

THE INFLUENCE OF WORK CONTEXT ON DEMAND FOR MASTER'S STUDIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN BRASIL AND SPAIN

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Primera edición: Junio 2002

Edición: Equipo TRALS. Universitat de Barcelona

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Figuera, P. y otros. (2012). The influence of work context on demand for master's studies: a comparative analysis between brasil and spain. Comunicación presentada en la 6ª Conferencia Jóvenes y Sociedades en Europa y el Mediterráneo los días 7, 8 y 9 de junio de 2012 en la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

URI:

Depósito Legal:

Resumé

La communication présente les résultats d'une recherche exploratoire et comparative dont l'objectif est d'analyser l'influence du contexte laboral actuel sur la demande d'études de master officiels dans le domaine éducatif. L'étude a été réalisée en comparant la situation de deux pays ayant des contextes laboral très différents entre eux: le Brésil, pays à forte expansion économique, et l'Espagne, pays en récession due à la crise actuelle. Dans ce sens, l'étude offre des données qui nous aideront à réfléchir sur l'influence de la constriction ou expansion de l'emploi sur le comportement et la demande des étudiants qui accèdent à des études de master et, sur comment peut influencer la trajectoire formative et laboral préalable sur la demande, perspectives et projets de futur. La méthodologie de travail employée est qualitative et la stratégie de recueil de données le "focus group". Dans un premier temps, un groupe de discussion fut organisé, formé d'étudiants de master de l'Université de Barcelone- España, puis un autre formé d'étudiants de l'Universidade do Vale do Itajaí- Brasil. Dans un second temps, la création d'un groupe de discussion mixte servit à analyser les différences et les similitudes.

Mots clés: Education; contexte de travail; études de master; Université.

Summary

The communication presents the results of an investigation of exploratory and comparative character which objective is to analyze the influence of the actual labour situation into the demand of official master studies in the field of education. The study has been developed in two countries with a very different labour situation: Brasil, country of economic expansion and Spain, in recession due to the actual economic crisis. In that sense, the study provides data for deep thinking about the influence of the constriction or expansion of employment on the behaviour and demand of the students who access master studies and on how the previous formative and labour trajectory affects their expectations, demands and future projects. The working methodology is qualitative and the strategy for data collection the "focus group". As a first approach, two groups of discussion have been formed with master students. A first one with students from Universidad de Barcelona- España and another one with members of Universidade do Vale do Itajaí- Brasil. Then, we constituted a mixed group of discussion in order to analyze differences and similarities.

Keywords: Education; Work context; Master's studies; University.

Objectives

In the last decade we have witnessed in the international context to a reorganization of university studies that have incorporated in a significant level the master's studies as a space of professional development (with the Anglo-Saxon tradition). A reorganization that's, in the European context, starts by the construction of the European Higher Education Area (known as The Bologna Process) and in our country, as in the other member countries, concludes with the organization of a new university degree programs structure, composed by three new cycles: Bachelor, Master and PhD (Royal Decree 55/2205 and 56/2005, and the article 37 of the Act to amend the organic law of Universities).

Since its implementation, demand and access to this level of studies have been progressively increasing, conditioning, in a parallel way that increased the diversity of student's profile, particularly in the European context (Estrategia Universidad 2015, 2010; Ariño y Llopis, 2011). An evolution affected, with no doubt, by the economic crisis. Professionals responsible for managing these levels of education claims that the economic crisis puts more value on the master's programs, because in a competitive and globalized environment, now forced by adverse economic situation, increases the number of professionals who continue his education, after years away from the educational system, with the purpose of increasing their employability. Candidates who joined the recent graduated students who extends their studies in front of the lack of job prospects and extend their years of study; conduct with parallels in previous economic crises (Figuera, 1996).

Meanwhile, the emerging countries have boosted the formation of enhanced master's programs, in this case, the need for a workforce skilled enough professionally to deal with a time of potential economic growth. Among these ones, is the case of Brazil, which as Morosini (2009) notes, have initiated postgraduación policies in the 70's that have been consolidated by the 90's.

This study develops between two countries with an opposite work context: Brazil, a country of economic expansion, and Spain, a country in recession due to the current economic crisis, that has affected the jobs on the educational sectors and their related professionals, whether in the private or public sector. In this context, the study provides data to reflect about the influence of contraction or expansion of employment and demand on the behavior of students who are entering in the master's programs; and how it affects their career training and their previous work, expectations and future projects.

