

Notions, Conceptualizations and Meanings of Parental Expectations amongst pupils from different educational environments in their career choices¹

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Abstract

Early research on the impact of parental expectations argued that parents with high expectations set high standards and make high demands of their children, which result in high academic achievement and influence the choices they make. Recent research also highlights the critical role of parental aspirations in this role. How students understand these expectations and aspirations becomes increasingly important. This study aims to present and analyze the notions, conceptualizations and meanings of parental expectations amongst pupils from different educational environments. We present specific aspects of social capital differentiations between pupils from Greek Vocational Lyceum and those in the General Lyceum and examine the relationship between trust and selection of a specific educational career. Recent research has found parental expectations and strategies have significant impact on children's educational career selections. We argue that pupils' conceptualization of these strategies and expectations also plays a significant role in these selections. We surveyed students in three high schools (1 Vocational and 2 General Lyceums) in two Greek cities. We hypothesize a difference in pupils' conceptualizations of parental expectations between students attending Vocational and General Lyceum. It appears that the final formation of meaning and conceptualizations are the result of trust in educational structure and the labor market. Thus, the relationship between trust –as an important factor of Social Capital–and education is important in the efficient functioning of the modern economies but also of the modern western societies (Fukuyama 2000).

Keywords

Social Capital, Trust, Parental Expectations

¹ If this paper is quoted or referenced, we ask that it be acknowledged as:

Theocharopoulos N., Michaloliakou T., Katsillis M., & Kamarianos I. (2020). *Notions, Conceptualizations and Meanings of Parental Expectations amongst pupils from different educational environments in their career choices*. In B. Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz & V. Zorbas (Eds.), *Citizenship at a Crossroads: Rights, Identity, and Education* (pp. 205 - 221). Prague, CZ: Charles University and Children's Identity and Citizenship European Association. ISBN: 978-80-7603-104-3.

Gap between choosing career and Citizenship: a common topic

An examination of the relevant research suggests that pupils' career choices are related to their sense of identity, their position and their role in society. It is assumed that, growing up, pupils will become independent and responsible citizens able to make viable decisions positively affecting themselves and others. Early research on the impact of parental expectations suggests that parents with high expectations set high standards for and make demands of their children, which in turn result in high academic achievements and influence children's choices (Davis-Kean, 2005; Pearce 2006; Vartanian et al., 2007). High parental expectations are also linked to student motivation to achieve in school, scholastic and social resilience, and aspirations to attend college (Peng and Wright 1994; Reynolds 1998). Recent research has also found that parental aspirations and expectations are crucial factors of students' career choices. There has been an extensive debate regarding the use of actual expectations, or students' perceptions thereof are better suited for the examination of the relationship between expectations and later choices (Reitzes & Mutran, 1980; Davies & Kandel, 1981; Gottfredson, 1981; Hoelter, 1984, etc.). Whether or not there is, in fact, a significant difference between the two measures, it seems illogical to suppose that a measure other than that which is understood by the students (i.e., their *conceptualization* of their parents' expectations, aspirations, and so on) would inform their later decisions. Following this logic and the research discussed above, we argue that understanding students' conceptualization of these expectations becomes increasingly important.

Fukuyama (2000) argues that the relationship between trust and education is important in efficient functioning of modern economies and western societies. According to Crozier (1964), parents pursue the effective economic development for their children and consider education necessary for this to succeed. Parents consider education a tool, which can help integrate their children into the labor market, and knowledge a produced good.

Purpose of the study

We seek to examine the importance of differential perceptions of parental strategies and expectations among students from different educational environments, in regards to students' own expectations. Specifically, we will examine the different emerging instrumentalizations of parental expectations and trust crisis as main factors of Social Capital (as per Coleman's Social Capital theory) and citizenship students from Greek Vocational and General Lyceum.

Hypothesis and Research Questions

We hypothesize that parental expectations and trust, as main factors of Social Capital, affect students' choice of educational setting: the Vocational Lyceum, which leads directly to labor market or the General Lyceum, which leads in Greek higher education area.

To examine this, we formulated two primary research questions:

- Do Parental Expectations and Trust affect Students' Expectations, consequently affecting their career, educational choices and eventually their citizenship?

What, if any, are the differences in Parental Expectations and Trust between students in the two educational settings?

