Dropping out: Students' reasons for leaving their second language teacher education programs at the University of Guanajuato

Deserción escolar: Causas de abandono entre estudiantes de programas de educación docente en segundas lenguas en la Universidad de Guanajuato

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Abstract:

An explanatory case study with the objective of exploring the dropout phenomenon in two undergraduate programs at the University of Guanajuato. It seeks to understand why former students of the Bachelor's Degree in English Teaching and the Bachelor's Degree in Spanish Teaching dropped out before finishing their degree. Data collected through the questionnaire are presented, where 53 participants share their experiences of dropping out of school. An explanatory case study is chosen in the methodological design to see how and why dropout occurs. From the responses of the 53 participants, we conducted a deductive-inductive process to code our data from the results of the qualitative survey. The results indicate confirming patterns determined by previous research, citing a combination of personal and institutional causes of dropout. Work obligations, life events, lack of motivation (in terms of loss of interest in the program or profession or vocational disorientation), family situations, administrative problems, mental health, and economic difficulties emerged as key contributing factors in decision making with the potential to change the lives of those involved.

Keywords: School dropout; Teacher training; Second language; University of Guanajuato; School abandonment.

Resumen:

Un caso de estudio explicativo con el objetivo de explorar el fenómeno de deserción escolar en dos programas de pregrado en la Universidad de Guanajuato. Busca entender por qué ex estudiantes de la Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés y la Licenciatura en la Enseñanza de Español abandonaron su carrera antes de terminarla. Se presentan los datos recogidos por medio del cuestionario, donde 53 participantes comparten sus experiencias de deserción escolar. Se elige un estudio de caso explicativo en el diseño metodológico para ver cómo y por qué se produce la deserción. A partir de las respuestas de los 53 participantes, llevamos a cabo un proceso deductivo-inductivo para codificar nuestros datos a partir de los resultados de la encuesta cualitativa. Los resultados indican confirmar padrones determinados por investigaciones anteriores, mencionando una combinación de causas personales e institucionales de abandono. Las obligaciones laborales, los eventos de la vida, la falta de motivación (en términos de pérdida de interés en el programa o la profesión o desorientación vocacional), situaciones familiares, problemas administrativos, salud mental, y dificultades económicas emergieron como factores contribuyentes clave en la toma de decisiones con el potencial de cambiar la vida de los involucrados.

Palabras clave: Deserción escolar; Formación docente; Segunda lengua; Universidad de Guanajuato; Abandono escolar.

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| Introduction

University studies are often truncated before college students compete for their undergraduate degrees. In part, this may be because we begin our tertiary education in a transitional period, maturing from adolescence to adulthood. It is hardly surprising, then, that life often "gets in the way." Public universities in Mexico are no exception to this unwritten rule (Amador Anguiano et al., 2021; Calderón et al, 2020; Medina de la Rosa, 2020; Rochin Berumen, 2021). The high rate of university abandonment gave rise to an interinstitutional research project on the trends in desertion1 during the decade 2011-2020. This paper reports on students' experiences in second language teaching programs at the University of Guanajuato and explores the causes of their decision to abandon their bachelor's degree. Data were collected through document analysis, a survey of the potential participant pool, and semi-structured follow-up interviews. In this paper, we will focus on the causes that precipitate university desertion and discuss the reasons why our former students opted for an early withdrawal from our BA programs.

Causes of University Desertion

A decade ago, de Vries et al. (2011) noted that in parallel with the increasing number of investigations into university desertion, the number of possible explanations seemed to grow correspondingly. In their study of 7,590 dropouts from the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, the authors identified an unwieldy 24 significant causes of desertion.

One of the challenges faced by researchers has been to silo the possible explanations of university abandonment into manageable categories. Depending on methodological, terminological, conceptual, and situational considerations, different authors have classified the causes of desertion in different ways. For instance, in their analysis of 44 empirical studies of university abandonment in Europe, Kehm et al. (2019) discovered nine main categories: study conditions at the university, academic integration at the university, social integration at the university, personal motivations for studying, information and admission requirements, prior academic achievement in school, personal characteristics of the student, the sociodemographic background of the student, and external conditions. An investigation of desertion at a single Bolivian university by Poveda Velasco et al. (2020) placed data into six major categories concerning economic problems, health concerns, academic issues, student motivation, social factors, and the family. Research by Díaz (2007) identified five distinct causes of desertion: pre-university education, institutional barriers, family, personal matters, and employment issues.

