



Causas de la deserción universitaria: el caso de una carrera de inglés

Causes of University Dropout: The Case of an English Major Program

Causas do abandono universitário: o caso de um programa de especialização em inglês

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Resumen

La deserción estudiantil es una realidad preocupante dentro del contexto educativo universitario porque impacta directamente en el proceso de educación superior y en todos sus actores. Esta investigación descriptiva cualitativa tuvo como objetivo identificar las causas de la deserción escolar en ocho estudiantes de la carrera de Inglés de la Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi en Ecuador. Los datos se recopilaron mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas y luego se transcribieron, codificaron y tematizaron mediante análisis temático (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Los resultados mostraron que las causas académicas (bajo nivel de inglés, dificultades en la comprensión de las materias, autopercepción académica y proceso de enseñanza) fueron las que más influyeron en la deserción y afectaron la salud física y mental de los estudiantes (ansiedad). Por otro lado, también se encontró que causas económicas como problemas financieros, trabajo y estudio y crisis financieras influyeron en el abandono escolar. En cuanto a las causas motivacionales, los estudiantes abandonaron sus estudios por falta de interés en estudiar la carrera de inglés. Estos resultados sugieren investigar estrategias para prevenir el fenómeno de la deserción universitaria.

Palabras clave: Abandono; Inglés mayor; Académico; Económico; Motivacional; Causas.

Abstract

Student dropout is a worrying reality within the university educational context because it directly impacts the higher education process and all its actors. This qualitative descriptive research aimed at identifying the causes of dropout in eight students of the English Major at Technical University of Cotopaxi in Ecuador. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and then transcribed, coded, and thematized using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The results showed that academic causes (low level of English, difficulties in understanding subjects, academic self-perception, and the teaching process) were the ones that were the most influential in the dropouts and affected students' physical and mental health (anxiety). On the other hand, it was also found that economic causes such as financial problems, work and study, and financial crisis influenced the dropouts. Referring to the motivational causes, students dropped out due to their lack of interest in studying the English major. These results suggest investigating strategies to prevent the phenomenon of university dropout.

Keywords: Dropout; English major; Academic; Economic; Motivational; Causes.

Resumo

A evasão estudantil é uma realidade preocupante no contexto educacional universitário porque impacta diretamente o processo de ensino superior e todos os seus atores. Esta pesquisa qualitativa descritiva teve como objetivo identificar as causas da evasão em oito estudantes do Curso de Inglês da Universidade Técnica de Cotopaxi, no Equador. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas e posteriormente transcritos, codificados e tematizados por meio de análise temática (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Os resultados mostraram que as causas acadêmicas (baixo nível de inglês, dificuldades de compreensão das matérias, autopercepção acadêmica e processo de ensino) foram as que mais influenciaram na evasão e afetaram a saúde física e mental dos alunos (ansiedade). Por outro lado, constatou-se também que causas econômicas como problemas financeiros, de trabalho e estudo e crise financeira influenciaram a evasão. Referindo-se às causas motivacionais, os alunos desistiram por falta de interesse em estudar inglês. Esses resultados sugerem investigar estratégias para prevenir o fenômeno da evasão universitária.

Palavras-chave: Abandono; Graduação em inglês; Acadêmico; Econômico; Motivacional; Causas.

Introduction

Nowadays, university dropout is a highly relevant problem due to its impact on the student, the family, higher education institutions, and the state itself. Student dropout in higher education has attracted the attention of the academic community, state, and social actors over the last three decades (Guzmán et al., 2021). All the universities in the world experience the phenomenon of university dropout, which has repercussions on the personal, economic, and social level of the students (Stăiculescu & Ramona, 2018). According to Behr et al. (2021), “dropping out from higher education is a complex process and students have very different motives for leaving university without obtaining a degree” (p. 325).

