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Student reflections on desertion: the case of a Mexican university

Reflexiones estudiantiles sobre la deserción: el caso de una universidad mexicana

Reflections students about desertion : the case of a mexican university

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ABSTRACT

The educational dropout is a phenomenon that has occurred at all levels: primary, middle, secondary, and higher education for decades in the Mexican context, specially, after the COVID-19 pandemic in which a high rate of dropout has been observed (INEGI, 2021). This article comes from a project which objective is to specifically explore, from an emic perspective, university students' dropout causes in a Mexican southern university. Thus, ten semi-structured in-depth interviews were analyzed in a concrete way and under a metacognitive process to identify the reasons behind dropping. Data was processed as codes and organized into categories to form, later, central concepts, by using the MAXQDA software. Among findings, we can mention that the dropping phenomenon is complex and multifactorial; nonetheless, it was possible to identify three central causes: academic (e.g., organizational management of undergraduate programs), personal (e.g., mental health), and economic (e.g., to prioritize work before studies). Similarly, some mechanisms to support students, between a short- and long-term period of time (e.g., a program to strength the graduation efficiency rate), are proposed to reduce the high rates of dropout in this study case.

Keywords: dropout causes; educational dropout; higher education; Mexico; university problems.

RESUMEN

La deserción escolar es un fenómeno que se ha presentado por décadas en el contexto mexicano en todos los niveles educativos: básico, medio, medio superior y superior. Dicho fenómeno es más evidente después de la pandemia por COVID-19, en la cual se observa un alto índice de casos de deserción (INEGI, 2021). Este artículo deriva de un proyecto cuyo objetivo es explorar de manera específica, desde una perspectiva emic, las causas de la deserción en jóvenes universitarios en una universidad mexicana al sureste del país. Es así como, por medio de diez

entrevistas semiestructuradas a profundidad, se indaga de manera concreta y bajo un proceso metacognitivo de análisis, diferentes situaciones que orillaron a la deserción. Los datos recabados fueron procesados a manera de códigos y organizados en categorías para, posteriormente, formar los ejes; esto con el apoyo del software MAXQDA. Entre los hallazgos se puede mencionar que el tema de la deserción es complejo y multifactorial; sin embargo, se lograron identificar tres grandes ejes que provocan la deserción escolar: las académicas (ej. manejo organizacional de los programas educativos), las personales (ej. salud mental) y las económicas (ej. priorizar el trabajo ante el estudio). De igual forma, se proponen algunos mecanismos de acompañamiento al estudiantado (ej. programa de fortalecimiento a la permanencia) que pueden ser implementados a corto, mediano y/o largo plazo, para evitar o atenuar los altos índices de deserción en este estudio de caso.

Palabras clave: causas de deserción; deserción escolar; México; nivel superior; problemáticas universitarias.

RESUMO

O abandono escolar é um fenômeno que ocorre há décadas no contexto mexicano em todos os níveis educacionais: ensino básico, médio, médio e superior. Este fenômeno fica mais evidente após a pandemia da COVID-19, em que se observa um elevado índice de casos de abandono escolar (INEGI, 2021). Este artigo deriva de um projeto cujo objetivo é explorar especificamente, desde uma perspectivaêmica, as causas do abandono escolar em jovens estudantes universitários de uma universidade mexicana no sudeste do país. É assim que, por meio de dez entrevistas semiestructuradas em profundidade, diferentes situações que levaram à evasão são investigadas de forma concreta e sob um processo metacognitivo de análise. Os dados coletados foram processados como códigos e organizados em categorias para posteriormente formar os eixos; isso com o apoio do software MAXQDA. Entre as

conclusões pode-se mencionar que a questão da evasão é complexa e multifatorial; No entanto, foram identificados três eixos principais que causam o abandono escolar: acadêmico (por exemplo, gestão organizacional de programas educativos), pessoal (por exemplo, saúde mental) e econômico (por exemplo, dar prioridade ao trabalho em detrimento do estudo). Da mesma forma, são propostos alguns mecanismos de apoio aos estudantes (por exemplo, programa de reforço da permanência) que podem ser implementados a curto, médio e/ou longo prazo, para evitar ou mitigar as elevadas taxas de abandono neste estudo de caso.