An early study by Braxton et al. (1997) placed the determinants of desertion into just four categories: 1) individual factors, including age, gender, marital status, family environment, and social integration; 2) academic factors, including professional goals, the type of school attended, academic performance, program quality, entrance exam results, dissatisfaction with the program, and the number of subjects taken; 3) institutional factors, including scholarships and financing, university resources, the quality of the program, the degree of commitment of the educational institution, the level of personal interaction with professors and students, and regulations; and 4) socio-economic factors, including

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social position, employment status, family income, economic dependence, dependents, the educational level of parents, family environment and the macroeconomic environment of the country. This last taxonomy has since remained helpful to some researchers. For instance, Calderón and González (2005), Dzay Chulim and Narváez Trejo (2012), and Patiño de Peña and Cardona Pérez (2013) classified the results of their research by placing the causes of desertion into similar categories.

The most parsimonious taxonomies divide causes into only two camps, what Kehm et al. (2019) refer to as "push" and "pull" factors. Push factors are those within a given university relating to student interests, competencies, personality, and affective states. These intra-school variables include motivational, personal, and psycho-affective problems; feelings of frustration; vocational disorientation; teacher suitability; changes in learning style; poor adaptation to the environment; problems with academic performance; the paucity of institutional budgets; archaic registration systems; the overcrowding of classrooms; the shortage of adequate teaching spaces; the lack of modern methods; the rigidity of the curricula; and a program's disconnection and disarticulation with the student's social reality and the labor market (de Vries et al., 2011; Eicher et al., 2014; Santamaría & Bustos, 2013; Torres et al., 2015). Pull factors, on the other hand, are those that emphasize extra-school variables, including the socio-economic situation; working conditions (and therefore the hours available for study); the family context; health issues, including a student's propensity towards depression and substance abuse; unfulfilled personal expectations; motivation; and temperament (de Vries et al., 2011; Patiño de Peña & Pérez, 2013). Of course, push and pull factors are often interconnected and influence each other.

Causes of Desertion in Mexico

As the studies above demonstrate, the problem of

desertion is multidimensional, its causes are resistant to easy classification. Einstein, in a 1933 lecture, famously declared that: "...the supreme goal of all theory is to make the irreducible basic elements as simple and as few as possible without having to surrender ... adequate representation ..." The push/pull taxonomy meets these requirements. At the same time, the dichotomy usefully highlights the issues that may be most amenable to amelioration by educational systems and particular institutions.

Within the literature dealing with the Mexican context, an array of push factors is mentioned. Most studies are highly situated investigations of specific universities. Research is, therefore, generally institution-specific, and there is surprisingly little overlap between research findings. Causes include, but are not limited to, educational practices that are alien to students' profiles and particular needs; a low level of interaction between students and their professors; a low level of professorial commitment to their students; the inability of students to enter their chosen fields of study; students changing their minds about their chosen fields; the cancelation of classes; inconvenient schedules; the length of the program; a lack of induction courses; a lack of student associations; few psychological support services; few academic tutors; the lack of transparency in administrative procedures; inequality in the disbursement of grants; a lack of university support; a lack of curricular flexibility; disinterest in the classes offered; the poor quality of professors; a lack of clear information about bureaucratic matters; a lack of integration into university life; and poor grades (Calderón, et al., 2020; de Vries et al., 2011; Dzay Chulim & Narváez Trejo, 2012; Huesca Ramírez & Castaño Corvo, 2007; López Villafaña et al., 2014; Rodríguez Lagunas & Hernández Vázquez, 2008; Silva Laya, 2011).

Pull factors identified in the research seem to fall more neatly into just a few major categories than push factors do. Socio-economic challenges and poor academic

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preparation are two themes that stand out in the literature. Socio-economic issues, such as poverty and inequality, are significant pull factors contributing to university dropout rates. A study published in 2016 by the Centro Interuniversitario de Desarrollo (as cited in de Oliveira, 2019, p. 159) reports on the uneven distribution of educational opportunities in Mexico. In 2014, only 3.4% of university students belonged to the lowest income bracket, while more than 40% came from the highest income category. Poverty can limit the educational opportunities available to students, making it difficult for them to access higher education or afford the cost of tuition, living expenses, and academic materials. Because of such challenges, students from low-income families are more likely to drop out of university than their more affluent peers (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Political de Desarrollo Social [CONEVAL], 2018; de Oliveira et al., 2019; Salvador Benítez, 2008; Silva Laya, 2011).

