

Emerging Adulthood and University students: the case of an Educational Greek Department

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we investigate the dimensions of emerging adulthood on teacher students and possible divergences to other disciplines. The research was conducted in 2020, with the participation of 206 students of the Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education at the University of Patras in Greece. The research tool was Arnett's IDEA questionnaire (Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood), adjusted by the researcher. The results confirmed the emerging adulthood characteristics of teacher students, nevertheless, interesting findings were also revealed. It seems that during their studies, teacher students progressively become more conscious, more realist, and more mature, meaning they move slowly towards adulthood.

KEYWORDS

Emerging adulthood, higher education, university pedagogy, teacher students, pre-service teacher education

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet article, nous étudions les dimensions de l'âge adulte émergent sur les étudiants enseignants et les divergences possibles vers d'autres disciplines. La recherche a été menée en 2020, avec la participation de 206 étudiants du Département des Sciences de l'Éducation et de l'Éducation de la Petite Enfance de l'Université de Patras en Grèce. L'outil de recherche était le questionnaire IDEA d'Arnett (Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood), ajusté par le chercheur. Les résultats ont confirmé les caractéristiques de l'âge adulte émergent des étudiants en enseignement, néanmoins, des résultats intéressants ont également été révélés. Il semble qu'au cours de leurs études, les élèves-enseignants deviennent progressivement plus conscients, plus réalistes et plus matures, ce qui signifie qu'ils se rapprochent lentement de l'âge adulte.

MOTS CLÉS

Émergence de l'âge adulte, enseignement supérieur, pédagogie universitaire, enseignants en formation, formation initiale des enseignants

INTRODUCTION

According to literature (Arnett, 2004; Brookfield, 2012; Cranton, 2000), university students are characterized by particular developmental elements that are related to their psychological, pedagogical, and sociological dimensions of the way they learn. We argue that, in order to support university students during their learning process, the necessity of understanding all the dimensions that influence their developmental path seems essential. In this paper we focus on university students and their way towards adulthood, investigating the role of the university context in this process. Taking into account the massification of higher education worldwide, it seems that the university, as a social framework in which the young person exists, lives, and acts, has a catalytic effect on his/her development (Raikou, 2020).

One of the basic questions adult education researchers seek to answer was always the timing or period of the transition to adulthood (Brookfield, 1986; Jarvis, 2010; Knowles, 1970; Lindeman, 1926; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). During the last decades, there is a convergence that adulthood is not determined based on the typical criterion of age, because this criterion is not maintained in different eras and societies, while the age at which one can be described as an adult may vary even within the same society. In order to characterize a person as an adult, we should consider whether s/he is in the state of adulthood, while a broader consensus among researchers is identified as to the critical importance of taking on roles and responsibilities for the transition to adulthood (Kokkos, 2005).

Therefore, adulthood is rather a developmental process of a person to maturity, autonomy, and responsibility. If we approach by this point of view the period of university studies, meaning the period after adolescence and in the early years of adulthood (from 18 and up to almost 30 years old), we realize that the university years coincide with the period of great challenges and changes in the development of the person.

EMERGING ADULTHOOD

The above period, meaning the period after adolescence and in the early years of adulthood, has been the subject of research in recent years. The American developmental psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2004) systematically studied the specific period of development of the individual, giving it the term emerging adulthood. According to relevant research (Reifman, Arnett, & Collwell, 2007), emerging adulthood is a period associated with developmental challenges, which in some cases can be difficult, while there is great heterogeneity, mainly due to socio-cultural differences.

As Arnett (2000) states, emerging adulthood is not seen worldwide among young people, but especially in developed modern societies, which provide the opportunity to explore the different alternative paths in their lives. However, even among these societies, differences in nationality, economy, social classes, and culture of each region are distinguished (Arnett, 2004; Arnett, Žukauskienė, & Sugimura 2014). The findings of these surveys, with emphasis on the impact of the socio-cultural context on shaping the characteristics of emerging adulthood, confirmed by corresponding surveys carried out in recent years in Greece, mainly on students at Greek universities (Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017; Galanaki & Sideridis, 2019; Leontopoulou, Mavridis, & Giotsa, 2016; Petrogiannis, 2011).