There are some international studies that explain the causes of university dropout: for instance, Islam and Pavel (2011) found that the factors influencing student dropout in Asa University in Shyamoli, Dhaka, Bangladesh were economic shortage, academic, work, and family problems, change of university, and immigration abroad. The authors suggest the increase in guidance hours by teachers, the implementation of English recovery classes, the training of teachers, the offer of extensions, and work for deserving or needy students. They also suggest the search for donations,

the granting of loans, and the maintenance of an aid fund for said students. In relation to family problems and changing universities, there is little that can be done. In the same way, Echchafi et al. (2021) revealed that students' lack of educational guidance and direction as well as problems related to the change in the language of instruction may have contributed to this phenomenon. The dropout rate has increased as a result of comprehension and retention problems, poor teaching techniques, absenteeism, and inadequate communication between teachers and students.

Awang and Faizuddin (2023) showed that economic and academic factors are the most influential for student dropout, while Poveda et al. (2020) indicated that the most prominent factors that influence student dropout are economic and family, followed by motivational, academic, social, and health. Quiles et al. (2023) mention that components that directly affect university dropout are student acclimatization, socioeconomic status, personality, the educator-learner relationship, and the quality of university instruction. In addition, sub-causes such as lack of motivation, reduced self-esteem, pregnancy, frustration, among others must be considered to better understand the reasons for university dropout. Cabrera et al. (2006) indicate that the main causes of student dropout are categorized in different aspects such as psycho-educational, developmental, family, economic, institutional, and social.

Even though there is some international research on this issue, there is little research nationally and locally. According to Bonilla et al. (2020), in Ecuador, there are limited studies that investigate the issue of university student dropout. Moreover, little or no follow-up of students who have dropped out has been established. Grau (2020) mentions that taking into account the importance of dropout at levels such as personal and institutional, it is incredible that the data on the subject is partial and lacks updating, with the absence of periodic data as the main cause. According to the director of the English major at Technical University of Cotopaxi in Ecuador, every academic term, students drop out of their studies (especially in the first four levels); however, there is not any research. For this reason, this research aimed to identify the causes that influence student dropout from the English major at Technical University of Cotopaxi during the academic term August 2022 - February 2023. This study was guided by the following question:

What were the causes of English major students' dropout at Technical University of Cotopaxi during the October 2022-February 2023?

Identifying and monitoring the student dropout rate as well as establishing the predictor variables and exploring the various causes and solutions are fundamental elements that can enhance the

student retention process (Bonilla et al., 2020). This will serve as the basis for future research on the subject due to the scarcity of studies carried out. It can also help prevent future student dropouts by clarifying the main causes that produce them since understanding the factors that affect student dropout will be very helpful in preventing it as much as possible (Awang & Faizuddin, 2023; Cabrera et al., 2006; De la Cruz-Campos et al., 2023).

Literature Review

To Pierrakeas (2020), dropout is an important indicator of the effectiveness of an educational system because it shows the persistence of serious deficiencies in the direction, advancement, transition, and adaptation of students. The ignorance of the causes of student dropout does not allow authorities to establish strategies to minimize the problem. In this context, Bonilla et al. (2020) mentioned that knowing causes of the problem may provide higher education authorities with more useful information for developing successful dropout prevention and reduction measures.

Causes of University Dropout

Academic

For those involved in education, the general academic performance of students has been a major concern (Amua-Sekyi & Nti, 2015). There are different researchers that describe many academic causes that can influence student dropout: for example, academic failure, adaptation to the university environment, level of demand, relationships between classmates (Cabrera, 2016), entrance qualification, academic performance, parents' academic level, teacher-student relationship (Quiles et al., 2023), academic self-perception, academic preparation (Poveda et al., 2020), difficulty of doing the thesis, bad relationship with the supervisor, satisfaction with learning, quality of the professors, relationship with the professors (Awang & Faizuddin, 2023), poor academic performance, truancy, discipline problems, involvement in fighting with classmates or teachers, prior poor academic performance, frequent changing of schools, lack of interest, negative academic climate (Tsolou & Babalis, 2020), methodology and techniques used by the teacher, relationship with other students, study habits, and workload (Kopper, 2018).