Significance of the Study

Research suggests that in times of social/economic crisis, individuals and families employ specific strategies to maintain or expand their capital, class, etc. in an effort to survive. Some of these familial strategies, concerning children's career choices, actively participate in the effort to survive, by dictating students' educational environment. Families try to invest in strategies with minimum costs and maximum returns (Christodoulou, 2017). This imposes 'market lows' on education, necessitating a discussion centered on (a crisis of) Trust and the instrumentalization of education.

Several researchers have dealt with whether and how parental expectations affect their children's educational and occupational expectations (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010, Yamamoto, 2007, Seiter, 1993). Greece suffered an extreme fiscal crisis for more than a decade. In a time when great emphasis is placed on vocational training, the significance of research examining the comparative influences leading to one or the other educational settings is clear.

The selection of educational setting (or track) is not simply a question of knowledge acquisition but one of degrees of specialization, professional rights, shaping of professional relationships, staffing of the labor market, and, as a result, the final position individuals within society. In short, we must study whether, in a context more or less defined by the ongoing socioeconomic crisis, young people elect to find a job directly after the end of mandatory education, or choose to progress to higher levels of education.

Theoretical Context

Social Capital is probably one of the most popular concepts in Sociology in the last few decades and especially at the meeting point between Sociology and the Educational Sciences (Gudmundsson & Mikiewicz, 2012). The idea of Social Capital is complex but can be argued to play a role in a plethora of social phenomena, from Educational Achievement, to Child Welfare, economic prosperity, democracy, and even health and happiness (Putnam, 2000). Much of the research examining the role of Social Capital (Bourdieu, 1980, 1983, 1986; Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Flap, 1991; Lin, 1982; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 1993, 1995) agrees that it overlays a complex social interaction between individuals that results in corresponding returns.

There is an ongoing debate surrounding the conceptualization and operationalization of Social Capital, often dependent on the particular phenomenon a given researcher wishes to examine. We adopted Coleman's (1988) approach, which entailed recording empirical findings focused on students' family and social relationships, which could explain their performance at school and compare it to their socioeconomic background. In this context, Social Capital, utilized by the individual for educational purposes, functions as the basis for Social Mobility through the realization of certain goals (Coleman, 1988). Coleman (1988) argues that this Social Capital consists of:

1. Obligations, expectations, and reliability within social structures,
2. Information Channels and
3. Rules and the Penalties incurred for their violation

For Coleman (1988), parents' educational expectations, the frequency of parent child discussions, the involvement of parents in their children's education, and the parents' encouragement for children to continue their studies are functional factors of Social Capital. Thus, Coleman emphasizes the relationship between family and school as a key variable in understanding school achievement (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).

Children's Social Capital includes the relationships and interactions between parents and children, which contribute to individuals' socialization. Strong Social Capital corresponds to the development of stronger, more intense, more stable and lasting relationships. This characteristic is a result of what Coleman (1988) termed "functional" Social Capital. This 'functionality' was a result of his belief that strong parent-child relationships would enable young people to absorb all of the positive elements of the Social Capital available to them.

Coleman uses Social Capital to combine two of the leading theories of Sociology of Education: Rational Choice and Cultural Capital (Christodoulou, 2017). According to the Rational Choice theory, "the choices pupils and their parents

make are determined by expected benefits, costs, and probability of success for different educational alternatives” (Breen & Jonsson, 2005 p.227) and students’ aspirations are, among other things, dependent on their family socio-economic background (Boudon, 1974; Breen, 2001; Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Goldthorpe, 1996, 2004). This dependency functionally means that students’ aspirations, and their corresponding later choices (e.g. what type of school to enroll in or which educational track or specialization to select), are both based on and maintain their social status.

According to the Cultural Capital Theory, on the other hand, young people make decisions based on the upbringing provided to them by their families or, in lay terms, how they were raised. Some parents, for example, consider education to be a natural step in their children’s development and so implement educational strategies, while other parents (e.g. those belonging to agrarian social classes) distance themselves from their children’s education, viewing it solely as a means of survival (Reay, 2005). School plays a vital role in this “survival”, as it enables easier participation in the labor market. Thus, children of agrarian parents will often shun (what they perceive to be) unnecessary education and, by extension the General Lyceum; they employ education as a tool, more often electing to enroll in the Vocational Lyceum, which will allow them to join the labor market as soon as possible.

