

Project Document N°3

**Educational and labour market trajectories  
of secondary TVET graduates in Chile.  
Background and challenges for public policies.**

Dr Leandro Sepulveda, Dr Maria Jose Valdebenito and Dr Judith Jacovkis

## Introduction

This document summarises the main key ideas, conceptual framework, and methodological strategy that organise the course of module 3 of the study education and labour market trajectories of secondary TVET graduates. Background and challenges for public policies

## Context of Research Focus

The background for the development of this module are the following:

- One of the main changes that the Chilean society has undergone in the last two decades is related to the relevance that education and *educational credentials* have gained as the driving force for economical development and the potential improvement in the population's quality of life that this would bring about. From the perspective of the prevailing aspirations and social motivations, it is noticeable that the *educational effort* is at the core of the organisation of family life and structuring of future projects of the newer generations. In the last 15 years, the amount of students between 18 and 24 years of age that enrolled in higher education increased from 15.6% in 1990 to 51.2% in 2013. Currently, the national enrolment goes over 1,200,000 students. The percentage of students belonging to the two poorest quintiles has quadrupled in the last decade, especially in institutions of technical-professional higher education, which corresponds to almost 45% of the total enrolment.
- Compared to other countries in the region, Chile displays a great progress in the average level of education of the young population, measured by years of schooling. However, the Chilean educational system presents great inequality of opportunities according to the socio-economic origin of students. This is noticeable through the high social segmentation that exists in the different types

of secondary education divided in scientific-humanistic and technical-professional schools, the gap that still exists in the access to higher education based on the socio-economic group and, especially, the great number of students of low and medium socio-economic levels in higher education institutions with less academic recognition and prestige.

- In this context, it is remarkable to see the persistence of sector policies and a TVET secondary education training model that has remained relatively stable during the last 20 years in spite of the prevailing discourses that influence national policies, which contradict its basis (contrast between a model of universal and inclusive education against a differentiated model of education for work). Thus, some of the critical issues that have been used for years to question the educational system remain the same: Strategic ambiguity in the curriculum definition (tension between an early start in the job market/continuity of studies), a model that creates a logic of socio-economic and gender segmentation, as well as TVET educational proposals that are highly conditioned by the job market requirements. The TVET secondary education system deserves special attention as it represents a large number of secondary education students (40% of enrolment in the last two years of compulsory education), and has a profile of students coming from predominantly poorer areas as the main one in its internal composition.
- McGrath (2012) states that an obsolete model of development has prevailed in the dominant vision of technical-professional education worldwide. This model is mostly productivist and does not consider contemporary approaches that would promote development based on the needs and capabilities of people - a perspective that is found in the educational agenda and curricular reforms - thus strengthening economically biased policies and institutional orientations. The TVET Chile project seeks to address this issue with a comprehensive approach that includes a critical analysis of the discourses of the main agents involved, as

well as the strategies, organisation process and conflicts of interest linked to the implementation of policies in different regional or local management bodies.

- The study also considers the reshaping of aspirations and trajectories that young students experience in this system as a way to complement a critical analysis of current technical-professional education policies. As for any other policy, those that guide the development of technical-professional education act as a means to reach certain social development models that have an impact on the experience of individuals. However, these *individuals* elaborate projects, build rationalities and define paths based on institutional contexts and from their own biographical experiences. The recognition of the relation between these policies and the educational and labour trajectories of the youth represents a relevant thematic knot of this study and its results. It is an empirical proof that can sustain an informed debate about alternative policies for the future with emphasis on the educational options that are or should be offered to the youth in the poorest areas in Chile.

## Research questions

What are the expectations and aspirations of the TVET secondary education graduates?  
What is the value of education and the place that work takes in mid and long-term projects?

How different are the personal projects of the youth? Do gender, field of studies or any other aspect have an impact on it?

What are the youth's perceptions regarding available job opportunities in the educational system and/or the job market? What resources do they favour in order to reach their goals?

What trajectory do graduates develop and what resources are used to reach personal goals?

What is the degree of satisfaction of graduates regarding their educational experience? How useful do they find their field of studies? What aspects do they consider more relevant?

What are the long-term projections once they graduate from secondary education? How do they correlate with their initial expectations and how they base their own interests?

