A study about the causes that stops academic achievement in higher education: The case of the BA in english language at Unacar

Un estudio sobre las causas que detiene el logro académico en la educación superior: El caso del BA en lengua inglesa en Unacar

· 1 5 0 ·

Gina del Pilar Pacheco Balam

Universidad Autónoma del Carmen

(gpacheco@delfin.unacar.mx)

ORCID: 0000-0001-5852-0488

Salvador Bautista Maldonado

Universidad Autónoma del Carmen

(sbautista@pampano.unacar.mx)

ORCID: 0000-0001-9816-1299

Rosa Adriana May Meléndez

Universidad Autónoma del Carmen

(rmay@pampano.unacar.mx)

ORCID: 0000-0003-0571-7986

ABSTRACT

In this paper it is presented an overview of the causes that are affecting the right development of academic achievement of students attending a BA in English Language at a public university namely Universidad Autónoma del Carmen (UNACAR). Following the national policies and previous research of the topic there were analyzed four factors that might be considered as the causes of failing a course. By means of a questionnaire it was administered to 62 students, divided into four groups depending on the semester they were attending at the moment of the research, all the students who participated in this research were attending the BA in English Language. The four variables tested in this research were the factors related to the academic achievement, familiar factor, social factor and motivational factor. Results do show

that the motivational factor and the academic factor are the high factors that promotes the failing a course, backwardness, dropping-out a course and finally a low academic achievement.

KEY WORDS: *graduation rates, dropping out, academic achievement, laggard behind, repeater*.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there are a lot of problems related to dropping out, backwardness and low graduation rates in Mexican Higher Education Public Universities (ANUIES, 2001). To solve these problems, the National Association of Universities of Higher Education in Mexico ANUIES (henceforth ANUIES) suggests that each Public University has to develop programs to tackle each situation according to their needs and possibilities with the purpose of detecting the core and growing of those specific problems faced by each Public University. There are specific Academic Programs or Bachelor Degrees where the dropping out, backwardness and low graduation rates have been detected. So, it is the role of each Public University to start doing research about academic trajectories of the students with the aim of detecting the causes of the low academic achievement. Following the suggestion of ANUIES, some public universities have already started detecting the problems and proposing some solutions related to the low academic achievement in students attending public universities. In order to analyze the academic achievement of the students of higher education it is required to have in mind what variables do we need to analyze. In this case we are interested in the academic trajectory, in a sense that during this period we can analyze the issues that are causing the backwardness, low academic achievement, dropping out a course among other issues related to the academic trajectory of the students. To define an academic trajectory, Vera, Ramos, Sotelo, Echeverría, Serrano and Vales (2012) state that

an academic trajectory of a student must start since the student begins his or her degree from the first semester until the end of all the courses and paperwork of graduation inclusive. In other words, an academic trajectory includes passing all the courses of the curricula, failing a course, repeat a course etc., until the student get his or her degree title printed. Cain and Ramírez (1997) also suggest that in an academic trajectory must be included the following: academic achievement, passing a course, failing a course, repeating a course, backwardness, drop-out, and efficacy. In this sense, there have been various studies to analyze the academic trajectories of students attending a BA in higher education. For example, Romo and Hernandez (2005) categorized the academic trajectories into three main types: regular student, repeater student, and backwardness student. For them, a regular student is someone who starts a degree and selects the courses that he or she is going to take during a semester and he or she finishes those courses without any failure, so he or she does not repeat a course and he or she avoids the backwardness during the time of duration of his or her four years of formation in the university. Following the same line of research, Hernandez-Marin, Yon-Guzman and Arias-Gomez (2017) conducted a study involving participants of two degrees, English Language and Education, at the Universidad Autonoma del Carmen. They analyzed the causes of failing of the following generation of students: 2010,2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 from both degrees. They concluded that the students of the first four semesters are the ones who present more backwardness situations and dropping out compared to the most advanced semesters. Similar results were found by Saucedo, Herrera, Díaz, Bautista and Salinas (2014) whose research tried to identify the most common indicators of failing a course at the Faculty of Education at Universidad Autonoma del Carmen. Saucedo at al reported the following percentages of failing a course and their causes

