



Female and Male Students from Upper Secondary School towards their University Choice

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Abstract

The article shows the results of a survey performed by the Students' Department of University of Genova during the Orientation Fair, held in Genoa from 16 to 18 November 2011 which was visited by approximately 8.000 upper secondary school students in the process of deciding whether or not to enroll at a university course. The survey was conducted with the main aim to deepen opinions and attitudes of female and male students towards their future choice of a university course in a gender perspective. The instrument used to test students was a questionnaire given to the first 400 young people who have requested orientation, career guidance and information, investigating so their perception about the existence of some course more suitable for males or others most suitable for females as well as the influence of teachers and parents. The results of the study highlighted students' characteristics in a gender perspective, in particular, about their sending school, the type of sending school, the regularity of their education, the future outlook about university enrollment, the type of the chosen faculty. The results of the analysis show a strong influence of gender on orientation and choice of a university course after graduating from upper secondary school.

1. Overview

Occupational expectations of 15-year-old are segregated by gender in a manner resembling gender segregation in university enrollments and in the labour market. In general, females are more ambitious than males [1] [10]. The role played by gender and ethnic-cultural belongings must be taken into account: some studies have shown how being women or men, and belonging to a different culture affects training/working individual stories and differentiates coping means in situations of transition, giving rise to needs of support that must be properly regarded and differentiated in responses when guidance actions are put in place [4] [5].

During the Orientation Fair, held in Genoa November from 16 to 18, 2011, the Students' Department - Orientation and Guidance Service of the University of Genova performed a survey with the main aim to analyze the opinions and attitudes of female and male students with respect to their future choice of a university course, in a gender perspective.

The survey was carried out by administering a questionnaire to the first 400 young people who have requested guidance and information, investigating so their perception about the existence of some course more suitable for males or others most suitable for females as well as the influence of teachers and parents [2] [3] [11].

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2. Sample

The survey involves 397 young people; 384 students out of 397 provide information on gender and 76.3% are female students. They are upper secondary school students, mostly eighteen (62.0%), the others seventeen and nineteen (respectively 15.0% and 22.0%). Most of students come from Genova (47.7%) the others from other Ligurian cities (43.1%) and approximately 10.0% from Piedmont. There are also few students coming from other Italian regions. With respect to the type of school, 71.0% of students attend high school, 15.9% a vocational institute and 11.1% a technical institute. With regard to gender differences, more female students come from high schools in front of an equal distribution between male and female gender in technical schools and a prevalence of male students coming from vocational institutes. As regard to the attendance year, 77.6% of students belong to the 5th year of upper secondary school, followed by students belonging to the 4th year (17.4%). About 70.0% of students are in good standing with the year attended, while 21.7% is repeating; 7.1% of students, however, do not answer this question.



3. Method

Students were administered a questionnaire already used by the Students' Department of the University of Genova, enriched with some more questions about students' attitudes.

The questionnaire included a battery of questions consisting of 7 items which students had to check for expressing their level of agreement / disagreement on a scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree." The proposed items are the following: being graduates helps to find an economically better job; being graduates allows finding an agreeable job; I like to study and deepen the topics I'm mostly interested in; my school teachers inform me about university courses; my parents give me tips on what to do after graduating from upper secondary school; my friends' opinions are important to choose what to do after school graduation exam; I think it is difficult to study at university.

The main results are shown by descriptive analysis.

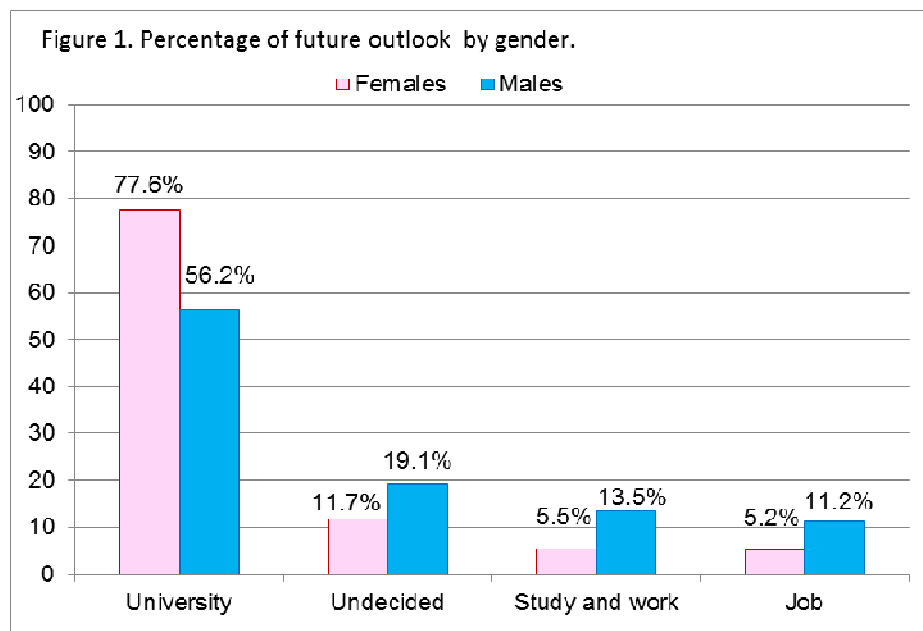
4. Results

4.1 Future outlook

In outlook on what to do when finishing upper secondary school, most of students answer they intend to enroll at university (72.6%), while 13.5% do not know yet, and 6.6% of students want to find a job.