Any social relationship, such as those created in educational settings above, must be governed by Trust. Coleman (1988) perceives a social relationship as a relationship of Trust when its potential products benefiting the subject exceed than those that harm the subject. Lack of Trust, in turn, lays the groundwork for “reciprocity”, a concept related to Trust, collective social action and social relevance, while also being linked to social interaction within social networks (Putnam, 1993). Coleman (1988) connects the concept of trust more with the first dimension of Social Capital presented above (Obligations, expectations and reliability within social structures). This connection is based on the logic that if, for example, one member of the group helps another, an obligation is created to the person who received the help but also an expectation of reciprocity from the person who helped. The connecting link uniting the existence of such an obligation with its reciprocation is Trust.

None of the above, however, takes into account the existence of a crisis of Trust, which can lead to substantial social change. Studies have shown that the Trust Crisis has intensified across many aspects of social life in recent years (General Social Survey, 2009; Bertelsman & Stiftung, 2010). Bormann and John (2014, p.9) argue that “having trust in the education system or its capability is essential [...] because the education system is the prerequisite for the future workforce”. This

position is borne out by our findings from the comparison of students in the Greek Vocational and General Lyceum.

Research Methodology – Research tool – Data collection

Our sample consisted of 138 pupils of the Vocational Lyceum and 103 pupils of the General Lyceum, selected using convenience sampling at the level of the school unit. We employed a single questionnaire to collect data from students of both Vocational and General Lyceums. The questionnaire was divided into five parts, measuring demographics, family socio-economic capital, expectations, the conceptualization of parental expectations and trust in the educational structure, respectively.

Demographics

The research involved 241 students in upper secondary education: 138 students of the Vocational Lyceum and 103 from the General Lyceum. The majority (nearly 55% or 132) of students were male (vs. approximately 45% or 109 girls). The sample consisted of students from every grade in both schools. From the General Lyceum there were 20 students from the 1st Year, 25 from the 2nd Year, and 58 from the 3rd Year. Students from the Vocational Lyceum comprised of 21 in the 1st Year, 53 in the 2nd Year and 64 in the 3rd Year. The schools were purposefully selected to be in cities near agricultural areas, so that their student body would be a mix of pupils from city centers, suburbs and rural areas. In the General Lyceum subpopulation, 20 students lived in rural areas, 46 in the suburbs and 30 in city centers; 7 students did not provide information regarding their area of residence. In the Vocational Lyceum subpopulation, 46 students lived in rural areas, 55 in the suburbs and 37 in city center.

Results

Demographic Differences

There were several important differences in Social Capital component demographic characteristics between our two school-type subpopulations. The first of these was Parental Educational Attainment. Specifically, more than 30% of General Lyceum students' mothers have completed upper secondary education (Lyceum), while more than a third of them have a University or graduate degree. While almost the same proportion of mothers of Vocational Lyceum students' mothers graduated from upper secondary education (Lyceum or Vocational

Lyceum diploma), the percentages with higher education are noticeably lower (see Figures 1 and 2).

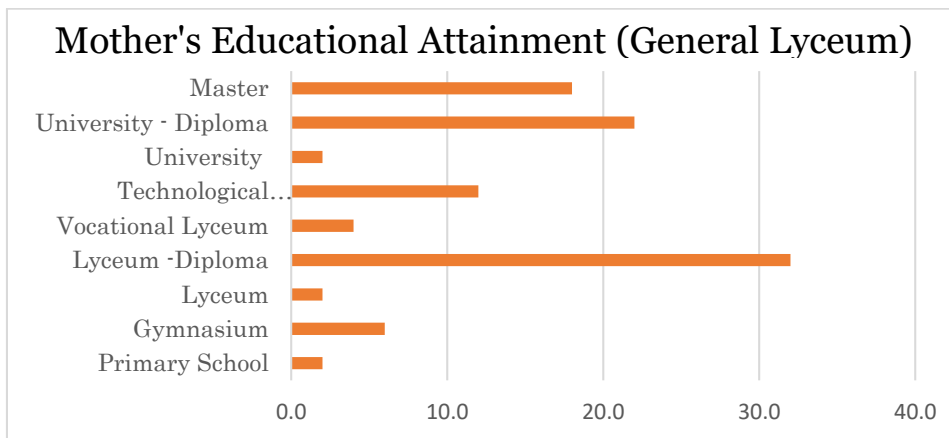


Figure 1: Mother's Educational Attainment (General Lyceum)

