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Kontakt / Contact:

peDOCS
Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung (DIPF)
Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung
E-Mail: pedocs@dipf.de
Internet: www.pedocs.de

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Inclusion and exclusion factors in adult education of youth with a low educational level in Spain¹

Francesca Salva-Mut

University of the Balearic Islands, Spain (f.salva@uib.es)

Elena Quintana-Murci

University of the Balearic Islands, Spain (elenaquintana74@gmail.com)

Danielle Desmarais

University of Quebec, Canada (desmarais.danielle@uqam.ca)

Abstract

In this paper we analyse, from a biographical perspective, youth participation in education and training, aged between 26 and 28 years, who have no qualifications or at most have a qualification corresponding to the Lower Secondary Education Certificate (LSEC) (ISCED 0-2), during the 10 years elapsed between the end of compulsory education (2000) and the time of the interview (2010). As regards their personal life stories, we cover a broad period which includes different stages in the transition into adulthood, stages which take place in a historical context in which we have moved from a time characterised by ease of access to employment among youth with a low educational level to another time in which youth unemployment levels affects over half of the workforce aged 16 to 24 and in which public policies supporting training and social and professional insertion of young people with a low educational level have been reduced.

Keywords: youth pathways; lifelong learning; adult education; low level of education; biographical perspective

Introduction

Theoretical perspectives

The problems arising from the high number of young people with a low level of education (ISCED 2 level or lower) in Spain are considered to be a major issue in the political and media discourse of our country. The main indicators reveal the disadvantage of Spain within the framework of the European Union: with an early school leaving rate of 26.5% (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, 2013a); a youth unemployment rate in the 20-24 year age group of 51.68% (data from the Labour Force Survey for the first quarter of 2013); and 18.5% of young people aged 15 to 24

who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Social and Economic Council, 2013). The fact of not having a job and not being in education or training are two situations that are found to a far greater extent among young people with a low level of education (Social and Economic Council, 2013; Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, 2013b).

Youth transition's into adulthood in general and, particularly, as far as the transition from education into employment is concerned, has undergone significant transformations due to recent social, economic and demographic changes. Despite differences between countries due, among other factors, to the characteristics of national and regional job markets and the structures of education systems, there is a general consensus in the literature concerning this issue as regards the characteristics of transitions in contemporary job markets. They are the following:

- Lengthening of the transition due to the characteristics of the job market and generalised lengthening of schooling (Furlong et al., 2006; Wallace & Kovatcheva, 1998; Casal, 1999; Bradley & Devadason, 2008).
- Complexity: transitions have ceased to be linear, and involve comings and goings between several situations of employment and education (Casal, 1999; Settersten et al., 2005; Machado, 2007; INJUVE, 2008).
- Precariousness: youth transition processes are marked by the flexibilisation and casualisation of jobs and salaries (Bradley & Van Hoof, 2005) and young people are more vulnerable to job loss, worse working conditions (part-time jobs, non-formal economy, low salaries) and ruptures (Casal, 1999; Macdonald, 1994; Fenton & Dermott, 2006).
- Individualisation: there are many different shapes and they are articulated in an individualised way based on the interaction of many factors (Settersten et al., 2005; Jones, 1995, 2002). Yet structural factors—such as social class, gender or ethnicity (Bradley & Van Hoof, 2005; Fenton & Dermott, 2006)—and institutional ones—such as the social and labour policies in each country (Settersten et al., 2005; Quintini & Martín, 2006)—continue to have a fundamental weight.

These changes are found in the context of societies in transformation and in the dialectic relationship therein. The social, political, economic and demographic transformations are many, as are the concepts coined to name them, understand them and explain them. In all cases, what stands out is: the focal role of science and technology and, hence, of knowledge; changes in all the fields of personal and professional life, as part and parcel of contemporary life stories (employment changes, family situations, moving home,...); and a growing social dualisation, which is especially harmful to people with greater educational deficits, and which is made manifest in a particularly virulent way in the current economic crisis.