In programs in which English is the medium of instruction, the low level of the language makes it difficult to get good academic results (Qasem, 2019, p. 14). Thus, it has been suggested to have

teachers who are well qualified in the management of their subject (Pineda-Báez, et al., 2011) since the quality of teaching directly affects the performance of the students (Checchi et al., 2022). In this way, the English level of students in the short or long term becomes a problem. In addition, course requirements (or lack thereof) often contribute to student dropout (García & Vilca, 2021). With respect to this fact, Armea et al. (2022) suggested that “English learners receive seminars and workshops to improve their command of English in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension” (p. 150). This can improve students' self-perception, which will guide their academic performance and improve their skills in specific domains (Garello, 2018; Superreguy, 2018).

Economic

Economic factors are also major determinants of the school dropout phenomenon (Poveda et al., 2020). According to these authors, the main causes of student dropout are parents' occupation, family income, fluctuations in the labor market, lack of financial aid, incompatibility with studies and work (Cabrera et al., 2006), the type of housing, economic level of the parents (Quiles et al., 2023), work and study, low income of the parents, individual income when the student is married, marital status (Awang & Faizuddin, 2023), socioeconomic status of the family, family mobility, lack of parental support, absence of stability in the family environment, job search (Tsolou and Babalis, 2020), financial crisis in the home, loss of job of the member with higher income, work (Islam and Pavel, 2011), lack of funding for studies, financial support (Pineda-Báez et al., 2011), and finally financial limitations (Dev et al., 2023).

One way to minimize this problem and its effects is to provide certain financial support through scholarships. In fact, the art. 77 of LOES (2010) asks higher education institutions to establish full scholarship programs, or their equivalent in financial aid, for at least 10% of the number of regular students at any of the higher education training levels.

Motivational

In addition, motivation, without a doubt, is a factor that can affect student dropout. Freshmen usually feel unmotivated and decide to drop out (Kopper, 2018). Students' motivation is influenced by their interests, needs, expectations, and demands (Quiles et al., 2023). One of the solutions to

enhance students' motivation can be the implementation of motivation techniques (Kopper, 2018; Quiles et al., 2023) as well as a guidance system for conscious career choice (Klimov et al., 2020).

Health

Quiles et al. (2023) reported that the most common health problems found in students who drop out are stress and anxiety. Nurmansyah and Nurmayasari (2018) defined anxiety as “a human feeling of fear, worry, and nervousness. Anxiety is an emotion that tends to have great effects in many aspects of human being life” (p. 123). Anxiety is a predictor of student dropout (Bailey et al., 2003; Quiles et al., 2023). To cope with this problem, Nurmansyah and Nurmayasari (2018) affirmed that having better preparation is the main tactic used by low proficiency level students to deal with their speaking anxiety. Resignation (acceptance), positive thinking, relaxation, and seeking out peers are also strategies that are employed. Therefore, teachers should encourage students to express their feelings about studying or speaking the foreign language through a student information sheet, which can be completed on the first day of class (Bailey et al., 2003).

Family

Family issues can occasionally cause a student's career to be interrupted and lead to discouragement (Quiles et al., 2023). According to Cabrera et al. (2006), pressure and high expectations from the family cause conflicts in students that lead to dropping out or changing their major.

Methodology

Design and method

This was a qualitative case study since it aimed at achieving a detailed understanding of the causes that influenced (Cresswell, 2012) the students' dropout in the English major at Technical University of Cotopaxi.

Research context and participants

The study was carried out at the Technical University of Cotopaxi, Pujilí Extension, which is a public institution of higher education, located in Pujilí, Ecuador. Fourteen students who dropped out of the English major during the academic period October 2022-February 2023 were identified,

but only eight students agreed to participate in the research. Finally, the director of the English major was also interviewed. All interviews were conducted in Spanish and translated into English.