### **Research objectives**

(a) To know and interpret the main aspirations and expectations of students regarding their situation as TVET secondary education graduates, as well as the factors that have or could have an impact on the possibility to be successful or unsuccessful once they graduate.

(b) To characterise the predominant trajectory models from the experience of TVET, analysing the eventual differences between men and women or based on the studies pursued.

(c) To analyse the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the youth with their situations, the degree of adjustment of expectations and the redefinition of their future project taking their experiences as starting point.

(d) To know the young TVET secondary education students' perceptions of the integration to the labour market and the relevance of the received education to properly meet the job demands.

(E) To analyse and understand gender experiences in the transition process of female TVET secondary education graduates, with emphasis in the social expectations that affect women's experiences and how these expectations are reframed in their educational and labour trajectories.

### Conceptual Approach<sup>1</sup>

The openness to analysis of active strategies of personal development, construction of life plans and educational and labour transitions represents an emergent perspective in the sociological investigation of youth. This has been a source for several studies about mass enrolment of young students in higher education, postponing of the start of working life, the temporal extension of the experience of study-work combination, the transformations in daily life and family life organisation, as well as the tendency towards a low labour integration under the new conditions of the international economic order (Heinz and Krüger, 2001; Furlong, 2009).

The analysis of said phenomena has put forward the need to study the life course processes (education and labour transition or transition from dependent to full autonomy), considering the conditioning of social structure and institutional framework in which this are verified as well as the specific experience of individuals depending on their social and temporal situation (Evans, 2002; Machado Pais, 2000). This line of research highlights the relevance of an approach that focuses on the subject-structure relation with a clear emphasis on a perspective that recovers the individual's experience as a relevant core of analytical reflection (Woodman and Wyn, 2011). The consideration of the *individual* from this point of view responds to the "need to recognise the growing singularisation of personal trajectories, the fact that actors are

---

<sup>1</sup> A large part of this section is found in Sepúlveda L. *Trayectorias educativo-laborales de jóvenes estudiantes de educación técnica en Chile: ¿Tiene sentido un sistema de formación para el trabajo en la educación secundaria?* Journal "Páginas de Educación". Vol. 9, No. 2 (2016)

exposed to different experiences that tend to singularise them in spite of them having similar social positions” (Martucelli, 2007:10). The works that have emphasized the need of intelligibility of individuals responds to a central principle: “if the individual gains such a centrality it is because their process of constitution allows them to discover a new way of making society” (Ibidem).

Area studies (i.e. Staff and Mortimer, 2003; Furlong, 2011) praise this perspective in relation to the great changes experienced in the last decades, which show a weakening in the uniform models of transition associated to social class condition or age. These investigations highlight the fact that the current processes of transition that new generations experience incorporate a mostly individualised dimension focused on expectations, strategies and specific capital accumulated by the subject, leaving transversal collective orientations aside. In this context, a loss of sense of transition as a normative and linear sequence is observed. The traditional model of *dependency - preparation for adult life - adulthood*, that corresponded sequentially to the transition from school life to the world of work, has added other variables of transition that incorporate a higher level of complexity and uncertainty about temporal and spatial boundaries.

Likewise, the current models of transition that characterise youth have become temporally longer and end up postponing the assumption of traditional roles for a large number of individuals. The two most striking factors related to this are the increase of the average schooling years as well as postponing the decision-making regarding forming a family or making commitments that require financial independence (Leccardi and Ruspini, 2006). However, some authors warn that, in spite of the heterogeneity and diversity of experiences that might be found in an empirical investigation, structural factors continue to influence the possibilities and choice alternatives of subjects. Thus, the current individualisation must not be mistaken for a mere *biography of choice*, which would hide the structures of inequality that exist in society (Biggart, Furlong and Cartmel, 2008; Cieslik and Simson, 2013).

The relevance of this approach comes from the fact that policies in general, especially those related to education and work, must be analysed and assessed based on the experience lived by subjects that would benefit from them. Sarojini (2014), employing Stephen Ball's contributions in the educational field, points out that, unlike a linear perspective, it is best to consider policies as a cyclic system that is created and recreated through time by the different actors that are involved and influence it. In other words, a policy goes beyond its legislative character and intertextuality is found with aspirations and subsequent conducts being highly relevant<sup>2</sup>.