In this context, the level of education plays a much more central role than in the past, and upper secondary qualifications have become the minimum level required for successful entry into the job market, and the basis of subsequent participation in further education (OECD 2005, 2010). In studies concerning the youth transition into adulthood, the disadvantageous situation of youngsters with a low educational level is clearly documented as regards successfully developing the many complex tasks required by this ever-lengthier period of life.

Since the transition into adulthood is measured in terms of taking on more independent roles, the fact that the transition time is becoming longer makes it a period of

development which for some offers opportunities to explore different situations, to develop skills and to have enough support to do it, whereas those who do not have these chances become even more vulnerable (Berzin, 2010). In the same line of argument, Cote (2006), quoted in Berzin (2010), maintains that once transition from school to employment becomes longer; those who have higher levels of education increase their advantages over those who cannot attain these educational levels.

Although it is hugely complex to understand such a dynamic period on the basis of internationally comparable indicators, a recent study by the OECD (2010) provides relevant data regarding the characteristics of young people's participation in employment and, particularly those who have the greatest difficulties. This and other recent research studies conducted on youth pathways from education into employment (Berzin, 2010; Hango & Broucker, 2007; Kuehn et al., 2009; Quintini & Manfredi, 2009; Walther et al., 2002) clearly reflect not only the youth with a low educational level disadvantages in their process of transition into adulthood, but also the impact of the characteristics of education and training systems on these pathways and the need to develop transition policies that will promote positive transitions.

Along these lines, we highlight the contradictions between the discourse of the knowledge society and transformations in the field of employment (Livingstone, 2010), and education and training policies and practices that largely act as a filter (Arrow, 1973; Spence, 1974; Stiglitz, 1975).

The education role in the transition pathways into adulthood of these young people is not very well known for several reasons. Among these, the low participation of people with a low educational level in the different education options available to adults. In fact, a low level of education is considered the most significant predictor in relation to a low participation in education in adulthood (Bélanger, 2011). Along the same lines, research into early school leaving considers the difficulties involved as regards later access to education to be one of the most harmful effects of this dropout (Dale, 2010). In fact, the concept of NEET (young people not in employment, education or training) was coined in reference to youth with a low educational level who were neither furthering their education nor in employment. In Spain, it became popular first of all through a television programme in which a stigmatising view of young NEETs predominated, as if this fact depended fundamentally on their own free will. The impact of the economic crisis and the dissemination of the results of research into the issue have led to a more accurate, fairer view, the highlight of which is a recent publication by the Institute for Youth with the enlightening title of 'Dismantling NEET. A youth stereotype in times of crisis' (Navarrete, 2011).

In a recent study based on the ETEFIL survey 2005 (Transition, Education, Training and Labour Insertion survey for young people under 25 years old), a follow-up of the young people who had finished Lower Secondary Education (LSE) in 2000-2001 was carried out during 2001-2005. The results of this research—conducted in a representative sample for Spain of 3.012 young people who dropped out of LSE with no qualifications—show that in this group, which represents 34% of all young people who finished LSE in the year of reference, only 31% resume education: 21% obtain the Lower Secondary Education Certificate (LSEC); 2% are in Adult Secondary Education (ASE); and 8% are doing non-formal vocational training (García et al., & Sánchez, 2013).

The adoption of a biographical perspective is a leading heuristic element, to approach the exclusion and inclusion mechanisms in education and training operating in the Spanish context for this type of population, and to provide elements for the construction of a more inclusive education and training system.