Table 1: Information about the participants

N°	AGE	GENDER	CIVIL STATUS	DROPOUT SEMESTER	CURRENT SITUATION	PROVINCE/CITY	CODE
1	26 Years old	Female	Single	Third Semester	Remains retired	Cotopaxi/Pujili	(MMVFD NR)
2	25 Years old	Female	Single	Fourth Semester	Resumed her degree.	Cotopaxi/Pujili	(LAMCE DR1)
3	20 Years old	Female	Single	Fourth Semester	Resumed her degree.	Cotopaxi/Pujili	(GNMME DR2)
4	22 Years old	Male	Single	Third Semester	Resumed his degree.	Tungurahua/Ambato	(WDMME DR3)
5	27 Years old	Female	Lives in a free union	Third Semester	Resumed her degree.	Cotopaxi/Pujili	(JNSCED R4)
6	28 Years old	Female	Single	Third Semester	Program change	Cotopaxi/Pujili	(AJRGEC C1)
7	26 Years old	Female	Single	Third Semester	Program change	Cotopaxi/Latacunga	(BMEPCC 2)
8	23 Years old	Female	Single	Third Semester	Program change	Cotopaxi/Pujili	(BVPIEC C3)
9	56 Years old	Female	Married		Director of English major at Technical University of Cotopaxi.	Cotopaxi/Latacunga	(DCPINE)

Research instruments

A semi-structured interview was implemented for data collection. For the semi-structured interview, four guidelines were created with questions designed for the four types of interviewees: students who dropped out permanently, students who dropped out and returned, students who dropped out and changed majors, and, finally, for the English major director. The interviews were carried out both face to face and by telephone depending on the availability of the participants.

Data analysis

The steps of the thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed. The interviews were transcribed in order to obtain a broad and in-depth perspective of the data. After understanding the data, they were classified into themes (academic, economic, motivational, and health) and sub themes (Academic: English level, difficulties in understanding subjects, academic self-perception, and the teaching process; Economic: financial problems, work and study, and financial crisis; Motivational: interest to study the English major; and Health: anxiety). All the excerpts were analyzed, interpreted, and discussed, taking into account existing theory.

Ethical considerations

An informed consent was used in order to obtain the acceptance of the participants. Through it, the ethical rules of the study such as confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of the research were clarified. In addition, it served to communicate, both to the students and to the career director, about the objective of the study. Thus, written informed consent was obtained from all research participants.

Results and Discussion

Research question: What are the causes of English major students' dropout at Technical University of Cotopaxi during the October 2022-February 2023 academic term?

Category 1: Academic factors

Sub-category 1.1: English level

Excerpts from students who dropped out from the English major and university

[At the time of the presentations, I couldn't express myself so well, let's say, form the sentences, all that] (MMVFDNR).

Excerpts from students who changed their study program

[I wasn't ready; (...) I could not pronounce well. I had those difficulties, pronunciation and speaking] (BVPIECC3).

[I did not have all the necessary tools to be able to understand English] (AJRGECC1).

[I didn't even know the verb to be; with that, I say everything] (AJRGECC1).

Excerpts from students who dropped out and returned to English major

[I couldn't understand what the teachers were telling me] (LAMCEDR1).

[Nerves, difficulties in communicating, in expressing myself] (LAMCEDR1).

[I knew basic English; what they had taught me in high school] (GNMMEDR2).

Excerpts from the authority

[To start, we do need the A2 level] (DCPINE).

[It is seen that the dropout is in the fourth semester, fifth semester, or sixth semester. Why? Because of the difficulty with the language] (DCPINE).

All participants agree that they had a very low level of English when they started their studies. They could not structure sentences, pronounce, understand, and produce the language. These opinions suggest that the level of English was the cause of these students' dropout. To study in an English major program, among other skills, students must have a good level of English. In this context, Armea et al. (2022) states that it is necessary for tertiary level students, especially those who choose English as their major, to develop their English linguistic skills. "Students who have difficulties with English language may not function effectively, not only in English as a subject but in all their academic endeavors" (Amua-Sekyi & Nti, 2015, p. 30).

Even though the English major curriculum (2016) at Technical University of Cotopaxi does not establish a requirement for any level of English, the director mentioned that an A2 level is required.

This finding leads to the suggestion of analyzing the requirements of the admission process and the need of leveling and reinforcement programs to improve students' level of English. In this regard, Pineda-Báez et al. (2011) mentioned that higher institutions must have adequate admission programs since it is a key factor in student retention. Furthermore, Poveda et al. (2020) affirm that the leveling and reinforcement courses are also strategies to eliminate or minimize the difficulties in the study of the career subjects.