Palavras-chave: causas da evasão; evasão escolar; México; nível superior; problemas universitários.

INTRODUCTION

School dropouts are a transversal problem at all educational levels and contexts in Mexico. Different organizations, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (ANUIES), among others, have observed and studied this phenomenon from different angles, classifying it as a pressing problem for attend (OECD, 2015). To do this, it is necessary for higher education institutions to investigate in depth the reasons why this phenomenon occurs. This research addresses the causes of dropout from the perspective of those who have abandoned their studies and are the main actors in this problem. The research question sought to be answered is: what are the main causes of school dropout from a university in the southwest of Mexico between the years 2011-2020? The aim of this is to know the reasons and/or reasons why the dropout phenomenon occurs, which will allow actions to be taken from within the universities, through a program to prevent

school dropouts and/or to strengthen the permanence.

Several studies ensure that the first school year is critical to apply strategies that allow increasing student retention indicators (Guillermo Alcaraz *et al.*, 2019; Rochin Berumen, 2021). However, it is not only in this critical period that desertion occurs, as it can also happen in intermediate and/or advanced periods. Investigating the causes of dropout at all times is the scenario of the educational institution where this research was carried out through a case study. Although attrition is considered a "complex abandonment process" (OECD, 2015), Rochin Berumen (2021) mentions that it is really complex to define it because "there are no clear theoretical parameters that delimit it" (p. 4). However, Roblero Mazariegos (2018) suggests that dropout is "a process of voluntary or forced abandonment of the course in which the student enrolls" (p. 23).

The approaches in which dropout from university studies have been studied have been various. Fonseca and García (2016) mention five: psychological, sociological, economic, organizational and interactionist (p. 29). The various forms in which dropout can occur are determined by the nature of the educational institutions; That is, there is a variety of institutional situations that can be considered desertion. In the case of a university in the southeast of Mexico, for the purposes of this study, the following dropout situations were determined: students who leave one educational program to enter another at the same institution; students who leave an educational program at a university to enter another Higher Education institution; students who change their study modality (e.g. from schooled modality they go to semi-schooled or distance learning); students who change to another type of program (e.g. leaving a bachelor's degree to study engineering); or permanently leave the field of Higher Education. Taking the above as a basis, the causes that led to this action were investigated among the participants.

Tinto (1993) manages to distinguish three main causes for which students drop out: the disposition and expectations of the students, prior to their entry into Higher Education; your experiences during your studies; and external causes that can fall into economic, family, etc. For their part, Dzay Chulim and Narvárez Trejo (2012) observed four main causes of university dropout: economic, administrative, academic and emotional. In a more recent investigation, using the data mining technique, López Pedraza, Macías González and Sandoval García (2019) identified "the personal, academic and socioeconomic type" as the main factors of dropout (p. 11), similar to what found in the present study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research project, from which this article is derived, was carried out simultaneously with four other public universities in Mexico. In the case of the Autonomous University of the State of Quintana Roo, a sequential mixed study (Creswell, 2012) was carried out at the institutional level, on its five campuses. The general objective was to analyze the causes of school dropout from the student perspective between the years 2011-2020, with the purpose of designing an action plan that allows increasing retention rates in educational programs. Although the study has quantitative results, for reasons of space this article reports the qualitative findings derived from in-depth interviews regarding the causes that led students to abandon their studies.

The purpose of the qualitative approach of the project was to explore the reasons why the students fell into a dropout situation. The unit of analysis focuses on the Autonomous University of the State of Quintana Roo, a Higher Education Institution (IES) located in the southwest of Mexico. This is the largest IES in the state and has five campuses: Chetumal (2), Cancún, Playa del Carmen and Cozumel.

Study participants present cases from all campuses. Due to contingency conditions, ten in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out by video call that sought to understand the problems that led to the participants dropping out of school. In all cases, the purpose of the project was explained and consent to participate was requested.