We analyse the elements of educational inclusion and exclusion based on a review of the literature concerning participation in continuing adult education (Bélanger, 2011), highlighting the following key aspects:

- A conception of the demand for education and training as a result of a dialectic relationship between the demands of a society or of an organization and the aspirations and experiences of the persons involved. In this sense we consider especially relevant the idea that the demand for training is a social construct in which prior learning experiences have an enormous influence and in which mediation policies are fundamental: ‘People’s demand for acquiring new capacities for action in order to be able to pilot important shifts in their lives is constructed through accumulation of prior learning experiences, either positive or negative. Hence the paramount importance of policies supporting ‘expression and mediation of learning demand’ (p. 86).
- Rubenson’s valence-expectancy theory (Rubenson, 1977 quoted in Bélanger, 2011), according to which the decision to participate in continuing adult education depends on their appraisal as to the relevance or value of the educational activity and on the perception of being able to do the activity successfully.
- The typology of obstacles to participation, which differentiates between institutional obstacles (characteristics of the educational offer, lack of guidance services); situational ones (linked to personal and labour situations which result in a lack of time or money, a low basic level of education); and dispositional ones (self-concept concerning their own learning ability which results in a low level of confidence, lack of projects, feeling of irrelevance or uselessness concerning the training).

Methods and sample

Given the characteristics of the object of the study, we favour a qualitative or interpretative methodology based on the biographical method and with an ethno-sociological perspective (Bertaux, 1997). The study of the pathways was approached using a retrospective longitudinal methodology (Casal et al., 2011) focused on the pathways followed during the approximately 10 years elapsed between the finalisation of compulsory education (2000) and the interview (2010).

The procedure to design, conduct and analyse the content of the biographical interviews was carried out using the contributions of Desmarais (2009) and the experience accumulated by the team in previous research studies.

The fieldwork took place in an urban setting. The sample is made up of 18 people, born in 1983 or 1984, living in neighbourhoods with different degrees of vulnerability in the city of Palma de Mallorca (Balearic Islands, Spain). It is stratified according to gender (9 women and 9 men) and level of education (9 with no qualifications and 9 with the Lower Secondary Education Certificate).

Access to the sample was obtained from different sources of information due to the obstacles to gain access to young people with the required characteristics, as well as the difficulty that, once contacted; they would want to participate in the research.

Main findings

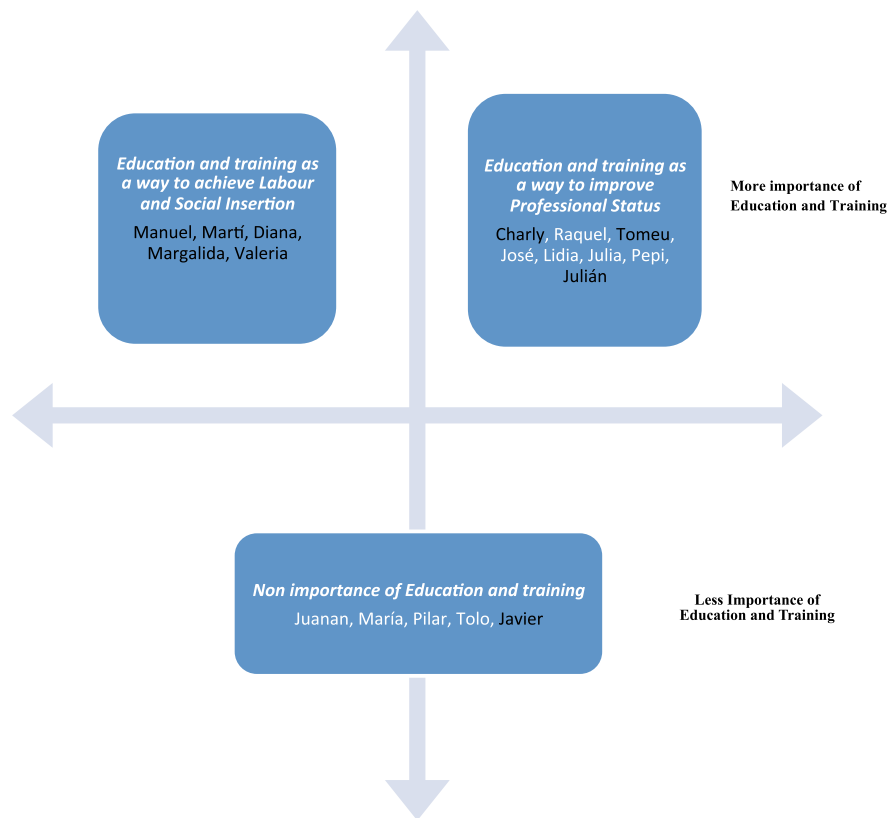
An analysis of the education and training pathways leads us to establish three different educational pathways followed by these youths depending on the importance they attach to education and training, their degree of participation in formal and non-formal education, and the main goal they want to achieve by participating in education and training activities.