Sub-category 1.2: Difficulties in understanding subjects

Excerpts from students who dropped out from the English major and university

[I did not understand the teachers very well because in the third semester, there were about three subjects in English, so I felt that I wasn't going to understand English] (MMVFDNR).

Excerpts from students who changed their study program

[You cannot even sleep in an English major trying to understand and express yourself] (AJRGECC1).

[I suffered when we were going to have [an English major subject], or I had a presentation] (AJRGECC1).

[Some subjects were complicated for me, others were not (the subjects in Spanish); (...) in the subjects in English, I was lost] (BMEPECC2).

Excerpts from students who dropped out and returned

[Yes, in certain subjects, there is a certain degree of difficulty] (LAMCEDR1).

Students mentioned having difficulties in understanding some subjects taught in English. This was another cause of dropout. The use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) represents a challenge for students. According to Zumor and Qasem (2019) "using English language to teach scientific disciplines has a seriously negative impact on the scientific content comprehension and assessment of a majority of the students" (p. 74). It affects their academic performance, and it causes anxiety, frustration, tension, fear, and embarrassment. EMI affects the effectiveness in understanding, communication, interaction, discussion, and inquiry (Zumor & Qasem, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to use their pedagogical skills well so that the students' learning process is facilitated.

Sub -category 1.3: Academic self-perception

Excerpts from students who dropped out from the English major and university

[Yes, my knowledge was lower] (MMVFDNR).

Excerpts from students who changed their careers

[They used to, in fact, speak well. Then, I had none of those bases] (AJRGECC1).

[I was seeing myself lost in relation to my classmates who already knew] (BMEPECC2).

[My other classmates were more advanced than me] (BVPIECC3).

Excerpts from students who dropped out and returned

[Some (...) were from bilingual courses or schools, so they had more command of the language, or they acquired it from an early age] (LAMCEDR1).

The results showed that the participants considered their classmates' academic performance to be higher than theirs. They felt that they were at a disadvantage compared to their classmates, who had a more advanced level, spoke well, and had greater command of the language. Their self-perceptions could have influenced their decision to drop out since academic self-perception is related to the academic comparison that the students make with their classmates based on their interpretations of learning situations (Poveda et al., 2020). Garrello (2008) suggests that self-perceptions provide data about the degree to which students exercise control and monitor their beliefs and feelings; that is how they self-regulate their learning. Thus, "if a student feels competent in an academic domain, this sense of ability might enhance his or her self-concept, enabling the student to persist at, and seek out, activities that further influence academic achievement" (Susperreguy et al., 2018, p. 2197).

Sub -category 1.4: The teaching process

Excerpts from students who dropped out from the English major and university

[There were times when I did not understand, but the teacher got kind of annoyed, so we could not tell him to repeat] (MMVFDNR).

Excerpts from students who dropped out from the English major and university

[The tutoring was quite basic because they taught us the same content of the class] (MMVFDNR).

Excerpts from students who dropped out and returned

[There are teachers (...) who explain the topic once, and those who understood, understood; those who did not understand, didn't!] (LAMCEDR1).

[It depends on the teacher because there were some who only made us give presentations for all the classes, but there wasn't much explanation from them. Sometimes there was a question or whatever, and they just said read the book and that's it] (GNMMEDR2).

[The first semester, the English teacher was a little weak since (he or she) gave exact things from the school, so to speak, (he or she) must have increased the intensity a little more, thus reinforcing our English from the first moment] (GNMMEDR2).