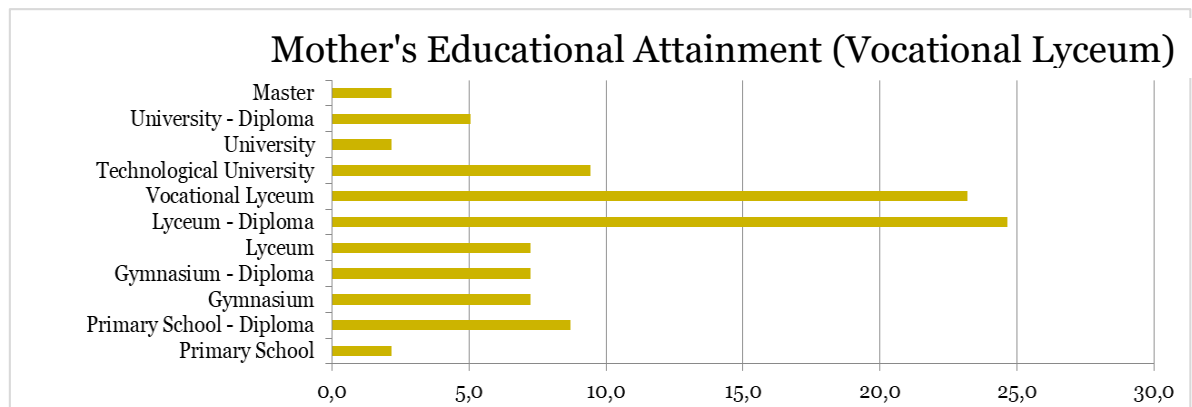


Figure 2: Mother's Educational Attainment (Vocational Lyceum)

Much the same is true for students Fathers' Educational Attainment. Nearly 25% of Fathers of students studying in the General Lyceum have also graduated from the General Lyceum and almost the same percentage has a university degree, while approximately 17% graduated from the Vocational Lyceum. Fathers of pupils studying at Vocational Lyceums have overwhelmingly attained a Vocational Lyceum diploma (nearly 30%), with the next most common option being a diploma from the General Lyceum, followed by lower levels attainment and trailed, finally, by University or graduate degrees (see Figures 3 and 4).

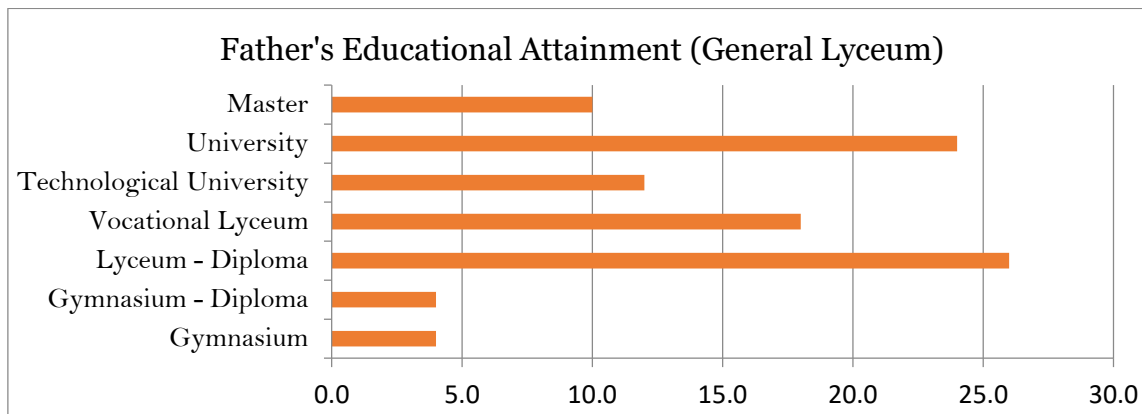


Figure 3. Father's Educational Attainment (General Lyceum)