The aim of the present research was to analyse the influence of the current work context in Brazil and Spain on the demand for the official Masters studies in the field of Education, from the following criterion: profile analysis (motivation, characteristics, expectations ...) of the students who access the Master's programs by these two context, and to know the influence of the current economic and labor situation on the access features in these two reference countries and to analyze the job prospects after they finished the Master studies.

Metodologia

The investigation presents an comparative and exploratory descriptive study, with the aim of analyzing the influence of the current work context of the *Universidad de Barcelona* and the *Universidade do Vale do Itajaí* in the demand for official masters studies in the field of Education. The research comes to fill a gap in the field of researches about college transitions between educational levels, providing an initial understanding on the state in question.

The methodology chosen was qualitative and the data collection strategy was the *Focus Group*. The research process was conducted in three phases as discussed below:

In the **Phase I** is carried out two different groups of discussion (a brazilian and a spanish group).

The purpose of this phase was to analyze the student's profile (characteristics, expectations, motivations ...) the influence of the labor and economic context on demand and the future expectations in these two countries under analysis.

The first group (GE1), on the *Universidad de Barcelona* and coordinated by TRALS, with the participation of eight second cycle students, three men and five women (representative proportion of the educational reality in the area of study, Education) and ages between 25 and 45 years old, conditioned by selection criteria of each Master program from the following described programs offered by the Faculty of Education ("Education for citizenship and values", "Social and Educational intervention", "Research on Teaching, Training and Educational Evaluation", "Psychopedagogy" and "Higher Education"). We have a heterogeneous group, that represents the classroom reality: people with a large and recognized labor experience, others with a short work experience and, finally, some freshly graduated people.

The second discussion group (G.B.2) was carried out with students of *Universidade do Vale do Itajaí*, coordinated by the Research Group named "Education and Labor" of the aforementioned Brazilian university, attended by seven masters students, mostly women of this private university, of the only one Master of the Education Area (Academic Master on

Education). The research was conducted in a heterogeneous group, when we look at the work experience of the students. Regarding the profile of age students are concentrated mostly in the range of 30 to 40 years.

The discussion groups of the Phase I deepened in the following thematic and their specificities:

1. Demand configuration: perception of the current demand for master's studies, quantitative evolution of demand.
2. Characteristics of student's profile: perception of the evolution of the profile of education student, identification of student types.
3. Motivational configuration and expectations on the formation of Master. Heterogene and self-perceptions.
4. Influence of socio-occupational and public policy in the shaping of demand, profile and expectations pf the Masters students.
5. Perceived value of the Master, in terms of training, value added and its recognition in the social and labor context.

In a **Second Phase** were transcribed and analyzed the results, based on defined categories and thematics.

In a **Third Phase** was conducted a third discussion group about a total of nine students from both countries (*Universidad de Barcelona* and *Universidade do Vale do Itajaí*) through videoconference. The topics discussed at the focus group were the same as Phase I. A document with the conclusions of the groups *GE1* and *GB2* in each of the dimensions analyzed. Participants assessed the differences and similarities found among students of both countries.

After this comparison, we preceded the analisis of the content and the conclusions of the study.

Hypothesis

The working hypothesis was formulated as follows: "The situation of the labor market influences behavior, demand and future expectations of Master students."

Results

The results obtained in Phases 1 and 3 were organized in relation to the main thematics analyzed.

As for the configuration of the demand for Masters and the quantitative aspect, students are seeing a significant increase in demand and access to master studies in the two countries studied. Official data from statistical agencies of respective countries confirm this first idea. Thus, in the Spanish context, and since the implementation of Masters training with the European Higher Education in the year 2006/07, the data show a gradual increase in their access. During 2008/09 there were 46,523 students enrolled in Master Programs in Spain, a figure that increases to 89,139 students during 2010/11.

In the autonomous community of Catalonia, during 2006/07 was offered 191 Master programs, with 3.566 students, a number that increases during 2007/08 to 379 offered Master programs with a total of 7.725 students. These data have increased in subsequent years and if was analyzed in the all autonomous communities context, follows a similar trend to the community of Madrid. In relation to our study group, according to AQU, about 70,81% of students in the social sciences area at Universidad de Barcelona who continues his studies in 2011, 30,30% did it in the Master's Program.