Arnett (2000, 2004) in his work identified five dimensions of emerging adulthood, which include (a) identity exploration, (b) instability, (c) self-focus, (d) feeling in-between, and (e)

possibilities. In other words, despite the socio-cultural heterogeneity, the above research has shown that these dimensions are identified, however, with different connotations and gravity depending on the context. The dimensions of emerging adulthood are described as follows:

(a) During this period, identity is investigated. Young people test possibilities and process their thoughts on how they want to live their lives and on the commitments they will make, mainly by focusing on relationships, profession, and ideology (Arnett, 2000). Although the formation of identity starts from adolescence (Erikson, 1968), however during emerging adulthood the young person, without full dependence on parents in adolescence and without committing yet to specific roles, can try alternative options and explore different lifestyles. It is perhaps the "best opportunity for such a form of self-discovery" (Arnett, 2004, p. 8).

(b) This is probably the most unstable period of human life. During this time there are usually very frequent changes in love relationships and work. According to Arnett et al. (2014), this instability is mainly attributed to the internal search for the identity of young people. However, in some cases, he claims to be due to external factors, such as a dismissal in the workplace or different choices of their partner (Arnett, 2000; Arnet et al., 2014). However, instability can also occur concerning the young person's studies. Contact with reality is likely to lead them to change their original plan for what they wish to study and what profession they will choose to do in the future.

(c) At this time the person focuses on himself, as at no other time in his life. The demands of the parents and the school of adolescence, as well as the professional and family obligations of adulthood, absorb the individual so that he cannot turn to himself and think about him. On the contrary, young people in emerging adulthood probably have the most time to do so, because their obligations are usually less. They have the opportunity to focus on themselves, which is a positive thing according to Arnett (2004), because in this way they discover their potential, acquire useful skills for the future, both in interpersonal and professional terms while learning to act as self-sufficient individuals and rely on their skills and strengths.

(d) Individuals currently have the feeling of an intermediate situation because they may feel that they cannot identify themselves either as teenagers or as adults. In many cases, they are partially dependent on parents and do not yet fully feel the ability to take responsibility and make independent decisions, which young people associate with adulthood, because this ability is gradually acquired (Arnett et al., 2014). This is a slow process linked to previous dimensions, because the instability observed, as well as the exploration of identity and the focus on the self that characterize emerging adulthood, take time and justify the nearly ten-year duration of this development period.

(e) It is a period filled with possibilities and optimism. Young people, despite the difficulties they often have to manage, have a positive attitude and high expectations for their future. Since most of them have not yet experienced serious problems or critical life events and have not been forced to make important decisions, they feel optimistic and have a great choice, as well as many possible scenarios for their future.

THE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT: STUDYING IN A DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION IN GREECE

According to the literature, the university is a social framework with a significant impact on the formation of students' lives. Particularly in Greece, where the majority of young people attend university, this influence is crucial. The university framework is characterized as an intermediate

stage between the family and the wider social context. It contributes, in other words, to the transition from the full family dependency of adolescence to the autonomy of adulthood (Raikou & Konstantopoulou, 2021).

In the last decade, some research has been carried out on university students in Greece and the results confirm the existence of the same dimensions of emerging adulthood in Greek students as described by Arnett (Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017; Galanaki & Sideridis, 2019; Leontopoulou, Mavridis, & Giotsa, 2016; Petrogiannis, 2011). Nevertheless, the last years research focusing on specific groups of students has taken place, investigating the conditions of education and how these conditions affect the development of young people. In particular, studies have been carried out on the emerging adulthood of Greek students concerning the role of practicum in the development of future teachers (Raikou & Filippidi, 2019), as well as the contribution of the Erasmus student mobility programme to the emerging adulthood of the participants (Mastora, Panagopoulou & Raikou, 2020; Raikou & Karalis, 2020). The results of the above research reveal that those experiences during their studies had significant benefits for students, both in shaping their identity and in developing professional and social skills. At the same time, a survey on medical students outlined that the early inclusion of practical exercise during studies, meaning the development of students' professional roles from the beginning of their studies, enhances the responsibility of young adults (Raikou & Konstantopoulou, 2021). Accordingly, another survey on fighter pilots showed that student pilots feel adults in rates at least two times higher than their peers and this should be addressed, on the one hand, to the kind of education they have received and, on the other hand, the feeling of responsibility that is received from their new role (Kapogiannis, Karalis, & Raikou, 2021).

