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**Academic Motivations of Undergraduate Students of
Gerontology**

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Academic Motivations of Undergraduate Students of Gerontology

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Abstract

The aging process in Mexico is currently a major challenge and it is expected to become one of the main challenges in the future, making it necessary to have professionals in the gerontologic field. The University of Guadalajara, recently established the degree in Gerontology to prepare professionals in understanding and addressing the needs of a growing population of older adults. For this reason, the motivations of students that choose this field of studies are important due to their relation with the success in the exercise of their profession. The data collection was conducted among students through a structured interview face to face divided into two parts. The first part included sociodemographic characteristics such as name, age, marital status and employment status. In the second part, we applied the Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand, Blais, Brière, & Pelletier, 1989) that explores the reasons for studying a degree. participants 99 students; age 18 ± 61 years; women 80%; single 80.8% showed that students generally have low levels of demotivation, and the major components of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation were found above the average. We found scores above the average grades in the main components of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Most of the students have intrinsic motivations, they have interests towards studying and they are looking to achieve personal goals.

Keywords: Academic motivations, undergraduate students, higher education, gerontology degree.

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Introduction

The growth in the number of older adults, given on one hand a decline in fertility and mortality and in the other an increased life expectancy, necessarily involves research, planning and providing care to the elderly.

The increase in life expectancy, demands professionals in health sciences but especially gerontologists, with different characteristics including those related to a deep reflection. Excellent training and an interest to act together with other disciplines to go beyond the tertiary care of geriatric medicine and include other promotion criteria and specific protection of development-aging healthy and active throughout the human life cycle. To preserve as much as possible functionality, autonomy and independence to reach to the stage of old age with the potential to keep seniors with a better quality of life and social welfare (CGA, 2011).

To adequately address issues related to the elderly, the University of Guadalajara created a degree in gerontology, as part of a new educational scheme at the Campus located in Tonalá, Jalisco, Mexico. The degree in gerontology comes with a commitment to train professionals who understand the elderly, and the aging process from both the cultural context and the social policies surrounding it and be able to carry out prevention and health promotion, assessment, diagnosis, treatment and intervention and active participation in public policy for the benefit of the elderly.

It is important to know the academic motivation of students, because it helps in the formation of qualified human resources, as students direct their acts by motives, which can influence their future professional work. The perception of achievement and productivity of the task associated with emotional and self-regulatory factors, largely determines the motivation against the approach of the tasks and the study, influencing academic performance, either to promote or hinder it (Gálvez Fernández, 2006).

The purpose of this project was to identify the academic motivations of students from the bachelor in Gerontología offered by the University of Guadalajara, that in the Summer 2013 semester were pursuing the degree.

Literature Review and Framework

Mexico has two main features to be noticed regarding the topic. The first related to a demographic transition that has led to an increase in the elderly population, mainly due to higher life expectancy and a decline in both fertility and mortality; the second can be referred to a decrease of infectious diseases replaced by chronic degenerative diseases. Both conditions established a scenario where, in order to be sustainable, the health systems should be adjusted to improve the maximum health and functional capacity of older people and their social participation and security (OMS, 2002). In addition to this, it is vital to have specialized human resources in Gerontology, to understand and address

the needs of an increasingly large elderly population from a development perspective of a healthy and active aging (CGA,2011).

That is how the intrinsic or extrinsic motivation students chose their degree are important because they can succeed in the exercise of their profession. Students who are intrinsically motivated, ie. who are interested in their studies and seek to achieve personal goals, are actively involved in learning with the intention of achieving an understanding and intellectual development. (Donald, 1999). By contrast, students who have extrinsic motives and are only focused on achieving an external goal, minimize the time and effort they spent on learning activities.

The concept of student motivation is heterogeneous because it contains their attitudes, goals and strategies. Byrne & Flood (2005), point out that students are motivated to enter higher education, by a mixture of extrinsic and intrinsic goals. Clearly, students are driven by career aspirations and the desire to develop intellectually. These individual motivations are also reflected in the students' reasons for choosing a career. The degree is seen as a path to an attractive career and gives them the opportunity to learn more about subjects they liked in middle education.

In previous studies (Harrell, Caldwell & Doty, 1985; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991; Mas Tous & Medinas Amorós, 2007; Núñez Barriopedro, 2010) it is shown that the decisions that influence and encourage young people to continue their studies are guided by both internal (characteristics of the young) and external factors (stimuli and barriers), and these may affect the future professional work of students.

Fan & Wolters (2014), point out that much of the evidence indicates that the motivational beliefs and attitudes of students play a key role in their academic success. They state that there are several ways specifically in the beliefs that students have in their abilities, intrinsic interest they have to learn, and academic expectations. Epstein, Clinton, Gabrovska & Petrenko (2013), determined that extrinsic motivations are factors that attract students; but they increase their intrinsic motivation and help students successfully throughout their studies.

