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Merely an illusion: aspiration changes over time and the effects of wealth on children's accomplishment of educational and occupational aspirations in Peru[1]

Solo una ilusión: Cambios en las aspiraciones y en el logro de las metas educativas y laborales de los niños y niñas en el Perú

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the dynamics of educational and occupational aspirations among children in Peru through the completion of basic education and to determine the effect of wealth on their ability to achieve these aspirations. We use longitudinal data from the older cohort of the Young Lives Study (YLS) in Peru (n = 580) collected between 2002 and 2016, and employ quantitative methods, including descriptive and multivariate analysis. Specifically, a logistic regression model is used to identify factors associated with the likelihood of students fulfilling their occupational or educational aspirations. Our findings reveal a general pattern of educational and occupational aspirations despite differing living contexts. As students progress through basic education, their aspirations increase; however, these aspirations decline upon completing or leaving basic education. Moreover, the multivariate analysis showed that family wealth is a key determinant in the accomplishment of these aspirations. These results highlight the dynamics between aspiration and the larger societal and institutional structures in place in Peru. Two main barriers were identified: wealth and academic experience. Consistent with prior studies emphasizing the role of socioeconomic and educational factors, these results reinforce the need to address structural barriers that restrain the educational and occupational opportunities of high school students.

Keywords: educational aspirations, occupational aspirations, achievement, structural barriers, basic education and wealth

Resumen

La creencia en los retornos de la educación ha motivado a los estudiantes peruanos a aspirar a estándares más altos tanto en el ámbito académico como laboral. Este estudio analiza la evolución de las aspiraciones educativas y ocupacionales de los niños y niñas en el Perú hasta la culminación de la educación básica, y evalúa el impacto de la riqueza familiar en el cumplimiento de dichos objetivos. A partir de los datos longitudinales de la cohorte mayor del estudio Young Lives en Perú (n = 580), se estimó un modelo de regresión logística para examinar la influencia de la riqueza del hogar en la probabilidad de que los estudiantes logren sus aspiraciones educativas y ocupacionales. Los resultados muestran que las aspiraciones tienden a incrementarse a lo largo de la educación básica, pero disminuyen posteriormente. La riqueza familiar constituye un factor determinante para alcanzar dichas aspiraciones. El estudio subraya la interacción entre las aspiraciones individuales y las estructuras sociales más amplias, identificando la riqueza y la experiencia académica como barreras centrales. Superar estas limitaciones estructurales resulta fundamental para ampliar las oportunidades de los y las estudiantes de secundaria.

Palabras clave: aspiraciones educacionales, aspiraciones educativas, rendimiento, barreras estructurales, educación básica, nivel socioeconómico

Introduction

Alongside the growth in educational enrollment, education has increasingly been promoted as a key driver of development and poverty reduction, with governments and families viewing it as the main pathway for social mobility and access to higher-status occupations (Camfield, 2011; Crivello, 2010; St Clair & Benjamin, 2011; Tafere, 2014). However, as societies have generated more ambition than opportunities (Nielsen, 2015), the challenge of regulating aspirations through institutional mechanisms in stratified educational systems in which not all students would meet their ambitions, has become a topic discussion (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cicourel & Kitsup, 1963; Clark, 1960). This growth in aspirations led some to call this generation the ambitious generation (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999), although some would not fulfil their aspirations. In this vein, the aspirations–achievement paradox identified by Hanson (1994) can be understood as the misalignment between young people's aspirations and the socioeconomic conditions that constrain them.

Research on aspirations has identified that those are not constructs independent of institutional and social contexts where adolescents and youngsters live. On the contrary, both the way aspirations evolve and their fulfilment depend on those contexts. The phenomenon known as cooling out describes the gradual moderation of students' aspirations as they face the constraints of stratified educational systems (Clark, 1960). It reflects how schools and other institutions mediate opportunities and how structural inequalities shape students' aspirations over time. While these institutions may implement mechanisms such as counselling to help to reduce the pressure on students and the sense of failure, it does not address the core of the problem. As Rosenbaum (2011) argues, addressing the barriers that limit achievement, such as the type of college or the social capital of families, should be a priority over mechanisms that merely adjust aspirations.

However, according to Alexander et al. (2008), cooling out occurs but the most typical pattern is holding steady. This pattern has often been interpreted through narratives of individual improvement that seek to challenge stereotypes about students of lower resources and has also moved towards the school actors that in turn seek to reduce the stigma of failure (Nielsen, 2015; Rosenbaum et al., 2007). According to Nielsen

(2016), obtaining a college degree goes for some beyond better salaries and therefore it holds its value in some narratives of youngsters: it involves in turn achieving autonomy, creativity, and promoting a positive social identity that greatly helps youngster involved in negative situations.