The systematization of the data was very important for the analysis; Therefore, the audios were transcribed in order to have the texts to process and organize in the MAXQDA software. Although everything seemed to indicate that Grounded Theory could be used to analyze the interviews from the bottom up (*bottom-up*), it is necessary to comment that this applies when there is no previously established category. However, as observed in the theoretical references, there is a similar study in the literature that covered the same context, with the exception that the data used was from years prior to 2011; Therefore, it was considered that, due to having a prior classification, qualitative content analysis, known in English as Qualitative Content Analysis (Schreier, 2012), was more viable to identify the causes of dropout, based on broad categorizations such as : Academic, Personal and Economic factors (Dzay Chulim and Narváez Trejo, 2012; Rochin Berumen, 2021), which formed the starting point for the analysis without limiting the coding process, which was triangulated among the researchers.

The analysis procedure included, first, that the researchers in training and researchers associated with the project individually carried out their analysis, taking the aforementioned classifications as reference. Every time the individual analyzes were carried out, in a group manner, the findings were compared that made it possible to identify and ratify those coincident categories, as well as discuss the diverse categories. This is how a data matrix is created in which various reasons and reasons why dropout cases occur stand out. This matrix is called Causes of Dropout.

RESULTS

For reasons of length in the article, this section presents the causes of dropout with the greatest impact, without dismissing the others.

Academic causes

The academic causes were manifested in three large areas: Educational Program (PE), Pedagogy and Academic Performance of the students (see table 1).

Table 1- Academic causes of desertion

Category	Axial Code	Initial Code	Number of labels
Academic Causes	Educational program	Academic Logistics Offer/Limited	8
		Modality of PEs /subjects	6
		Misinformation about the PEDDisinterest of the Academic Authority in the PEDisinterest in PE	5
		Low Potential of the PE	3
			2
		2	
	Pedagogy	Pedagogical Insensitivity	6
		Limited Number of Teachers	1
Academic performance of the student body		Insufficient Learning/Pedagogy	8
		Academic Difficulty Failure/Low Performance	4
			2

Academic logistics and limited offer

Regarding academic logistics, one of the problems with the greatest incidence falls on the schedules that the university requires of its students. These hardly allow students to carry out other activities (e.g. work) while they are studying.

"Your classes are from 7:00 to 2:00 in the afternoon and from 4:00 to 6:00 you had to take English. From 6:00 to 8:00 you had to take a subject [...] and well, in "When am I going to work? When am I going to support my expenses?" (Participant #06).

The lack of flexibility in schedules also extends to other academic-administrative procedures that the student body considers rigid. For example, the limited offer of subjects each semester does not allow the recovery of failed subjects. Failing serial subjects, for example, must be appealed with another generation, given that they are not offered every semester. The fact of studying with another generation is even more complicated when there is no compatibility of schedules between one generation and another. A common example can be seen in language courses:

"I failed the subject (Language 1), which is part of the compulsory subjects and since they were serialized from there I began to have more problems because I had to take it with another generation so I could not take other subjects, as well as go to some internships which basically put me a year behind" (Participant #01).

The previous cases lead us to deduce that each Higher Education institution must have a strategic academic plan that allows recovering the serial subjects that are failed, in order to give opportunities to the students to level up as soon as possible for their generation, which would support increasing graduation per cohort. Although the PEs indicate that they have a flexible curricular plan, it is not clear to what extent this flexibility can be exercised; That is, it is not specified whether the flexibility is in terms of the series of subjects, the offer of subjects at varied times, sufficiency of groups, among others. Likewise, the causes of dropout could be addressed by defining institutional strategies to guarantee, to the extent possible, the variety of schedules of their academic offerings, as well as encouraging the flexibility mechanisms of their PEs; that in practice they are real academic flexibility mechanisms, known and within the reach of the student body so that they can continue aspiring to their terminal efficiency.

Misinformation, disinterest and low PE potential

The expectations that applicants have regarding an educational program, which they particularly find attractive, are high. When the student body realizes that the chosen career does not meet their expectations, disinterest, demotivation and most likely dropping out of the EP arise:

"That was one of my problems because I liked to repair computer equipment, disassemble and put it back together and not what it was like in [Degree X]" (Participant #04).