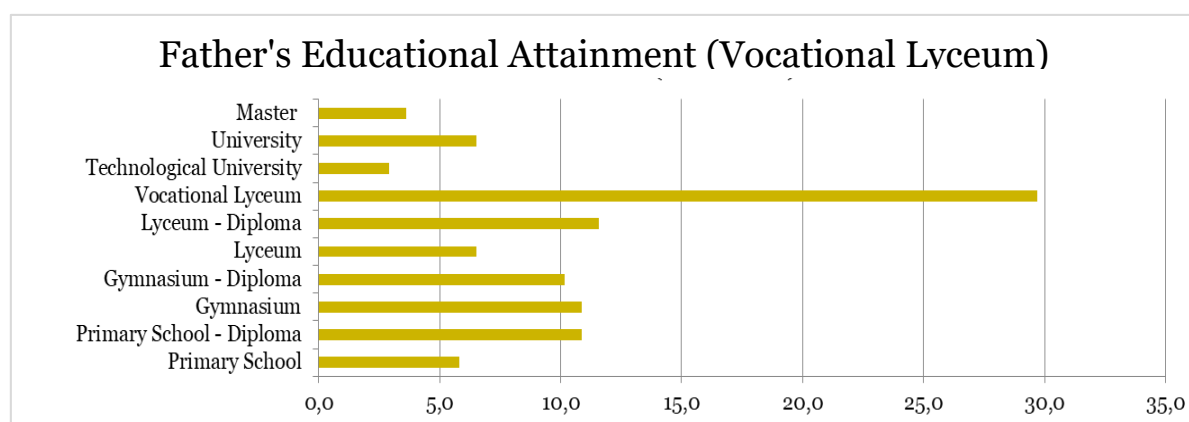


Figure 4. Father's Educational Attainment (Vocational Lyceum)

Students' family income (measured in brackets of 500 euros per month) also showed marked differences between the two subpopulations. The distribution of family income for pupils in the General Lyceum appears to be bimodal, with peaks in the 1000- 1500 euros bracket (approximately 30% of the subsample) and the >2001 euros bracket (more than 20%). Monthly family income for pupils of the Vocational Lyceum appears to be unimodal and positively skewed. Nearly 40% of pupils reporting family income in the 501-1000-euro bracket, somewhat less than 20% reporting 1001-1500 euros a month and less than 10% reporting any more than that (see Figures 5 and 6).

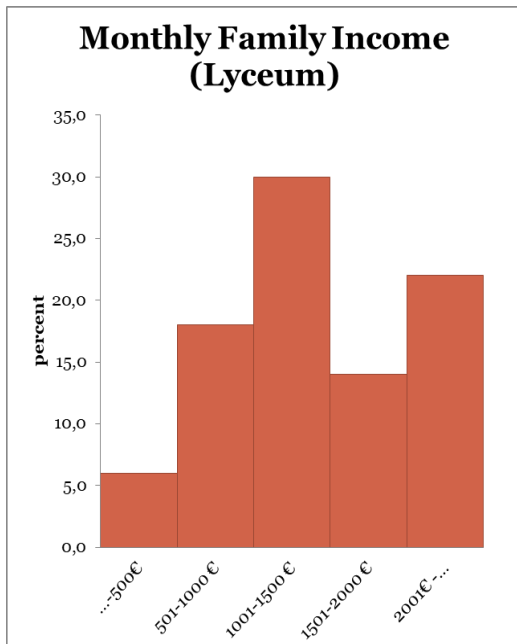


Figure 5. Monthly Family Income (General Lyceum)

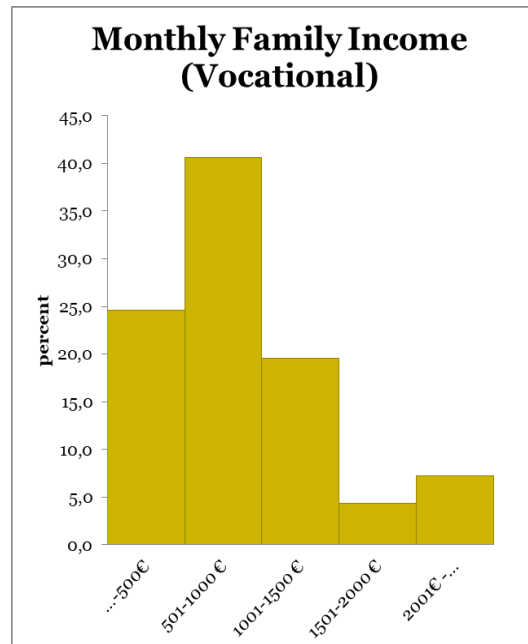


Figure 6. Monthly Family Income (General Lyceum)

Expectations

The majority of pupils in the Vocational Lyceum expect to enter the labor market (see Figure 7), while the majority of pupils in the General Lyceum expect to enter higher education (see Figure 8). Specifically, 55% of students in the Vocational Lyceum expect to enter the labor market post-graduation, while 39% expect to continue in higher education area (at a University or Technological University). Pupils in the Vocational Lyceum do not expect to obtain a graduate degree.