of that failing: 38% of students did not catch the teachers' explanations, 29% of students were not really interested in the topics taught in class, and another 9% said that they did not understand the teaching method of the professor and 13% by different causes. Saucedo et al concluded that those failing percentages are presented in a high level during the first semester of the students, mainly with courses not related to their area (those courses that belong to the generic formation such as Maths, ICT, and English for Academic Purposes). A recent research was reported by Diaz, Salinas, Saucedo and Bautista (2019) were it was found that two factors are the most detected as the causes of index of failing a course in higher education. Diaz et al conducted a study using an instrument that contained 52 questions divided into four categories, each category eliciting data related to four different variables: academic factor, social factor, familiar factor and motivational factor. They administered their instrument to 105 students of the three BAs (Ba in Education, BA in English Language and BA in Communication and Cultural Affairs) in the Faculty of Education at the Universidad Autonoma del Carmen, the students they selected were those who had failed at least a course during their academic life at the university. Diaz et al used WEKA to analyze the data gathered. Their results do show that from the 105, from the three different BAs, students who participated there were two main factors detected as the most relevant to cause low academic achievement, those two factors were the academic factor and the social factor.

In the present study, a similar analysis is carried out due to the low rate of graduated students aforementioned. But in this case our participants were only students attending a BA in English Language. Using a modified version of the instrument used by Diaz et al, it was administered to 62 students attending their degree during the period of February to July 2019. The aim of this study is to see which of the four factors (academic factor, social factor, familiar factor and motivational factor) are the most frequent and that originate the low academic achievement of the students such as failing a course during their academic trajectory.

PARTICIPANTS

The four factors analyzed are presented by each group of participants, each group was classified according to the semester they were attending at the moment of administering the test. There were a total of 62 participants divided into four groups: group 1: (n=5), group 2: (n=19), group: 3 (n=22) and group 4: (n=16). All the participants were attending the BA in English Language. Those participants of the group 1 were attending first semester, those of the group 2 were attending the fourth semester, those of the group 3 were attending 6th semester and finally those of the 4 group were attending the eighth semester. This information is presented in table 1 below:

Table 1 Participants in this study

	Semester attending	Number of participants	%	Gender
Group 1	second	5	8.06	F: 3 M: 2
Group 2	fourth	19	30.65	F:11 M:8
Group 3	sixth	22	35.48	F:11 M:11
Group 4	Eight	16	25.81	F:13 M:3

THE INSTRUMENT

The instrument to collect data consisted of a questionnaire that contained four sections. Each section belonging to each variable tested in this research. In each section of the instrument there were 13 items. In total there were 52 target items. The sections of the instrument are illustrated in table 2 below:

Table 2 Sections of the instrument

Section 1 Academic factor	There were a total of 13 target items in this section. The main aim of this section was to identify the most common factors that might cause failing courses during their academic life in the university. Among the questions elicited were: 1 *I did not like the course, 2 I did not get the teacher´s explanations, 3 I was not interested in the course, 4 I did not like the teacher method, 5 classroom environment, 6 lack of time for studying, 7 arriving late to classes, 8 homework did not handed-in, 9 lack of knowledge of the topic, 10 learning difficulties, 11 not getting along with the professors, 12 missing classes, 13 dropping out the course.*
Section 2 Social factor	In this section, there were also 13 target items. Most of the questions of this section were targeting issues related to the social factors affecting the academic achievement of the participants. The questions were: 1 *spending a lot of time practicing a sport, 2 meeting with older friends, 3 social influences, 4 addicted to drugs or alcohol, 5 living alone, 6 working for self- funding, 7 providing living expenses for the family, 8 nightclubbing, 9 spending much time in social networks, 10 feeling discriminated, 11 spending much time with friends, 12 problems with boyfriend/girlfriend, 13 problems with classmates.*
Section 3 Family factor	This section is composed of 13 target items, the main aim of those target items was to identify the impact of the family situation and its relationship with the academic achievement of the participants. This section contains questions such as *1 separation of parents, 2 parents not showing interest in the academic life of the student, 3 health problems of a family member, 4 dysfunctional families, 5 economic situation faced by the family, 6 death of a family member, 7 having an addict in the family, 8 unwanted pregnancy, 9 harassment within the family, 10 violence in the family, 11 taking care of sick relatives, 12 taking care of a family business, 13 providing living expenses for the family.*
Section 4 Motivation factor	In this section, there were also 13 target items. Those items were directed to the motivational issues faced by the participants. The aim of these items was to get an idea of how motivated the participants are while attending their BA and if these motivation is affecting their academic achievement. The questions administered were like 1 *I felt excluded from the class/group, 2 I felt lost in class, 3 I don't have study habits, 4 lack of flexibility in the schedule, 5 feeling unsatisfied with the education provided by the university, 6 the professors do not care about my learning problems, 7 my vocational issues, 8 counseling to study this BA was not a lot, 9 lack of economic resources to support my degree, 10 lack of rewarding, 11 the curricula is really huge and complicated, 12 lack of personal skills for the selected BA, 13 If something goes wrong I do not do it again.*