University students from poorer rural areas or those who must relocate for their studies face additional financial burdens, such as housing and transportation expenses. A study by Aguilar et al. (2018) found that the high cost of transportation was a significant financial barrier for students attending school in Mexico City. Additionally, students from marginalized communities may face discrimination and lack access to resources, making it difficult for them to succeed academically. Students from indigenous communities in Mexico face significant barriers to accessing and completing higher education (López Delgado, 2016).

Poor academic preparation is another significant pull factor contributing to university desertion. Many students enter university with inadequate academic preparation, particularly in the areas of mathematics, science, and reading. On the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment exam, Mexican students performed far below the OECD average, ranking 61 out of 78 in mathematics, 57 in science, and 53 in reading (Aguayo-Téllez & Martínez-

Rodríguez, 2020).

The socio-economic challenges mentioned above also contribute to inadequate academic preparation and limited access to early educational opportunities. Torres Carrillo (2020) notes that many students who drop out of universities in Mexico attend schools with limited resources, inadequate curriculums, high rates of teacher absenteeism, and low rates of teacher training.

| Method

The current research was carried out applying a mixed-method approach, which allowed for a deeper understanding of the problem than a purely qualitative or purely quantitative inquiry (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Maxwell, 2010). Furthermore, an explanatory case study was chosen as the central organizing principle in the methodological design to look at how and why desertion occurs. This process suited our objective to have a more accurate description of the facts, alternative explanations, and more precise understanding to allow us to come to some conclusion on the issue (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010). As in every case study, two key criteria must be considered. The object of study should be (1) clearly delimited and (2) viewed from multiple perspectives to guarantee a well-rounded examination of the phenomenon (Blatter & Haverland, 2012; George & Bennett, 2005; Thomas, 2015; Yin, 2018). Regarding this investigation, the two undergraduate degree programs in Teaching English and Teaching Spanish as a Second Language at the Department of Languages (known for their Spanish abbreviations as LEI and LEES, respectively), University of Guanajuato, delimited the boundaries of the study, while comprehensiveness was ensured through the application of three different data collection techniques: documental analysis, an online survey (see appendix) and a series of semi-structured interviews.

During the first stage of data collection, a documental analysis (Perchinunno et al., 2019) was completed on the

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enrollment statistics from the two programs. By inspecting these statistics, we hoped to discover patterns in the data that might highlight the causes of desertion and help us build a profile of the students who left their studies. This first phase revealed that of the 448 students who had enrolled in the English teaching BA, 201 dropped out, another 90 did not finish their final graduation projects (although they had obtained all their subject-based credits), and 157 received their diplomas. Regarding the Spanish teaching BA, of the 166 students who enrolled, 59 deserted, 44 left without terminating their final projects, and 63 earned their diplomas.

The second data collection instrument was an online questionnaire (Brace, 2018; Krosnick, 2018), which is the focus of this article. It was applied on the MS Forms platform and distributed on social media. The invitation was also sent out to our former students in a blind-copied email. In addition to two biodata items regarding the participants' names and sex, the questionnaire included 17 multiple-choice and closed questions relating to the circumstances of their dropping out of the program. Out of the pool of 394 possible participants, including 291 English teacher-trainees and 103 Spanish teacher-trainees, 53 (13.45% of the group) volunteered to participate in the study. As for the survey participants' profile, 39 were female and 14 male, while 39 had been enrolled in the English teaching program and 14 in its Spanish-teaching counterpart. The youngest was 18 years old, and the oldest participant was 51, averaging 25.29 years. Finally, for the last phase of the research, we carried out 33 semi-structured follow-up interviews on the Zoom application.

At this point, it is fundamental to highlight that, in terms of the ethical procedures, we followed national and international guidelines (Cámara de Diputados, 2010, 2017; World Medical Association, 2013), specifically concerning the scientific requirements and protocols of research, including informed consent, the privacy, and confidentiality of the participants, as well as the publication and dissemination of the results.

The overall research project on two BA degree programs regarding desertion was done in three stages: first, we carried out descriptive documental data analysis with quantitative and qualitative results (Zimányi et al., 2022); then, we turned our attention to the information gathered through the questionnaires (an online survey), which is the focus of the present publication); finally, we carried out 33 semi-structured interviews, which we will report on in a future contribution. As a whole, we collected a rich data set due to the amount of data involved, complicating its triangulation within one single article, as it falls outside the scope of the present publication.