Having the results of those studies in mind, and since we are talking about a period of shaping the identity of the young person, the question is whether the subject of study relates to differences in the dimensions of emerging adulthood (Raikou & Konstantopoulou, 2021). In this study, we are interested in exploring teacher students. In Greece, graduating from the Department of Education requires attendance of four academic years. The educational programme includes lectures, tutorials, and practicum. Practicum is a significant part of their studies and includes a series of compulsory and elective courses, workshops, and implementation of educational activities at school, from the second year of studies onwards.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This research aims to investigate the period of emerging adulthood experienced by young people studying at a Department of Education at the undergraduate programme, in order to detect and understand the factors and parameters that influence this period. The main research questions are regarding how emerging adulthood is related to the effective training of teacher students, as well as how the characteristics of the period of emerging adulthood affect the development of motives for the successful completion of the educational studies for the future teachers. This study comes after other similar studies on pilot fighter students and medical students (Kapogiannis et al., 2020; Raikou & Konstantopoulou, 2021), to detect points of convergence and divergence among students of different disciplines.

The research tool was a questionnaire of 77 closed-type questions, in most of which the five-level Likert scale was applied. The questionnaire included three parts: demographics, a part of Arnett's IDEA questionnaire (2004), adjusted by the researchers, as well as questions about participants' views on teacher's education.

The research procedure included four distinctive stages:

- The stage of determining the participants to be studied,
- The examination of the information collected from various sources available to us (literature, electronic databases, participants)
- The selection of the research tool to be used, through which the useful data for our study would be obtained
- The application of the collection and sorting procedure for data processing.

From the overview of Greek and international literature, it became clear that the stage of emerging adulthood includes a large number of factors that affect how young people participate in the educational procedure. The survey involved 206 teacher students from the University of Patras, aged between 18-30 years old, 11 of whom were male (5.3%) and 195 were women (94.7%), which is approximately the ratio among the students of the Department, as this Department has been chosen mostly by women over time. The duration of studies is four years, and the participant students came from all the years of studies except the first. Students in their second year of studies amounted to 30.4%, 31% were in their third year, 32.5% were in their fourth year, while 3.4% had exceeded their minimum study period. The period of the research lasted from October 2020 until January 2021. It is worth mentioning that during the research period due to the COVID pandemic the teaching at the university was online and there was no practical exercise programme at schools.

RESULTS

The majority of the participants (61.2%) live with their parents, 30.6% live alone and 8.3% cohabitate. These data on accommodation contradict the findings of Kapogiannis et al. (2021) on student pilots, according to which a little more than half of them (54.3%) live on their own, one third (33.3%) share a flat, while the others (12.3%) live with their parents. This can be explained by the fact that fighter pilot students are more financially independent than teacher students because they are paid during their studies.

Regarding the educational level of parents, 28.8% of fathers and 40.5% of mothers have completed post-secondary or higher education studies. In terms of their socio-economic situation, 53.4% consider it to be satisfactory and 37.9% moderate. During their studies, the majority had work experience (60.7%), either permanently or periodically, while 58.3% mentioned that they faced financial problems. Compared to the corresponding research in medical students, the sample of this research shows a lower socio-economic and education level of parents, while they faced a higher percentage of financial difficulties during the studies (Raikou & Konstantopoulou, 2021). The majority of participants do not consider as adult characteristics the ability to financially support, care for children and engage in domestic work, either for men or women. The average value of the answers ranges between 2.03-2.67 on the 5th Likert scale, where 1: I totally disagree & 5: I totally agree. In addition, no statistically significant differences were found between the years of study. In other words, it seems that in terms of the relationship between gender and adulthood, there are no differences. The views of future teachers on the characteristics of adulthood do not differ according to gender but are the same whether we are talking about the adulthood of men or women. Here, however, it should be noted that the vast majority of the participants expressing the above opinions were women.

We then examined their views on whether the adult avoids driving drunk, banned substances, excessive alcohol consumption, profanity, and vulgar language, as well as whether he/she drives safely and within the speed limits. It is observed that their responses are statistically significant ($< 0.05\%$) and are at a moderate level, however with a higher mean compared to previous views, since values range between 3.05%-3.51%. In other words, at levels 4 & 5 (I agree/totally agree) the answers are between 53.9%-35.9%, with the largest percentage being the view that the adult avoids driving drunk and the smallest percentage that the adult avoids profanity and vulgar language. However, through multiple comparisons (Bonferroni) there appear to be statistically significant differences between the years of study, regarding these two views (the adult avoids driving drunk and avoids profanity and vulgar language): as the year of study increases, the average agreement, the intensity of these views grows.