The participants said that they had difficulties with the quality of the teaching process they went through. They pointed out the teacher's lack of interest, attitude, and handling of the class as deficient. Students also mentioned that the tutoring sessions were basic and insufficient. The authors suggest that the quality of the teaching process also affected the dropout. Checchi et al., (2022) mentioned that higher quality teaching can reduce dropout rates and improve students' performance. Well-trained English teachers, availability of resources, effective organization of content (Amua & Nti, 2015), and good student-teacher relationships (Awang & Faizuddin, 2023) are considered some of the variables to predict student dropout. Equally important are tutoring sessions on procedures regarding their academic and professional training. Tutoring involves communication and interaction processes on the part of teachers; it implies personalized attention to students based on knowledge of their problems, needs, and specific interests (García & Vilca, 2021). The university must determine appropriate mechanisms to guarantee compliance and the quality of the tutorings (Reglamento de régimen académico, 2022, art. 23) because academic support strategies improve terminal efficiency rates (UNESCO, 2022).

Category 2: Economic

Subcategory 2.1: Financial Problems

Excerpts from students who dropped out and returned

[We went together. It was inconvenient because sometimes there was no (money)] (LAMCEDR1).

[It was insufficient, as my mother has other children... my younger siblings, and that was the reason. I could not finance myself, nor my family] (WDMMEDR3).

[Lack of money for tickets, everything that includes food, copies, all of that] (WDMMEDR3).

Excerpts from the authority

[We say that education is free, but this is not true because investment in copies is required. In our case, we need the investment of a text] (DCPINEI).

Students mentioned that their family income was insufficient to cover academic expenses. They lack money for food, transportation, copies, and other supplies. The Director mentioned that students have to invest money in various academic supplies. “Families with low economic status have limited access to public and social benefits, including the benefit of education. Consequently, they are excluded both socially and educationally” (Tsolou & Babalis, 2020, p. 1377). The financial capacity of the students, as well as the economic support received by their family, plays a key role in the permanence or desertion. To alleviate this problem, higher public institutions must grant monetary support to students as it is mentioned in art. 77 of LOES (2010).

Subcategory 2.2: Work and Study

Excerpts from students who dropped out and returned

[When you work, sometimes you no longer have time to do your homework; sometimes you also have to pay and cover other expenses] (LAMCEDR1).

[The schedules were at night, and that made it difficult for me between work and study] (WDMMEDR3).

[I needed to improve my English. So I chose to retire, work, and acquire a (English) course] (LAMCEDR1).

[I work, and I was working while studying, and that made it difficult for me to connect with the subjects. Since the schedule was at night, that made it difficult for me to transition between work and study] (WDMMEDR3).

Students mentioned that coping with academic activities and work was difficult. According to the participants, the problem of combining work with studies was a cause of their dropout. Cabrera et al. (2006) stated that the economic problems of some families or the shortage of financial aid force some students to work while they study, which in some cases causes university dropout. In the

same way, Awang and Faizuddin (2022) found that some students drop out because of their work; they do not have time to attend the university and do homework. They concluded that employment status affects student dropout. Since jobs cover a wider variety of needs, students choose to prioritize work over studies (Kopper, 2018).

Subcategory 2.3: Financial Crisis

Excerpts from students who dropped out and returned

[My mom had just had eye surgery, and then it was as if the money was not enough] (LAMCEDR1).

[We had a mishap (...) so I had to incur additional expenses (...) I could not cancel certain registrations for some subjects that I missed. My mom's house was also robbed (...) my dad also suffered an assault and was kidnapped for a few hours. Furthermore, the little money he had in his account was stolen from him. Then we were completely defunded] (JNSCEDR4).

The students said that their families suffered financial crises, depriving them of continuing their studies. Islam and Pavel (2011) mentioned that learners who withdrew due to financial crises have been found to have their family going through financial crises after their admission. Financial constraints affect students' motivation and academic achievement, which can increase the probability of college dropout. It is necessary to examine students' financial stress and academic performance regularly since these limitations can affect students' self-esteem and self-efficacy (Dev et al., 2023).

Category 3: Motivational

Subcategory 3.1: Interest to study the English major

Excerpts from students who changed their major

[I always liked Basic Education, even Initial Education] (BVPIECC3).

[English was not really my thing, so I continued in the first semester until the second semester, and I made the change in the third semester] (BVPIECC3).

[I wanted basic education, but it didn't come out. (..) So, I had no other choice] (AJRGECC1).