Regarding this, Wyn and Dwyer (2000) pointed out the existence of two main topics related to this process, which is directly connected to the debate on the educational system: (a) the recognition of the difficulty for a proposal of an educational policy to be adapted to the fundamental changes that have occurred in the productive system and social organisation. From this perspective, the educational system seems to continue to be based on a model of *predefined transition*, thus barely responding to the new challenges of social integration of the predominant productive model; (b) it is remarkable to see a change in future expectations, meanings and proposals from new generations as opposed to the prospects of professional development found in the traditional educational system. Particularly youth from socially vulnerable areas recognise the obstacles and limitations that the traditional professional prospects, which force them to reconsider their priorities and expectations both in their professional and labour project and all other dimensions of their daily lives organisation.

For the authors, the recognition of the great transformations of the post-industrial era questions the viability and passive assumption of a predefined model of *normal transit to adulthood* of the youth: "We cannot simply put into place the predefined program

---

<sup>2</sup> In a similar line, Willis (2003) states the importance of recognising the social responses (bottom-up responses) to institutional practises (top-down practises) that seek to organise the order from the definition of policies. For Willis, the new scenarios of modernisation correspond to a specific field of interaction between both processes and a complex interpretation of the social reality leads to a view that includes said interactions.



(which still influences the current generation of those responsible for education policies and youth research). We must test it by contrasting it with the programs of the young themselves as a response to the different *sine qua non*s of the post-industrial era” (Wyn and Dwyer, 2000:25).

This perspective is what motivates the development of the research activities of this module.

## Methodology

This module is based on the three complementary but autonomous research activities: (a) the processing of MINEDUC databases of the 2012 cohort of TVET secondary education 4th year students and their educational outcome in higher education in the following two years tracked with their student ID number; (b) a follow-up of *short trajectory* of a sample of 2016 graduates from 9 secondary educational institutions in the Region of Antofagasta, Region of Valparaiso and Metropolitan Region, which includes information collection from the last year of secondary education (carried out on the second semester of 2016) and the enquiry about the graduation situation a year later; and (c) the development of an enquiry strategy about the transition process that female students experience from the TVET secondary education system into the labour market and the consequences of this experience in their life projects. The enquiry includes three rounds of open interviews to a qualitative sample of TVET secondary education female graduates. The first and second interviews were carried out during the first and second semester of 2016 respectively and the third one was carried out on the first semester of 2017.

The *short trajectory* follow-up is complemented with a series of interviews and discussion groups that were conducted in 2016 and also with a round of individual interviews to young people who were part of the graduates’ sample of this study. In 2016, the first phase of data collection was performed through a survey of 37 questions to a sample of 533 students from the three selected regions, emphasising on aspirations