The professionalized character of the university becomes a key factor that can have an important influence on students' motivations and can result in a diversification of educational and professional projects. The college experience involves a socialization process both in academic terms -concerning the educational requirements of the institution- and in professional terms as a construction of a role and a professional identity (Elías & Sánchez Gelabert, 2012).

Among the factors that contribute to student success, the most predominant factor is self-determination. The self-determination theory proposes different types of motivations based on the interaction between the individual psychological needs (need for competence, autonomy and relationship) and the environment: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991, Ryan, & Deci, 2000).

- Intrinsic motivation (IM) refers to the performance of an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from the practice of such activity.
- Extrinsic motivation (EM) is a set of behaviors performed by instrumental reasons ie that has meaning because it is directed to an end. An extrinsically motivated person performs an activity for getting rewards or avoiding something unpleasant once the activity is performed.
- Amotivation happens when a person does not perceive relations between their actions and the results. People are disillusioned, wondering why they are performing the activity in question and they will possibly abandon the practice thereof.

So the academic motivation of students, not only affects how they approach learning tasks, it also influence how students adapt to an environment of higher education in general. (Byrne & Flood, 2005). The motivation of students to choose a career can respond to different reasons and these may affect on the one hand, in different ways to understand the college experience and on the other, in different actions carried out by students.

Methodology

Data collection was performed on the total of enrolled students of the Degree in Gerontology (Summer 2013 semester), belonging to three groups of different semesters 1st, 2nd and 3rd, by a two-part questionnaire. The first part of the survey focused on the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants such as name, age (in completed years), marital status, employment status, and frequency of coexistence with older adults. In the second part, was applied an spanish versión of the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) (Vallerand, Blais, Brière, & Pelletier, 1989) that explores the reasons for studying higher education.

The AMS (Vallerand, Blais, Brière, & Pelletier, 1989) is composed of 28 items distributed in seven subscales of four items each evaluating the three types of IM (intrinsic motivation to know, intrinsic motivation toward accomplishments and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation) , three types of EM (external regulation, introjection and identification) and amotivation. Validation studies revealed that the AMS had satisfactory levels of internal consistency, with an average Cronbach's alpha of .80, and high levels of temporal stability and an average of .75 on the correlation test-retest. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis corroborated the structure of seven factors of AMS and construct validity was tested through correlations between the seven subscales of the instrument. In addition, the AMS has been able to predict the behavior of school drop (Vallerand, et al., 1992).

Procedure

For data collection, the questionnaire application was made in groups in the classrooms of the students and in class schedule, with the prior approval of the teacher in turn. The student participation was voluntary. Data was analyzed through descriptive statistics and means, frequencies, percentages and the standard deviation were obtained. Pearson's correlation was used for the correlation of variables. For purposes of statistical matching, a comparison was made by sex, age group 18-24 years and ≥ 25 years, marital status, employment status, frequency of coexistence with older adults and semester.

Results

A total of 99 students participated, corresponding to the total of students enrolled in the Bachelor of Gerontology, belonging to three group semesters 1st, 2nd and 3rd. Table No. 1 shows the distribution of participants which shows that: 80.8% (80) were women and 19.2% (19) men, with an age range of 18-61 years. The overall observed distribution by marital status was represented mostly by single students (80.8%). Worked besides studying 41.4% (41 students) and 48.5% was related every day with older adults.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Description of Students of the Degree in Gerontology

Variable	Women		Men		Total	
	fa	%	fa	%	fa	%
Gender	80	80.8	19	19.2	99	100.0
Age group						
18-24 years	67	83.7	11	57.9	78	78.8
≥ 25 years	13	16.3	8	42.1	21	21.2
Marital status						
Single	68	85.0	12	63.2	80	80.8
Married and other	12	15.0	7	36.8	19	19.2
Currently working						
Yes	30	37.5	11	57.9	41	41.4
No	50	62.5	8	42.1	58	58.6
Frequency of coexistence with older adults						
Everyday	36	45.0	12	63.2	48	48.5
Sometimes	42	51.4	7	36.9	48	48.4

Source: direct

Table No. 2 shows the results of the descriptive statistics of the AMS. Students had low levels of amotivation. The main components of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation were found above the degrees means. The lowest score in amotivation was observed in the item 5 estimated by 1.20. Higher scores of IM corresponded to general values of IM knowledge (6,171) and within the IM toward the accomplishments. The maximum score found was estimated in the item 6 by 6.38.

