



Citation for published version:

Pineda, P, Celis, JE & Anzelin, I 2022, "Get Two Degrees for the Price of One": Career Orientations and Choices of Double-Degree Students', *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 66, no. 2, pp. 342-364.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/718781>

DOI:

[10.1086/718781](https://doi.org/10.1086/718781)

Publication date:

2022

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

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“Get Two Degrees for the Price of One”: Career Orientations and Choices of Double-Degree Students

PEDRO PINEDA, JORGE CELIS, INGRID ANZELIN

Double degrees have been identified in universities around the globe. The Colombian double degree is a local hybrid of the American double major and the local profession-enabling *pregrado* that universities, particularly elite private ones, marketize in a context of mass higher education, devaluation of first university degrees and a weak economy ensuing from social conflict. Through a narrative approach, we found that students learn to pursue two degrees to: maximize their investment in education; seek future job security; reduce their *angst* about survival given the low value of university credentials; and gain recognition from peers and family members. Choosing two degrees also maximizes their opportunities for preparing themselves to serve others; allows them to pursue intellectual development and to satisfy their curiosity. The main trend found is that of students led by a consumerist orientation privileged over an educational rationale. We argue that the superimposition of consumerist orientations over self-cultivation motives may occur in the context of implementation of new programs such as double degrees, implemented by universities under a market logic.

Introduction

“A 23-year-old young man from the Pontifical Bolivarian University receives three degrees the same day” (Ospina 2017). This headline from an article in a local newspaper with the photo of a graduate exhibiting his three credentials from a prestigious private university and the positive congratulations received exemplifies the social legitimacy that simultaneously studying more than one undergraduate program may have. Double first-degree programs *at the same university*¹ are a well-established practice nationwide: in 2019, 12,821 students were enrolled in two simultaneous undergraduate courses of study at Colombian universities and 848 graduated from such

¹ Double degrees should be differentiated from two degrees offered by two universities, from the specialization in two academic fields called double (or dual) majors (Del Rossi and Hersch 2016) and from taking a second subject (*Zweifach*) in Germany (Grunert and Ludwig 2016). Similar terms with a varying use in the literature are dual degrees, combined degrees, joint degrees or double graduation programs (Russell, Dolnicar, and Ayoub 2007).

programs (0.8% of total students and 0.4% of graduates) (SNIES 2020; Ministerio de Educación Nacional 2020).

Beyond Colombia, the double-degree modality comprising two undergraduate degrees studied simultaneously *at the same university* is found in other countries. The Colombian double degree is similar to other combination of degrees discussed in academic literature about higher education in Australia (Baldry, Märtsin, and Eivers 2018; Russell, Dolnicar, and Ayoub 2007; Fleming et al. 2012), mentioned in Spain (Berriain and Fondevila Gascón 2012; Oliva Marañón 2012), China (Chang 2006) and the US, where around 3% of male and female college graduates in 2010 reported a second bachelor degree (Del Rossi and Hersch 2016).

In Colombia, the double degree was established in the 2000s in a context of curriculum reform in higher education. The first degree, called *pregrado*, was shortened and reformulated into credits to fit the American bachelor-master structure. Double degrees also emerged under high unemployment related to a fragile economy destabilized by armed conflict (Cortés-Sánchez 2018) and a young entry age to university of 17 years; only 38 (17%) of 223 countries in the world have an entrance age of 17 years or less (UNESCO 2021). Double degrees also emerged in a broader context of massification and privatization in higher education (Schofer and Meyer 2005) in Colombia and in Latin America in general. In Latin America, 49% of students are enrolled at private universities (Levy 2012) and in Colombia the figure is 61% (1,674,600 students in 2019) (SNIES 2020). Credential inflation is also related to pressures to lower costs and reduce intellectual demands in favor of practical programs or subspecialities (Chiroleu and Marquina 2017).