This comment clearly reflects that there is the possibility of misinformation regarding the purposes and/or objectives of the degree curriculum. Although this information is given to applicants in promotion and during introductory courses at the university, the phenomenon of forgetting or distorting said information occurs and generating expectations that do not align with what is established in the different careers. Therefore, it is important that the academies, especially the person responsible for the academic administration of the PE, be attentive to presenting again the characteristics of the career in their charge, at least at the end of the first semester, so that the students have a clear idea of where your academic and professional training efforts are going.

The orientation that students receive upon entering the university is crucial, as stated by Participant #08, since it is not a question of sending the Study Plan - digitally or physically - to new students, but rather teaching them how to interpret and/or understand it:

"Have a little more guidance, maybe a little more information, because the students see the plan and program, right? But they don't really know how to

read [interpret] a plan and program [...] right? " (Participant #08).

Orientation on the academic environment and/or the educational program itself can be strengthened through general tutorial days, in addition to group and/or individualized tutorials. The ultimate goal is for students to really know their educational program and increase their interest in it. This leads to the authorities and administrative apparatus around the PEs becoming more involved and improving communication with the students, teachers and tutors.

Pedagogical insensitivity

The participants also expressed having perceived a certain pedagogical insensitivity on the part of some of their teachers. For example, participant #04 comments:

[subject *you must know*, and the way they talked to us [...] I felt like it was something threatening" (Participant #04, *our emphasis*).

Although the previous example shows a hostile attitude on the part of a teacher, other types of pedagogical insensitivity are related to the lack of flexibility on the part of the teaching staff regarding issues of non-attendance, late attendance in the classroom and late delivery of assignments, due to schedules and workload on the part of the students. Human relations are an important issue in the educational field, since pedagogies evolve and stop focusing on the teacher to focus on the student. Given this, teaching updating is of great importance and goes beyond pedagogical methodology. Therefore, implementing training courses for teachers on the emotional diversity of human beings and stress management, in addition to those of pedagogy, can help them better understand and/or attend to the academic needs of their students.

Insufficient learning/pedagogies

Studies prior to higher level represent great support in the pre-training of the student body. However, sometimes, the contents at the upper secondary level are not necessarily compatible and/or contribute to university training, mainly due to the very characteristics of the training or technical training received at said educational level. In this sense, some participants express their learning experiences contrasting the high school level with the first semester of university:

"We took computer science and [...] they taught us how to make a video or make an edition in macro media flash, so when I arrived at [University 1] they taught me [...] (to) convert from binary numbers to octal, from decimals to binaries [...] so in my high school world that I studied [...] I never knew that this computer science existed" (Participant #04).

It is evident, from this example, that the dimensions and contents of the area of study in question do not correspond to the expectations of Participant #04, which was one of the reasons why he abandoned his studies. These academic differences can and should be resolved through preparatory leveling courses or pre-entry to Higher Education institutions. This would serve two fundamental purposes: so that the students themselves know in an experiential way where the career they chose is heading, as well as the level of possible difficulty throughout their academic career; and so that the academy of the different PEs can carry out the necessary filter on the attitudes and/or aptitudes of the students regarding the fundamental subject of the PE and can guide them from the beginning of their career to other leveling and/or reinforcement courses that they allows you to remain at the academic level required by said PE.

Academic difficulty and failure

Academic difficulty and, possibly, aptitude for study represented yet another cause of dropout. Although there were participants who decided to leave a PE to take another that they considered was better for their professional training, they noted that this change was not significant and that the cause of their poor performance and/or failure was something else. In a metacognitive way they formulated that the problem was not the university but themselves:

"The university was not the problem if I am not the problem because it is hard for me and it is hard for me to dedicate myself, to be more committed to reading, right? in research" (Participant #03).