As regard to gender, slightly more than half of males (56.2%) plan to go to university, compared to 77.7% of surveyed female students; 13.5% of males say they want to study and work at the same time, against 5.5% of females.

About 20% of males say they do not know what to do once completed upper secondary school, compared to only 11.7% of females. 11.2% of male students want to go to work after school, while females are only 5.2%. Furthermore, there is a greater number of undecided students among males (19.1%) than females (11.7%).



A percentage of students (23.7%) state that they no longer want to study after upper secondary school, while 55.4% express a preference for a specific Faculty, 11.3% want to study at university after upper secondary school, but without specifying the curriculum, 7.8% are undecided between two or more faculties.

Only 14.9% of students coming from high school say they would not continue their studies versus 45.4% of students coming from a technical school and 41.3% coming from a vocational school.

Most of males intend to enroll at Faculty of Medicine, of Engineering and of Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences, while most of female students intend to enroll at the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, of Foreign Languages and Literature and of Education Sciences. A trend characterized by gender influence seems therefore clear with regard to the choice of a university course.



4.2 Students' interest in studying

Most of surveyed students (81.8%) are pleased in studying and deepening the topics considered most interesting without significant gender differences. As regard to the type of school, students coming from high schools and from vocational schools show to be more pleased studying the topics they are interested in than their fellows coming from technical schools. 50% of students agree that it is difficult studying at university with no substantial differences of gender while some differences emerge as regard to the type of school. 61.7% of students coming from vocational schools consider as difficult studying at university versus 48% of students coming from high school and 53.6% of students coming from technical schools; this result may be explained by the fact that students coming from a vocational school are more likely to consider their study path as finished with the end of upper secondary school and therefore they perceive as unlikely continuing studying at university.

4.3 Expectations towards a university degree

As regard to the statement that a university degree helps people finding a better job, female students are less optimistic than males (74.7% versus 81.4%) and 15.6% does not express an opinion versus 12.1% of male students. In addition, 9.6% of females and 6.6% of males are completely at odds. The differences are more pronounced compared to the type of school: overall, students coming from high school agree more than their fellows coming from technical and vocational schools about the statement that being graduates helps finding an economically better job.

Most of male and female students agree about graduates getting an agreeable job but 23.1% of males and 15.5% of females disagree with this statement. As regard to the type of school, students coming from a vocational school agree more than students coming from technical and high schools with the fact that graduates can get an agreeable job, with a distance of about 12-14 percentage points. Therefore students coming from a vocational school give more value to the opportunity to find a more agreeable job through a high training program which appears to them more difficult and so it becomes a sort of myth.

4.4 The information received

Most of students (53.0%) believe that their teachers fail to inform them about university courses, with a higher incidence of female students (54.8%) than male students (47.2%). With regard to the type of school, more than half of students coming from technical and high schools believe that their teachers do not inform them about university training, while students coming from vocational schools claim to be better informed by their teachers.

Most of students agree with this statement, without strong gender differences, although 33.0% of male students versus 26.0% of female students do not agree that parents give tips on what to do after finishing upper secondary school. As regard to the type of school, most of students coming from high schools as well as technical and vocational schools, with a higher incidence of the latter, show a general agreement about the usefulness of parents' advice on what to do after finishing upper secondary school, showing a significant family influence in students' educational choices.

Most of students argue that the opinions of friends are not important in choosing what to do after finishing upper secondary school, with a higher incidence of female students than male students and, in relation to the type of school, a higher incidence of technical schools (71.3%) compared to high schools (66.8%) and vocational schools (53.2%).



Figure 2. Percentage of agreement by gender.