The fulfillment or not of aspirations also depends on the social and institutional circumstances students encounter throughout their lives. Some research shows that there are discrepancies between aspirations and achievement. Khattab (2015) notes that student's ultimate achievements do not only depend solely on their aspirations but are also determined by both the economic and social structures and the resources and/or cultural capital of the students and parents. This imbalance between aspirations and achievements for vulnerable groups has already been studied by Kao and Tienda (1998), for African American students, or by Hill and Torres (2010), for Latino students. The lower achievements of adolescents from less advantaged families can be explained from the perspective of life-cycle theory of human skill formation (Cunha & Heckman, 2007; Sanchez, 2019). According to this theory, skills are accumulated throughout the life cycle and are influenced by parents' investment decisions in human capital. However, when families are poor and lack access to credit markets, there may be suboptimal investments in skill formation (Sanchez, 2019). This, in turn, can limit adolescents' ability to fulfill their aspirations and negatively impact their educational and occupational outcomes. Furthermore, a student's educational experience is a major factor in achieving their aspirations (Alexander et al., 2008). This experience serves as a critical resource, enabling students to progress in their educational and occupational career. It can take the form of cultural capital, encompassing the acquisition of valuable knowledge and skills fostered by the school, or as social capital, which accumulates over time and provides motivational support.

The analysis of changes in aspirations and their levels of achievement is lacking in Latin American literature. However, three aspects of the issue of aspirations which are also part of the literature have been shown here. First, several studies suggest that the majority adolescents aspire to attain a university education (Aguirre, 2004; Ochoa, 2007; Ochoa & Diez-Martínez, 2009; Meo & Dabenigno, 2010). According to Aguirre (2004), university education is a common ambition in adolescents as a better education translates to a

better opportunity in the labor market. Also, the high level of aspirations among the Chilean adolescents surveyed is linked to an optimistic vision of their accomplishments. Particularly, in Peru, it appears that parents have a large role when it comes to aspiration. Ansión et al. (1998) claim that the educational aspirations of parents have an influence on the educational aspirations of their children, with most parents desiring their children to pursue university studies. Guerrero (2014) adds that both adolescents and their parents hold high educational expectations, aiming to achieve a higher level of education than the current status quo.

Secondly, the socioeconomic status of families has been identified as another key element related to the aspirations and expectations of adolescents. According to the literature, those individuals coming from families with high socioeconomic status have higher educational and occupational aspirations (Aguirre 2004; Benavides & Etesse, 2012; Figueroa et al., 2015; Hartung et al., 2004; Muñoz & Solórzano, 2007; Ochoa, 2007; Pasquier-Doumer & Risso, 2015; Sewell et al., 1969; Zegarra, 2013). Socioeconomic status appears to play an important role in shaping the educational and occupational aspirations of adolescents (Zegarra, 2013). To that end, Guerrero (2014) argues that adolescents and their parents consider the economic support of the family as the main factor to set their educational expectations, in comparison with their skills or academic performance, which are not so influential.

Thirdly, as students' aspirations are influenced by their socioeconomic background, there is an ongoing debate around whether poor people tend to have lower aspirations and whether they make any effort to achieve their aspirations. Some authors argue that poverty limits people's capability to aspire and therefore have a limited vision of the future (Appadurai, 2004; Ray, 2006). In Egypt, Ibrahim (2011) report that people may be reluctant to aspire or to envision a better life, while Bernard et al. (2011) report similar findings of fatalistic beliefs and low aspirations among rural households in Ethiopia. However, other studies have questioned this individualistic interpretation, finding that many working-class students maintain high aspirations despite facing structural barriers that constrain their achievement (Gorard et al., 2012; St Clair & Benjamin, 2011). This has led researchers to challenge policy assumptions that simply raising aspirations will necessarily improve educational achievement.

Overall, there is a gap in the knowledge of how aspirations evolve over time and how family resources, especially wealth, affect their fulfillment upon completion of basic education. Regarding the dynamics of aspirations, we aim to determine whether, in Peru, students experience a moderation of their aspirations or a sustainment of them over time. Additionally, we seek to understand the role of economic resources in predicting the fulfillment of educational and occupational aspirations. This is a significant difference in that, if this effect occurs, an additional way through which inequalities operate would be identified: the gap between what adolescents and youngsters aspire to and what they finally achieve.

Objectives of the study

It is relevant then to have studies that could explore the educational and occupational aspirations over time and the factors associated with the accomplishment of these aspirations in developing countries such as Peru. Peru is experiencing an expansion and demand at all levels of basic education—early childhood/pre-school, primary and secondary education. According to Guadalupe et al. (2017), the educational system grew sixty times between 1906 and 2016, from approximately 150 000 students to about 8.9 million, while the national population increased only 8.8 times during the same period. This phenomenon is further illustrated by the sharp increase in the rate of completion of basic education. As shown by Guadalupe et al. (2017), cohorts born after 1930 have achieved progressively higher completion rates, with primary completion surpassing 95 % among recent cohorts and secondary completion exceeding 80 %.

The Peruvian case is interesting because, alongside significant growth in enrollment rates, there exist, as in other countries, an «ambitious generation» striving for higher aspirations, despite persistent inequalities tied to socioeconomic, gender, ethnic and geographic factors (Benavides et al., 2006; Benavides & Etesse, 2012). These mechanisms are difficult to transform during the educational cycle and are further reproduced in the educational system's unequal offering (Cueto et al., 2014). Although there is not a formally stratified system, there is a marked inequality in the educational offering. In other words, it is default tracking.

It is worth asking in this context whether aspirations are moderated or sustained over time and whether there is the paradox of which Hanson (1994) spoke; specifically, in this work, whether economic barriers reappear to limit the fulfillment of high aspirations. Unlike other contexts, there have been no ad-hoc institutional mechanisms to moderate or maintain expectations, despite being a rather unequal system. As noted, the basic education system is one, with no formal tracking within. In that regard, both the dynamic of the aspirations and their level of fulfilment depend fundamentally on the resources and experiences of the students.