To see the complete set of items of each factor go to APPENDIX A.

PROCEDURE

The test was administered in only one session. It took 10 minutes maximum to participants to complete the test. The version of the test was a "paper and pen" and it was only a page length. The participants were selected if and only if they had failed any course during their academic life attending their BA in English Language at the university (students that had not failed any course were not taken into consideration in this research). After selecting the students, they were given by hand the instrument and they were told the instructions in order to direct the students to mark every item presented in the four sections of the instrument. At the end of the administration of the test, all the tests were collected and filed ready to code the data and to run the analysis. The results of the analysis are presented in the next section.

RESULTS

The results are organized as follows: The four factors involved are presented by group and the frequencies detailed comparing the factors between groups of the four factors involved in this research.

Results of the academic factor are presented in the following 1- 4 figures below:

Figure 1 Group 1 Academic factor

Figure 2 Group 2 Academic factor
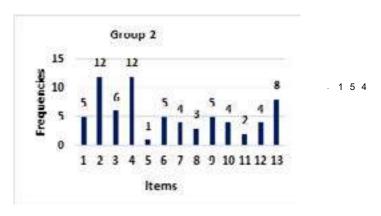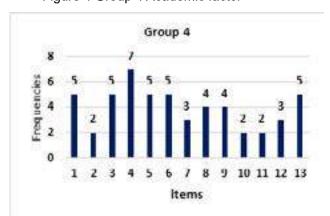
Figure 3 Group 3 Academic factor

Figure 4 Group 4 Academic factor

As it can be observed in the figures 1-4 above, there is no a pattern of behavior of the four groups in relation to the items but it can be observed that the second semester , group 1, has got less frequencies in selecting most of the items in comparison with the other groups, and also the fourth semester , group 2, is increasing the frequencies in most of the items in relation to the group 1, but what is really striking is the behavior of the advanced groups , in other words, group 3 , sixth semester, and group 4, eighth semester, are showing the most frequencies in most of the items tested. At a glance it can be inferred that as students are promoting to the next semester they are decreasing their academic achievement.

The analysis for item do show that the most frequent selected was item 4 (*I did not like the teacher method*), item 9 (*lack of knowledge of the topic*) and 10 (*learning difficulties*) were high too, except for the group 1. What is relevant to note here is that students attending higher semesters, after the second semester (group 1) the three groups selected really high frequencies in item 13 (*dropping out the course*), group 2: 8 frequencies, group 3 : 12 frequencies and group 4: 5 frequencies. What those results are telling us is that there are individual factors that are resulting in dropping out a course, and it is shown that this dropping out starts after the second semester.
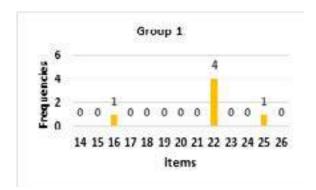
Next, there will be presented the results of the social factor. The figures 5 - 8 below show the frequencies of the four groups in relation to the social factors:
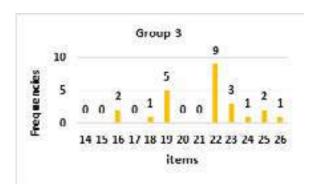
Figure 5 Group 1 social factor