Table 2. Academic Motivation Scale

Item	Average	TD
Amotivations	1.45	.709
Item 5. Honestly, I do not know; I really feel that I am wasting my time in school.	1.20	.742
Item 12. I once had good reasons for going to college; however, now I wonder whether I should continue.	2.00	1.457
Item 19. I cannot see why I go to college and frankly, I could not care less.	1.27	.867
Item 26. I do not know; I cannot understand what I am doing in school.	1.33	.881
EM	5.405	1.153
External Regulation	5.025	1.505
Item 1. Because with only a high-school degree I would not find a high-paying job later on.	3.92	1.926
Item 8. In order to obtain a more prestigious job later on.	5.23	1.845
Item 15. Because I want to have "the good life" later on.	5.42	1.642
Item 22. In order to have a better salary later on.	5.53	1.643
Introjection Regulation	5.340	1.031
Item 7. To prove to myself that I am capable of completing my college degree.	5.00	2.085
Item 14. Because of the fact that when I succeed in college I feel important.	5.24	1.648
Item 21. To show myself that I am an intelligent person.	5.12	1.710
Item 28. Because I want to show myself that I can succeed in my studies.	6.00	1.525
Identified Regulation	5.851	1.031
Item 3. Because I think that a college education will help me better prepare for the career I have chosen.	5.88	1.431
Item 10. Because eventually it will enable me to enter the job market in a field that I like.	6.19	1.267
Item 17. Because this will help me make a better choice regarding my career orientation.	5.35	1.680
Item 24. Because I believe that a few additional years of education will improve my competence as a worker.	5.98	1.363
IM	5.620	.865
IM to know	6.171	.937
Item 2. Because I experience pleasure and satisfaction while learning new things.	6.30	.974
Item 9. For the pleasure I experience when I discover new things never seen before.	5.86	1.492
Item 16. For the pleasure that I experience in broadening my knowledge about subjects which appeal to me.	6.11	1.244
Item 23. Because my studies allow me to continue to learn about many things that interest me.	6.41	1.060
IM toward accomplishments	5.640	.960
Item 6. For the pleasure I experience while surpassing myself in my studies.	6.38	1.057
Item 13. For the pleasure that I experience while I am surpassing myself in one of my personal accomplishments.	6.05	1.281
Item 20. For the satisfaction I feel when I am in the process of accomplishing difficult academic activities.	4.36	1.594

Item 27. Because college allows me to experience a personal satisfaction in my quest for excellence in my studies.	5.82	1.452
IM to experience stimulation	5.035	1.07
Item 4. For the intense feelings I experience when I am communicating my own ideas to others.	5.91	1.179
Item 11. For the pleasure that I experience when I read interesting authors.	4.67	1.539
Item 18. For the pleasure that I experience when I feel completely absorbed by what certain authors have written.	4.32	1.602
Item 25. For the "high" feeling that I experience while reading about various interesting subjects.	5.24	1.533

Source: direct

Regarding the distribution by gender, marital status, employment status, frequency of coexistence with older adults and semester, no statistically significant differences were observed in relation to the scores of the AMS.

Table No. 3, shows the distribution of the AMS scores in Gerontology students by age group. The table also shows statistically significant differences for a motivations, where the group ≥ 25 years old had lower scores from those of the younger age group, overall with $p \leq 0.006$, for the ítems 5 ($p \leq 0.008$) and 12 ($p \leq 0.020$). For the EM we found higher scores in the 18-24 age group, with statistical significance for scores of external regulation ($p \leq 0.020$) and the ítems 8 ($p \leq 0.012$) and 15 ($p \leq 0.009$). Although there were differences in scores according to age group, only the ítem 2 ($p \leq 0.000$) was found with a high statistical significance in the IM to know for the group ≥ 25 years.

Table 3. Academic Motivation Scale by Age Group

Ítem	Age Groups				Total P
	18-24 years		≥ 25 years		
	Average	TD	Average	TD	
Amotivations	1.51	0.770	1.20	0.322	0.006
Item 5	1.26	0.829	1.00	0.000	0.008
Item 12	2.14	1.535	1.48	0.981	0.020
Item 19	1.32	0.960	1.10	0.301	0.079
Item 26	1.36	0.953	1.24	0.539	0.452
EM	5.54	0.987	4.88	1.552	0.074
External Regulation	5.25	1.306	4.16	1.886	0.020
Item 1	4.13	1.861	3.14	2.007	0.052
Item 8	5.53	1.633	4.14	2.197	0.012
Item 15	5.69	1.462	4.43	1.912	0.009
Item 22	5.68	1.410	4.95	2.269	0.175
Introjection Regulation	5.45	1.283	4.92	1.738	0.209
Item 7	5.18	1.926	4.33	2.536	0.167
Item 14	5.38	1.556	4.71	1.901	0.148
Item 21	5.14	1.704	5.05	1.774	0.830

