

Social perceptions about university among third-year secondary school students

A field study on students of Khalid bin Al-Walid Secondary School, Adrar

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Abstract:

The current study aims to know the structure of social perceptions about university among third-year secondary school students who are about to take the baccalaureate exam. To achieve this, the researchers used the descriptive approach for its suitability to the phenomenon of case study, relying on the associative implications network technique of "Annamaria Silvana de Rosa", on a sample of (40) individuals of both sexes and all specializations. The results of the study show that there are (25) components of students' perceptions of university, which are characterized by relative stability, with differences in terms of importance and prevalence among the study sample. As for the trends of students' perceptions.

Keywords: Social perceptions; students; university; associative association network technology.

INTRODUCTION

The topic of social perceptions is one of the psychosocial social subjects that have received wide attention from researchers, from various trends, due to its direct connection to human behavior and given the fact that perceptions include all aspects of life. As Claudine Herzlich (1972) pointed out, it is a process, for constructing reality, which simultaneously affects both the stimulus and the response, modifying the former and directing the latter (Herzlich, 1996, p. 304).

The problematic issue of the study:

As it is full of topics, elements and situations that are related to each other, our existence in and connection to this world around us always make us in need of knowledge to understand it. Each of these

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elements has the utmost importance in society, and it is these situations that embody our personal life and all what is a record of our values and customs. Whatever it would be our connection to those topics and situations, the individual always needs that communication whether negatively or positively, for this latter embodies, in its core being, a scattered set of knowledge, rituals and customs that are different and common to all members of society (B. Moliner, 2001, p. 07).

Third-year secondary school students who are about to discover the realm of university have many perceptions about this new life, which are shaped through subjective perceptions and non-objective ideas. Consequently, once they reach university, they develop some behaviors according to those perceptions. Through the current study, the researchers will try to identify the structure of these social perceptions and their direction, by calculating statistical values and indicators of polarity, neutrality and stereotype.

Objectives of the study: the current study aims to:

Identify the structure of social perceptions about university among secondary school students.

Identify the trends of social perceptions about university among secondary school students.

Importance of the study:

The importance of this study lies in the importance of the subject (social perceptions), especially in the educational field (secondary school). It is also the first study in its kind at the level of educational institutions in Adrar District. Moreover, the study contributes to enriching university libraries.

Some terms of the study:

Social perceptions:

Terminologically: it is a combination of individual experience along with social models on how to deal with reality. It is a knowledge built by individuals of a certain society about a part of their existence or about their entire existence. It is a social interpretation of events so that it becomes itself the truth for individuals belonging to that society (L. François, 1994, p. 278).

Procedurally: they are the social perceptions that a third-year secondary school student who is about to go to university holds about university life.

Third-year secondary school students: are the students who are about to take the baccalaureate exam for the 2023-2024 educational season.

Theoretical framework

The concept of social perceptions has taken on many meanings, due to the diversity of fields of study. According to Emile Durkheim (1967), they are acquired habits, prejudices, tendencies that subconsciously direct us. In a word, social perceptions are everything that shapes our moral traits (E. Durkheim, 1967, p. 113). Moscovici perceives them as a system of values, concepts and practices related to topics, aspects or dimensions of the social environment that guarantee not only both the stability and balance of the framework of the lives of individuals and groups, moreover, they constitute means of directing social attitudes and accordingly building responses (S. Boumediene, 2004, p. 14). Godley considers them a form of socially formulated knowledge, with practical purposes that contribute to the construction and shaping of a shared reality within a given social group (D. Godley, 1993, p. 36). According to Abric, they are product or process of mental activity, through which an individual or a group shapes a confronted reality and gives it a specific meaning (Abric, 1988, p. 64). Harzlich (1969) believes that the study of perceptions aims to re-assess the methods through which knowledge and symbolic visions are carried out in their relation to behaviors. In other words, perception is a symbolic act, a structure of thought, and an activity related to a subject. Perceptions about a subject determine the various behaviors that individuals adopt toward this subject. In turn, practices afterwards modify perceptions of the subject.