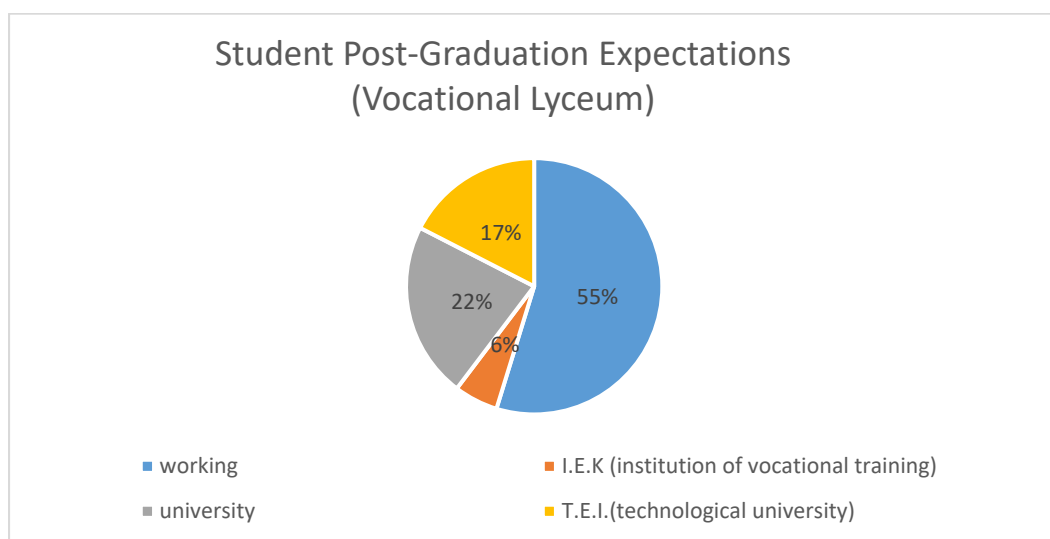


Figure 7. Student Post-Graduation Expectations (Vocational Lyceum)

Only 6% of pupils in the General Lyceum expect to stop their education after high school. The overwhelming majority (84%) expect to continue into higher education, some as far as a University degree (41%), while even more expect to get a graduate (i.e. Masters or Ph.D.) degree (43%).²

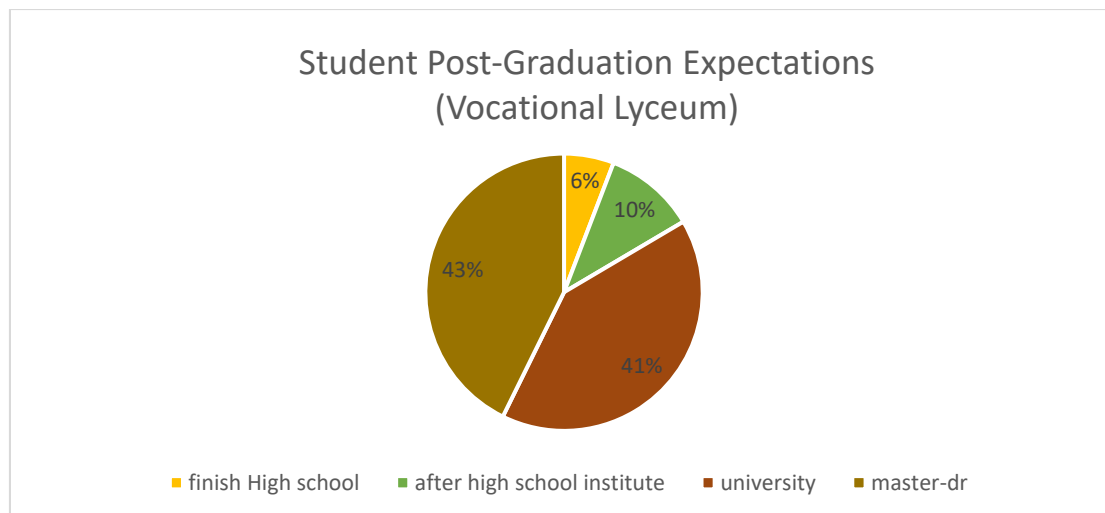


Figure 8. Student Post-Graduation Expectations (Vocational Lyceum)

The difference in average post-graduation expectations between the two groups was, on average, nearly two levels (Mean Diff.=1.900 p=.000, dof=98) in favor of students of the General Lyceum³.

The higher expectations of Lyceum pupils are reflected in the fact that almost all expect to be examined in National University Entrance Examinations (commonly referred to as Pan-Hellenic Exams), which are the only means of access to Higher Education in Greece. Approximately 20% of students in Vocational Lyceum will not participate in Pan-Hellenic Exams. This is reflected in the effort and achievement of General Lyceum pupils compared to Vocational Lyceum pupils; General Lyceum students invest more effort in studying (see Figure 9) and have higher achievement (see Figure 10) than their counterparts in Vocational Lyceum.

