables, elements such as participation in non-curricular activities and the type of school have a weight in explaining student engagement. Thus, it was proven that participation in certain non-curricular activities reduces the differences in the three types of engagement due to the social origin of the students. Therefore, student engagement can be increased and the differences in social origin reduced due to the participation of the students in non-curricular activities. Moreover, students in the schools that do not divide students into ability groups and have a high participation in non-curricular activities within the school have higher behavioural engagement, lower absenteeism, and less disruptive behaviours.

The dissertation also provides knowledge about engagement at the longitudinal level and its relationship with academic performance and the transition to post-compulsory studies. When it comes to choosing the academic or professional track, we find that there are differences in terms of gender, migratory origin, and parents' educational level. However, previous academic performance also plays an important role. The students with the lowest performance choose the professional route to a greater extent.

In the transition to the post-compulsory education system, students in the professional track increase their performance and their behavioural engagement. Those who choose the academic track also increase their behavioural engagement, but to a lesser extent. Furthermore, engagement in 10th grade has an impact on the performance of students in the first year of post-secondary school. Therefore, the results of students in the academic track are influenced by their previous engagement and performance. Thus, we can conclude that behavioural engagement is a predictor of school success.

Regarding the research questions raised in this dissertation, all of them were able to be answered, although there is a lack of further study of the effect of long-term engagement and its effect on educational trajectories. The results of this dissertation contribute greater specific knowledge to deepen the debate on the importance of student engagement in school and how this affects academic performance and educational trajectories. To this effect, the results of this research allow us to reflect on and improve the mechanisms for dropping out of school and for helping young people to enter the labour market or vocational training.

Limitations

It is important to note the limitations of this research. Something that has been both an advantage and a limitation is the data I have worked with. On the one hand, I was able to work with very complete and longitudinal data, as well as use data from other cities for some comparative analyses. However, on the other hand, I did not have enough variables and information to be able to analyse other types of engagement such as agentic engagement (Lee & Reeve, 2012; Reeve & Tseng, 2011) that is related with students' contribution or participation in the classes; and social engagement (Wang et al., 2019) related with helping peers, working with peers and learning from

them. Therefore, I was not able to ascertain whether these types of engagement influence performance or educational pathways.

Despite being longitudinal data, for the engagement variables it was only possible to use data from the first two years of the panel. This allowed for longitudinal analysis (Publication F), but it would have been interesting to be able to carry out more complex analyses, incorporating more waves of the project. This would have enabled me to not only analyse the change in student engagement in the academic and professional pathways, but also to know how these changes occur and how engagement evolves in the medium and long term. In addition, analyses should begin on the transition from primary to secondary education.

Future lines of research

In line with the limitations of this dissertation, it is important to mention some elements that need to be further studied and researched.

First, the analysis needs to be expanded to other dimensions of engagement such as agentic and/or social engagement. This will allow to deepen in elements such as the importance of student participation within the classroom and/or the importance of the peer group. Introducing these dimensions would help to better conceptualise and understand student engagement.

Second, in future research school engagement needs to be deepened from a longitudinal point of view, which will provide more information on the relationship between engagement, academic performance, and educational trajectories in the medium and long term. Furthermore, it would allow for a more in-depth analysis of the results of this dissertation. To do so, longitudinal data needs to be obtained and other methods of analysis such as Growth Curve Modelling need to be explored, which would also make it possible to confirm the causal relationships of the effects. Furthermore, it would be interesting to start the analysis in the transition from primary school to secondary school to see how school engagement is created and developed.

Third, it is important to continue using mixed methods to understand and deepen the subject, and to broaden the qualitative analyses through interviews directly focused

on student engagement. Alternatively, classroom observation or longitudinal qualitative study of student engagement, for example, would also be interesting.

A fourth point in terms of future lines of research is that it would be interesting to look more closely at the differences between countries and education systems, including the analysis of the effect of the time or age at which students must choose one educational path or another (track).

Fifth, in future research more elements from the families, teachers, and school climate need to be incorporated to better understand how student engagement develops. Furthermore, it is important to analyse engagement from a perspective that incorporates elements from different levels -micro, meso and macro-.

Last, in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, future research could analyse whether the lockdown and virtual studies have modified student engagement in the sense of whether there has been greater disengagement among students or whether new forms of engagement are emerging.

Proposals for policy makers and stakeholders

This research provides relevant information to guide specific policy and educational measures to help improve the school experience of students, and especially those from more disadvantaged social backgrounds. Since the results show that engagement is malleable and helps students to have a better school experience and higher academic performance, it is important to implement measures in this regard. Teachers and schools can thereby benefit from improving the engagement and school performance of their students.

Different proposals are derived from the results of this research. First, the results show the important role of schools and teachers. The educational practices and accompaniment they provide to students are extremely important when it comes to engaging students. The qualitative results prove that they are fundamental actors in students' accompaniment and their school experience. For this reason, the strategies of accompaniment and guidance of students in schools could be reinforced and extended. What also emerges from the results is that the social composition of the

school also has an important weight in explaining engagement. To this effect, practices to avoid school segregation would diminish certain inequalities and could improve student engagement.

Second, teachers and schools can also benefit from working on non-cognitive skills such as self-efficacy, communication, collaboration, and self-control to improve engagement and academic performance. Strategies can be devised to improve these skills within the school's curricular activities. However, non-curricular activities can also be taken advantage of as a further space to work on these non-cognitive skills.

Third, another proposal that emerges from the results of this dissertation is that given that participation in non-curricular activities increases school engagement, schools could develop strategies that motivate students with more academic difficulties to participate in the organization of activities at school such as carnival or the end-of-year trip. For its part, the public administration could grant scholarships to students with fewer economic resources so that they can participate in non-curricular activities and go to academies to complement their training in a more personalized way.

Fourth, it is important to be aware of stereotypes and not to think that disengagement and resistance at school is found exclusively in the most complex schools. To this effect, it is important to work on teachers' expectations and prevent this from conditioning students' academic performance or educational pathways. This is what is usually called the "Pygmalion Effect".

Last, educational policies need to be implemented to make the school more attractive to all adolescents and to provide support and scholarships to the most disadvantaged students with the fewest resources so that they can continue with post-compulsory studies.

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