To carry out the data processing and analysis of the survey results: 1) we read and organized the open-ended qualitative responses as narrative in an Excel sheet, 2) we classified and color-coded the responses received according to salient and recurring themes, 3) we analyzed how many themes were mentioned by all the participants, 4) to see the number of times themes were brought up, we counted how often each theme was mentioned, 5) we tallied up the number of recurrences for each theme in the data. As per Kuckartz (2014), we conducted a deductive-inductive process to code our data from the qualitative survey results.

Through the synthesis of these results, we have been able to gain an overall perspective on the phenomenon under review (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Greene et al., 1989; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Yin, 2006), which will facilitate designing specific corrective measures to help more students complete their degree program.

| Findings and discussion

In this section, we present and comment on the results from the online survey we applied to fifty-three (53) participants.2 First, we furnish general quantitative descriptive information that, in broad strokes, paints a picture of our students' employment situation and their general

reasons for leaving the programs. Next, we discuss in somewhat more detail the data taken from the qualitative section of the survey.

Quantitative and qualitative descriptive information: Even though the participants had not completed their LEI or LEES BA program, more than half of the respondents (40 out of 53, i.e., 75.5%) were working in the field of education at the time they responded to our survey: twenty-four (24) were English teachers, two (2) were teaching an L2, eight (8) were teachers but did not specify the subject, three (3) were language schools administrators or coordinators, and three (3) were running their private language schools, leaving only thirteen (13) survey respondents working in areas unrelated to teaching.

Due to the high demand for English teachers in Mexico and the fact that language teaching is essentially unregulated, it is relatively easy for English speakers to find work as instructors without a BA in the field. Twenty-one respondents (39.6%) said they had not been asked to provide proof of their degree to secure their job, while thirty-two (60.4%) said they had been asked for such proof. Because it is possible to find employment without a degree, many LEI students are offered work while still in the program. Some leave their studies to work full-time and do not return.

When asked if they would be interested in returning to the program to complete their BA degree, most participants responded positively: almost 60% (31 of 53) indicated they would like to receive their diploma. Results from the top-down imposed multiple-choice section of the survey show that the leading causes of desertion had to do with socio-economic (22), personal-familiar (22), and affective-emotional (19) issues. Furthermore, participants mentioned academic (11) and administrative (8) factors. The qualitative results from the survey's three open-ended questions shed more light on why respondents dropped out of their programs. (The interview results will be explained in a follow-up article). For the present analysis, we grouped emergent themes into nine categories: 1) administrative issues; 2) employment obligations; 3) econo-

mic hardship; 4) family circumstances; 5) unforeseen life events; motivational factors, which were categorized as either 6) a loss of interest in the BA program or as 7) a loss of interest in the language teaching profession; 8) mental health issues; and 9) poor academic performance. We also considered the findings in terms of their PULL and PUSH factors.

For many students, program abandonment is related to the BAs previous requirement that, unless they had a grade average of 9.5 or higher, students had to complete a thesis or professional memoir to graduate. Twenty-two of the study's participants (more than 40% of the total) identified their inability to finish the thesis as a reason for dropping out. This factor is no longer relevant for current BA students, as the university has since ceased to require a thesis. However, for the ex-students who are the focus of the current study, there is still the possibility that they can return, finish their work, and graduate.

#1) Administrative issues, an apparent PUSH factor, were mentioned by eleven (11) participants. One participant reported that an administrative error made it impossible for him to complete the LEI.

> *Hubo un error administrativo en el ofrecimiento de materias cuando estaba en 5to o 6to semestre que no me permitió terminar con todos mis créditos de manera acorde al finalizar los 8 semestres. (P. 35)*

Another respondent had issues with the validation of his studies outside of Mexico. Ultimately, the University SIIA (*Sistema Integral de Información Administrativa*) expelled him from the program.

> *Tercer semestre, necesitaba revalidar mis estudios en el extranjero y la universidad me dio de baja del programa. (P. 18)*

Several ex-students recalled problems with meeting degree requirements.

> *Cuando al recibir los resultados de mi 4to TOEFL no llegue al puntaje. (P. 49)*

#2) Employment issues and obligations were mentioned by 21 respondents, who recalled the difficulty of balancing their professional responsibilities with classes and

homework, finding it challenging to find a balance with their workload. It is significant to state that the LEI program is offered on weekends, with classes on Fridays and Saturdays. Therefore, it is common for students to work as English teachers while also attending to their full load of classes and other demands simultaneously. Student workload (a PULL factor) can represent a significant barrier to degree completion.