Item 28	6.10	1.335	5.62	2.085	0.323
Identified Regulation	5.93	0.890	5.54	1.431	0.252
Item 3	5.91	1.261	5.76	1.972	0.746
Item 10	6.32	0.987	5.71	1.953	0.182
Item 17	5.53	1.509	4.71	2.125	0.113
Item 24	5.97	1.338	6.00	1.483	0.943
IM	5.60	0.809	5.67	1.072	0.771
IM to know	6.13	0.883	6.32	1.127	0.480
Item 2	6.15	1.033	6.86	0.359	0.000
Item 9	5.82	1.448	6.00	1.673	0.657
Item 16	6.13	1.188	6.05	1.465	0.818
Item 23	6.42	0.919	6.38	1.499	0.903
IM toward accomplishments	5.66	0.873	5.61	1.257	0.880
Item 6	6.44	0.831	6.19	1.662	0.519
Item 13.	6.06	1.166	6.00	1.673	0.870
Item 20	4.35	1.467	4.43	2.039	0.864
Item 27	5.81	1.359	5.86	1.797	0.907
IM to experience stimulation	5.01	1.027	5.09	1.261	0.801
Item 4	5.83	1.178	6.19	1.167	0.223
Item 11	4.60	1.436	4.90	1.895	0.502
Item 18	4.36	1.529	4.19	1.887	0.709
Item 25	5.28	1.404	5.10	1.972	0.687

Source: Direct

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the academic motivations of students of the degree in Gerontology of the University of Guadalajara, in Mexico. Participants were mostly women and had a fairly wide range of age (18-61 years), a very different age range presented by the Secretariat of Public Education of Mexico, corresponding to the level of higher education regarding the gross enrollment ratio of 19 to 23 years old (SNIEE, 2014). According to García Castro and Bartolucci (2007), “regular school career has in the age component a strong social force in the perception of the opportunity of subjects”.

A significant number of students had part-time jobs (41.4%). Studying and working are two activities that many of the higher education students performed simultaneously, however, there could be certain negative consequences of doing so, as it is considered that working while studying affects school performance. In Mexico, the proportion of students who work corresponds to approximately 30% of the student population (less than that found in Gerontology students figure) and 3.5% of the employed population from 18 to 29 years (Guzmán Gómez, 2004).

A large proportion of students coexist every day with older adults (48.5%). Young people who experience a relation with older adults have more positive

attitudes about them. Having an accurate view of older people is often the result of close and direct contact made with an older person and this is even stronger when a bond is forged (Tan, Zhang, & Fan, 2004).

We observed scoring above average grades in the main components of academic motivations, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivations. According to the reviewed literature, the ideal of motivation in education is the intrinsic motivation. Afzal, Ali, Aslam Khan y Hamid (2010), in their study about the motivation of college students, and their relationship with their academic performance, indicate that students with intrinsic motivations are more enthusiastic, self driven, challenging and take pleasure in their studies, and students with extrinsic motivations feel compelled to learn, and always put minimal effort to achieve maximum appreciation. García Castro and Bartolucci (2007) explain: “intrinsically motivated, students tend to use strategies that require more effort and allow them to process information more intensely”.

In our study was found a high statistical significance in the IM item: "Because I find satisfaction and I like to learn new things" in ≥ 25 group. Regular school career has in the age component a strong social force in the perception of opportunity of individuals (García Castro & Bartolucci, 2007). “The youngest of the group socializes in the desire or expectation to achieve higher levels of schooling, encouraging them to act accordingly”.

Conclusions

One of the main challenges in the planning of Higher Education is related to the link between the supply of and demand for University students. Knowledge on the needs of the population and other academic motivations of the students, are instruments of description, prediction and essential evaluation to streamline educational resources.

The Gerontology students showed a profile characterized by having a wide range of age, being mostly women and having the need to work and study. Over one-half of the participants coexist in a daily basis with older adults and are motivated academically.

We found scores above average grades in the main components of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Most of the students have intrinsic motivations and interests towards studying. We consider a guarantor of success for students, to have intrinsic motivations that make them stand out and gain knowledge every day to develop their career in the best way.

The degree in Gerontology is a recently created major so it is even more important to know why students applied to it, to avoid amotivation in students that in individual cases could lead to desertion or to a precarious professional development. Moreover, we envision that having intrinsic motivation, not only brings benefits in the academic development of students; it could also certainly contribute to a greater job satisfaction.

It is important to mention that both assessment and monitoring are needed during the development of the degree to improve the academic motivations of

students. This would also help to know more about the needs and expectations of the students. Also the constant evaluation regarding the motivations is necessary because it serves as an instrument of continuous improvement, to make proposals to value and above all reinforce the vocation of students.

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