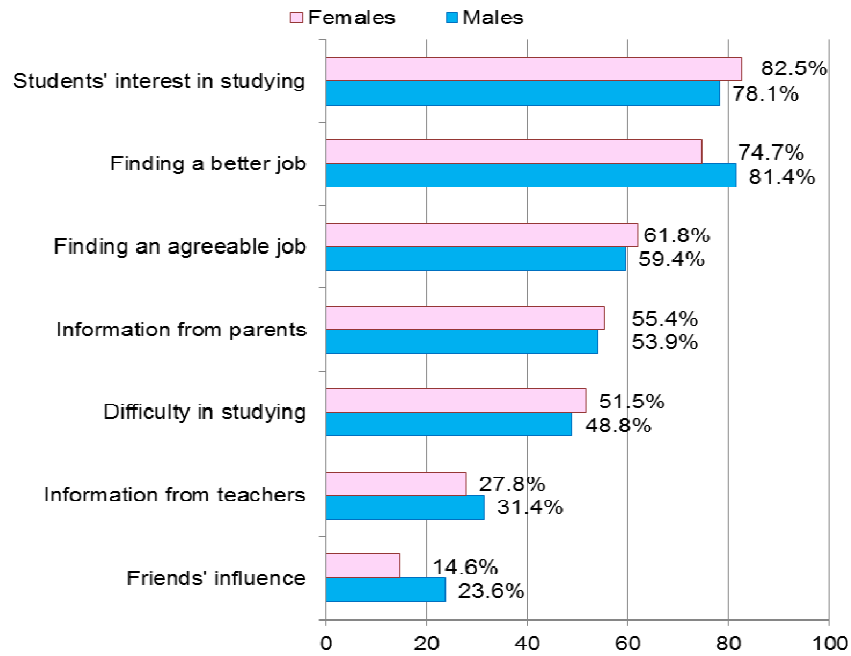
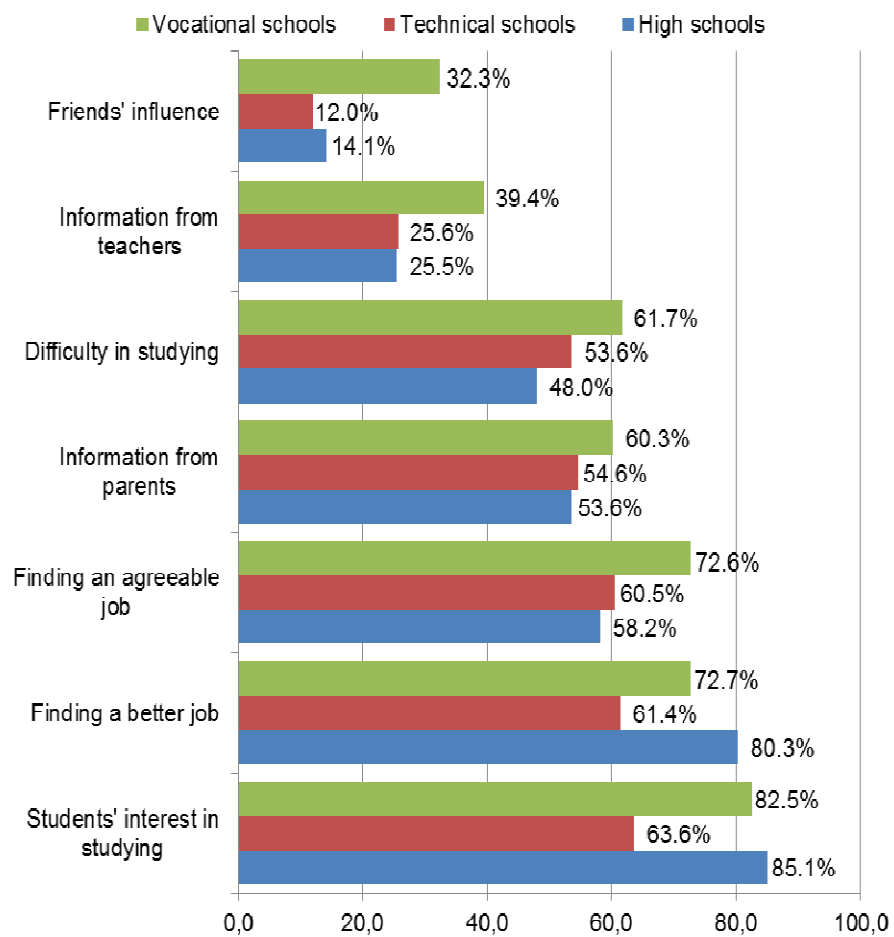


Figure 3. Percentage of agreement by type of school.





5. Conclusions

Results of analysis show that generally high school trains students for a university education, while technical and vocational schools are mainly aimed at the transmission of the most useful skills for immediate entrance of young people in the labour market. The fact that 50.0% of students coming from a technical school and 39.7% of those coming from a vocational school declare their intention to continue their studies can be due to self-selection effect of the sample, so it's obvious they are interested in enrolling at university and, consequently, to receive information about higher education paths; it also shows the need for a greater synergy between schools, universities and the labour market, supported by the fact that, however, a substantial number of young people from technical and vocational schools (45.4% and 41.3%) say they would not continue their studies compared to 14.9% of students coming from high school.

Recent studies [6] [7] [8] [9], show that students coming from vocational schools are characterized by more disadvantaged conditions and even more by worst socio-economic, family and cultural background than students coming from high and technical schools so that there is a teachers' greater sensitivity in guidance in order to avoid the higher risk of drop-out students.

The findings may suggest that in vocational schools teachers pay more attention in well informing students about feasible high training paths mainly because of a more disadvantaged background with more students at risk of failure and conditioned by the opinions of parents, who generally show a strong influence on the educational choices of their children. Therefore data analysis confirms the crucial role of parents in students' choices, giving to the families themselves the responsibility, both in case of positive or negative choices, of influencing their children's learning outcomes in higher education paths.

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