One of the consequences of non-recognition of aptitudes, representing a difficulty or barrier to learning, is the failure of subjects; This results in a high failure rate which, in turn, represents one of the main causes of dropout. A limited number of universities in the country have implemented the aptitude exam as part of the entry requirements, which has allowed applicants to reorient their academic training. This, however, is an action that should be carried out in the last semesters of the upper secondary level. However, it would be advisable for the administrative area that focuses on university admission to design a preparation project (that includes a professional vocation test) that allows the applicant to recognize their aptitudes, which will greatly support them in their professional training. . In addition to that, they should carry out a psychological study that allows them to identify from the beginning those cases that will require mandatory professional support throughout their academic career; That is, it is important to identify "the characteristic personality traits" of the student (Fonseca and García, 2016, p. 29) that allow assertive support. This set of tests would support the school profile of

new students and may represent a strategy that allows a higher rate of permanence in institutions.

Personal causes

The category of personal causes includes four main reasons why desertion occurs. These are those concerning the educational program, interpersonal relationships, physical and/or emotional health and other issues that go beyond the academic core as such (see table 2).

Table 2- Personal causes of desertion

Category	Axial Code	Initial Code	Number of labels
Personal Causes	Educational program	New/Different interests	3
	Relationships	Difficulty in the adaptation process	3
		Family/ Intra-family conflicts /Dating Discrimination/ Bullying	22
	Health	Stress/Emotional burden	8
Health problems		6	
Other personal matters	Security/Personal integrity	6	
	Transportation and mobility	1	

New/different interests

Most, if not all, universities have a website where all their educational programs are promoted. These are freely accessible for consultation on different digital platforms and in different printed media; In addition, there are academic and administrative staff who are responsible for providing information on its basic characteristics such as: its objectives, entry and exit profiles, and professional activity, among others. The above, however, is sometimes insufficient, given that there are students who realize that their professional vocation is in an area of knowledge that is not originally the one they chose to train; Therefore, it does not serve them or seems inadequate. In some cases, there are students who enroll and try to study

different educational programs and still drop out. That is, they sign up for one, they realize that it is not to their liking and they unsubscribe from that one and sign up for another.

"I never saw myself exercising them like this in the long term, and when I had the opportunity to study another career, I was able to decide [...]. In the end I feel that the decisive factor for me to make the sacrifice of leaving school, well, was the fact that, truly, I feel that I found a vocation, and to this day I continue to pursue it with great enthusiasm" (Participant #05, *our emphasis*).

These cases of dropout merit further study, since at first glance it may seem that the student does not have clarity or certainty about his or her vocation due to lack of guidance. Therefore, those efforts that institutions can make to get to know the students from when they are applicants (e.g. vocational and aptitude studies), can lead to decision-making with academic impact that leads students towards a better professional choice.

Difficulty in the adaptation process and discrimination/ *bullying*

The assimilation aspects of university life, the educational context and even the demographic context (e.g. possible change of residence), together with the interpersonal support systems that a student creates or has, is one of the relevant causes for university dropout. :

"The emotional part of being alone in a place where you don't have colleagues, friends, family" (Participant #06).

Likewise, there are cases of discrimination and *bullying* that cause complex situations

of hostile relationships in university life and that, in the same way, cause school dropouts:

"When I arrived at the university I saw that rejection from my classmates and it made me feel a little sad and I started to think about what a community should be like, so I didn't feel comfortable with my classmates" (Participant #04).

The lack of adaptation, feeling of discrimination and/or *bullying* represent a discomfort in the educational environment in which, possibly, with a promotion of university values along with integration actions between the actors of the university community -administrative, academic, students could support the reduction of situations such as those expressed by the participants. Today, the issue of inclusion has great strength, not only in the educational sector, but at both the federal and state levels and has significance in all sectors. This can be considered by university authorities and contemplate inclusion programs in their development plan, which impact not only the central campuses, but truly permeate all campuses.

Stress, emotional burden and health problems

Among the most recurrent causes of dropout cases are stress and emotional burden, which in turn cause health problems (Medina Soto and Gaytán Díaz, 2018). This item is the most prominent in the responses given by the participants in this project. Specifically, the problems of psychosomatic illnesses are a constant and deserve special attention:

"Personally, I was in a very bad place emotionally, psychologically [...] I didn't attend all my classes and because I was going through

depression, I attended some that I liked, but I didn't pay much attention anyway and little by little I stopped attending" (Participant #09).

