








RESEARCH ARTICLE



# Factors contributing to the (un)fulfilment of employment aspirations of recent Chilean university graduates

Oscar Espinoza , Luis González , Luis Sandoval , Yahira Larrondo ,  
Bruno Corradi , Noel McGinn  and Karina Maldonado 

<sup>a</sup>Facultad de Educación y Humanidades, Universidad de Tarapacá, Arica, Chile; <sup>b</sup>Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones en Educación (PIIE), Chile; <sup>c</sup>Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana, Santiago, Chile; <sup>d</sup>Escuela de Sociología, Universidad de Chile, Arica, Chile; <sup>e</sup>Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, Cambridge, USA

## ABSTRACT

The benefits of growth in university enrolments are contingent on the articulation of university expansion with changes in other areas, particularly the economy. The costs of a mismatch are felt at the societal level, but especially by individual graduates. This article describes problems faced by professionals in one country that has experienced very rapid expansion of higher education in a highly privatised market economy. While not uniformly generalisable to other countries, the results are illustrative of what can occur. The study is based on subjective information provided by Chilean university graduates who have recently sought employment. The graduates' narratives can be aligned along three major dimensions of dissatisfaction: labour force entry; earnings; and working conditions. The themes are linked and combine to describe a difficult transition from university to work in a context of low salaries and unstable and uncertain employment. Among factors contributing to unfulfilment of aspirations are the graduates' social capital and socio-economic status, the geographic location of the job, the university from which they graduated, and activities while a student. Unsynchronised expansion of different social institutions can reduce social equity and cohesion.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 1 September 2022  
Accepted 19 July 2024

## KEYWORDS

Aspirations; employment; perceptions; graduates; higher education

## Introduction

The world's number of university graduates<sup>1</sup> has in the last few decades grown exponentially (OECD 2019). This growth has led to imbalances between the supply of graduates qualified for certain occupations and labour markets' demand for new professionals. Chile too has been affected (Castillo and Rodríguez 2016; O. Espinoza 2015). The Chilean economy has grown but, in the process, has left a significant proportion of graduates without the type of work they were seeking.

Worldwide growth in enrolment in and graduation from higher education is directly linked to the high expectations and aspirations that youth and their families have had for attaining a university credential (Tholen 2017; Zajda 2012). Most important has been their ambition to find meaningful work at reasonable wages (Marginson 2016; Zhao 2012). Their hopes were based on projections based on earlier research in other countries that appeared to promise well-paying employment for all (Améstica, Llinas-Audet, and Sánchez 2014; Canales, Opazo, and Camps 2016; Psacharopoulos and Patrinos 2018).