Figure 6 Group 2 social factor

Figure 7 Group 3 social factor
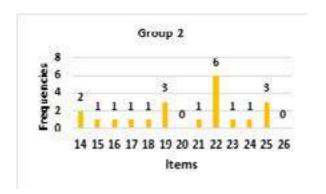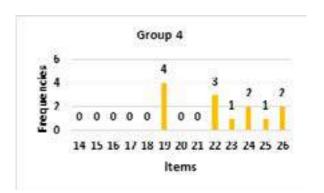

Figure 8 Group 4 social factor

Having a look at the figures above (figures 5-8), it can be observed that item 22 (*spending much time in social networks*) is influencing their low academic achievement of all four groups, and hence to fail a course. This situation is increasing as the students are promoting to the next semesters being the highest in sixth semester (group 3) and a slow decrease in the eighth semester (group 4). The other item that is selected as high is the item number 19 (*working for self-funding*) that is high selected after the fourth semester (group 2) and it continues as a high frequency in the sixth and eighth semesters respectively. It is likely that students after the fourth semester start working for self-funding their own degree.

The results of the familiar factor are presented below in the figures 9-12.
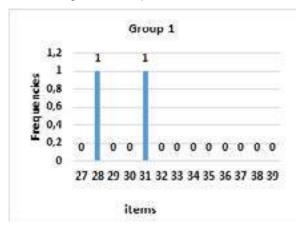
Figure 9 Group 1 familiar factor
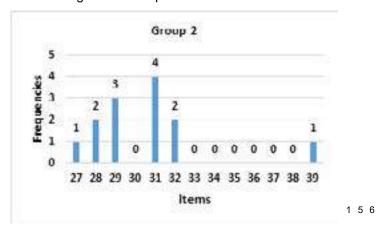

Figure 10 Group 2 familiar factor

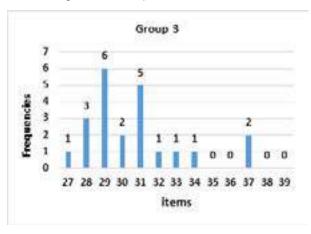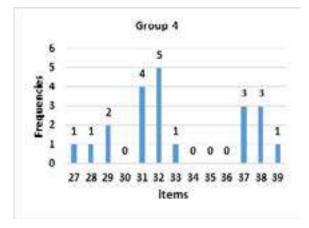Figure 11 Group 3 familiar factor

Figure 12 Group 4 familiar factor

The results presented above in figures 9-12 do show that the familiar factor is being affecting the four groups since the second semester, this issue is related to the item number 31 (*economic situation faced by the family),* and item 29 *(health problems of a family member)* being this last item affecting the group 2, group 3 and group 4 respectively, but it is not affecting group 1 (second semester students). Item number 32 *(death of a family member)* is also affecting in a high frequency in the group 4. In general, it seems that the economic situation that the

community is facing in these years is really affecting the achievement of the students and hence failing a course, or some courses, and finally the dropping out of the university.

Results of the motivational factor are shown below in figures 13-16:
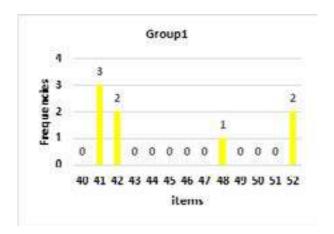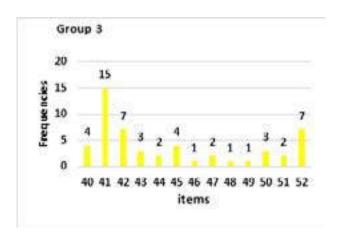
Figure 13 Group 1 Motivational factor