Specifically, this study uses data from the Young Lives Study (YLS) to analyze the educational and occupational aspirations of one cohort of children over time. Two major questions will be answered. The first one is to analyze the dynamic of aspirations over time. The second one is the role of wealth in the accomplishment of their aspirations once they finish basic education.

Methods

Data

Data from the Young Lives Study is used. Young Lives is a longitudinal study that allows for an understanding of the consequences of poverty for children from an early age. The study has been conducted in Peru, India, Ethiopia and Vietnam. For this study, we will be analyzing the Peru dataset. Also, the YLS follows two cohorts of children: a younger cohort (born in 2001-2002) and an older cohort (born in 1994-1995). Currently, data is available for five rounds which are: 2002 (R1), 2006 (R2), 2009 (R3), 2013 (R4) and 2016 (R5). The original YLS was randomly selected from twenty sites across the country. However, because the study focused on childhood poverty, the richest 5 % of districts in Peru were excluded (Escobal & Flores, 2008). Consequently, the indicators of students' aspirations reflect this specific population and are not nationally representative.

This study focuses on the older cohort as it has educational and occupational aspirations and/or ambitions from 8 to 22 years. In other words, using the older cohort allows us to compare and follow educational aspirations from an early age until the completion of their studies. Over time, the number of children that are lost between rounds is reduced. Additionally, attrition

rates observed are relatively low for the older cohort: the initial sample (R1) included 714 children, while R5 included 608 children. The final panel sample population used (information for the five rounds) totals 580 children.

Variables

The main dependent variables used for the different descriptive and multivariate analyses of this study are described below:

Occupational aspirations.[2] For round 1, the occupational aspiration variable was built based on the following question: *What do you want to be when you grow up?* For this question, children choose an occupation from a list of seven categories within which there is an option in which they can indicate any *other* occupation. In round 1, the option *other* accounted for 25 % of the answers given by children. The occupations in the «other» list were analyzed resulting in the addition of 40 different occupations to the list. Then, this list was coded according to their type of occupation. For rounds 2, 3 and 4, the question measuring occupational aspirations was modified and formulated as follows: *When you are 20/25 years old, what job do you think you will be doing?* Unlike round 1, the list of occupational choices increased in rounds 2, 3 and 4 in such a way that children were able to choose an option on the list. The question asked entailed a specific frame of time (20/25 years), a period in which they should or could be pursuing higher studies. In rounds 3 and 4, a category named *university student or other form of higher education* was included. These aspects were reflected in rounds 3 and 4 as most adolescents choose «university student» as an occupational response.

Each occupation was assigned a score according to the type of occupation chosen by the children. We categorized all occupations in three groups according to the years of education that it demands to fulfill it. These groups are: 1) low aspirations: unskilled or semi-skilled manual jobs, ii) intermediate aspirations: skilled workers and technicians, and iii) high aspirations: high levels of skill and training.[3]

2 While the same question is not used between round 1 and the other rounds, due to their similarity in purpose, both questions were used to codify aspiration.

3 See table A1 in the appendix for details of the occupation assigned to each category.

Educational aspirations. The educational aspirations of children were collected only for round 2 and 4. The question used to measure aspiration is: *Imagine that you have no restrictions and you could stay in school as long as you want; what level of education would you like to complete?* The response options for this question range from primary to post-graduate level (e.g., doctoral degree). Similarly to occupational aspirations, educational aspirations were also divided into three groups: i) low aspirations (secondary or lower), ii) intermediate aspirations (complete or incomplete higher technical education), and iii) high aspirations (university, post-graduate or doctoral level), following the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) by UNESCO (2012). ISCED provides a standardized framework that classifies educational programs and educational attainment according to their degree of complexity and specialization of educational content, ranging from basic to advanced. Accordingly, this framework guided the classification of students' aspirations across successive levels of education.

Achievement of educational aspirations. An ordinal categorical variable was created to describe the students' achievement of educational aspirations. The student was coded with a 1 if the educational situation of the adolescents in round 5 is lower than that stated in round 2 (e.g.: R2: university – R5: technical education), the value 2 if the situation of the adolescents in round 5 is the same as that stated in round 2 (e.g.: R2: technical education and R5: technical education), and the value 3 if the situation of the adolescents is higher than that stated in round 2 (e.g.: R2: technical education – R5: university), that is, surpasses their educational aspirations. However, given the small sample size of the upper educational mobility, the variable was converted from an ordinal categorical variable to a binary variable. Students who fell into a value of 2 and 3 as 1, and those who had a value of 1 as 0.

Achievement of occupational aspirations. An ordinal categorical variable was created to describe the students' achievement of occupational aspirations. The student was coded with the value 1 if the occupational situation of the adolescents in round 5 is lower than that stated in round 1 (e.g.: R1: high – R5: technical), the value 2 if the situation of the adolescents in round 5 is the same as that stated in round 2 (e.g.: R1: intermediate and R5: technical), and the value 3 if the situation of the adolescents is higher than that stated in round 1 (e.g.: R1: intermediate – R5: university), that is, surpasses

their occupational aspirations. It should be noted that since children are still pursuing their studies with the intention of getting a job, the current situation of students (type of studies pursued) has been considered as a proxy for occupational achievement in R5. However, given the small sample size of the upper occupational mobility, the variable was converted into a binary variable. Students with a value of 2 and 3 were coded as 1, and those with a value of 1 as 0.