Financial independence from parents is for a large percentage of participants (73.3%) a factor of adulthood. About half of the participants agree or totally agree that adults use methods of contraception to avoid unwanted pregnancy (49%) and that no longer living in your parental home is a sign of adulthood (47.5%). However, a small percentage considers marriage (16.1%) and having at least one child (12.1%) to be a sign of adulthood, while a few more (but still at low levels) consider commitment within a long-term relationship (27.2%) and monogamousness (29.7%) to be a sign of adulthood. In addition, no statistically significant differences were found between the years. These findings are consistent with research in medical students (Raikou & Konstantopoulou, 2021), in which the majority of participants (values above 60%) consider that marriage or long-term relationship, the creation of a family as well as the care of the home and the family, are not characteristics of adulthood, either for the man or the woman.

In contrast, the vast majority consider that characteristics of adulthood are the acceptance of responsibility for the consequences of our actions (89.3%) and the ability to decide based on our personal beliefs, regardless of the beliefs of our parents (82.5%). In addition, a significant percentage reports that an adult is considered to be the one who can appreciate (64.5%), as well as when establishing his relationship with his parents as equal adults (58.2%). Here, too, no statistically significant differences were found between the years.

Other views examined showed that most participants consider as characteristics of adulthood the capacity for financial independence from parents (79.7%), full vocational rehabilitation (71.3%), the ability to provide security for their family, both for men (65.1%) and for women (64.1%). In addition, about half of the participants agree or totally agree that the criteria of adulthood are the emotional weaning from parents (56.3%), the ability to apologize (55.3%), and be able to control your emotions (48.5%). The only statistically significant difference (0.029%) lies in the view that the man should have completed his military obligations (between the 2nd and 4th year, with the largest average agreement in the second year).

The above findings are consistent with previous surveys of Greek students (Kapogiannis et al., 2021; Raikou & Konstantopoulou, 2021; Petrogiannis, 2011), however, in some cases, the findings vary noticeably. Indicatively, the percentages on assuming responsibilities (89.3% - medical students: 67.2% - fighter pilot students: 97.5% - Petrogiannis: 89.9%) is similar to Petrogiannis study which was conducted ten years ago on Greek students of different disciplines; however, they are much larger than medical students and smaller than fighter pilot students. Regarding financial independence (79.7% - medical students: 60% - pilot students: 70.3% - Petrogiannis: 82.8%), again the percentages of teacher students are similar to Petrogiannis study, however, they are higher than both medical students and fighter pilot students. Finally, regarding their views on marriage and the creation of family (16.1% - medical students: 15.4% - pilot

students: 50.7% - Petrogiannis: 29.1%), the percentages were similar to medical students but lower than student fighter pilots and Petrogiannis study.

At the same time, the majority of teacher students are optimistic about the future, considering that they will have a better life than their parents. Nevertheless, they seem less optimistic than the medical students, and this is obviously due to prevailing perceptions of the high status of the doctor's profession (Raikou & Konstantopoulou, 2021). In particular, teacher students believe that compared to their parents they will have a higher quality of life (59.7% - medical students: 68.2%), better financial achievements (35.4% - 70%), better professional achievements (71.8% - 93.6%), as well as better interpersonal relationships (50% - 78.2%).

In the question “do you think you have reached adulthood” (Table 1), the vast majority (78.6%) preferred “in some respect yes” and “in some respect no”, 18% of them chose the answer “yes” and 3.4% the answer “no”. As it can be concluded from the data of other research in the Greek context (Table 2), the answer “yes”, i.e., the clear choice that they feel like adults, ranges between 15.6% and 38.2% for the university students (in the oldest research among them, except for the fighter pilot students: 74.1%), while the incapability of a clear choice ranges from 59.3% to 80.7% (with the exception again of the pilot students: 24.7%).

TABLE 1

Medical students' assumptions on reaching adulthood

Do you think you have reached adulthood?	N	%
YES	37	18
In some respect	162	78.6
NO	7	3.4

It is clear from the above that a small proportion already feel adults, while the majority of the participating teacher students feel that they are on the path to adulthood, without having yet fully conquered it. These findings are similar to the corresponding conclusions of Tsipianitis & Karalis (2018) and close to the results of Galanaki & Leontopoulou's (2017) study (with differentiation on those who answered ‘no’). However, we see significant variations in comparison with Petrogiannis (2011), Galanaki & Sideridis (2019), Kapogiannis et al. (2021), and Raikou & Konstantopoulou (2021). It seems that teacher students consider themselves as adults in a similar percentage with their peers and a smaller percentage than fighter pilot students, medical students, and vocational institute students (Table 2). Nevertheless, we should mention that due to the COVID pandemic the participating teacher students did not attend any practicum, meaning they didn't have any practical experience in their professional field (schools) as the students of the other studies did.