Consequently, double degrees illustrate how current developments in higher education affect students, their career orientations and choices. Why are some

Colombian students oriented towards studying two university degrees? In this article, we use the sociological concept of orientation (Bohnsack 2014; Bohnsack and Nohl 2003) applied to career choice (Rodrigues, Guest, and Budjanovcanin 2013) and refer to literature on student choices in higher education (Waters, Brooks, and Pimlott-Wilson 2011; Tomlinson 2016; Remedios, Kiseleva, and Elliott 2008) to examine how student social orientations emerge in the context of the imported practice of double first degrees. After describing the implementation of double degrees in Colombia, we define student orientations, and organize the analysis of our student interviews according to the eight orientations we found. We finally discuss the implications of our analysis for our current understanding of career orientations and career choices in the Colombian context and beyond.

Theoretical Framework

Career orientations

Changes in orientations and career orientations can occur along with transformations in higher education. Orientations can be understood in the sociological literature as habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron 1964) or implicit knowledge framing social behavior, and acquired through socialization in a specific social milieu (Bohnsack 2014; Bohnsack and Nohl 2003). We understand career orientations as the implicit knowledge guiding decisions on future employment and related educational choices (Rodrigues, Guest, and Budjanovcanin 2013; Carlson, Derr, and Wadsworth 2003) that we explore in this study. Orientations may have both an individual and a social dimension comprising personal hopes and dreams in a cultural and social context. Career orientations may be identified in different individuals, and identifying combination

patterns of orientations may allow understanding the personal and social dimension in which double degrees are chosen.

Career orientations have been classified within taxonomies of motives for career choice emphasizing different weightings of universalism or social context. The psychological literature about career choice influenced by self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci 2000) differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Amabile et al. (1994) contextualize this theory in the context of career choice and builds a typology of nine intrinsic and extrinsic motives that includes a focus on the dictates of others, recognition concerns, and curiosity.

In turn, Rodrigues, Guest, and Budjanovcanin (2013) draw on Schein's (2006) typology of so-called career anchors but prefer to use the concept of orientations instead of fixed typologies to allow viewing the interplay between the individual and the broader social, family, educational and labor market context. Orientations can be multiple and changing, depending on factors such as aging, fulfilment of orientations, and family roles. Still, some people may have one salient primary orientation. Orientations can also be context-specific, but some orientations may partially overlap across contexts while other may be increasingly common if social and economic structures are similar education acquires similar trajectories.

Student choice

Social orientations also operate when students make decisions on choosing degrees or following career paths. Common motives in the choice of degree and in career choice are a calculative motivation and personal development or intellectual joy. Scholars discuss the influence of globally interconnected curriculum reforms in creating new patterns of student motives where the calculative motive becomes predominant.

The lower enjoyment orientation both in British and Russian students and their lower motivation to master their studies in favor of a calculative motivation as they evolve during their study program found by Remedios, Kiseleva, and Elliott (2008) exemplifies this debate. Tomlinson (2008) confirms the increasing consumerist view of university credentials by interviewing students in the UK. He explains that the students' calculative motivation occurs in a context of massification, perceived devaluation of university credentials and increasing positional competition. However, he has also found nuances in this main trend represented by students who are still oriented towards learning and nurturing intellectual self-development (Tomlinson 2016). Through examining UK students' motivations to study abroad, Waters, Brooks, and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) discovered that a search for a search for joy required escaping from the United Kingdom and its educational system that obliged them to choose a degree program at the age of 17 or 18. For these students, higher education in the US with its lack of terminal examinations and the choice of a liberal arts degrees often better matched their orientation towards enjoyment of studies and prolonging the transition to adulthood.

Adely et al. (2019) find that students in a Jordanian public university value university education for enabling a better understanding of life, but this was secondary to the positional social and economic advantage university studies offer given the unprecedented difficulties in obtaining positions in the public sector related to neoliberal reforms. The search for positional advantage motivates Swiss business students to participate in extracurricular sport, artistic and community activities (Roulin and Bangerter 2013), whereas elite universities in the US enable on-campus corporate recruitment, thereby promoting the focus on restricted options for career paths and fields of knowledge (Binder, Davis, and Bloom 2015). Thus, student choice depends

both on intrinsic enjoyment or the search for economic security and the options provided by universities.