As can be seen, the causes of illness, especially mental health illnesses, are the most relevant. Sometimes not even the students themselves realize and/or recognize their health condition, in part, because they are under the rigor of university life which, many times, is designed to have full-time students. It is necessary for Higher Education institutions to have and/or strengthen their areas of support and accompaniment, in addition to observing the importance of promoting interpersonal and socio-emotional skills (OECD, 2015) of benefit to students. In addition to this, it is important to continue strengthening tolerance, solidarity and other values among the university community towards these types of situations.

Personal security/integrity

Higher Education institutions have security services to safeguard their facilities and staff on their campuses. However, situations have arisen in which the security and integrity of university students and staff are diminished in the surroundings of their facilities.

"A boy who begins to see me, to follow me. I arrived at the university and this boy was always in front of the room, the one I was in. He was always sitting there alone, in front of, um, this boy, well at first he was alone He was waiting for me in front of my classroom [...] and there came a point when he followed me, if I went to the library, if I was going to buy something; then he started to follow me to my house" (Participant #07).

Without a doubt, regarding the events of insecurity of harassment and feeling vulnerable, although they are matters that are in charge of some university authority because they are matters that must be resolved at a competent legal level, it is advisable to strengthen the infrastructure and surveillance systems. continuous and make them more efficient in all areas of the university and its surroundings.

Economic causes

The second category refers to the economic causes that generated the abandonment of studies. Fonseca and García (2016) suggest that these causes "respond mainly to the cost-benefit relationship of the studies" (p. 29). However, in the case of our participants, the main causes focus on the impact on the academic performance of the students and the limitations, not only in monetary resources, but also in student support (see table 3).

Table 3- Economic causes of desertion

Category	Axial Code	Initial Code	Number of labels
Economic Causes	Academic performance	Labor	6
	Limitations	Lack of resources Lack of student support	5 3

Labor

Labor causes are the most recurrent among economic causes, since they have an impact on the academic career of the participants, causing part of the student body to make the decision to abandon their studies. The fact of having to combine work activities to have an economic support with which to maintain their studies has been, in some cases, a reason for dropping out:

"A small business [...] I started to work on my own and that was what also made

me leave there [university], because I was already working, right? and since no one helped me, I had no income from anywhere else part, then alone" (Participant #06).

One of the consequences of working while studying is the interest and effort that the student puts into his work, to such a degree that he "falls in love" with his job and wants to train in that branch of work to do his job in a better way and decides abandon your initial studies to start others:

"I started working, and during work I really liked [...] accounting, which is what in the end was the career I studied. Unfortunately [...] there is no such career at [university 1] and, I had to look for this alternative school to study" (Participant #05).

It is observed, then, that there is a need to offer new educational programs, so it is necessary that from time to time studies of relevance and feasibility be carried out that allow universities to be at the forefront of the needs of the socioeconomic environment, not limited towards the local, regional and/or state, but also including a national and international vision; that is, including a look at global application and development.

Lack of resources

The scarcity of resources since the beginning of the studies represents a cause for dropout. For example, foreign students who support themselves by not having the financial support of their parents or other relatives are forced to work from the moment they arrive in the town where the university campus is established. The case of Participant #06 emphasizes that the reason for abandoning his studies has to do with the economic problems that arose

during his stay at the university; similar to what was reported in OECD (2015):

"At the beginning of the semester, the first semester, some details of economic issues began, first of all, right? [...] because in a place where you don't know absolutely anything and no one and when asking for a scholarship from the university, well, I don't like it. provided it" (Participant #06).

In these cases, it would be feasible to assign scholarships from the first semesters to foreign students with financial needs, paying special attention to foreign students in precarious situations. Supporting them with a financial scholarship would allow them to focus on their studies from the beginning of their academic career.

Although higher education institutions have, for the most part, a support scholarship program for their students, very often, they are highly difficult to access due to problems ranging from misinformation and/or promotion of these to the student body, to the exhaustive list of requirements to be submitted to obtain said benefit. This can be simplified with socioeconomic studies that allow us to get to know new students and automatically have institutions award scholarships to those who really need them.