Another important consideration is that using students' current educational status as a proxy for occupational achievement presents certain limitations. In the Peruvian context, several studies have documented a mismatch between educational attainment and actual employment outcomes, where higher education does not necessarily translate into better occupations or earnings (Yamada et al., 2015; Molina et al., 2024). Therefore, this variable should be interpreted as a proxy measure that captures educational progression associated with occupational aspirations.

Independent variables. This section provides the two main independent variables used in this study[4]. The first is the welfare level index, a continuous variable built in round 1 based on the following sub variables: number of household assets, presence of basic services at home, housing quality and levels of overcrowding in the home. Quintiles are considered for analysis and the fifth is used as reference. The second is the change in welfare index, a continuous variable indicating the difference between round 5 and round 1.

Statistical Model

To estimate the likelihood of a boy or girl from the longitudinal sample fulfilling his/her aspirations (occupational or educational), simple linear regression models cannot be used (Ordinary Least Squares) for situations where a dependent variable takes the values 0 and 1. This is because a linear model does not adequately capture the probabilistic and non-linear nature of binary outcomes. OLS assumes a continuous dependent variable and homoscedastic errors, which does not hold when the dependent variable is dichotomous. In contrast, logistic regression accounts for the non-linear relationship between predictors and the probability of the event occurring, constraining predicted

4 Control variables used in the model are described in table A2 in the appendix.

values to the range between 0 and 1 (unfulfilled aspirations = 0, and fulfilled aspirations = 1) and providing consistent estimates of likelihood. Therefore, a non-linear model such as a logistic regression model is used.

The linear representation of the logistic model is as follows:

ln [p/(1-p)] = β0 + β1 Demographic characteristics of boys or girls + β2 Family characteristics + β3 Educational characteristics + β4 Area of residence + β5 Changes over time + ui

Where:

p : likelihood that the event Y will occur, p (Y = 1)

p/(1-p) : ratio of occurrence or non-occurrence of the event Y

ln [p/(1-p)] : logarithm of occurrence or non-occurrence of the event

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of adolescents

To test whether there are significant differences in the average of socio-demographic variables by level of occupational and educational aspirations, a t-test was conducted. The following table presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the adolescents who are a part of this study according to their educational and occupational aspirations from R4.

Table 1

Individual, family and academic characteristics of the sample by educational and occupational aspirations in round 4

	Educational			Occupational			All sample
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High	
Individual characteristics							
Female	66.7 a	52.8 a	49.7 a	51.0 a	55.0 a	48.9 a	51.0
Age in months - Round 4	227.1 a	227.8 a	227.2 a	228.2 a	227.0 a	227.2 a	227.3
Height for Age (z score)	-1.8 a	-1.4 a, b	-1.3 b	-1.8 a	-1.3 b	-1.3 b	-1.3
Mother tongue is indigenous	16.7 a	8.3 a	2.6 a	12.2 a	4.2 a	2.6 a	4.2
Academic background							
Repeated a grade during basic education	66.7 a	54.2 a	31.5 b	51.0 a	40.0 a	32.8 a	37.1
Cognitive abilities (Raven's score)	17.8 a	19.8 a	22.0 a	20.4 a	20.8 a	22.0 a	21.5
Attended a public school	94.4 a	81.9 b	80.3 b	87.8 a	80.8 a	80.0 a	81.2
Family characteristics							
Father's education							
Primary or less	38.9 a, b	45.8 a	26.1 b	44.9 a	33.3 a, b	25.5 b	30.2
Secondary	38.9 a	47.2 a	45.2 a	40.8 a	47.5 a	45.1 a	45.3
Technical	11.1 a, b	0.0 a	15.9 b	6.1 a	8.3 a	16.6 a	12.9
University	5.6 a, b	2.8 a	9.9 b	2.0 a	5.8 a, b	11.1 b	8.4
Mother's education							
Primary or less	66.7 a	50.0 a, b	37.6 b	63.3 a	46.7 a	33.6 b	41.1
Secondary	27.8 a	44.4 a	41.1 a	22.5 a	42.5 b	44.3 b	41.1
Technical	5.6 a, b	2.8 a	15.9 b	12.2 a, b	8.3 a	15.7 b	13.1
University	0.0 a	2.8 a, b	5.4 b	2.0 a	2.5 a	6.4 a	4.7
Wealth Index - Round 4	0.5 a	0.6 b	0.7 c	0.5 a	0.7 b	0.7 b	0.6
Both parents at home - Round 4	83.3 a	73.6 a	79.9 a	75.5 a	75.0 a	81.7 a	79.0
Number of siblings - Round 4	1.6 a	1.2 a	1.5 a	1.6 a	1.4 a	1.5 a	1.5
Place of residence - Round 4	38.9 a	13.9 b	12.1 b	32.7 a	10.8 b	11.1 b	13.6

Note. Averages with different superscripts indicate differences statistically significant between means at 5 % according to inferential tests adjusted for the clustered sampling design of the Young Lives survey.