> *No hay suficiente tiempo para cumplir los requerimientos docentes de las instituciones donde se labora tiempo completo y tantas tareas. El programa está supuestamente diseñado para docentes, solo porque se asiste 2 días a la semana, pero en realidad hay un exceso de tareas, en las cuales, los que somos docentes, se nos hace complicado trabajar tiempo completo, cumplir con los requerimientos laborales y además encontrar el tiempo suficiente para cumplir con las tareas. (P. 4)*

> *Al finalizar la licenciatura tuve una gran carga de trabajo. Me asignaron más grupos y más tareas, y le fui dando más importancia a mis responsabilidades laborales. (P. 12)*

> *Tenía problemas en el trabajo, tenía que mantener el trabajo y las carreras. Trabajaba y estaba en dos programas de universidad, tenía que hacer muchas tareas y no tenía tiempo. Estaba muy saturado. (P. 14)*

> *Siempre he estudiado y trabajado y los horarios de mi carrera no me ayudaban mucho. (p. 53)*

From an institutional perspective, the time problem cannot be easily resolved. Offering more financial support could help to alleviate some of our students' financial pressure. Naturally, money is limited.

Economic hardships, and family obligations and circumstances are often related, so we are presenting those two themes together with examples of the participants' results.

#3) Difficulties deriving from **Economic hardship** (a PULL factor) were reported in the data by nine (9) students.

#4) Concerning **family obligations** (another PULL factor), thirteen (13) participants reported that taking care of their families was challenging. We are presenting these

two categories together as they are usually directly intertwined. One participant, a mother, mentioned the economic instability she faced as she struggled to take care of her child and work at the same time:

> *No tuve la estabilidad económica para solventar mis gastos escolares ni básicos. Mayormente fue por no contar con dinero para costear mi semestre, y se me hacía pesado cumplir con algunas tareas y trabajos entre semana ya que era atender mis estudios, el trabajo, los estudios de mi hijo menor y sus necesidades. (P. 32)*

For the following LEES student, the fact that her father underwent surgery forced her to leave the BA temporarily.

> *Mi entorno familiar y mi perfil personal no son lo que se dice "ideales" para estudiar una carrera a tiempo completo y además rendir en el trabajo. La razón más pesada, para mí, es la familia. […] Ahora, llevo un año de retraso en el programa, pero espero con todas mis fuerzas, regresar pronto. […] Mi papá tuvo una cirugía y eso aunado a que mis horarios eran un caos y sentía que no podía rendir al 100 en el programa hicieron que muy a mi pesar me diera de baja temporal. (P. 5)*

The participant mentions time pressures, economic hardships, and family obligations. This response illustrates the difficulty of clearly demarcating the causes of school abandonment since variables are often highly interrelated.

In another case, a student stopped receiving support from her parents and was told to return to her city.

> *Mi familia me pidió regresar a mi ciudad, pues ya no me apoyarían más (económica y moralmente). (P. 6)*

Similarly, family problems obliged the following student to return home to care for her mother, which in this case has to do with both family situation and economic hardship.

> *Estaban por operar a mi mamá de cataratas y regresé a cuidarla, después encontré trabajo como profesora particular de español. (P. 46)*

Another student had to help support his family economically because of the passing of his father:

> *Terminé mi tesis y al poco tiempo papá falleció. Tuve que*

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doblar esfuerzos en mi trabajo para poder apoyar a mi familia. Nunca pude concluir el proceso de titulación. (P. 47)

The cases above underscore how difficult it is for a university program to support students. Many factors that drive desertion frequently fall outside the scope of institutional capabilities. It is possible that more onsite counseling and additional scholarships might help students cope with the pressures they feel with their outside program obligations. Nevertheless, in truth, there is very little a university can do to relieve economic and family pressures.

#5) Other PULL factors have to do with **unforeseen personal life events**, such as pregnancies, health issues, and job opportunities. Nineteen participants mentioned leaving the BA because of unforeseen issues in their lives. For instance, one participant reported that she had an opportunity to move her business to a foreign country.