1. The structure of social perceptions:

Social perceptions are formed from a central core and peripheral elements that work as one entity, where each part performs a specific function that is integrated with the other part. (Grider, 2011)

1.1. The central core:

Many experimental studies have confirmed the validity of “Abric’s” assumption that each perception is organized around a central core, the number of its elements is usually small. (Boumediene, S, 2003,; 31). According to Abric (1987), the central nucleus is the basic element in the concept, as it is the one that determines at the same time the meaning (signified) and the organization of the concept, and also

provides two basic functions. (Michel, L.; Patrick, G., 1998,: 33)

1.1.01. Generating function: Through the central nucleus, the meaning of all the basic elements of the concept is determined (and may be transformed).

2.1.01. Organizing function: The central nucleus determines the nature of the links that unify and stabilize the elements of the concept. (Adel, Suleiman, 2014,: 179).

2.01. The peripheral system (the peripheral device)

According to Abric, the peripheral elements of the perception are organized around the central nucleus, and they are in direct relationship with this nucleus, meaning that the presence of these elements, their balance, their values and their function are all determined by the nucleus. The peripheral elements are the most important in the content of the perception and the easy-to-reach part, as they are tangible and more vital, as they include the retrieved, selected and translated information, and they contain judgments formed based on the subject. (Abric, 1994, : 26).

Methodological procedures of the study

1. Study method: The researchers relied in the current study on the descriptive method, because it helps us describe the pure as it is in reality.

2. Study community and sample:

2.1. Study community: The study community is represented by all third-year secondary school students, and those who are about to take the baccalaureate certificate at the level of Khalid bin Al-Walid Secondary School in Adrar.

2.2. Study sample: The study sample is represented by (40) third-year secondary school students, And those who are about to take the baccalaureate certificate, of both sexes, and from different specializations at the level of Khalid bin Al-Walid Secondary School in Adrar, and Table No. (01) below shows that.

Method of selection: The study sample was selected randomly, and from those who were actually present in the institution on the day the technology was applied to the sample, and the reason for choosing the third year of secondary school over other years, is because third year students are on the verge of entering university, which focuses their thinking more on university unlike the second and first years of secondary school, and it also helps us crystallize the real perceptions of the students.

		Number	Ratio
Gender	Male	11	27.5
	Female	29	72.5
Sum		40	100
Speciality	Literature and Philosophy	29	72.5
	Management and Economics	05	12.5
	Foreign Languages	06	15
Sum		40	100

3. Limits of the study:

3.1. Human limits: represented by third-year high school pupils, who are about to take the baccalaureate exam.

3.2. Temporal limits: the study was conducted from April to May 2024. This timing was purposely chosen for the reason that students at this stage may focus more on university than ever before.

3.3. Spatial limits: represented by Khalid bin Al-Walid Secondary School in Adrar.

4. Study tools: based on the nature of the study topic, which is social perceptions, the researchers decided to rely on the associative implications network technique of "Annamaria Silvana de Rosa" (1995). This technique aims to reveal the structure and contents of social perceptions, as well as indicators of polarity, stereotypes and neutrality of the related semantic field. According to the same researcher, this is the only multi-methodological approach that can actually remove complexity from the multiple dimensions of social perceptions. (Abric, 2003, 61.62). The associative implications network technique is one of the techniques used to determine the structure and contents of the semantic field. This latter is related to the set of meanings that a linguistic sign takes according to its use within specific contexts. The semantic field consists of: (In Mushtar, H, 2017,: 37-36).

- The explicit meaning
- The sum of suggestive or implicit meanings.
- It is determined by the uses in which the textual context is employed (Al-Farabi, et al., 1994,: 38).

1. The explicit meaning: it is a linguistic sign that refers to a specific subject according to a cultural relationship between the sign and the reference. The sign refers to the reference, and hence every statement refers directly to the reference. (Al-Farabi, et al., 1994, 66).