The analysis provides no evidence that the group means differ between the characteristics of adolescents with medium and high aspirations, both educational and occupational. However, clear differences emerge when comparing these two groups with adolescents who have low aspirations. The results suggest that mother's education, place of residence, and academic background differ significantly across these groups. We can infer, from table 1, as reported by the literature, that the adolescents with high aspirations

are those who have more educated parents, come from wealthy families, are Spanish speakers, did not repeated a grade, and have high cognitive abilities.[5]

Occupational aspirations over time

Figure 1 (left panel) shows the evolution of the occupational aspirations over time (round 1 to round 4). An interesting aspect that can be seen is that at the beginning of round 1 to round 3, the occupational aspirations of adolescents remained high over time with around two third of the children in both rounds with high aspirations. However, in round 4, a period in which almost all of them have already completed their regular basic studies, the percentage of children with high aspirations decreases from 64 % in round 1 to 58 %, while increases the percentage of children who have medium aspirations going from 21 % in round 1 to 30 %. This highlights that children's occupational aspirations remain high during their time in school but decline once they finish their basic studies.

To test whether this same pattern holds true in all residence types (rural vs. urban), we divided the sample by area of residence (see figure A1 in the appendix). Urban children consistently demonstrate higher occupational aspirations than their rural counterparts in each round. However, both groups follow the general trend: aspirations increase throughout basic education but decline after its completion.

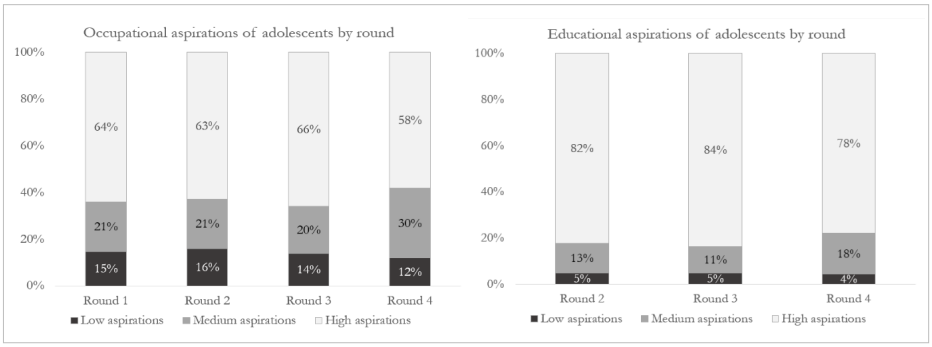
Educational aspirations over time

The same general trend seen in occupational aspirations is also evident when measuring the educational aspirations of the children in the sample (see figure 1, right panel). While there is an initial increase in high aspirations (between round 2 and round 3), a fall of 6 percentage points in round 4 is observed. While the decline in educational aspirations is not as evident as

5 In round 1, the Raven's Colored Progressive Matrices (CPM) Test was administered to the older cohort to assess cognitive development. The test requires that the child completes a pattern of figures so that they make sense. It consists of three subscales, each with twelve items. Subscales A and B measure aspects related to the cognitive processes of the children while subscale AB measures the intellectual capacity of the children (Cueto et al., 2009). The variable is expressed as the total number of correct responses to the items.

in occupational aspirations, a general pattern, specifically an increase in aspiration during basic education followed by a decrease upon completion of basic education.

Figure 1
Occupational and educational aspirations of adolescents by round



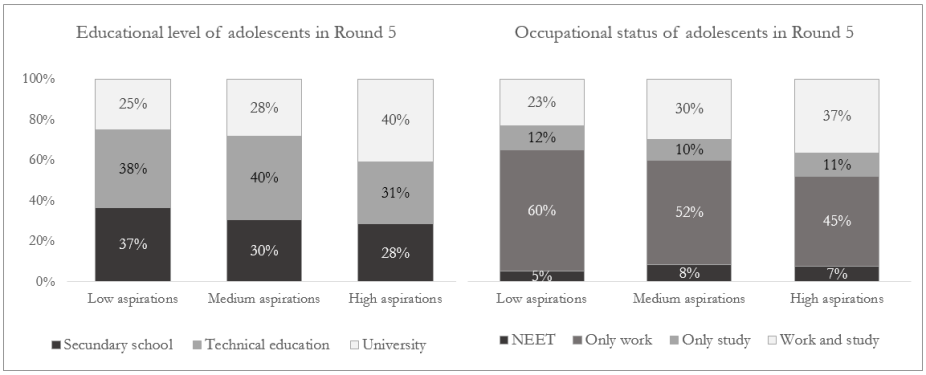
Source. Young Lives.

Similarly to occupational aspirations, educational aspirations are analyzed by area of residence as shown in figure A2 in the appendix. The results are consistent with the general pattern found. Educational aspirations increased between round 2 and round 3 and then fell in round 4 for both urban and rural areas, with the fall being greater for adolescents in rural areas (12 percentage points).

Fulfilling Aspirations

When comparing the occupational aspirations of children in round 1 with their current situation in round 5 (educational or occupational), those children with high occupational aspirations in round 1, are currently pursuing studies of higher education, whether technical or university (71 %), or only studying or studying while working (48 %) (see figure 2). On the other hand, 63 % of students with low occupational aspirations in round 1 report pursuing some form of higher education, and less than half of them is studying or studying while working (35 %).