In particular, in terms of their sense of themselves and their readiness to take on roles and responsibilities attributed to an adult, the vast majority (94.2%) feel ready to take responsibility for their actions, 64.5% to independent of their parents, and 66.5% to make commitments. A little more than half of them (55.4%) seem ready for a commitment to a long-term relationship, while a small percentage feel ready to become parents (18%). These findings confirm the fact that the students who are in a “critical” age and are going, like their peers, through the period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2004; Arnett et al., 2014).

It is worth noting, however, that during the analysis, statistically significant differences were found ($< 0.05\%$) in the first four criteria, namely, in the assumption of commitments, responsibilities, long-term relationships, and parenting (ANOVA 6). Multiple Comparisons (Bonferroni) showed that the differences are found between the years of study and specifically

between the 2nd and 4th year, with a higher average in the 2nd year. It seems that the more the years of study (and therefore the age) increase, the less ready the participants feel to undertake the above commitments and responsibilities.

TABLE 2
Perceived adult status in various studies in Greece

Study/Researchers	Sample	Yes (%)	In some respect yes, in some respect no (%)	No (%)
Petrogiannis, 2011	183 undergraduate students from various Departments of the University of Ioannina and the Technological/Vocational Institute, Ioannina, Greece	37.7	59.3	3.0
Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017	784 undergraduate students from various Departments of the National and Kapodistrian University, Athens, Greece	15.6	71.4	13.0
Galanaki & Sideridis, 2019	814 undergraduate students from various Departments of the National and Kapodistrian University and the Athens University of Economics and Business, Athens, Greece	27.4	62.7	9.9
Tsipianitis & Karalis, 2018	332 undergraduate students from two Departments of the University of Patras, Patras, Greece	16.9	80.7	3.3
Kapogiannis, Karalis & Raikou, 2021	81 student fighter pilots of the Hellenic Air Force	74.1	24.7	1.2
Raikou & Konstantopoulou, 2021	110 undergraduate students from the Medicine School of the University of Patras, Patras, Greece	38.2	60	1.8
(<i>present study</i>)	206 undergraduate students from a Department of Education of the University of Patras, Greece	18	78,6	3.4

source: Kapogiannis, Karalis & Raikou (2021)

If we correlate their sense of adulthood with the readiness they feel to take responsibility and commitments, it seems that this is a statistically significant relationship ($< 0.05\%$ - Chi-Square Tests), with the largest percentages concentrated in those who say they feel like adults in "some respect" and at the same time responded "agree" to their readiness to take responsibility for their actions (50.5%), make commitments (40.3%), become independent of their parents (31.6%) and commit to a long-term relationship (29.1%). Similarly, a statistically significant relationship also appears between those who feel adult in "some respect" and totally disagree /disagree (53.9%) about their readiness to become parents.

In an attempt to associate all the above with the training of the teacher students, we have recorded the participants' opinions on questions concerning the assumption of their choices and their ability to respond to them. More specifically, the majority (73.3%) have no problem with taking on commitments, nor are they jealous of their peers who do not have their obligations (66.5%), while 67.5% feel confident in choosing the profession. Furthermore, half of them feel the fear of failure (50%) and a little less feel "pressure" (44.7%), but they don't believe that they have taken a lot of responsibilities in an early stage of their lives (43.2%). Almost one in three feels ready to work as a teacher (36.4%) but sometimes they find it difficult to respond to requirements (30.1%).

In our attempt to link the above-mentioned characteristics of emerging adulthood to what constitutes a motive for the successful completion of the training, we have recorded the participants' opinions to questions concerning earnings, the distinction among colleagues, personal satisfaction of successfully achieving a goal, acquisition of new knowledge and skills, gaining confidence in their abilities and improving their self-esteem.

The main motives that urge young teachers to complete their studies seem to be similar with medical students and pilot students and concern mostly self-development issues (Kapogiannis et al., 2021; Raikou & Konstantopoulou, 2021). These include acquisition of new knowledge and skills (95.7%), gaining confidence in their strengths (95.7%), personal satisfaction of successfully fulfilling a goal (94.2%), and improvement of their self-esteem (90.3%). In addition, 79.2% also consider vocational rehabilitation as a motive. On the other hand, only almost half of them (52.4%) are motivated by financial earnings and less (39.8%) by the desire to distinguish among colleagues (Table 3). This last finding on financial motivation could be interpreted by the high level of unemployment observed in teachers in recent years, as opposed to the financial security offered by this profession in the past or in comparison with other professions (doctors, fighter pilots).

