

Student' Attitudes Toward Learning and School – Study of Exploratory Models about the Effects of Socio-demographics and Personal Attributesⁱ

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate exploratory models about the effects of factors – students' gender, contextual background, age and school failures – that may interfere with attitudes toward school, and students' perceptions about learning, while explicitly modelling the multilevel structure of a large data set from an educational context. Based on a study with Portuguese youngsters (N=778) from regular classes, whom we applied the QATS – Questionnaire of Attitudes Toward School [1][2], we use regression trees algorithm to predict student' attitudes toward learning and school. Predictors include socio-demographics, personal attributes and some specific characteristics related to school.

The results come to reveal the importance of understand attitudes toward school and toward learning, as being affected for different combinations of factors. Attitudes should be understood based on the natures of the subject. Thus the improvement of attitudes and motivation toward school should involve students, teachers, parents and community.

1. Introduction

The construct *attitude toward school* was first defined by Lewy [3] as being the subject's behaviours, their feelings expression regarding to affection and judgments, favourable or unfavourable, for the school and school experiences. The affective characteristics of it may be an important explanatory element of quality-education and investment of individual actors in the different dimensions that make up the school [4]. This construct is intrinsically related to other constructs, such as students' perceptions and interest about learning, their competence (perceived and as result of academic achievement) and motivation.

As it appends with other constructs, also with attitudes there are differences regarding to gender. Where girls seems to have more positive attitudes, while boys are less motivated and have more negative attitudes toward school [5]. In general, results show that girls do not require more time to study, engage less in cases of misconduct and behaviour, have less absenteeism, and also have more expectations about future and are more enthusiastic about further studies [5]. On the other hand, boys are less committed to studies and give up more easily [5], once their representation of popular teen does not require to have good grades and being committed to school [5]. Also there is evidence that cognitive variables such as ability-related and expectancy beliefs, general attitudes toward school, and attitudes toward specific academic subjects are related to academic performance and that these can differ across gender and racial groups [6].

When we talk about the relation between attitude toward school and socio-economic level, the results of previous studies had shown that boys with higher levels appear to be more satisfied with school and that student's from lower socioeconomic status and who have less access to school resources and computers express more negative attitudes toward school.

Socio-economic level also regards to the way in which families take part in their children academic life. In this aspect, previous studies show that family contexts that are less exciting and involved in their children's education are manifested in less positive attitudes toward school, less resilience levels [7] and have higher probability of dropping out of school, once they feel less support from their family and community [8], and tend to believe that having studies and complete school course are not important to have a job or maintain a career.

Regarding to the relation between *attitudes toward school and academic achievement* we are able to say that previous school performance experimented by students have influence in the attitudes they shown