The interplay between students' aspirations and the social and educational context are less well studied when choosing two simultaneous degrees is possible. A survey of students at a university in Australia showed that the main interest in studying two degrees was practical: in 78% of cases, students were looking to improve their employment prospects and 70% looked to acquire more skills; 53% looked for better value (Baldry, Märtsin, and Eivers 2018). Improving their employment opportunities also seems to be the main reason to study two degrees among Spanish students of journalism and marketing (Berriain and Fondevila Gascón 2012). In a university in the United States, both enjoyment and parental approval were simultaneously pivotal for decisions on studying two majors (Zafar 2012). Regression models of graduates in the US, though, show that obtaining two bachelor degrees is not a predictor of earnings (Zhu and Zhang 2021; Del Rossi and Hersch 2016) and is a negative predictor of job satisfaction despite being perceived as allowing a better match of university studies with current employment (Del Rossi and Hersch 2016). However, it remains unclear how the double degree relates to career orientation and student choice in a context of a weak economy and civil war and when higher education is influenced by current developments affecting other countries such as the Bologna reform and the devaluation of first university degrees.

Method

Colombia represents a country with a strong private university sector where traditional first university degrees have devaluated. Private higher education in Colombia increased from 34% in 1953 to 60% in 1983 (Patrinos 1990); 60% of 1,513,715 undergraduate enrolments in 2019 are in private universities (SNIES 2020).

The World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank played a role in generating this trend, in that, based on human capital theory, they promoted the view that higher education should be funded privately because it provided private benefits and that it was necessary to cut governmental expenditure (Rodríguez and Alcántara 2001). Colombia is also a paradigmatic country to study the effects of curriculum reforms on students' lives and aspirations in the social setting of high social inequality and civil war.

We chose to study a private, elite university offering two or more simultaneous degrees (“multiple degrees”) since 2007 because it is representative of elite universities, the most important providers of double degrees. Private elite universities are older, have a higher status, and often offer better quality of programs than demand-absorbing universities (Levy 2012). In 2019, 7,946 of the 12,512 undergraduate *pregrado* students enrolled in a double-degree program (64% of all double-degree enrolments and 79% of all private double-degree enrolments) were studying at the eight private, elite universities appearing in the QS World University Rankings (see Figure 1). The decrease of enrolments in the public sector (Figure 1) is related to new regulations in 2018 at the Universidad del Atlántico (2018) which drastically shortened 4,167 enrolments in 2017 to 1,155 in 2019. At the top of university ranking and of the list of elite universities offering double degrees is the Universidad de los Andes: 4,324 and 34,6% of all double degree enrolments in 2019 (Table 1).

[Figure 1]

[Table 1]

We also selected this private university because it offered different combinations of study programs that provided variation in the population studying double-degree programs. From January 2019 to March 2020, we used snowball sampling to contact fourteen students with eleven combinations of double degrees, with the goal of representing diverse cases (Gerring 2008). The first three students we contacted were referred by faculty from different areas who knew they were studying two degrees. All except one had begun studying when they were 17 years old, and in most cases had selected their study program when they were 16, starting a second program in the third semester because the university only allows this choice after the second semester. All interviewees were between 20 and 25 years of age and had already completed at least six semesters at the university. Women were the majority of students at this university, and 11 out of our 14 interviewees were women. The average student from their cohort (2014) at this university has a middle-upper social stratification, indicated by 67% of students in strata 4-6 from a national scale of 1 to 6 (SPADIES 2021). Nationwide only 6% of students in higher education are in this same category. Our cases also included three students who had abandoned one of their programs. The proportion of enrolments in relation to graduates (12,821 and 848 respectively in 2019) (Ministerio de Educación Nacional 2020) indicates that dropout might be a common phenomenon.

Each open-ended interview was designed to tell the story of the students' decisions to study each of their two degrees. Interviewers tried to make as few interventions as possible while ensuring that the interview followed the narrative about their orientations for choosing each study program and the students' social environment when taking their decision. Our analysis followed the narrative approach known in Germany as the documentary method, developed by the German sociologist Ralf Bohnsack (2014). First, we noted the main topics in the interviews using MAXQDA.