Figure 2
Occupational aspirations of adolescents in round 1 and situation of adolescents in round 5

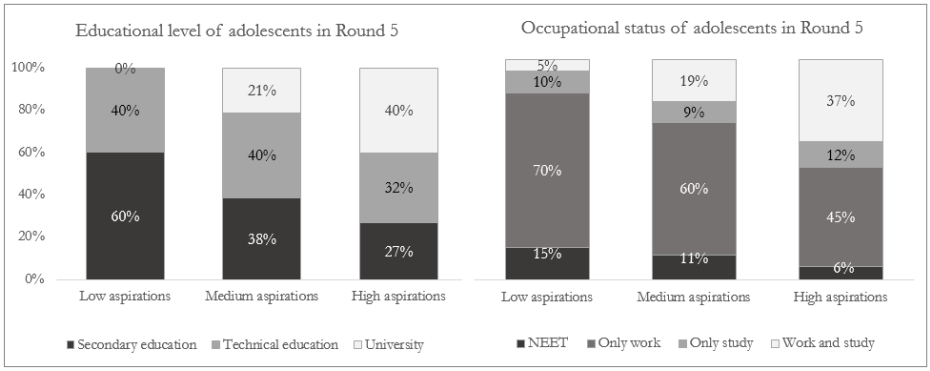


Source. Young Lives.

Regarding the educational aspirations of adolescents in round 2, in contrast to their educational and occupational status in round 5, it may be observed that from those adolescents who had high educational aspirations in round 2, only 40 % of them are fulfilling their purpose of attending university and 32 % of them choose technical education (see figure 3). A totally different picture could be seen for adolescents who had low educational aspirations in round 2, where most of them are fulfilling their aspirations and 60 % have secondary education, and 40 % have the chance to pursue technical education. Then, when comparing the educational aspirations in round 2 with the occupational situation of adolescents in round 5, 49 % of those who had high educational aspirations in round 2 are studying or studying and working, while 15 % of those who had low educational aspirations are studying or studying and working in round 5. Thus, while children may have high educational aspirations in round 2, few can fulfill those aspirations and, rather, those with low educational aspirations do fulfill that aspiration.

Figure 3

Educational aspirations of adolescents in round 2 and situation of adolescents in round 5



Source. Young Lives.

In sum, results indicate that students who had higher aspirations for education attended some form of higher education at a higher rate than those who had lower aspirations (figure 3). Of the students who had high aspirations, 72 % pursued either technical or university. These figures dropped 14 percentage points for those with intermediate aspirations (61 %), followed by an additional 21 percentage points (40 %) for those with low aspirations. In other words, the higher the educational aspiration a student has, the more likely they will pursue higher education. Figure 3 also indicates that students with higher aspirations also went on to study and work or study at higher rates: 49 % of students with high aspirations studying or working while studying and 15 % of students with low aspirations studying or working while studying.

Is family wealth a factor associated with students keeping on track to meet aspirations?

To answer the second objective of this study, we first conducted correlations between our dependent variables and our independent (wealth) and the control variables. Table 2 shows the correlations between being on track of educational or occupational accomplishment and individual and family characteristics.

Table 2

Correlation between on track of occupational and educational achievement and individual, academic and family characteristics

	On track of … accomplishment			
	Occupational		Educational	
Individual characteristics				
Female	-0.15	**	-0.03	
Age in months - Round 5	-0.05		-0.03	
Height for Age (z score)	0.08	+	0.08	
Mother tongue is indigenous	-0.09	+	-0.02	
Academic background				
Repeated a grade during basic education	-0.18	***	-0.25	***
Cognitive abilities (Raven's score)	0.17	***	0.19	***
Attended a public school	-0.12	*	-0.07	
Family characteristics				
Father's education				
Primary or less	-0.14	**	-0.05	
Secondary	-0.05		-0.10	*
Technical	0.14	**	0.15	**
University	0.16	***	0.13	**
Mother's education				
Primary or less	-0.10	*	-0.13	**
Secondary	-0.09	+	-0.06	
Technical	0.18	***	0.17	***
University	0.15	**	0.17	***
Wealth Index - Round 5	0.15	**	0.17	***
Both parents at home - Round 5	0.10	*	0.13	**
Number of siblings - Round 5	0.11	*	0.12	*
Place of residence - Round 5	-0.05		0.01	

Note. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.10$.

There is a positive correlation between being on track to achieve occupational and educational aspirations with height for age and cognitive abilities. In contrast, a negative correlation was found between being on track with repeating a grade during basic education and gender. Finally, in terms of family variables, higher parents' educational attainment and wealth are associated with the chances that adolescents accomplish their educational and occupational aspirations. These results guided the specification of the multivariate model, allowing us to control for individual, academic, and family factors simultaneously and to assess whether the role of wealth remains significant once these are accounted for.

Finally, table 3 shows the net effect of wealth controlling by other individual and family variables. Consistent with the results in table 2, it was found that wealth is a strong predictor of accomplishing their educational aspirations, even after accounting for other factors. Children who repeat a grade in primary or

secondary school have lower chances of accomplishing their educational and occupational aspirations as well as children with lower cognitive abilities in round 1. Also, a change in the number of siblings has a positive and significant effect on the achievement of educational aspirations.