On a basic level we analyse the importance of education, in the sense of whether it makes certain sense and/or has coherence in relation to the overall youth situation. From this perspective, we can distinguish two different pathways. First of all, a group of 13 young people whose education and training pathway appears to make certain sense and display coherence. A second group, made up of 5 subjects, is characterised by the little or non-importance of education.

The subsequent analysis focuses on the goal of education and training, differentiating between education as a way to improve professional status (in a broad sense that includes basic and specific training addressed mainly at improving job opportunities) and as a means of social and labour insertion.

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Figure 1. Typology of pathways according to the importance of education and training and to the goal thereof



Source: Own elaboration

■	Youth names with ISCED 1 are written in black
□	Youth names with ISCED 2 are written in white

Education and training as a way to improve professional status

This is the case of Charly, Raquel, José, Tomeu, Lidia, Julia, Pepi, and Julián. The majority of them have the LSEC (ISCED 2) except Tomeu, Charly and Julian (ISCED 1).

The group that has the LSEC qualification is characterised by attempting to continue their studies in post-compulsory education without any rupture between attaining the LSEC qualification and doing post-compulsory secondary studies; whereas in the group that finishes LSE without any qualifications, there is a long break in time before they attempt to resume their studies and the return is produced to a lesser extent than the continuation of studies in the LSEC group.

In all cases, education is abandoned before obtaining the qualification. Dropout occurs at different times, the extremes of which are one girl who leaves 3 months after starting the course and another girl who leaves when she only has two subjects left and the work placement in an Intermediate Vocational Diploma (IVD). Among the main reasons, the most outstanding are a lack of meaning to what they are doing (“I wasn’t well advised”, “it didn’t motivate me”, ...); difficulties related to academics (repetition, failed subjects,...), and to relationships in the centre (“I was repeating and was with younger kids and my friends were leaving to study away from home”, “I didn’t get on with the tutor”,...); the influence of friends (“my friends told me I had to earn money like them”); wanting to do other things incompatible with studying; ease in finding a job (in a family business or elsewhere) and the low value placed on qualifications in relation to possible employment options. Overall, what stands out most is the disorientation of the young people and lack of support services for their academic perseverance.

In all cases, after school dropout they got a job and after a couple of years working (following linear or non-linear labour pathways, suffering precariousness, lack of motivation, ...) they decided to return to formal or non-formal education as a way to improve their professional status or to achieve better chances of getting a job. They followed the meritocracy model; that is education as an instrument to get a job with better conditions and more stability.

Although due to the size of this text, we cannot analyse all the situations, we would like to illustrate some aspects we consider key to understanding inclusion and exclusion in education. In order to address this, we focus on two cases (Pepi and Charly) we consider are a success as regards the relevance of the education in the context of the young person’s pathway considered as a whole; and on one (Lidia) with an as yet unclear outcome and in which the impact of the economic crisis has a clear relevance.

Pepi and Charly have both made a purposeful commitment to education with the belief that it will be useful for their personal project, and this commitment has already had clearly positive results in the 10 years studied. They serve to illustrate two highly differentiated cases that enable us to analyse the elements of inclusion and exclusion.