2. The suggestive or implicit meaning: it refers to the sum of the connotations, suggested by a certain word, that are contrary to its common connotation (i.e. its explicit meaning). This suggestive meaning is often related to emotional or subjective phenomena, and it comes from multiple contexts which may be:

2.1. Socio-cultural contexts: for instance, the word “autumn” suggests to the farmer (the plowing season), to the student (the start of school), to the writer (the symbol of life), and to the psychologist (the season of madness).... etc.

2.2. Psychological context: what the utterance “woman” suggests to a widowed husband is different from what it suggests to a single man or a child.

2.3. Geographic context: What a sea urchin suggests to a man in the desert is different from what it suggests to an islander. (cocula.b; peyroutet.c, 1978,: 51).

3. Textual context: in communicative approaches, the textual context is based on the principle that the one who uses language does not produce isolated sentences, rather, produces a discourse according to a specific situation and time and in order to achieve goals and intentions. (Al-Farabi, et al., 1994,: 54).

In contrast to calculating the psychometric conditions for a specific scale, in the associative network technique, the following indicators are calculated: Stereotyping indicators, Polarity indicators, and Neutrality indicators (Mushtar, H, 2017,: 36).

The procedure of assigning numerical values (+, -, 0) to phrases is something new and unfamiliar to implications research as we obtain the polar index, which is considered a measure of direction and evaluation of an implicit position in the conceptual field, while the neutral index is a monitoring measure. The aim of calculating these two indices is to measure the extent of the general orientation of the elements of perceptions towards negativity, positivity or neutrality, while the stereotyping index aims to know the stereotyping of perceptions, as the lower the value of the index would be, the more stability it indicates for the element that constitutes the perception and vice versa (Amer, 2005,: 182).

Stereotyping index: it indicates the general verbal register - the linguistic dictionary - evoked for the subject of the perception and it is related to the differential ratio. (Mushtar, H, 2017,: 37).

This index, symbolized by (y), is calculated according to the following formula:

Y = the number of different associated phrases linked to each group x 100

Total number of associated words

Since an individual does not associate with the same number of words as another individual, this typical index is calculated by dividing the total associated words for each individual by the total associated words for all individuals. In order to obtain the value of Y between (-1) and (+1), we apply the following equation based on the result obtained from the equation:

$$Y = (2Y - 1) \times (-1)$$

Polarity index: It is used to measure the components of development in the situation, or development in the implicit direction of the social perception, where people are asked to attribute to each word a polarity, by assigning a sign +, -, 0 depending on whether this term is in this context, and the topic is positive, negative or neutral to weight the polarity based on the total number of words associated with each topic. (Lamia, B; Wasila, H, 2022,: 236).

The polarity index is symbolized by the symbol (P) and is calculated as follows:

P = number of positive words - number of negative words

Total number of associated words

This index is limited within the range [-1, +1], so if:

P is limited between [-1, -0.5], then this value can be statistically characterized by (1) and it can be said that most of the associated words are negatively coded (⊖) or have a negative direction.

- P is limited between [-0.04, +0.04], then this value can be statistically distinguished by (2) and it can be said that most of the positive and negative associated words tend towards neutral values.

P is limited between [+0.04, +1], then this value can be statistically distinguished by (3) and it can be said that most of the associated words are coded positively (+) or have a positive direction.

Neutrality Index: It is used to measure the components of control and regulation of social perception.

It is symbolized by the symbol (N) and is calculated as follows:

N = Number of neutral words - (Number of positive words + Number of negative words)

Total number of associated words

This index is limited within the range [-1, +1], so if:

N is limited between [-1, -0.5], then this value can be statistically

coded by (1) and we can say that the associated words have weak neutrality.