While in the **Brazilian context**, characterized by its potential economic growth, the country has developed in the recent years a policy that intends to orientate to the Master's access driven by the support of a national plan for postgraduate studies (PNPG), coordinated actually by the national council of postgraduate. The national plan 2011/2020 was marked with the priority of continued growth of the National Postgraduate System (SNPG) quality incorporating new actions. The impact is so significant that even from the private labor spheres, increases the formation of Master programs in their own workforce. As CAPES claims, during 2004/05 there were 72.000 students enrolled in the Masters programs with an investigative character, academic purpose. During 2009 the data shows a significant increasing of the number of students enrolled at the Master's programs, with an investigative-research purpose (93.059) and vocational programs (10.135 students). In this year (2009), it was observed that the panoramic view of the postgraduate courses contemplate the following data: 2.719 activity programs represented by 4.101 courses, configured by: 2.436 official Master programs (59,4%), 1.422 PhD (34,7%) and 243 Vocational Master's programs (5,9%).

Beyond the quantitative increase observed in both countries, the result of focus groups confirms the existence of differences in the **student's typology** that access the Master's programs.

In Brazil, the majority students profile is formed by professional with more than 30 years old, with labor experience already recognized who search for better job conditions trough the qualification of a Master program and a solid theoretical formation. As extrapolated from the data is promoting the formation of Master's programs with a distinctly professional mode and, mostly, people who access this training makes second round to

move up his college career, therefore, looking to expand their knowledge and functional progression.

In Spain we are witnessing, at least in the field of education, diversification of profiles or types of students, set in different generational stages. The first type is composed of newly qualified students seeking a first professional specialization, the following quote illustrates this idea: "*After years in the university system did not feel prepared to face the working world and look in the Master more skills development, and greater specialization to open the doors to the labor market*" (GE1). A second group includes people over 30 who seek to get deep in their knowledge and develop skills in their professional field, optimize resources and / or obtain professional promotion. And finally, a third group includes students seeking a change in their own domain or a redefinition of their professional project. In both groups, some of the students are unemployed or working in underemployment conditions and the demand for training is conditioned by this situation, in our country, of labor market constriction, which encourages students to want to increase their credentials for employability. This student's typology was found in both discussion groups, although it was in Spain, where the labor market and professional relations were more obvious. The following quote exemplifies these opinions: "It is a strategy to seek new ways of rethinking our professional contacts and career" (G.E.1) and "Entering a Master's program allows you to expand your career path" (G.B.2).

The analysis of the hetero-and self-perceptions about expectations and motivations of students from both countries allows us to get deep into the analysis of the influence of work context in choosing a new study formation. The Brazilian participants recognize that the demand is influenced by the importance that their own country provides to the "continued education" as a way to assure a job, based on the belief that a higher educational background enables employability, establishing coherence with the *Theory of Human Capital*, expectations and job opportunities with higher status, more stability and better opportunities for their career evolution. Recognize the competitive markets and the requirement of better education as a guarantee of future; from a marketing perspective, as some authors pointed (Pochmann, 2006; Kuenzer, 2005 and Castro, 2004), promote education will help us to find answers to improve our Society. Thus, in this context, continuing education (slogan) is seen as the ideal way to stay in the labor market. Therefore, an increasing number of people in Brazil are returning to University in search of training and professional expertise.

In Spain the motivations and expectations when choosing a Master are different, in fact conditioned by the different access profiles. As indicated by the students, to a newly formed, a Master's program is a starting point for your professional life and the person who has experience is an end point to continue with their goals. For some it is a space for training, for others, a "waiting room" where they can change their status of "unemployed" to "students". In face of the optimism showed by the Brazilian students, about the value of

the education, Spanish students indicate that the effect of conflicting messages set out by the labor market as a point of negative influence on their professional trajectories. As expressed repeatedly in discussion groups, the education and employment systems has been highlighting the need for more qualified professionals; but the reality is that people with high education credentials got problems with job selection processes. In this context, young people feel unsafe in the process of decision making and "lack of professional benefits of investment in Master's programs" just generating feelings of dissatisfaction.