Figure 14 Group 2 Motivational factor

Figure 15 Group 3 Motivational factor

Figure 16 Group 4 Motivational factor

Those frequencies presented above do show a pattern of behavior in relation to the item 41 (I *felt lost in class*), item 42 is also having a high frequency (*I do not have study habits*) and finally item number 52 (*If something goes wrong I do not do it again*) is rated high since the second semester (group 2). It seems that the motivational factor and the academic factor are the most relevant factors affecting the academic achievement and due to this the students fail
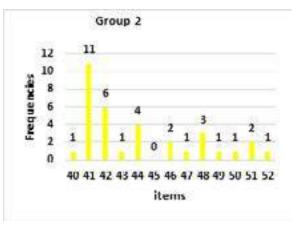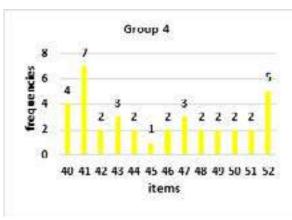
a course, drop out a course and it results in a low academic achievement since they are left behind a semester, a year or more.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

After analyzing the results of the four factors included in this research, it can be concluded that the most frequent factors selected by the participants are the ones related to the first

factor: *the academic factor* and the last one: *the motivational factor*. Also, it can be observed that the dropping-out and starting to have a low academic achievement began when the students are in the fourth semester and not and during the first semesters, the first and the second, there are not high frequencies of failing a course. It seems that if the students have got an academic problem they do not face it and as a consequence they fail the course and it is when they start to be left behind. Also, it seems that most of the students, or all, start their degree with a high motivation, but as they got into the following semesters that motivation ceases and it is when they start failing courses. One observation done in this research is that as the students start failing a course, this failing triggers the fail of a different course instead of trying to avoid the failing situation, they got familiar failing courses and it seems that for the students to fail a course is something normal. It is likely that, students do believe that taking a university degree it is also similar as high school, or preparatory school, but

the transition of this stage is different and during this transition the students get stuck due to their inadaptability to new situations, in this case the academic situation of the requirements of high education, which implies new responsibilities, new tasks and new teaching methods. What is clear here is that the results are different from the ones presented in previous research done in the same department. For example, it was reported that the generic courses, math, ICT and English, were the courses that caused backwardness and dropping-out of a course and as a consequence low academic achievement. However, those research done previously are too general in a sense that they tried to identify the most relevant factors that cause failing courses but any of those research has been focused in analyzing separated courses and the behavior of the students in those courses specifically. In other words, this research and previous research most be fined grained in detecting which course is the one that generates the failing situation of the students. But this is a topic for further research.

. 1 5 8 .

R E V I S T A   B O L E T Í N   R E D I P E   8   (1 2) :   1 5 0 - 1 6 1   -   D I C I E M B R E   2 0 1 9   -   I S S N   2 2 5 6 - 1 5 3 6

REFERENCES

Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior -ANUIES (2001)*Deserción, Rezago y Eficiencia terminal*. Consultado en http://www.anuies.mx/servicios/p_anuies/publicaciones/libros/lib64/indice.html

Cain, R. and Ramirez, C. (1997) Trayectoria Escolar: La eficiencia terminal en la Universidad Veracruzana. Revista de la educación Superior. Consultado en : http://publicaciones.anuies.mx/pdfs/revista/Revista102_S2A2ES.pdf

Diaz-Perera, J., Salinas-Padilla, H., Saucedo-Fernandez, M. and Bautista-Maldonado, S. (2019). Factors that influence the academic achievement at the Facultad de Ciencias Educativas-UNACAR. *International Journal of Current Research, 11* (05), 3747-3752.

Hernandéz-Marin, G., Yon-Guzman, S. and Arias-Gomez, L. (20179 Alcances y limitaciones del Programa de Tutoría en el nivel superior.

Boletin Virtual 117, Vol 6.

Romo, A. and Hernandez, P. (2005) Estudio sobre retención y deserción en un grupo de instituciones mexicanas de educación superior. *Proceedings del Seminario Internacional de Rezago y Deserción en la Educación Superior*. Universidad de Talca, Chile.