Pepi follows a pathway focused on employment and studies, which is strongly marked by the desire to combine both activities. She considers herself a good student in compulsory education and obtained the LSEC qualification with no delay, without repeating a year. She enrolled in the social baccalaureate because she didn't know what to do, or what branch to study, and dropped out when she was repeating 2nd baccalaureate for the third time. Subsequently, she had a few months of inactivity, after which she began a period focused on employment, only interrupted by a 4-month period without work. Her work activity took place practically exclusively in the travel agency sector, until she began to work for an internet advertising agency in order to have working conditions that allow her to combine studies and work. She wants to work with children and to get out of the world of "offices" and, therefore, since 2008 she has carried out several educational activities for this purpose. Now she is studying Pedagogy at the UNED (National Distance Learning University). She is emancipated and lives in a flat she shares with friends.

As we can see, Pepi's pathway is characterised by of subjective and objective success helped by labour market characteristics, her own initiative and family support. Pepi believes that education will enable her to have a job she likes, and is able to manage the different events in her life with this goal. Although during a certain period of her life, the institutional obstacles are insurmountable for her (dropping out of baccalaureate); after several job experiences she makes the decision to continue her studies. With this goal in mind, she uses the option of the university entrance exam for over 25s and enrolls in a distance learning degree. Thereby she can keep up and strengthen her process of autonomy and combine work and studies.

The case of Charly has a common point with the above in his clear, determined commitment to specific education that will enable him to practice the profession he desires, after an exploratory period in which he has several jobs; as well as the success of his commitment to education in the context of his pathway. In this case it is worth noting the way he overcame institutional obstacles (inadequacy of the standardised education available, the reason why he himself organises a system that will allow him to train as a tattooist by combining training in the workplace with a specific training course) and dispositional ones (exchanging services as a way of financing his education).

Charly dropped out of school in 4th LSE. Although until then his schooling showed no apparent difficulties, at that time he behaved badly, played truant and had to repeat a year. In 2001, immediately after dropping out of LSE, he did a six-month course in administration and accounting and afterwards began to work as a construction worker in his father's company. After three and a half years doing this job, he was unemployed for a period lasting between three and four months. Subsequently, he worked as a fish deliveryman for approximately a year and a half, until January 2007. But Charly has his own career project: to be a tattooist, which begins to materialise after he turns 23.

During a two-year period (2007 and 2008) a friend teaches him to tattoo in exchange for his work as a builder in his friend's tattoo parlour; at the same time as he takes a two-year long amateur drawing course. At this time he has economic difficulties because he is not earning and doing the building work is very demanding.

Charly chooses a career that is coherent with his social and cultural environment and in which he tries to unite his skills, interests and personal and professional expectations. Identifying himself with the profession of a tattooist enables him to develop professionally in an activity he likes, which he can do without having to take on the role of either employee or employer, with which he can obtain economic autonomy and which keeps him linked to the culture that is characteristic of the profession, which has a lot of elements in common with his personal experiences and cultural practices.

He lives in his parents' home, where he works in the informal economy, and is not thinking about becoming independent until he has greater stability.

Lidia has made a clear commitment to education but the results are still uncertain. The current economic crisis has a very clear impact on her pathway.

Lidia has a pathway characterised by the predominance of periods of unemployment and by her indecision in professional terms. Although she has a school life story with only one repetition of the 1st year of Primary School and she considers herself a good student in compulsory education, she does not finish an IVD in commerce and marketing. She did not like it and had problems with the tutor, which led her to find a job "doing whatever". She had a difficult transition into employment and during the first four years only worked on two occasions for one month at a time, a period in which she did some training courses for unemployed people. Afterwards she has some periods of employment, with the last one finishing in May 2009.

Her labour and training pathway is erratic until she makes a clear professional training choice: to do a High Vocational Diploma (HVD) in early childhood education. With this aim in mind she is preparing the entrance exam at an Adult Education Centre. She wants to become emancipated and to be economically self-sufficient, working in a kindergarten.