We then selected and transcribed major passages of the interviews, at least four for each case study, separating general social discourses from theories and actions reflecting orientations. Finally, we compared and classified students across cases according to their primary orientation to study double-degree programs. Our categorization was guided by the career orientation and student choice literature but was also open to building new categories.

Orientations of Double-degree Students

We found eight orientations among students in double-degree programs. Table 2 shows the orientations we found for each individual. Orientations are labelled ordinally in order of importance. All students turned out to have a primary orientation in line with Rodrigues, Guest, and Budjanovcanin's (2013) findings on career choice. The number of orientations we found in each interviewee ranged between two and four.

Maximize educational investment

In six of our cases, students chose a second degree mainly under the logic of maximizing the benefit from the investment that their families make, often following parental advice or coercion and without any concerns for intellectual development or helping others.

Santiago: Broadly speaking, I think it [double-degree program] is a very good initiative, above all because it reduces the time needed for two professional programs. Before, they had to do it in ten years, finish one and start the other and now it can be done in about seven years

Santiago's position seems like that of a client who is interested in maximizing his parents' investment in the university. Santiago sees this as an opportunity that did not present itself to other generations and probably will not present itself to other people.

This preference emerges in the context of the university actively promoting two undergraduate study programs. The role of the university in promoting double degrees is perceived as determinant. The arguments that are reproduced and internalized are not directly related to the enrichment of the educational process but to an economic logic of maximizing the returns on money and time. When asked about other motivations, a long reflection leads Santiago to conclude that the initiative is oriented “toward an incentive that seems economic. It is not the same to do two programs at the same time as one and then the other. It’s not the same to pay for just one and get two”. Sofia and Luciana decided that they could study business administration without leaving social communication because in the second program “it is not much that you get in return for all that you pay” (Sofia). Luciana started a second program instead of discontinuing the first one to “somehow to increase opportunities” because graduates from business administration and social communication programs were ranked among the first and fifth most contracted ones in articles she reports having read. Still, she had noticed that after various semesters in social communication “we had not learned anything (ironic laughter)”. This is the logic of business.

Isabela and Lucas ended up discontinuing their second study program. They blame the second study course they chose for their dropping it, and they still think studying two degrees at the same time is in general a “good option” and “very attractive” (Isabela and Lucas). Isabela decided to also study political sciences to fill a knowledge gap that the social communication program did not offer. She now says that the cost of leaving the second program is not having such a promising economic future given that she perceives that graduates from first degree programs with a master’s in social communication instead of those with a *pregrado* in social communication are the ones “working in newsrooms”. Still, she thought the effort to complement the “tools”

learned in social communication through finishing political sciences, which she viewed as “too theoretical”, was not worth it after failing two main theoretical seminars in the course. Lucas was looking forward to combining the “practical” knowledge of social communication with the “theoretical” or “enigmatic knowledge” of law through “paying only a small difference of 500,000 pesos” (approximately 150 USD), which he estimated as low in comparison to the cost of other academic programs. Salomé also explains the role of the university in promoting the double degree under an economic logic. She recalls being called by a representative of the university who explained “literarily they said you are going to get two degrees for the price of one”.

Security

Students maximizing educational investments also often articulate concern for their future job security. Santiago expresses that he had many options in mind, but he considered social communication and political science because “they were the ones that corresponded to my future plans”. Sofia explains that besides maximizing her investment in education she spoke with her parents who reinforced her perception that “a résumé with two degrees has more weight than a single degree and a master’s degree”.

Isabela mentions her concerns about studying social communication alone because it is a “professional program that in five or seven years will cease to exist”. She is worried that professionals from other fields may do the job after attaining a master’s degree in journalism that, according to her, may well be sufficient to cover the core contents of her studies. But her worries about the lack of preparation offered by her academic program in relation to those in other fields of study that provide content knowledge for a journalist are not accompanied by *angst* to survive. Isabela is confident about her future and assures herself that as a communicator “I will do well, maybe not

as good as other professionals, but well enough”. Lucas also does not express concerns about future survival like those found in the surviving orientation (see below); he even spent three semesters trying to pursue a sport program before starting his studies without perceiving any economic pressure.