[I feel comfortable in the career I am in currently. I'm not saying it's easy, but I do identify with it and I know that I do like it, which is the most important thing. I believe that for a student to progress in her career and be a good professional, she must like the career. When one feels identified with

the major, I think it becomes less complex and you try to do everything you can to achieve the goal.] (AJRGECC1).

Excerpts from the authority

[Perhaps because they did not obtain the place in the major they wished could be Basic Education, Language and Literature, or Initial Education, they are forced to accept the place in the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages major] (DCPINE).

Students mentioned that they did not like the English major; they wanted to study another. The director said that many of the students accept a place in the English major because they do not have the chance to study another major. Their lack of interest influenced their dropout. In fact, Awang and Faizuddin (2023) stated that the inability to adapt to the program and not selecting a program aligned with the student's interests are notable factors in dropout. In this sense, it is important that students feel a strong inclination towards their career, which motivates them to continue their studies. For students to meet their educational objectives and eventually obtain the necessary degree, motivation is crucial (Quiles et al., 2023). In addition, the free choice of career and prior vocational guidance that clarifies students' aptitudes and interests are key factors to university terminal efficiency. In this regard, Klimov et al. (2020) mentioned that "conscious and successful choice of a student's future profession can be facilitated by building a career guidance system throughout the entire period of study" (p. 633).

Category 4: Health

Sub -category 4: Anxiety

Excerpts from students who dropped out from the English major and university

[The teacher (...) already knows that you are not progressing as much and is, let's say, asking questions for that person. This caused me a lot of stress and also a kind of fear] (MMVFDNR).

Excerpts from students who changed their study program

[I was very afraid of the teachers because I knew that if I didn't know something they would choose me. Every time I hid, I didn't want to be there] (BMEPECC2).

[Not understanding frustrated me a lot. I began to have a lot of headaches and stress] (AJRGECC1).

[My major prevented me from resting. It stressed me out a lot. I said and now the presentations and now the exam, what am I going to do? I had this habit of always biting my nails, (...) when I was going to have a class. I had crises, I became depressed. I began to want to hurt myself. I knew that if I continued there, my health would continue to worsen] (BMEPECC2).

Extracts from the authority

[I am aware of students who suffer from anxiety nowadays. (...) Psychological, emotional problems...] (DCPINE).

Students said they felt anxious due to the pressure of their poor academic performance, which impacted their mental health. Participants said that they felt afraid, stressful, nervous, frustrated, anxious, and depressed. They had headaches, onychophagy, and the desire to harm themselves. They could not sleep well. The Director mentioned that it is known that students suffer from anxiety and other psychological problems. The anxiety derived from their poor academic performance also affected university dropout. According to Nurmansyah and Nurmayasari (2018), “student’s anxiety may emerge from their low English proficiency. The students are afraid to speak because they are less proficient, have difficulty understanding what the teacher says in the class as well as they are unable to respond to the teacher questions” (p. 123). In this way, the anxiety generated by the language affects the performance of students, causing them to drop out. An academic consequence of foreign language anxiety is student dropout. Compared to less-anxious students, high-anxious students are more likely to drop out of their studies (Bailey et al., 2003).

Conclusion

Student dropout is a problem that affects all Higher Education institutions and their different study programs. This research concludes that the causes that influenced students’ dropout in the English major at Technical University of Cotopaxi during the academic period October 2022-February 2023 were academic, economic, motivational, and health aspects. Causes such as the students’ low level of English, difficulties in understanding subjects taught in English, negative academic self-perception, and the poor teaching process directly influenced the participants’ decision to drop out. These academic aspects triggered another cause such as anxiety, stress, depression, fear, headaches, self-harm, sleeping problems, and onychophagia. The economic aspect also influenced the abandonment of the English major. Causes such as the financial problems, combination of work

and study, and financial crisis forced students to drop out of their studies. Finally, referring to the motivational factor, it was identified that the lack of interest to study the English major is a cause of dropout, causing the definitive abandonment or eventual career change of the students. Even though these results are subject to sample size limitation, they offer a view to plan strategies and policy for university retention. Thus, future research should be carried out on strategies to prevent university dropout.

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