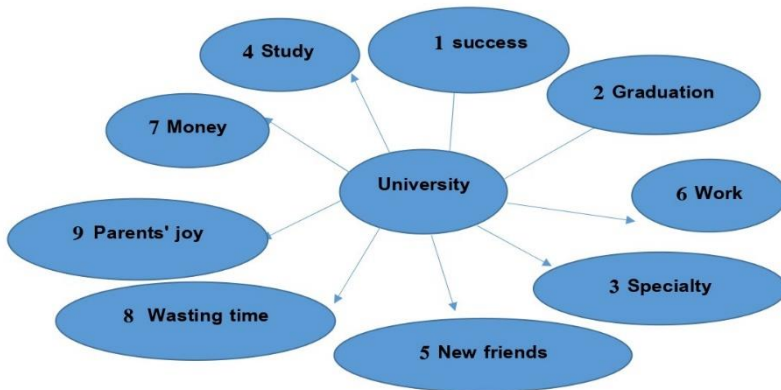
N is limited between $[-0.04, +0.04]$, then this value can be statistically coded as (2) and it can be said that most of the neutral association words tend to values equivalent to negative and positive words with moderate neutrality.

N is limited between $[+0.04, +1]$, then this value can be statistically coded as (3) and it can be said that most of the association words have high neutrality.

Stages of applying the associative association technique:

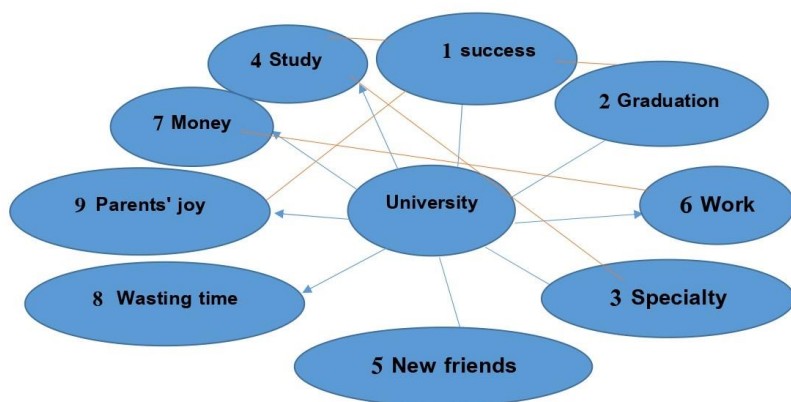
The first stage: At the beginning, we explained to the sample the goal of the study, after distributing blank papers, where we asked each student to write the words (adjectives, nouns) that come to his mind when he hears the word "university", by placing the words or branches between words using all the space surrounding the exciting word written in the center of the paper (university), and each time he puts a number for each word according to the order in which it came to his mind.

Figure No (01) shows the first stage of building the interconnected network



Stage Two: We asked each student to make connections between the words using arrows if he found it necessary.

Figure No (02) shows the second stage of building the interconnected network



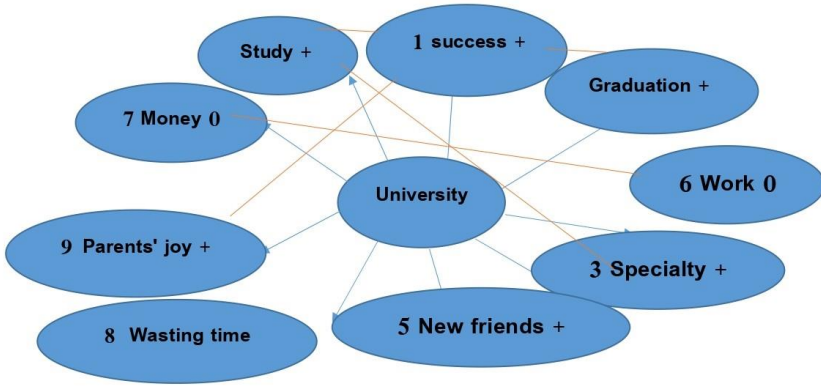
Stage Three: We asked each student to go back to the words he wrote and give each word a mark according to the meaning he gives to this word in the particular context:

(+) if its meaning is positive

(-) if its meaning is negative

(0) if its meaning is neutral

Figure No (03) shows the third stage of building the interconnected network

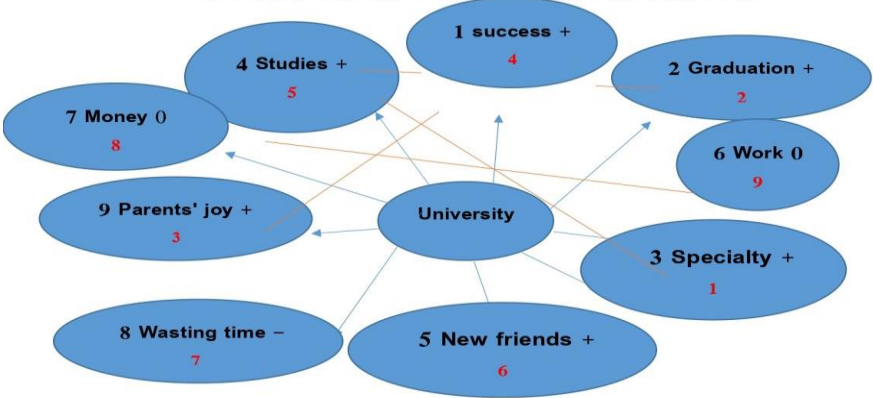


Stage Four: We asked each student to arrange the words in a preferential order according to their importance, by placing the number (1) with the most important word for him, then gradually numbering the words in descending order according to their importance.

To distinguish between the number written in front of the word and below, the student was asked to use a red marker.

Note: The first number at the beginning of the word is the number of precedence about the word coming to mind, while the second colored number at the bottom of the word is the number of the gradation in preference.

Figure No (04) shows the fourth stage of building the interconnected network



Displaying of study results

The researchers relied on the EXCEL program to classify the data obtained from the association network, relying on manual calculation.

01. Frequencies of vocabulary of students' perceptions about university

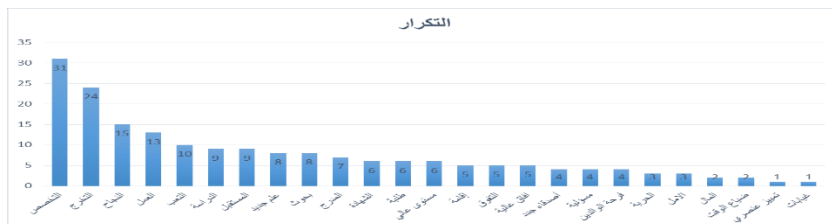
Vocabulary	Frequency	Percentage %	Occurrence Mediator	Importance Mediator
Diplomat	06	2.13	05	03
Graduation	24	8.54	03	3,5
Excellence	05	1.77	3,5	4
Future	09	3.20	01	2,5
Success	15	5.33	04	1
Studies	09	3.20	02	3
Wasting time	02	0.71	05	05
Fatigue	10	3.55	5.5	05
New friends	04	1.42	4.5	4
Specialty	31	11.03	03	02
Amphitheatre	07	2.49	03	05
New knowledge	08	2.84	03	03
Students	06	2.13	4.5	3,5
Money	02	0.71	4.5	05
Campus	05	1.77	06	05
High horizons	05	1.77	03	04
Hope	03	1.06	05	04
Discrimination	01	0.35	04	06
High level	06	2.13	2.5	02
Responsibility	04	1.42	04	03
Parent' joy	04	1.42	06.5	1.5
Freedom	03	1.06	05	2
Work	13	4.62	05	4
Absenteeism	01	0.35	07	8
Researches	08	2.84	08	06
Total	281			

The table above shows the following:

Repetitions of perceptions: Students' perceptions about university took different repetitions, as it is clearly shown in the number of recurring perceptions that reached (281). The perception of "specialty" came in first place with (31) times, at a ratio of (11.03), which makes this latter to be the center of social perceptions in the current study for it has the largest number of repetitions among other various components that are considered to be of its surrounding environment. The researchers consider this result to be logical if we consider that the first thing a student thinks about after succeeding in the baccalaureate exam is choosing the appropriate specialty at university. Therefore, all other components of perceptions depend on it. Success in choosing the appropriate specialty helps a lot in achieving the other components, and vice versa. The term graduation took up a large space in students' perceptions with (24) times, at a ratio of (8.54), as it is a goal to be achieved for every university student, especially as he is more likely to experience these moments with his parents and relatives at graduation ceremonies. The term "success" came in second place with (15) times, at a ratio of (5.33), whether success in the baccalaureate exam or at university courses. As for the issue of "work", it came in third rank with (13) times and a percentage of (4.62) as work in students' perception is necessary, as one of them said "there is no benefit from university if it does not provide me with a job opportunity after graduation". The concept "fatigue" came in fourth position with (10) times and a percentage of (3.55) as students believe that university requires a great effort more than the previous educational stages due to the multiplicity of university duties. Both "study" and "future" came in fifth place with (09) times and a percentage of (3.20). As for "research" and "new knowledge" they both came in sixth rank with (08) times and a percentage of (2.84), followed by "the Amphitheatre" in seventh place with (07) times and a percentage of (2.49). As for the terms "certificate", "students", and "high level" they came in eighth position with (06) times and a percentage of (2.13). The terms "excellence", "campus", and "high horizons" ranked low in the students' perceptions about university with (05) times and a percentage of (1.77). Regarding the terms "new friends", "responsibility", and "parents' joy" they are repeated (04) times at a rate of (1.42), then "freedom", and "hope" (03) times at a rate of (1.06). A small group of students sees university as "a waste of time", or an issue of "money" (02) times at a rate of (0.71), and in last

rank “absences”, and “racial discrimination” (01) times at a rate of (0.35).

Figure No. (05) shows the arrangement of the components of students’ perceptions about university.



Source: Prepared by the researchers based on the EXCEL program

2.1. Mediator of the occurrence of perceptions:

The reactions of students when they hear the word "university" is that it comes to their minds at first a term that may be associated with it or make them think of university. The students' perceptions about university according to the mediator of emergence or occurrence clearly varies, but the term "future" took the first place in terms of emergence, as the first word that came to their minds after hearing the concept of university was the word “future”. The researchers attribute this result to the students' belief that reaching university is a guarantee for the future of the individual, which is a widespread idea among the classes of society. "Study" came in second place, considering that university consists of lectures and lessons that are different from secondary school, as one of them expressed that "university has lectures, practical courses, and various specializations" and the study system is different from previous stages. The third place in terms of mediator of emergence came "high level", as students associate the term university with high level, then fourth "graduation", and “high horizons”. At fifth position came each of "success", “racial discrimination”, and “responsibility” while at sixth grade we find "new friends", “Students”, and “money”, then "certificate”, “wasting time”, “freedom”, and “work” came in seventh place. The following components came at the bottom of ranking in the occurrence mediator where we find in order "tire”, “residence”, “parents' joy”, “absenteeism”, and “research”.

Figure No. (06) shows the appearance medium for the components of students' perceptions.



3.1. The mediator of the importance of perceptions:

“Success” ranked first among other components of perceptions in the eye of students, which indicates the great importance of this component. We can attribute this to the nature of the human psyche in general, which seeks to achieve success in every venture it enters in life. For the student, success is a compass on which depends his status in society. “Parents’ joy” comes second, as nothing in life as a whole equals the joy of parents over the success of their children. The student sees that achieving this joy for the people who are closest to them is of great importance and is an ultimate purpose for them. As for “specialization, freedom, and high level,” they came in third place, as the previous components are stronger than all other subsequent components. They are followed by “new knowledge, studies, responsibility, certificate” in fourth place, while “graduation, students, work, excellence, high horizons, new friends, hope, work” in order are in late positions in the students’ perceptions about university.

Figure No. (07) shows the importance of the appearance medium.