Table 3

Associated variables with the probability to be on track of accomplishing their educational/occupational aspirations

	On track of … accomplishment		
	Occupational	Educational	
Individual characteristics			
Female	-0.24	1.07	
	(0.84)	(0.92)	
Age in months	-0.01	0.03	
	(0.03)	(0.04)	
Mother tongue is indigenous	-0.36	-0.56	
	(0.64)	(0.66)	
Height for age (z score)	0.05	0.05	
	(0.11)	(0.12)	
Family characteristics			
Father's education (ref. University)			
Primary or less	-0.56	0.14	
	(0.44)	(0.39)	
Secondary	-0.57	-0.48	
	(0.37)	(0.32)	
Technical	-0.01	0.36	
	(0.47)	(0.37)	
Wealth index - Round 1	2.74	4.60	+
	(2.19)	(2.66)	
Wealth index variation (R5 - R1)	0.89	0.78	
	(0.87)	(0.93)	
Lived in a rural area - Round 1	-0.68	-2.37	
	(1.91)	(2.24)	
Migrated to a urban area in R5	-0.02	0.04	
	(0.47)	(0.54)	
Lived with both parents - Round 1	0.25	0.10	
	(0.30)	(0.29)	
Change in family structure between round 5 and 1	-0.13	-0.12	
	(0.27)	(0.24)	
Number of siblings - Round 1	0.09	0.30	
	(0.21)	(0.22)	
Change in the number of siblings between round 5 and 1	0.08	0.15	+
	(0.10)	(0.09)	

Educational background				
Attended a public school	-0.23		-0.26	
	(0.26)		(0.23)	
Repeated at least one grade	-0.56	*	-0.69	**
	(0.22)		(0.21)	
Cognitive abilities (Raven's score)	0.01		0.03	*
	(0.02)		(0.01)	
R^2 pseudo	0.09		0.09	
N	484		511	

Note. Each column is a separated regression. Heckman's two-step approach was used to correct for selection bias. Standard errors computed using bootstrapping with 100 replications. Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.10$.

The correction for selection in Heckman's two-step model typically reduces the proportion of explained variance, which explains the relatively modest model fit. Overall, the results identify significant structural factors, particularly wealth and academic experience, within a broader set of mechanisms shaping educational and occupational outcomes. However, the model does not capture school-level characteristics or measures of social capital that also influence both the formation and achievement of aspirations.

Discussion

This paper examines and explores educational and occupational aspirations on children who live in Peru. We investigated how these aspirations change over time for a birth cohort, and we attempted to identify the role of wealth on child's accomplishment or progress towards accomplishing those aspirations. The main results show that children have high educational and occupational aspirations while in the basic educational system and upon exiting (or having already exited) the basic educational system, these changes dramatically drop, a pattern that aligns with findings on the *cooling out* phenomenon observed in stratified educational systems. This pattern is clearer for occupational aspirations. We observed that 64 % (SE = 2.4) of surveyed children at age 8 (round 1) have high occupational aspirations and this high occupational aspiration increases to 66 % (SE = 2.3) by age 15 (round 3). However, at age 18, when adolescents are about to go or have

already left the educational system, the percentage of adolescents with high occupational aspirations drops to 58 % (SE = 2.4). The difference between round 3 and round 4 is statistically significant ($p < 0.10$). This pattern holds no differences for urban or rural children.

While this may be the case, what these results also highlight is the dynamics between aspiration and the larger societal and institutional structures in place in Peru. While Peru's educational system encourages children to continue studying or to move upwards in terms of social origin, it often overlooks the structural barriers that children face in poverty contexts. Once they are at the end of the basic educational system, they face a crude reality about what they could really obtain as an occupational and educational aspiration.

The results of this study thus contribute to both the literature on the dynamic nature of aspirations and that linking aspirations to achievement. In the first case, the Peruvian case seems to be one in which, upon completion of basic education, the students themselves have already begun to moderate their aspirations. This seems to reflect the internalization of structural barriers that are both experienced and deeply embedded in their daily lives.

Two main barriers were identified: wealth and academic experience. While their impact becomes evident as predictors of aspiration fulfillment, looking at the results of changes in aspirations, it is a process in which those factors could be involved. Students would learn from their experience and that of others during the educational cycle. For instance, they observe how other people like them fail to achieve social mobility. As Wills (1981) points out, they learn from the negative experience of their peers. Students are aware of the social conditions they face and make decisions in response to these realities. Why continue thinking that one can sustain their aspirations if their own family members have not achieved their goals due to the lack of resources? But they learn from themselves as well. The study identifies educational experience as another important independent predictor. In the end, as Alexander et al. (2008) note, aspirations and their fulfilment end up following the lines of academic performance, but especially those pathways associated with high social inequality. The results highlight the need to address structural barriers that restrain the educational and occupational opportunities of high school students. Reducing these inequalities is essential to create conditions in which aspirations can be fulfilled.