² I.E.K. is an institution, private or public which is an after high school institution, between high school and university but is not necessary for proceeding to university

³ It is understood that tests of statistical significance should not, strictly speaking, be applied to convenience samples, due to the non-probabilistic nature of their selection. However, any sample can be considered representative of some larger population and these differences are presented here in this light.

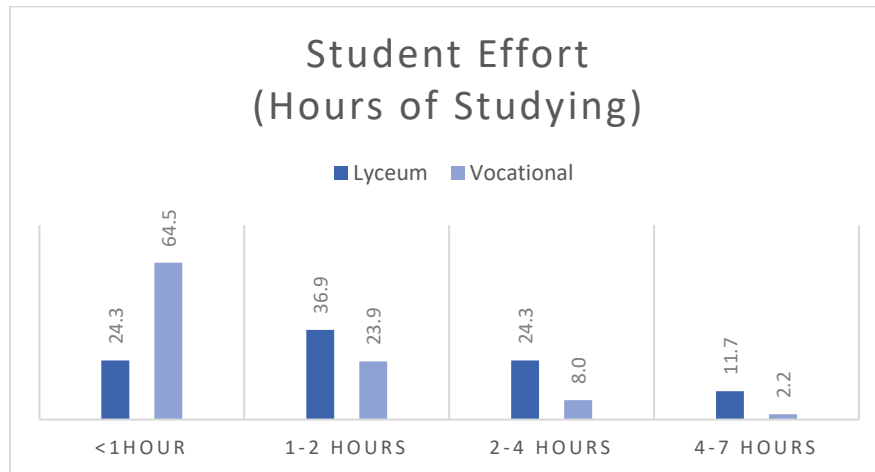


Figure 9. Student Effort (Hours of Studying)

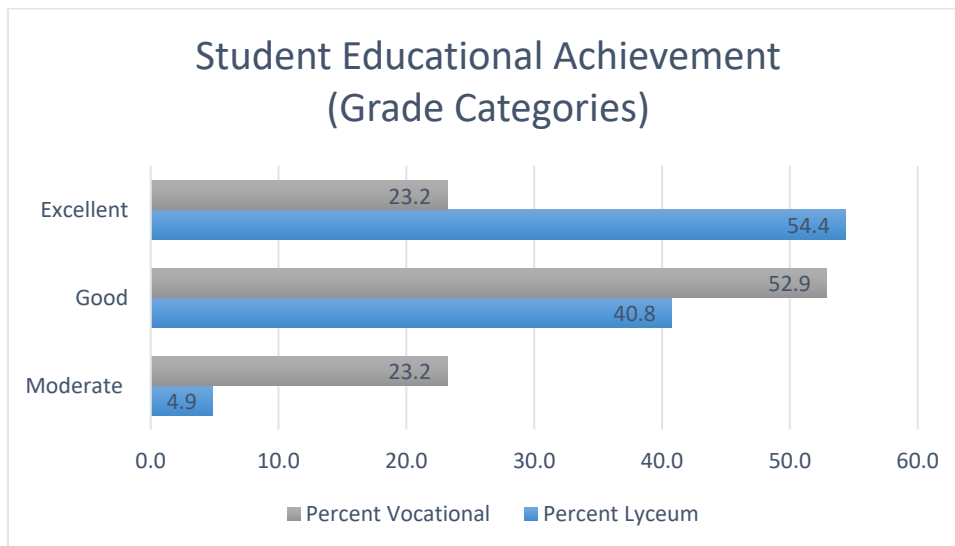


Figure 10. Student Educational Achievement (Grade Categories)

Trust

The majority of students in both General and Vocational Lyceums reported a complete lack of (Total) Trust in the educational institution (see Figure 11)⁴. This implies a Crisis of Trust (potentially related to the Greek socio-economic crisis), which only serves to further highlights the use of the education as a tool. It is worth noting, however, that students of the Vocational Lyceum reported greater levels of trust than General Lyceum pupils (Mean Diff.=3.600, $p=.000$, $dof=93$).

⁴ Total Trust is measured as combined student trust the educational institution and in teachers.