Showing the results of the associative implications network technique

Sample	N T W	N P W	N N W	N R W	I P	I N	I S
01	09	08	00	01	0.88	0.11	0.93
02	10	09	00	01	0.90	0.8	0.92
03	10	08	01	01	0.7	0.1	0.92
04	07	03	02	02	0.14	-0.42	0.95
05	08	01	02	05	-0.125	0.25	0.94
06	05	02	00	03	0.4	0.2	0.96
07	12	07	00	05	0.58	-0.16	0.91
08	06	05	01	00	0.66	-1	0.95
09	04	02	00	02	0.5	0	0.97
10	07	03	03	01	0	0.71	0.95
11	08	03	02	03	0.125	-0.25	0.94
12	05	04	01	00	0.6	-1	0.96
13	07	05	02	00	0.42	-1	0.95
14	09	01	03	05	-0.22	0.11	0.93
15	09	06	02	01	0.44	-0.77	0.93
16	08	05	02	01	0.375	0.75	0.94
17	07	03	00	04	0.428	0.14	0.95
18	07	05	00	02	0.71	-0.42	0.95
19	10	05	02	03	0.3	-0.4	0.92
20	04	02	00	02	0.5	0	0.97
21	07	05	00	02	0.71	-0.42	0.95
22	04	03	00	01	0.75	-0.5	0.97
23	06	03	01	02	0.33	0.33	0.95
24	06	03	00	03	0.5	0	0.95
2	05	04	00	01	0.8	-0.6	0.96
2	06	00	04	02	-0.66	-0.33	0.95
27	07	02	04	01	0.28	-0.71	0.95
28	05	04	00	01	0.8	-0.6	0.96
29	07	03	00	04	0.42	0.14	0.95
30	07	05	00	02	0.71	-0.42	0.95
31	08	05	00	03	0.62	-0.25	0.94
32	05	04	01	00	0.6	-1	0.96
33	13	09	02	02	0.53	-0.69	0.90
34	05	02	00	03	0.4	0.2	0.96
3	07	05	00	02	0.71	-0.42	0.95
3	06	06	00	00	1	-1	0.95
37	04	02	00	02	0.5	0	0.97
38	11	07	00	04	0.63	-0.27	0.92
39	05	03	00	02	0.6	-0.2	0.96

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40	05	00	00	05	0	1	0.96
Total	281	162	35	84			

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on manual statistics results
NTW: number of total words/ **NPW:** number of positive words/
NNW: number of negative words/ **NRW:** number of neutral words/
IP: index of polarity/ **IN:** index of neutrality/ **IS:** index of stereotyping

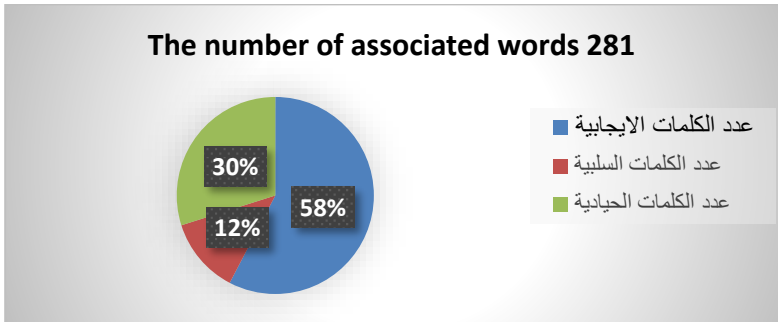
The above table shows the following:

The polarity index had statistical values that varied between "1 and 3" among the individuals of the current study sample which contains "40" individuals, as most of the associated words were within the value "3". This means that they had a positive connotation and were represented in: success, certificate, future, graduation, parents' joy, studies, responsibility, excellence, high horizons". Such positive signals explain the general satisfaction with university and the desire to enter it. The researchers attribute this result to the very type of the sample itself in the current study, which was secondary school pupils who voluntarily receive extra supportive classes, which means that the sample as a whole has a desire to study.

As for the neutrality index, the statistical value for the various perceptions of the sample in the field was between (-1, 0.05-), which is statistically symbolized by: 1. We can say that the words have weak neutrality, which expresses the importance of all components within the social perceptions of third-year secondary school students about university. This is based on the fact that the weaker the neutrality index is, the stronger the importance of the structural element of the perception would be, and vice versa.

As for the typical index, there was complete agreement regarding the statistical value of the different perceptions of the sample, as all values came within the range of (0.04+, 1+), which indicates the typicality of the components of students' perceptions about the university.

Figure No. (08) shows the number of associated words and their directions.



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