Education and training as a way to achieve labour and social insertion

This is the case of Manuel, Margalida, Valeria, Martí, Diana, all of whom have ISCED level 1 and are unemployed (except Martí) at the time of interview (2010). After a rupture and/or bifurcation in their lives, education became important as a way to achieve labour and social insertion and to reconstruct their pathways.

Margalida and Valeria illustrate the situation of two women with children, who have lost their customary source of income due to the entry into prison of their respective partners; during the 10 years analysed they did domestic and care work and

for this reason do not have a large experience in the labour market. In both cases they take part in a socio-labour education and insertion project for single women with dependents, where several support and training services are offered such as assistant cook and cleaner, which include work placement and job prospects in a network of collaborating companies. They both value this experience very positively for different reasons: network of friendships, improvement of social skills, guidance and support, training and work placement, access to employment... Although they both consider themselves good students during their compulsory schooling and consider getting the LSEC (Lower Secondary Education Certificate), and also believe the training they are doing in the project relevant, they perceive great difficulties to continuing their education for different reasons: economic, lack of time, lack of confidence in their ability to succeed.

Martí and Diana are two first generation immigrants, from Sub-Saharan Africa. They took Spanish courses for immigrants as a mechanism of integration into the host society. Martí arrived in Mallorca in March 2005 and after a few months, when he was 21, began a Spanish course for adults in a public centre, which lasted approximately a year and a half. Some of this time was also spent working. He has had no other education as he doesn't have time and prioritises working.

Diana moved to Mallorca in 2003 to live with her husband, who she was married to in an arranged marriage agreed on by her family when she was 17. She did a free Spanish course for a year and a half through which she was admitted into the same project as Valeria and Margalida thanks to the mediation of the person in charge of the course, to whom she had indicated her interest in cooking. In summer 2008 she began an assistant cook training course which she interrupted due to her second pregnancy, but which she resumed in summer 2009 and which enabled her to do the work placement in a café-restaurant. In the meantime, from social services, they helped her pay for her son's childcare for four months. In 2010 she is doing a cookery course and wants to study to learn how to read and write. She does not have the support of her family, neither does she have any friends, only the help of the professionals in the programmes and resources in which she has participated and her willpower to be economically independent in order to be able to get divorced.

In the case of Manuel, the onset of his participation in education takes place in January 2008, when he was 23, doing a horticulture course as part of the process of rehabilitation from his addiction to drugs. In this same process, an intensive course for activity coordinator enables him to participate in neighbourhood activities. Finalisation of his rehabilitation process coincides with the first years of the crisis and he manages to get two very short-term jobs one month each, thanks to the support of the rehabilitation project and the leisure club in his neighbourhood, which act as clear elements of integration along with his family and his partner. Having reached 26 he begins Adult Secondary Education (ASE). If we take into account the typology of the educational programmes they pursued during the analysed period of time, all of them participated in non-formal education. Margalida and Tomeu also participated in formal education but at different times in their lives. Manuel began ASE in October 2010, taking subjects he had failed in the 1st and 2nd year of Lower Secondary Education (LSE), in order to continue then with 3rd and 4th. He says he is really motivated and wants to study in order to find a job and be able to become emancipated. The fact of resuming his studies is associated to a new period of his life marked by having overcome his addiction to drugs. Manuel was fired from a tenure job due to this addiction and underwent treatment.

The case of Margalida reveals some differential elements. She dropped out of school at 13 and could not explain the reasons for that, but they appear to be related to the fact that her mother (employee) was going to have a baby, along with family tolerance towards dropping out of school. Thus, her decision to drop out of school is legitimized by the care of her new brother. After three years looking after her brother she enrolled in an Adult Secondary Education Centre where she studied for 9 months to sit the external candidate exam for the LSEC. She attended class and things were going well for her but when she went to register for the exam she was told she could not sit it, as she was not 18 years old. Margalida meets her husband and has a daughter at 17, whereby she resumes her dedication to housework and bringing up a family. The next attempt is made in 2009, in the context of her attempts at studying and obtaining an income due to the loss of her source of income from her partner, who is sent to prison. At this time she can't even start her studies as she can not afford to pay for the books and since a grant for books was incompatible with support from the Minimum Insertion Income which she was receiving.