Surviving

Students with a primary orientation towards surviving are deeply concerned with their future and are prone to enroll in two programs to relieve these worries. These students view themselves as having a wider range of professional possibilities after graduation on the basis of their two credentials, thus outcompeting graduates with a single credential. Salomé exemplifies how surviving becomes a specific orientation.

Salomé: Well, when I graduated, the architecture business was coming out of crisis and design was going into crisis, in fact, right now both are going in crisis (nervous laughter). (...) So, it's like having a plan B for never getting shipwrecked.

Gabriela has similar concerns as regards her professional future as a psychologist and a sociologist, study programs that she chose after her father convinced her to study instead of following her true vocation in fashion design. She decided to study psychology later because “sociologists can't make a good living”.

Lucía explains that she wanted to comply with the expectations of her parents who said that they had to struggle very hard in life: “So, I can also struggle very hard. And that in the end was horrible, it was cool because I learned many things but, in the end, very ugly, very ugly.” Advice not only comes from her parents in a family where “everything is measured in economic terms”. Her two sisters who studied liberal professions with perceived better job opportunities often joke to her saying “Watch out, watch out, because I'm going to have to maintain you because of that what you studied.

Yes, my sisters tell me that sometimes, and it's funny, but how can you tell me that? ”
(she looks down and laughs).

All three students fear negative prospects at the end of their studies if they do not find a job. They do not mention very high expectations, but simply not ending up “shipwrecked” (as Salomé describes) and failing to make a good living. Aiming to survive through studying two programs seems to offer a glimpse at a labor market scenario of uncertainty and the need for the tools that will allow them to overcome the future difficulties that they feel are certain.

Focus on parental dictates

Both the economic rationale and the desire to improve future career opportunities through the two chosen degrees are often pushed by parental dictates. The constant need to please the family often emerged in the interviews with all students with a primarily maximizing orientation. Calculative students often place central weight on the expectations of their families.

Lucas. My whole family is (...) like that first generation of Colombians, like (...) children of the public university. (...) I feel that studying law has that ... and especially in Colombia produces that wow (...) in the people. And I felt this need.

In Lucas’s case, studying meant that his family, including the extended family, gave him special recognition: he was the first of its members to be linked to a prestigious career. He describes that “There was this factor of family pressure” that became “a need I felt”. According to him, his family began consulting him on legal issues very early, which started to put a lot of pressure on him because not only did he not have the answers yet, but in parallel he realized that he did not want to continue studying law. Lucas remarks that studying two degrees generated a lot of tension that

was derived from the expectations that his family had placed on him, to the point that he had not ventured to share with his extended family that he had abandoned his law studies.

Sofía's parents, who have a family enterprise where they would like her to work, motivated her to study business administration. In turn, the families of Isabela and Santiago see the second program as a symbol of outstanding personal capacity and as a possibility to maximize the investment made in the study program, promoting with it a future career that would at least support the lifestyle that they were offering at that time. Apparently, with this choice, the students responded to an expectation that was created when they themselves brought the idea home after the university communicated this possibility. Now, the marketing efforts of the double-degree modality become part of family educational and social expectations. At the family level, the second study program represented a family achievement: having a member who, with a prestigious career, could bring benefits to all its members. Students and their family members have heard about the possibilities of studying two degrees from their own children, and now give a symbolic power to achieving this goal as a source of pride in the double-degree family member and family prestige overall.

Camilo illustrates an interesting exception that exemplifies another kind of family recognition rationale that does not value studying two degrees per se but rather careers that are not stigmatized. When informing his father about studying sociology at Colombia's main public university, his father said, "You're going to become a pothead and you won't have anything to live on". After suggesting studying political science, his father described this study program as a more "decent option" believing that it would make him a politician. For Camilo, the second program provided the opportunity to justify his choice and study sociology from the beginning. This was the program that he

had wanted to study from the start, being driven by an intellectual motive that he described as incompatible as his father's "snobbism". Camilo reflects that he had the option to opt for a single degree in a Colombian public university, work part-time and pay for his studies. Thus, the subordination to parents' values expresses an orientation to parental approval.