Mi negocio consiguió financiamiento y gané una visa de emprendedora, para irme fuera de México. No fue por insatisfacción con el programa, pero era y es lo que tenía sentido para lo que quiero profesionalmente. (P. 9)

Several female students had to leave the program because they became pregnant during their BA studies and could no longer cope with their academic responsibilities.

En mi quinto semestre, me salí porque estaba embarazada y no podía seguir yendo a clases. (P. 3)

One respondent reported that she had to leave the BA because of an accident.

En el último semestre de la carrera tuve un accidente en auto el cual me dejó inhabilitada. (P. 28)

In addition, some participants were offered an important opportunity at work:

Fue un evento preciso, yo quería seguir estudiando, pero cuando me llegó esa oportunidad era algo que no podía desaprovechar. (P. 7)

Las principales razones fueron, la primera: en ese momento, mis dos hijos hablaban muy poco español y estaba siendo difícil encontrar una escuela donde estudiaran en Ingles. Y la segunda, se presentó una oferta de trabajo en el extranjero. (P.15)

Another thematic category concerned **motivational factors**, which we divided into two distinct classifications. Three students attributed their **loss of motivation to a loss of interest in the profession** (a PULL factor).

#6) Eighteen (18) students reported **losing motivation in their studies** because of problems with their BA program (a PUSH factor). For instance, one student responded that they lacked the support of their teachers and program coordinator.

Los maestros no apoyaban a los alumnos a superarse, todo estaba en contra de los alumnos. Si uno daba una queja al coordinador de maestros, él apoyaba a los maestros no importa cuál fuera la queja. (P. 27)

Another ex-student also mentioned her dissatisfaction with her program. She reported that her classes were boring and monotonous, and she was frustrated by the lack of modern methods and teaching material. She complained that the workload and homework in the program were excessive. Moreover, she did not have internet access at home and could not download homework assignments and reading materials.

El nivel académico no me pareció el adecuado y las clases eran monótonas y sin material de apoyo para la enseñanza, incluso se tornaban aburridas pues las mismas radicaban en que el maestro acudía a leer sin que existiera una explicación sobre el tema en estudio […] Las horas de trabajo que debías dedicarle fuera del salón eran excesivas (elaboración de demasiados reportes, demasiadas lecturas, etc.). La mayoría del material de lectura, lo enviaban por correo electrónico y yo no tenía internet en casa (P. 26)

At the start of her BA in LEES, while doing homework and reading in the library, one student came to realize that this was not the right program for her. She also said that some of her classes were not taught by teachers who lacked adequate teaching skills, which could be considered a "PUSH" experience.

Al principio de la carrera, porque me sentía mal y no sentía que estaba en el lugar adecuado. Además, ciertas materias no se desarrollaban debido a un perfil incorrecto

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del docente. La especialidad y enfoque del docente no cuadraban con la materia que impartía. Estaba haciendo una tarea en la biblioteca y me dije a mí misma "¿Qué diablos estoy haciendo aquí? ¡Subrayando y leyendo algo que no me interesa!" (P. 24)

#7) On the other hand, three (3) participants dropped out because they became **disheartened by the language teaching profession**. They came to realize how little value and recognition language teachers receive. In this sense, they felt "pulled" from the program by a societal disregard for L2 instructors. One participant wrote that she lost her love for teaching English after becoming a practicing teacher. She felt her work was not well-paid and appreciated:

Nunca me salí de la carrera, solo decidí no terminar mi tesis. Decidí no terminarla porque poco a poco me di cuenta de que no me gusta la carrera que elegí ya que en el ámbito laboral nunca podré aspirar a ser más que una maestra de contrato que gana no más de 150 la hora y no tiene ningún beneficio que por ley debería tener […] Me cansé de que en ningún trabajo me dieran a mí y a mi materia la importancia que merecía. En cualquier institución por lo menos del estado de Guanajuato, que es donde he laborado, nos ven como la clase de "chocolate". (P. 22)

Another participant likewise stated that although she liked the LEI, she realized that the English teaching profession was poorly remunerated. She referred to the "enslavement" of language teachers in Mexico.

Me encanta la carrera, pero es muy mal pagada, se trabaja demasiado es esclavizante aquí en México y se invierte mucho tiempo haciendo tareas y estudiando en un programa que es de muy buena calidad para luego vender mi tiempo a empresas que se aprovechan del empleado ya que no existe un colegio regulador de los salarios de los egresados. (P. 3)

#8) Mental health and emotional hardships are a crucial thematic category. In ten (10) cases, participants mencionaron mentioned that the former made it impossible for them to continue their studies. The category of mental health can be viewed from both PUSH and PULL perspectives, depending on the sources of psychological difficulties. One wo-

man recalled losing a loved one, which made it emotionally and psychologically challenging to pursue her studies.