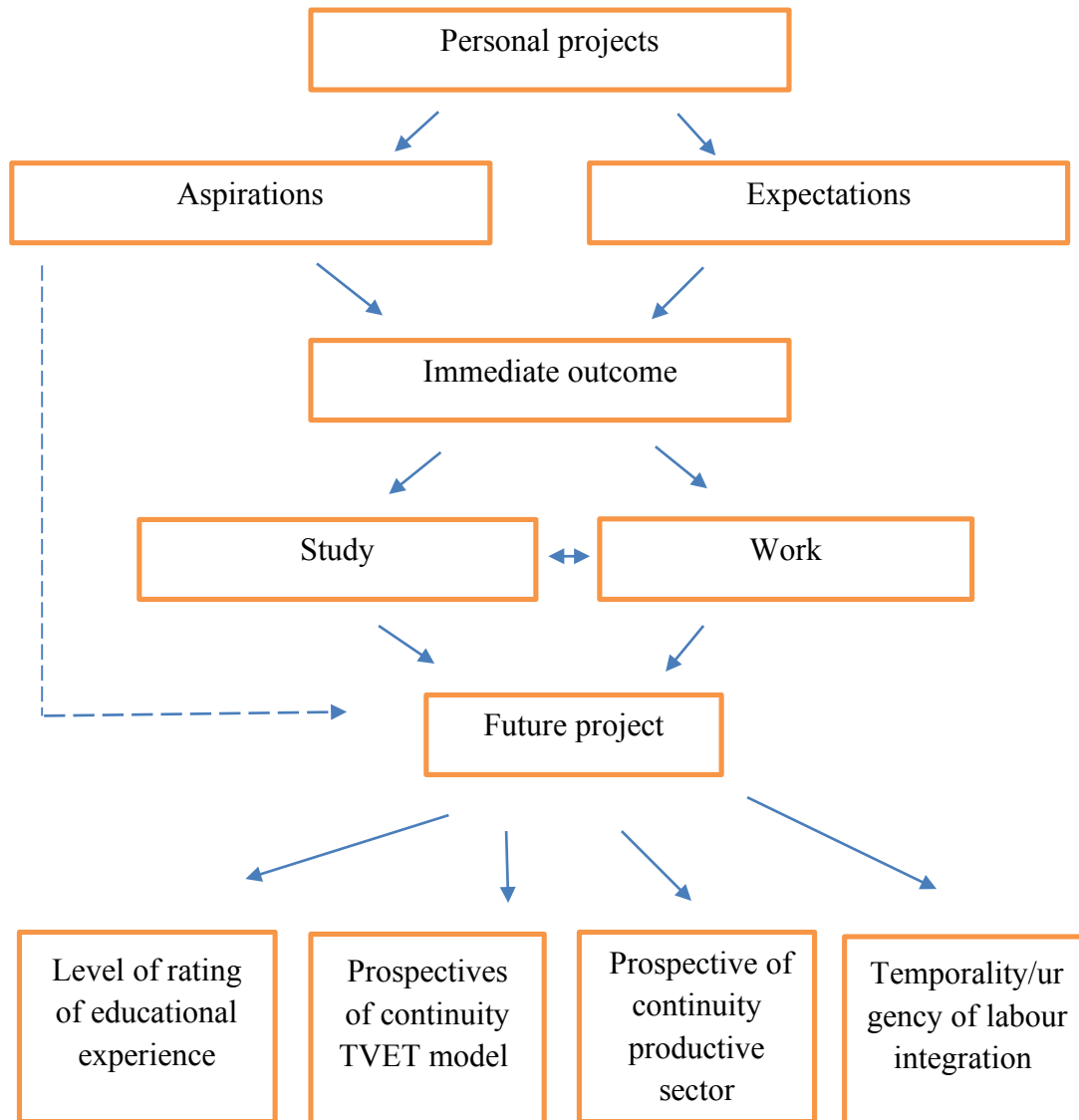
and future projects that they had prior to graduating from secondary education. The thematic matrix that organises both instruments that are part of the TVET secondary education graduates follow-up includes records of educational and labour experiences, future projects, personal support and records of the influence of the local and regional environment on the youth's future decisions.

Characterisation of students	Characterisation of subject	Name
		Sex
		Age
		Neighbourhood of residence
		Paternity/Maternity
		Educational level of parents
		Occupation of parents
	Educational situation	Reasons to choose TVET
		Degree of satisfaction with field of studies
		Self-perception of performance in studies
Assessment of received training	Opinion on received training	Usefulness of training for personal project
		Comparison of quality between Technical-professional and Scientific-Humanistic education
		Opinion on quality of education at the institution
		Opinion on training degree reached
		Opinion on management of competences
		Opinion on quality of teaching staff
Personal support	Perception of family support	Value of family
		Perception of support for the development of the personal project
		Perception of exigence to achieve project
		Level of confidence of families to achieve personal project
	Perception of educational institution support	Orientation to define personal project
		Support for choice for the future
	Self-perception	Level of self-satisfaction
		Main personal strengths and weaknesses to face the future
		Aspects to be strengthened to achieve personal goals

Current personal situation	Job experience	Work experience
		Weekly worked hours
		Salary situation
		Reasons for previous work
		Life references
	Perception of autonomy	When is one independent? (Salary, leaving parent house, make decisions)
		Level of self-attributed autonomy
At what age/event one becomes an adult?		
Possible projects and trajectories	Future prospects	Personal goals for the future (ideals)
		Level of definition of personal goal
		Factors that impact success/ lack of success
		Life stage in goal achievement
	Educational and labour project	Prospects of continuity of studies
		Study choice (program, institution)
		Factors that influence its fulfilment (personal/of context)
		Factors that influence its non-fulfilment
		Alternatives to non-fulfilment of goals
		Moment and type of entrance to the labour world
		Predisposition and feasibility of combinations study-work
	Level of incidence of development and productive analysis	Interest/motivation to continue studies-work in work area of field of studies
		Perception about opportunities/labour necessities both regional and local
		Prospect of permanence/work or educational migration
	Values position	Study
Distinction by educational institution/programmes		
Work		Willingness to work and carry out a certain type of work
		Factors that are favoured in the choice of a job
		Factors that are favoured in getting a job