The five young people that make up this group take part in formal or non-formal education programmes at a time of redirecting their pathway after a rupture; in fact, education plays an important role in all the cases of this redirecting process. In this participation the main trigger is external pressure (Margalida, Valeria, Manuel) or belief in the usefulness of education (Martí, Diana). Nevertheless, and as their life stories reflect, both elements are interrelated. The fact that the triggering factor is one or the other does not detract from the interaction between them both. Thus, for instance, even though Margalida, Valeria and Manuel begin their education due to external pressure, they consider it is useful for them. Conversely, the decision of Martí and Diana also arises from the demands of their environment, as without knowing the language of the host place they won't be able to integrate. In Diana's case we must add that education is her only possible way towards autonomy.

As regards the obstacles that hinder educational inclusion, the most outstanding are situational ones: lack of time and money, self-perceived difficulties for success, need for employment... Among the institutional obstacles, it is worth noting that in all cases participation took place through an offer specifically aimed at people with a certain profile. In all cases participation takes place within the framework of public policies to support socio-labour insertion of people with special difficulties, and activities in which tertiary sector organizations play a central role. The relationship of helping and accompanying throughout the whole process is particularly noteworthy, as is the networking between different organizations.

Concerning the follow-up of the situation, conducted in 2013 (around two years after the biographical interview), it is worth noting the suppression of the project for socio-labour training and insertion for single women with dependents, within the context of cutbacks in public policies.

No importance of education and training

This is the case of Juanan, María, Pilar, Tolo and Javier, all of whom present a strong employment centrality and perceive work as having an instrumental value for different reasons, such as need for economic resources to maintain a single family, pay the mortgage,... In nearly all the cases they have the LSEC –except Javier who has no educational credential—but none of them contemplate education and training despite being unemployed (Juanan, María and Javier).

Juanan thinks education has no value and displays zero intention of studying despite the fact that from August 2008 to December 2010 he has worked for only two periods, one month long each time. He lives in his parents' home and seems to have some economic income, the origin of which he does not explain, but it means he can afford certain consumer goods. In María's case, economic need is what stands out most (emancipated and being a single-parent family) and the impossibility of studying due to economic reasons and lack of time. In both cases, since 2001 (when they were 18 years old) education has not been part of their pathway.

Pilar has a job in a family business and, although she didn't want to work in it and, at some time, she thought of continuing her education in order to have other professional options, her stint in post-compulsory education was very short.

In none of the three cases do we see any environmental pressure with respect to education due to the characteristics of the education-employment transition model and the unskilled job offer before the crisis. In the case of María and Pilar, we can observe the social constraints they face to maintain a single family without any institutional support due to the lack of policies related to reconciliation of work and family life in our country.

In the case of Tolo and Javier, these are two young men with a very strong focus on employment during the period under study. They both grew up in a large single parent family, they are emancipated with their partner and do not have any children, they grew up in a neighbourhood with very high vulnerability, and arrived in Mallorca when they were very young, having been born in another region in Spain.

In both cases a model of emancipation typical of their class and gender is reproduced. In Tolo's case, the immediate transition from education into employment stands out, along with the fact of keeping the same job for the whole 10-year period studied. In Javier's pathway, periods of employment and unemployment are combined, with his ability to cope with adversity and the support of his immediate environment standing out.

Conclusions

The study with a biographical approach of the education and training pathways followed during the 10 years after finishing compulsory secondary education by young people with a low level of education allows us to document the characteristics of these itineraries and to establish three different pathways, as well as to analyse the main educational inclusion and exclusion factors in Adult Education (AE).

In relation to the characteristics of these youth pathways, what stands out is their heterogeneity as well as the fact that most of the youth in the sample participate in Adult Education: mainly young people with the LSEC who do non-formal activities and young people with no qualification who do formal and non-formal activities.