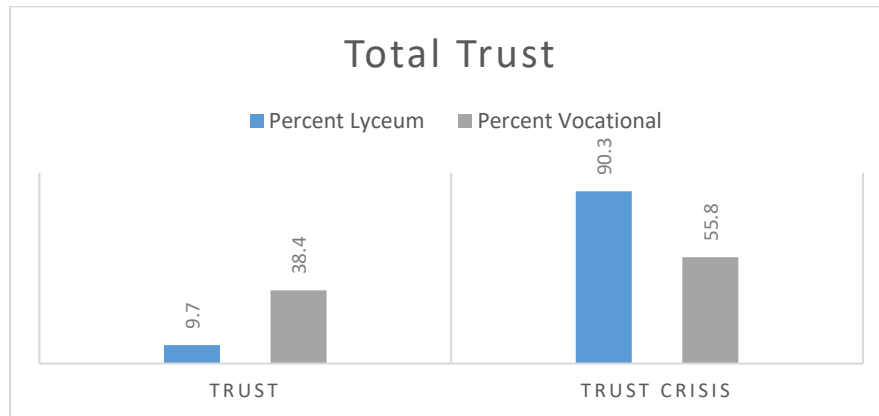


Figure 11. Total Trust in Education by School Environments (Type)

Parental Expectations, Trust, and Students Expectations

We posit that the formulation of students' Educational Expectations is dependent on both the Expectations of their parents and their level of Trust in the Educational Institution. Indeed, we find that students' Educational Expectations are strongly correlated with their Parents' Expectations for them (see Table 1). This is largely expected; Katsillis (1987) found Parental Educational Expectations to be the strongest component of Significant Others' Influence, which significantly affected students' Educational Expectations (see also Katsillis & Rubinson, 1990), while Katsillis (2015), examining the relationship directly, found a significant direct effect of Parental on Students' Educational Expectations.

Table 1. Correlation between Parental and Personal Expectations

Correlations				
			Personal educational expectations	parental educational expectations
Kendall's tau_b	Personal educational expectations	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	.622**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	137	136
	parental educational expectations	Correlation Coefficient	,622**	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	.
		N	136	137

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Given the logical and empirically established relationship between Parental and Student Educational Expectations, it is unreasonable to examine the relationship between Trust and Student Educational Expectations without controlling for Parental Expectations. Thus, we propose a model where student Educational

Expectations are linearly dependent on both Parental Expectations and Trust. Despite the theoretical importance placed on the role of Trust in the formulation of student's Educational expectations, however, it appears to play no substantial role in this formulation, substantial or statistical, when controlling for students' Parental Educational Expectations (see Table 2). This lack of any relationship between Trust and Students' Educational Expectations is, arguably, evidence of the instrumentalization of the contemporary educational process.

Table 2. Regression of Students' Educational Expectations on Parental Expectations and Trust

		Coefficients ^a				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1,374	,494		2,782	,006
	Parental educational expectations	,625	,064	,656	9,750	,000
	Trust in educational institution	,003	,038	,006	,086	,932

a. Dependent Variable: personal educational expectations

Discussion

In the present study, we have attempted to examine the influence of Parental Expectations and Trust in the Educational Institution on Students' Educational Expectations. While students, young people's expectations for their future life course as citizens are primarily expressed through the educational path they choose. In upper secondary education in Greece, this path has two branches, which are of central interest to this study.

Of the two factors of Social Capital examined, Parental Expectations and Trust, only Parental Expectations affect Student's Educational Expectations. These results raise several interesting questions, emphasizing the need for future research. What, for example, areas of Trust are responsible for the difference in confidence levels between the two school environments? To what extent does each "branch" succeed or fail in its role? The Vocational Lyceum seems to verify the goals and expectations of young people as it integrates them into the labor market and, as such, is considered a success, while directly entering the labor market from the General Lyceum is considered a failure.

Our findings regarding the relationship between Parental and Student Expectations seem to be in line with the relevant literature. Students have very similar Expectations for themselves to those held by for them by their Parents.

Parental Expectations in both school environments are largely shared with young people but there is arguably merit in examining whether this concurrence is affected by the choice of school path branch. It is also arguably worth examining this relationship in a more comprehensive model of Student Expectations, to examine both its persistence and the various paths through which the theoretically prescribed background characteristics may translate into differential expectations and to what extent this transformation is mediated by Parental Educational Expectations.

It is clear that our study has many issues, which could be addressed in future research. We hope to examine this issue on a much broader scale, using a probabilistic sample, allowing us to employ stronger tests and examine the inference of these findings to the entire Greek student population. We greatly anticipate the comparative examination of the relevance of these findings across different socio-cultural regions, city sizes, or even, as applicable, countries.

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