Salí del programa a los dos meses de iniciar con el segundo semestre, decidí desertar porque había pasado por muchos problemas psicológicos que me llevaban a creer que yo no sería capaz de terminar mi carrera y que no era un alumno lo suficientemente bueno para estar en la Universidad de Guanajuato. Principalmente acababa de lidiar con la partida de una persona muy importante en mi vida, me sentía sola y sin ánimos de acudir a ningún lugar, comencé a dejar de lado mis obligaciones como estudiante. (P. 21)

Another participant alluded to the fact that he felt emotionally incapable of continuing with the LEES program. He faced personal problems with his family and his girlfriend. Comments he received from some teachers exasperated his feelings of depression, which became so pronounced that he considered suicide.

Comencé a tener problemas con mis padres y con mi novia de ese entonces, aunado a eso hubo comentarios de profesores que me hicieron entrar aún más profundo en mi depresión, pues me hizo sentir insuficiente para la carrera. Todo eso pasó en un lapso muy corto de tiempo y al mismo tiempo fue cuando toqué el punto más bajo de mi depresión, incluso considerando el suicidio. (P. 42)

Emotional health problems and psychological difficulties could be reduced by providing more psychological and counseling services within the organization of the university to cope with the high needs of the student population.

#9) Poor academic performance was also mentioned by eight (8) participants in the survey results which meant that these students were experiencing difficulties complying with their study program requirements.

No es que haya desertado, terminé los semestres y materias, pero terminó mi plazo para concluir la licenciatura y es por eso que no pude acreditar el idioma y aplicar 2 extraordinarios pendientes. (P. 41)

We understand that academic issues are to be expected in higher degree programs which can be considered from

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both PUSH and PULL viewpoints. A deeper analysis of each situation would be needed to make that distinction more clearly.

| Conclusions

The purpose of the current study was to better understand the causes of student abandonment from two BA programs: the BA in Teaching English, and the BA in Teaching Spanish as a Second Language degree courses. Our study implies that the present findings will be used to help students achieve their academic goals of finishing the degree. We ponder that identifying causes of university desertion is of little or no value if the findings are not placed in the service of increasing graduation rates.

There are, however, at least two challenges to doing so. The first is a methodological issue that makes it challenging to code the data into separate or unrelated themes. As we have presented, there are many causes of desertion, and many of these are closely associated with other causes. The causes seem to be intertwined and entangled, difficult to pull apart. Outside socio-economic pressures, for instance, can negatively impact course completion, which can, in turn, affect motivation and psychological health. Problems like these may be further exacerbated by a lack of support from teachers and by family problems. The entanglement of determinants problematizes the clean, clear delimitation of causes.

The second challenge has to do with the fact that many dropout factors are simply impervious to easy solutions. For instance, fully sixty percent of respondents mentioned either outside work commitments or unforeseen life events as the reasons they could not continue their educations. Unfortunately, from an institutional perspective, there is very little that can be done from the inside to mitigate these pull factors.

The fact that answers are challenging to locate and clas-

sify does not mean, however, that academic programs are powerless to do anything. The university regulations have in recent years given the opportunity for dropouts to come back and continue their BA. In the case of the present LEI program, the authors of the current study are involved in efforts to encourage students to return to university and finish their degrees, which will be reported on in future publications. Some of the issues faced by the students are out of our control from within the institution. Fortunately, there are certain things within our power allowing us to bring students back to complete their studies.

| Notes

[1] There is considerable debate among those researching the causes of educational abandonment regarding terminology. Nomenclative choices hinge on such issues as polysemy and etymology. In Acevedo's (2021) brief review of the matter, the author identifies 14 ways in which school abandonment is referred to in the literature: desertion, dropout, stop-out, stopping, withdrawal, departure, attrition, leaving, abandonment, dismissal, quit, exhaustion, non-persistence, and non-completion. Each of these words carries different connotations and applies to a different context. In the current research, all such words are used interchangeably.

[2] In the narrative inquiry tradition, and out of respect for the context, the data quotes have been preserved in the language they appear in the original questionnaire. The participants' responses have been edited lightly only for the sake of orthographical and grammatical clarity.

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