We have been able to document different levels of importance of education and training as well as different goals thereof. Education and training can be seen to play an important role (meaning and coherence in youths' pathway considered as a whole) in 13 of the 18 young people in the sample. In this group, the goal may be mainly to improve professional status or social and labour insertion after a change that affects all the spheres of the person and which implies a rupture or bifurcation in relation to the earlier situation.

As regards factors of educational inclusion, the dialectic relationship between environmental demands and the aspirations and experiences of the people involved are documented and seen to be determinant in the demand for Adult Education. Concerning

environmental demands, the demand for education has increased due to the impact of the crisis. Nevertheless, this increase in external demand contrasts with the rise in obstacles to participation derived from the cutbacks applied in public policies that especially affect more vulnerable groups.

Regarding exclusion factors, numerous obstacles have been documented that hinder participation in Adult Education (AE). According to the theoretical framework, our research results suggest the characteristics of the Spanish Education System influenced and hindered participation in Education and Training of young people with a low educational level (OECD, 2010), and education and training policies and practices act as a filter (Arrow, 1973; Spence, 1974; Stiglitz, 1975).

According to Bélanger (2011), education inclusion and exclusion factors can be institutional, situational and dispositional. Among the institutional type barriers stand out the ones characteristic of AE in Spain, which, far from constituting an integrated system, is made up of different types of initiatives with a poor or insufficient relationship between each other. These offers are poorly or not at all adapted to the needs of young people with a low level of education, except for the ones that are specifically aimed at groups in situations of greatest social vulnerability. In the case of Adult Secondary Education (ASE), access is not allowed until 18, except in certain conditions, and there are no support services or transition modules when, as we have been able to appreciate, a return to education through ASE usually takes place after a long period outside the education system.

The essential role of mediation for inclusion in Adult Education of people with a low level of education stands out, mainly when faced with situations of rupture, which make them redirect their situation. One of the most serious problems we find is that this type of offers figure among the ones that are suffering the greatest budgetary cutbacks, to the point that the labour training and insertion project in which three of the young people with no qualifications were participating has been suppressed due to a lack of public funding.

Concerning situational factors, the influence of the school life story is clearly documented, as well as economic difficulties and time available to be able to devote to education. These factors are compounded, in some of the cases, by the socio-economic characteristics of the current and source families as well as by intra-family relationships. On the other hand, in others—despite the fact that we are talking mainly about people whose immediate environment does not have many economic resources—relationships with the family, partner and/or friends entail a more or less explicit support to education options.

In relation to dispositional factors, what stands out in some of the young people for whom education has not been important during the period studied is the perception that it is of no use in relation to access to employment. Nevertheless, in most cases, education is valued positively and the greatest obstacle lies in insecurity concerning their own ability for educational success, which is closely related to an education offer whose demands have too much in common with a school experience that the whole group has lived through with different types of difficulties.

In the case of women with no educational credential, we detected the prevalence of traditional gender roles and, after early school dropout, motherhood is the way to normalise their life; they present a centrality of domestic and care work, only giving importance to paid employment after a crisis or bifurcation in their paths.

As can be seen, participation in Adult Secondary Education is always produced in situations of unemployment or inactivity and the main motivation is the idea that it will make it easier to gain access to employment or to an intermediate vocational

qualification (IVD). Ambitions to study can clash with a low self-concept in relation to chances of success and with institutional obstacles regarding the characteristics and organization of Adult Education in Spain (age of access, lack of guidance services and of support to perseverance and to preventing early school dropout) and, more generally, with the weakness of our welfare system (few resources, incompatibilities in economic aid, lack of reconciliation policies,...), as well as with the characteristics of Spanish Labour Market influenced youth pathways (precariousness and instability).

For these reasons it is necessary to develop equality policies and to increase economic investment in Education to offer a new reformed Adult Educational System which is integrated and based on good practices, which facilitate the return to education for youth with a low educational level.

Notes

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