Peer recognition concerns

Besides the economic logic, Luciana and Sofia are also very sensitive to the social status that their peers award a student pursuing two degrees. Studying two programs becomes a factor affecting prestige and identity. They rely for the greater part of his or her professional identity on their parents' views on studying more in order to have a promising professional future. The social value of studying two programs at the same time is learned at the university where they came to learn about the double-enrolment modality. Luciana follows this same reasoning, and responds that "I don't know, I mean, the image of that person, like he's a good student, he can do double, and that feels good because ... because it feels good to have others think well of you". When asked about the people that she wants to be admired by, she answers "No, it's totally a social circle".

Salomé is also oriented to external recognition.

Salomé: I like power ... obviously bragging about it, because who doesn't like bragging about having two titles (...) Above all, because it used to be very rare for someone to have two degrees, much less 3 or 4 or more. But now it is possible.

She likes to "show off" to and "annoy" professors who are "skeptical" about the double-degree modality and say that it cannot be done properly. She calls them the "oldies" who need to stop being frustrated in confronting a change in the mentality [of

young students studying two degrees], that they need to accept and that this will mean that people will have “3,4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 degrees with a thousand *especializaciones* [Colombian short masters]”. However, Salomé’s primary orientation is surviving.

Serving others

Serving others was a purpose that Patricia, Adriana, Catalina and Miguel had when deciding on the combinations of their first and second degrees. Patricia chooses to follow “the call that is more vocational to help” through studying sociology in addition to psychology. She thought sociology complemented psychology to answer the question of “the social”, but always in connection to an occupation that allows her to “provide care in praxis as a psychologist with some extra tools that psychology doesn’t have”.

The desire to help others can be rooted in school and in distant family. Adriana says she grew up in a very conservative family and attended a conservative Catholic school that did not promote study fields beyond medicine, engineering and business administration, which in the Bogotá context are the only ones classified as “successful in economic and social terms, which allows gaining prestige”. When expressing her desire to study sociology her father said, “why are you going to study anything with sociology, which just brings up the war we had”. Her distant family, though, was liberal and her grandmother had to escape rural violence after she almost got killed because of supporting the liberal Liberal Party. “My grandmother inherited this liberal influence, my aunts as well and afterwards [already in the university] I realized that I was also interested in social themes”. The double-degree modality in sociology and anthropology, she says, gave her the opportunity to “rectify in the sense that I came out of sociology classes and felt different”.

Catalina wants to become a journalist who “tells stories” about certain groups in the media such as “peasants, indigenous people and ‘afros’ [Afro-Americans]”, initially

influenced by a schoolteacher. Serving others in the context of Colombia and its long-standing civil war is not only related to community work but also to a political position of helping communities that have been affected by social inequality and the adverse effects of the armed conflict. Catalina describes her desire to become a journalist since she was a child when she played at interviewing other children on the school bus.

The service orientation was the secondary motivation for Miguel to study linguistics, a program that he imagined as developing his rhetorical competences to do voluntary and missionary work in neighborhoods such as Ciudad Bolívar (a poor neighborhood in Bogotá). But his interest in making translations of the Bible became less salient after leaving the church and trying to pursue a career as a social scientist in anthropology.

Intellectual development

A further group of students is oriented towards intellectual interests. María chose to study anthropology besides psychology because “that seemed cool to me, (...) I can understand the problems related to the human being”. She wanted to complement her studies in psychology because she felt that the psychology program had “kind of politically aseptic, (...) super light [superficial]” classmates.

Miguel’s interest in intellectual development overlapped with his vocation in becoming a missionary for a Christian group which accordingly needed theological and linguistic knowledge for religious instruction of religious groups and other communities: “Wow! Maybe at the academy I can do something about it and if I can make a living from it, I’ll like it in the end”. This principal orientation changed during the selection of the second degree where, before withdrawing, he had viewed himself as a researcher in anthropology after working as a student assistant in a research project.