Lack of student support

The lack of support is a cause of dropout in various ways, ranging from educational programs with non-flexible curricula (see academic causes), to the lack of support throughout student trajectories (Mayer and Cerezo, 2018). Students who for various reasons find it necessary to work often face the limited flexibility that their educational program provides them. Among the consequences of this situation is the

incompatibility of schedules between studies and work:

"When I finally managed to get a job, but when I asked for time at the university with the teachers and so on, it wasn't provided to me, like there wasn't that accessibility" (Participant #06).

Likewise, those students who are parents and care, first and foremost, for their family, carry with them the responsibility of fulfilling the academic activities of the university, which adds to the workload and care of their family:

"[...] work workload, meeting family expenses and then the demands of the university" (Participant #02).

Given that the priority of some students is the maintenance of their family, the fact of studying and working at the same time implies a double effort. The desire of parents to improve is great, such that they enroll in university with all the enthusiasm and desire to become a professional. However, it is necessary for the university to provide support to this type of students in terms of guidance on their academic career, recommending a sufficient load of subjects to be able to advance, even if the completion of their degree takes more years. This type of "guidance in the middle" is almost always considered part of the tutoring service. Therefore, it is suggested to review said program, find its strengths and weaknesses, and update it according to current needs.

DISCUSSION

This article presents three main causes of dropout: academic, personal and economic. Among the academic causes, those related to the operational aspects of academic

programs and insufficient learning/pedagogies stand out. The latter represent an area of opportunity that, as Fonseca and García (2016) and Rochin Berumen (2021) point out, deserve a review of the *curriculum* offered to update it and/or adapt it to the needs of the environment in an innovative way. In the economic causes, labor-related ones stand out, that is, having to work in addition to studying (López Pedraza *et al.*, 2019), which demands time from the student, to the point of forcing them to prioritize work over studies (Mayer and Cerezo, 2018). For its part, within personal causes, health problems can be identified, especially issues related to mental health, such as stress, anxiety and depression (Medina Soto and Gaytan Díaz, 2018) that must be addressed due to the risk they represent beyond academics (Fonseca and García, 2016). In some cases, the causes can be interrelated with each other, such as, for example, the lack of financial resources leads to concerns that do not allow the student to concentrate on their studies. The close relationship between the causes of dropout is interesting, given that this relationship is not an invariable phenomenon, but rather a complex one, in which different variables are interconnected because they are multifactorial (López Pedraza, Macías González and Sandoval García, 2019).

The different causes of dropout presented in this article are a small sample of the problems surrounding school dropout, which can be addressed, some immediately such as administrative and/or academic-administrative (e.g. training courses, improvement in systems of communication within the institutions, use of instruments of knowledge of the student body such as psychological, socioeconomic tests, etc., from the beginning of their career) in which authorities intervene who can make expeditious decisions in support of the student body; Other causes, however, require medium and/or long-term actions, especially if the problem is related to the nature of the human being himself, that is, with human relationships (e.g. attitude, pedagogical beliefs, learning, geographical

roots, etc.) and health (e.g. stress, depression, etc.), which require longer treatment time and allow positive progress to be observed.

Although one of the limitations of the project is the small number of interviews, these show in a very clear and precise way the variety of problems that the student community faces every day and that leads them to be part of the school dropout rates; Therefore, Higher Education institutions must be prepared with strengthening programs for permanence and increased graduation and graduation rates. The cases described in this work are in the period 2011-2020; However, the COVID-19 pandemic brought with it a greater dropout problem, which must be investigated in depth (Pachay-López and Rodríguez-Gómez, 2021). Among the activities suggested throughout this manuscript we can mention: preparatory or pre-university courses, strengthening the tutoring service, promoting clear and precise communication of educational programs with potential students and with enrolled students (e.g. in the promotion), expand and diversify scholarships, etc. These efforts must be supported and strengthened by other external educational bodies (e.g. Ministry of Public Education), in such a way that they impact decision making, as well as local and national educational policies (Miranda López, 2018), in for the improvement of academic scenarios.

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