In addition to the labor market situation, the final configuration of the demand and access is conditioned by **the aid or promotion policies** in the two countries analyzed. Spanish students say that greater equity in access to higher education is being promoted by an adjustment of the price of the Master's program and policies of scholarships. In Brazil, access is more restrictive as the financial support offered, although as pointed before, are currently being boosted by public institutions as the National Plans of Post-Graduate Studies. Spain has a strong tradition of scholarship to enhance the entrance to this educational formation (recent formed or formed people), namely, from the sphere of educational policies to provide opportunities for newly formed people or professionals, because the access policies are not very exclusive in their requirements. While in Brazil, boosts aid from public and private spheres of labor sectors, is to say, since the labor market, to enhance the continuing education of its workers. Brazilians seek in the continued education, a way to improve as a society, in promoting the work and thus, be able to ascend socially and professionally way. Through the plans that guide policies in Brazil, expressed by public institutions like CAPES. We see better economic prospects for the country, on these educational policies and thereby enhance and recognizing the educational formation at all levels, giving the Master's programs an upgrade, with a differential boost in the labor market itself. They need to have professional experience to access the benefits, because policies of the Master's programs determined it. In a global sense, in the case of Brazil, there is a greater relationship University/Labor market.

Analyzing the **value and recognition** of the Master's programs in Brazil, the existence of a rising labor market generates confidence in the system and the educational formation, especially in cases where access is very careful. In Spain, if demand is high, the lack of job prospects determines the value of continued education given to Master's programs. Both countries agreed to highlight the influence of the student's professional experience when we consider the transfer of knowledge and skills acquired. Perceptions, beliefs and expectations about the value of the change or the reward of Master's programs are influenced, as we expected in our hypothesis, by the specific context of the labor market. In Brazil it is understood that anyone who gains access to the Master's program get better access in the professional world (role and status), while in Spain is training to be more accessible to all students, linked this view to greater accessibility to training Masters-still not clear how it can contribute to the subsequent insertion. While in Spain, since the

educational formation is more accessible to all, the student's opinions are commonly linked to their best access to the Master's programs, although it is unclear how can contribute to their subsequent employability.

We are observing the day to day that the high qualification of Spanish students, in many cases, it's not opening the doors of the labor market to them. In fact, many of these students are migrating to other countries, such as Brazil. In this sense, there are cases of Spanish professionals with high educational qualification in Brazil, the jobs are basically the more technical functions, and the industries are demanding high skilled workers.

Conclusions

With this study we have tried to approach the reality of the groups and get deep in those most significant variables through their own voice. This project has been framed inside the research work concept of *TRALS* group of *Universidade de Barcelona* and the *Education and Labor* group of *Universidade do Vale do Itajaí*, which has been developing this work with the finality of consolidate a thematic line of research in the Master's Ibero-American context.

The fast changes occurring in the global context can be seen reflected in the family, education and work context, requiring new challenges to the students but also to the educational institutions, that can be resumed by the need to prepare the people to the confront with complex situations with a quickly changing dynamic. In the current social and labor context, the educational formation constitutes the fundamental element of progress, and in this sense, the educational policies increases the human formation mechanism along life, like the case of Official Master's program implementation. And, by the data collected, newly formed students and professionals in adult age, can access , progressively, a higher education level.

Thus, the development of career, marked so far by a phase of initial educational formation. Working life is today, as confirmed by studies, much more complex. (Goodman, Schlossberg and Anderson, 2006; Rodríguez, Álvarez, Figuera and Rodríguez, 2008 and Savickas, 2009), so careers are now marked, like Riverin-Simard (2000) says, by the searching for new beginnings. As a result we can see two parallel processes: firstly, an enlargement of the initial educational formation of university students, and secondly a greater return of professionals to universities to qualify through master's studies in order to improve their chances of promotion or professional career change.

In this sense, the fact is that there is an increasing number of people already professional formed who enter Master's programs, challenging the educational system to know better the conditions and characteristics of their students, to reflect on their conditions, processes and practices, to the point of increase the chances of success of these students. We must begin to better understand and reflect these new transitions as the investment in social and

personal educational formation is very significant. The results of this exploratory study demonstrate the degree which labor market conditions influence the profile, aspirations, beliefs and expectations of these "new" students.

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