Curiosity

Five students (Santiago, Gabriela, Patricia Catalina and María) show that a common driver in their career choice was a simple interest in or curiosity towards a study program. Gabriela's reasoning is representative of how the second-degree modality allowed her to explore different fields when she did not have enough clarity about what to study: "In the same way that I was not so sure, I wanted to start with sociology first and if not then also study psychology". This interest is not necessarily just related to intellectual fulfilment but also to the decision that has to be made about which study program to choose at the age of 16 or 17 years, which is when our interviewees applied to enter the university.

Discussion

Among the eight orientations we found (Table 3), security, focus on parental dictates, peer recognition concerns, serving others and curiosity partially overlap or correspond to Schein's (2006) classification. We found that maximizing focus on parental dictates, peer recognition concerns, and curiosity relate better to the psychological literature on student motivation (Amabile et al. 1994). Intellectual development (Tomlinson, 2016) and the maximization of educational investment (Remedios et al. 2008, Tomlinson 2008) tend to correspond to orientations found in literature about student choices in higher education.

Still, our interviewees' orientations need to be understood within their social and educational context to grasp how they shape their choice to studying two programs. The economic return for students oriented towards maximizing their educational investment is taken to another level within a university environment that further promotes the rationalization of career choice to the point that maximizing the return on investment through obtaining more degrees becomes a principal goal in itself. The context of the

university is the space where other students learn from peers that having more than one university degree is not only legitimate but desirable. Some of these students were also oriented towards security (Schein 2006, 1978) and chose two programs as a local alternative to maximize their chances of a stable job position and in life, equivalent to extracurricular activities (Roulin and Bangerter 2013) or attending job fairs (Binder, Davis, and Bloom 2015).

Students oriented towards surviving may choose two first degree programs even if the effort is illusory and not based on consistent information about the market to make a rationalized calculation about expected returns. Students oriented towards survival not only search for security from a “job for life” (Rodrigues, Guest, and Budjanovcanin 2013, 148) but are also moved by the *angst* of not finding a job that they can live from—even after increasing their financial and academic efforts during two degree programs. The motivation to survive is not comparable to the worries of students in countries in the Global North. Rather, it is existential and accompanied by a level of stress similar to that found by Pérez-Roa (2014) in Chile among graduates with high student debts that cannot be paid off with professional salaries. Even if university studies are prolonged, the rationale is not the enjoyment of freedom and postponement of adulthood that Bourdieu and Passeron (1964) and Waters, Brooks, and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) describe in more privileged French and British students who also enter university at a young age. The responsibilities and hard work of adulthood are already present in the lives of all the students primarily or secondarily oriented to survival.

The focus on parental dictates is strong in the Colombian context where parents almost completely pay for undergraduate studies at elite private universities. Children often continue to live with their parents, except when they come from other cities. So, in Colombia, the role of parents in influencing career choice fits into the increased

awareness to the dictates of others (Amabile et al. 1994) and is mentioned by Zafar (2012) in terms of parental approval for the selection of double majors in the United States. The common setting in which this approval occurs is the preoccupation with social status and returns in the labor market, although in the classist Colombian society and the context of an elite private university these fears and pressures can be on a different scale. In this context, students strongly oriented towards recognition from peers use double degrees to demonstrate to others their capacity to obtain them. Having two degrees from an elite national university is perceived as providing symbolic power among students.

The intellectual development motivation evokes other descriptions of student orientations towards the joy of intellectual development displayed in the setting of the university (Tomlinson 2016). In contrast, the orientation towards curiosity to select a first or second degree because students were interested seems to emerge from an internal human curiosity-driven behavior (Ryan and Deci 2000), which here is displayed at a young age between 15 and 17 for deciding on the first degree and around 18 years for the second one. These students choose studying more than one degree out of curiosity about an area and chose to study a first or a second degree in accordance with this inner drive. Concerns about the young age at entering university in Colombia have been raised by the OECD (2016) with consequences for career choice that deserve further study.