In general terms, this enquiry should offer records regarding (a) level of affiliation of graduates to the TVET model and materialisation, (b) prospects of continuity in this program (degree of segmentation/coordination of the general educational offer for graduates of the system), (c) level of conditioning of the productive sector in the

formation of trajectories of the youth and (d) temporality in the construction of trajectories based on the expression of personal projects. The following diagram summarises the research items of this enquiry:



- May-August: MINEDUC database processing and descriptive report of graduation situation of cohort of TVET secondary education graduates.
- May-July: elaboration of instrument, follow-up of graduates samples in three regions and campaign of post-graduation information collection.
- July-September: systematisation of information and preparation of study results report.
- May-August: last round of interviews of TVET female graduates, processing and analysis of information.

### Expected outcome

- (a) A document of project of synthesis of educational trajectory of TVET secondary education graduates in Chile (database analysis)
- (b) A document of project about a follow-up study of graduates in three regions; preparation of congress presentation and a chapter of congress publication
- (c) An article for presentation to a specialised journal about the study of gender experiences in the transition of female TVET secondary education graduates.

### Bibliography

Biggart, A., Furlong, A. and Cartmel, F. (2008). Biografías de elección y linealidad transicional: nueva conceptualización de las transiciones de la juventud moderna. Bendit, R., Hanh, M. and Miranda, A. (Comps.). *Los jóvenes y el futuro: procesos de inclusión social y patrones de vulnerabilidad en un mundo globalizado* pp. 49-72. Buenos Aires: Prometeo.

Cieslik, M. and Simson, D. (2013). *Key concepts in youth studies*. London: SAGE.

Evans, K. (2002) Talking control of their lives?: Agency in young adult transitions in England and the New Germany. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 5 (3), 245-270.

- Furlong, A. (2011). El cambio social y las transiciones de la educación al mundo laboral en Asociación Internacional de Ciudades Educadoras. Monográfico. Ciudad, Juventud y Educación. Retrieved from: <http://www.edcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Monografico-Ciudad-Juventud-y-educacion.pdf>
- Furlong, A. (2009). Revisiting transitional metaphors: reproducing social inequalities under the conditions of late modernity. *Journal of Education and Work*, 22 (5), 343-353.
- Heinz, W. and Krüger, H. (2001). Life course: innovations and challenges for social research. *Current Sociology*, 49 (2), 29-45.
- Leccardi, C. and Ruspini, E. (Eds.). (2006). A new youth?: Young people, generations and family life. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Machado Pais, J. (2000). Las transiciones y culturas de la juventud: formas y escenificaciones. *Revista Internacional de Ciencias Sociales*, 164, 89-101.
- Martuccelli, D (2007) "*Cambio de rumbo: La sociedad a escala del individuo*"; Eds. LOM, Santiago.
- McGrath, S (2012) Vocational education and training for development: A policy in need of a theory? *International Journal of Educational Development* 32 p. 623-631
- Sarojini, C. (2014). *Aspirations, Education and Social Justice: Applying Sen and Bourdieu*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Staff, J. and Mortimer, J. (2003). Diverse Transitions from School to Work. *Work and Occupations*, 30, 361-369.
- Willis, P. (2003). Foot Soldiers of Modernity: The dialectics of cultural consumption and the 21st century school. *Harvard Educational Review*, 73 (3), 390-415.
- Woodman, D. and Wyn, J. (2011). Youth research in a changing world. Beadle, S., Holdsworth, R. and Wyn, J. (Eds.). For we are Young and...?: Young people in a time of uncertainty pp. 5-28. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Wyn, J. and Dwyer, P. (2000). Nuevas pautas en la transición de la juventud en la educación. *Revista Internacional de Ciencias Sociales*, 164, 17-29.