TABLE 3
Teacher students' motives for the successful completion of their studies

Motive	Disagree (totally-just)	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree (totally-just)
Acquisition of new knowledge and skills	3 (1.5%)	6 (2.9%)	197 (95.7%)
Gaining confidence in my strengths	3 (1.5%)	6 (2.9%)	197 (95.7%)
Personal satisfaction of successfully fulfilling a goal	2 (1%)	10 (4.9%)	194 (94.2%)
Improvement of my self-esteem	5 (2.4%)	15 (7.3%)	186 (90.3%)
Vocational rehabilitation	12 (5.8%)	31 (15%)	163 (79.2%)
Financial earnings	34 (16.5%)	64 (31.1%)	108 (52.4%)
Distinction among colleagues	54 (26.2%)	70 (34%)	82 (39.8%)

CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to investigate the period of emerging adulthood experienced by teacher students, in order to explore the dimensions of emerging adulthood on them and possible relation with their discipline. More specifically, our main objective was to trace differentiations during their studies but also in comparison with other disciplines through the lens of emerging adulthood characteristics, as well as possible correlation with the development of motives for the successful completion of their studies. The survey involved 206 students from the Department of Education at the University of Patras, aged between 18-30 years old. The participants answered a questionnaire with closed-ended questions.

Most of the findings confirm previous studies on Greek students, regardless of the discipline of study. The majority acknowledges the phase of transition to adulthood that they are going through, feeling in-between and not independent and responsible for their actions. They have also focused on themselves, giving priority to their personal development as individuals and leaving beside other social roles (such as husband/wife, parent, etc.) or what is called a mature social behaviour (in driving, speaking, communicating, etc.). For them, the main criteria of adulthood are responsibility and independence from their parents (either financial or social/emotional). In other

words, the dimensions of emerging adulthood as described by Arnett (2004) can be all traced by the answers of the participants. As far as the specialty of studies is concerned, they feel good about their choice, while their motivations to complete their studies are mainly self-development issues. Nevertheless, significant convergences between disciplines also appear. Regarding their financial situation, it seems that the teacher students who participated in the survey come from a lower socio-economic level than future doctors, faced greater financial difficulties than others (future doctors and pilots) during their studies (Kapogiannis et al., 2021; Raikou & Konstantopoulou, 2021) and do not hope much for financial comfort in the future. In other words, compared to other specialties, teacher students are optimistic about the future but not so much as other disciplines (medical students), probably due to high unemployment rates and low salaries among teachers.

Of particular interest is the sense of adulthood, where the majority feel in some respect and not entirely adult. The percentage that clearly feels adult is significantly lower than other specialties such as future doctors and pilots. According to a previous study (Raikou & Konstantopoulou, 2021), it seems that when students, who could undoubtedly be considered as emerging adults, are studying in a demanding and/or difficult training program, with emphasis on practical experience, they are 'forced' to manifest adult characteristics earlier than their peers. In the case of the teacher students of the research, although they have an intensive internship program in their curriculum, however, due to COVID quarantine this did not take place. For this reason, it would be interesting to apply the same research to teacher students who have implemented the internship program.

On the other hand, however, it is observed that most of the participants do not feel adult but feel ready to take responsibility and commitments, nevertheless there is a difference between the years: as they grow older, they feel less ready to take on responsibilities and commitments. In other words, it seems that they are in a transitional phase towards adulthood and during their studies they gradually realize the sense of responsibility that adulthood entails, resulting in the appearance each year of studies more down-to-earth and restrained, more mature, more realistic, and aware of where they are, what obligations and what possibilities they have. An interpretation that could be given to this finding concerning the subject of study is that these students, since they study in a department of Education with a large number of psycho-social-pedagogical courses, have many opportunities during their studies to self-reflect, and more consciously define themselves. According to our previous studies (Raikou, 2012, 2018), critical reflection and transformative learning opportunities at universities foster students' self-awareness and development in every aspect of their life (personal, social, psychological, professional).

Finally, we could say that these findings are following literature, meaning adulthood is rather a developmental process of a person to maturity, autonomy, and responsibility and the university context plays a catalytic role in this direction (Kokkos, 2005; Raikou, 2020). It would therefore be interesting in future research to also explore the specific factors that influence these changes during studies, while it would be useful to apply similar research in other disciplines.

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