Lastly, in the Colombian context the service motive is not only a desire to help others, such as for example in Rodrigues, Guest, and Budjanovcanin (2013) description of pharmacists' orientations in the UK. In a country with a long history of war and endemic violence such as Colombia, serving others also involves striving for occupations such as teacher, journalist or anthropologist working in social programs

that are most likely going to be linked to improving the lives of people in dire need. The service orientation we found is mediated by a political and social sensitivity towards marginalized groups (indigenous peoples and Black people), a sensitivity that also means an identification (or stigma) with a more left-wing side of the political spectrum.

Conclusions

Our analysis of the orientations of Colombian double-degree students contributes to the literature about double degrees and more widely to discussions about the educational consequences of privatization in higher education in the context of massification (Schofer and Meyer 2005), young entry age to higher education (Waters, Brooks, and Pimlott-Wilson 2011), increasing devaluation of university degrees (Chiroleu and Marquina 2017) and a fragile economy (Adely et al. 2019; Pérez-Roa 2014). Our findings indicate that students may be building another relationship with their university studies if some or all of these conditions are a common denominator in contemporary higher education.

The primary and most frequent orientation of university students, to get the best return on their invested money, may emerge in a context where private universities promise students they can “get two degrees for the price of one”. Students are willing to appropriate this provision to study two degrees in a context of extreme social inequality that motives them and their families to strive for the social status associated with two university degrees when one from an elite university may be insufficient for obtaining a job. The early age at which students choose a first degree and often a second degree was often related to studying two simultaneous programs. Students were more prone to follow the simple heuristic (promoted by the university) of maximizing options instead of a better-informed calculation of future returns or the exploration of their own vocations within a single program.

Contrary to the search for enjoyment and freedom found among British students studying in the US (Waters, Brooks, and Pimlott-Wilson 2011), we find that the main orientation of education as a goal in itself tends to be a secondary orientation and appears in relation to the orientation to serve others or intellectual development. The trends in student orientations we found are thus closer to the primary value Jordan's public university students place on economic success (Adely et al. 2019) and the orientations found in Russian and British students (Remedios, Kiseleva, and Elliott 2008; Tomlinson 2008) as regards their lower levels of enjoyment and motivation to master their subjects during their studies. Massification and a loss of value of university credentials are common denominators in all these countries related to accounts of students' fixation in the economic value of skills learned in higher education. Weak economies related to the introduction of a liberal economy in Jordan, Russian post-soviet capitalist economy and Colombian civil war, and the central role of private universities marketing new programs in Jordan and Colombia may further lead students to develop consumerist over self-cultivation orientations.

But our findings differ from those of Remedios et al. and are closer to Tomlinson (2016) because we also identify that serving others and intellectual development can be a primary orientation in some but not the majority of students. While intellectual development is often associated with university education, serving others is associated with an interest in marginalized communities, also those affected by the civil war, among students who had developed this sensitivity in their families and schools. Still, the main picture our research shows is a university that encourages double programs as a means for future returns and social prestige rather than an institution that enables an experience of self-cultivation as an ultimate goal.

Our research indicates that in a context of extreme social inequality associated with social violence and very high job insecurity, as well as a young age at career choice, students at elite private universities may accept the offer to study two degrees. Their orientations and relationship to university studies are further shaped by this decision. This rationale of maximizing educational investment associated with parental dictates or peer recognition or linking the first or second academic program to future security or survival then conflates with common orientations such as the service motive and intellectual development. These findings show the advantage of investigating career orientations and student choices jointly with qualitative methods and so to surpass the rigid inventories of motivations, as Rodrigues, Guest, and Budjanovcanin (2013) argue. Inventories of motivations are useful but certainly limited if considering the current transformations of educational contexts.

Further research on demand-absorbing universities and a wider sample from different study fields could show further regularities and differences in the patterns we found for double-degree students. Of special interest could be the implementation of and research on structured double-degree programs that allow the connection between similar orientations, as proposed by Wimshurst and Manning (2015). Studying other contexts where the double modality exists could also serve to further study students' emerging professional identities longitudinally in connection to our emphasis on career orientations. Future systematic research could also uncover whether gender or social class seem to play a role in the selection and attitudes towards the double-degree modality.

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