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Appendix

Table A1

List of occupations and category assigned

	Low occupational aspirations	Medium occupational aspirations	High occupational aspirations
Occupations	Farmer	Private detective	Lawyer
	Carpenter	Computer Operator	Architect
	Trader/businessman/ woman	Journalist	Astronaut
	Cosmetologist	Professor	Biologist
	Tourist guide	Administrative assistant / secretary	Dentist
	Nanny	Actor/actress	Economist
	Labourer	Artist	Writer
	Domestic worker	Religious leader / priest	Pilot
	Shop assistant	Nurse	College professor
	Flight attendant	Mechanical	Administrator
	Singer	Construction Worker	Engineer
	Driver	Soldier / Armed Forces	Veterinarian
	Taxi driver (driver)	Firefighter	Psychologist
	Cook (a)	Police	Doctor
	Sailor	College student	Accountant
	Electrician	Designer	
	Mine machinery operator		
	Fisherman		
	Tailor		
	Athlete		

Table A2

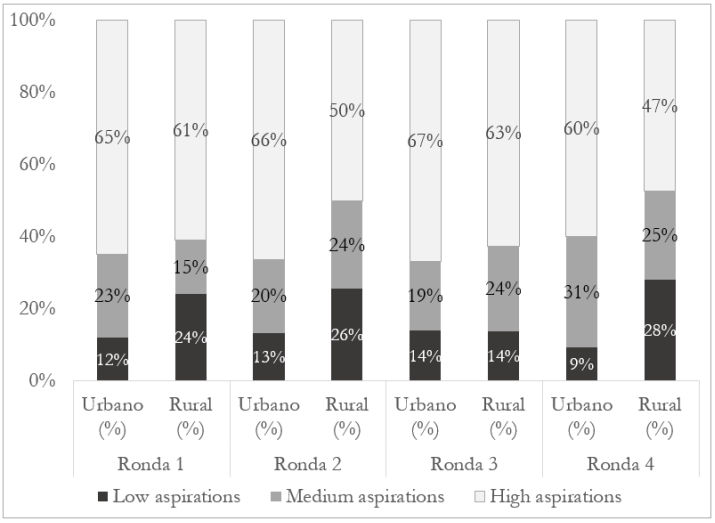
Description of the control variables used in the analysis

Variables	Round	Description
Individual characteristics		
Gender (female)	R1	Qualitative variable (binary) equal to 1 if the adolescent is female and 0 otherwise.
Age (months)	R5	Continuous variable indicating the adolescent's age in months.
Mother tongue (indigenous)	R2	Qualitative variable (binary) equal to 1 if the mother tongue is indigenous (Quechua, Aymara or Amazonian) and 0 otherwise.
Educational characteristics		
Type of school (public)	R5	Qualitative binary variable that indicates the type of school attended by the adolescent during his/her school lifetime, collected in round 4 and 5. It takes the value 1 if the school is public, and 0 otherwise.
Repeats the grade (at least one grade)	R5	Binary variable equal to 1 if the adolescent repeated the grade at some point during his/her school lifetime, and 0 otherwise.
Performance on the cognitive test (RAVEN)	R1	Continuous variable indicating the score obtained in the Raven's test.
Family and other contextual characteristics		
Family structure	R1 and R5	Qualitative variables related to the family structure. Variables taking the value 1 if the household has the presence of both parents and 0 otherwise are included.
Change in family structure (R1- > R5)	R1 and R5	Qualitative variable (binary) that takes the value 1 if the family structure of the adolescent is different in round 1 than in round 5, and 0 otherwise.

Variables	Round	Description
Number of siblings living in the household.	R5	Continuous variable indicating the number of siblings living in the household.
Change in the number of siblings living in the household.	R1 and R5	Continuous variable indicating the difference in the number of siblings living in the household between round 5 and round 1.
Father's level of education	R2	Qualitative variable indicating the father's level of education. The levels considered for each qualitative variable are secondary or lower, technical or higher. In the analysis the *secondary* level was considered as reference group.
Area of residence (rural)	R1	Qualitative variable (binary) that takes the value 1 if the adolescent lives in a rural area and 0 otherwise.
Change of residence (rural- > urban)	R1 and R5	Qualitative variable (binary) that takes the value 1 if the adolescent living in a rural area in round 1 moves to an urban area in round 5, and 0 otherwise.

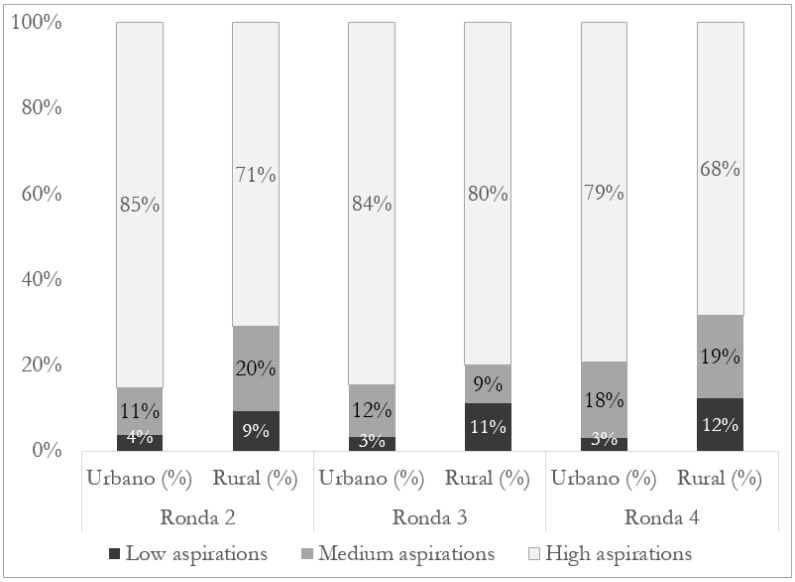
Figure A1

Occupational aspirations of adolescents by area of residence and round



Source. Young Lives.

Figure A2
Educational aspirations of adolescents by area of residence and round



Source. Young Lives.