Saucedo, M., Herrera, S., Díaz, J., Bautista, M. and Salinas, H. (2014) Indicadores de Reprobación: Facultad de Ciencias Educativas (UNACAR). *RIDE Revista Iberoamericana para la Investigación y el Desarrollo Educativo, 5* (9) pp. 1-12

Vera, J., Ramos, D., Sotelo, M., Echeverría, S., Serrano, D. and Valdes, J. (2012) *Factores associados al rezago en estudiantes de una institución de educación superior 3* (7). Consultado en: http://www.scielo.org.mx7scielo.php?script=sci_arttextandpid=S2007-28722012000200003

Appendix A (INSTRUMENT)

ENCUESTA PARA EL SEGUIMIENTO DE LAS TRAYECTORIAS ESCOLARES

Estimado estudiante, la presente encuesta tiene como objetivo identificar los motivos por los que has reprobado alguno de tus cursos. Asimismo, tiene la finalidad de servir como insumo para propuestas de seguimiento de trayectorias escolares en beneficio de la comunidad estudiantil. Es por ello que, tu participación es valiosa.

*Número de curos reprobados durante tu estancia en la UNACAR:*_____

*Licenciatura:*_____ *Semestre:*_____

Género: Mujer (   )   Hombre (   )

Señala con una X el motivo por el cual reprobaste el curso:_____

_____

Académico (motivos)	Social / emocional (motivos)	Familiar (motivos)	Motivacional (motivos)
◯ 1. No me gustaba el curso	◯ 14. Por practicar un deporte todo el tiempo	◯ 27. Separación de mis padres	◯ 40. Me sentí excluido
◯ 2. No entendía las explicaciones del profesor	◯ 15. Círculo de amistades mayores	◯ 28. Desinterés de mis padres por mi formación	◯ 41. Me sentí desorientado
◯ 3. No tenía interés por el curso	◯ 16. Influencia social	◯ 29. Problemas de salud de un familiar	◯ 42. Pocos hábitos de estudio
◯ 4. No me gustaba la forma de trabajar del profesor	◯ 17. Adicción a una droga o al alcohol	◯ 30. Familias disfuncionales	◯ 43. No existe flexibilidad en los horarios
◯ 5. Las malas relaciones con el grupo influyeron en mi aprendizaje	◯ 18. Vivía o vivo solo (a)	◯ 31. Por problemas económicos que enfrenta la familia	◯ 44. No estoy satisfecho con la calidad de la formación recibida.
◯ 6. Falta de tiempo para estudiar	◯ 19. Tengo que trabajar para sostenerme	◯ 32. Pérdida de un familiar	◯ 45. Poco interés de los profesores por mis problemas de aprendizaje
◯ 7. Por ser impuntual	◯ 20. Mantengo a mi familia (hijos o padres/hermanos)	◯ 33. Familiar adicto	◯ 46. Falta de vocación por lo que estudio
◯ 8. Por no entregar las tareas	◯ 21. Por ir a fiestas (desvelos fines de	◯ 34. Embarazo no deseado	◯ 47. Poco apoyo de mi tutor (a)

· 1 6 0 ·

	semana o entre semana)		
◯ 9. Falta de conocimiento de la materia	◯ 22. Mucho tiempo en redes sociales	◯ 35. Acoso familiar	◯ 48. Pocos recursos económicos para estudiar.
◯ 10. Dificultad para aprender	◯ 23. Me sentía discriminado (a)	◯ 36. Violencia intrafamiliar	◯ 49. Falta de reconocimiento
◯ 11. Diferencias con el profesor	◯ 24. Por estar mucho tiempo con mis amigos	◯ 37. Por cuidar a un familiar	◯ 50. Planes de estudio muy extensos y complicados
◯ 12. Faltaba mucho a clases	◯ 25. Problemas con mi novio (a)	◯ 38. Por atender el negocio familiar	◯ 51. Falta de habilidades para la carrera elegida
◯ 13. Abandoné el curso	◯ 26. Problemas con mis compañeros	◯ 39. Por hacerme cargo de la familia	◯ 52. Desisto si algo sale mal

Escribe una razón por la que abandonarías tus estudios en la UNACAR

_____

_____

¡GRACIAS POR TU PARTICIPACIÓN!