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DETERMINANT FACTORS TO DROP OUT AND REASONS FOR STUDENTS WHO CHOSE ELT AS A SECOND OPTION TO STAY

A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF:
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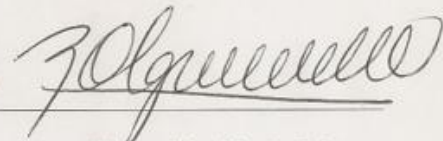
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Abstract

This research goals was to identify the main factors influencing dropout in higher education, precisely in the career of English Language Teaching, at the same time it was to explore the reasons that made students stay to obtain their degree even though ELT was not their main choice to study. Researchers of this topic have developed and showed a great amount of non-related and related school factors as well. Some significant factors are highlighted in the results explaining dropout such as: difficulties faced with subjects, dislike of the school program, perception of job opportunities and economy solvency, on the other hand results explaining factors to stay such as: opportunities the university offers and better job and studies opportunities if the career is completed.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Rationale

Drop out can be considered as one of the main concerns at any private or public university not only from Mexico, but worldwide as it is generally thought that the society expects students to get a degree and contribute in as many ways as possible to make local economy grow (Santos, 2001). When there is a high rate of drop out consequently there is a low percentage of graduate students. This can be a problem of low rate in education. Such is the case of a program of English Language Teaching in a Public University in central Mexico where the dropout rate is particularly high.

In order to face this current problem, universities have their own graduate retention programs to give students the facilities and comforts with the purpose of motivating them to finish their studies. This is not the final solution, even when universities try to retain students; there are many factors that lead students to drop out. These factors may vary according to the university, career and even the student himself. The purpose of this research is to identify the principal and common factors that lead students to drop out and stay in the LEI focusing on students who chose LEI as a second option.

For example, as university students we had the opportunity to witness closely diverse cases which led our first-year college classmates to make a final decision to no longer attend classes and finally dropping them out. One of the cases that highlighted was one of our closest friends who came from United States and as opposed to the majority of students who enroll in to learn English language, he already had well-developed skills due to being an English-speaking person. Because of this fact he had no interest at all to

conclude his degree at the LEI (Licenciatura en Enseñanza del Ingles) but he was more interested in a Management Company career. He happened to think the LEI would be a sort of English private course without considering this career is mainly focused on learning how to teach a second language which he did not feel comfortable with and this finally led him to drop out.

There was another case we were able to witness, a classmate who chose this career with the purpose of merely learning English as well as a third language. He wanted to study an international relations career, but unfortunately, he was not admitted, in contrast with the first case, he barely had contact with a foreign language; this made it more difficult for him. However, this did not end up being a bad experience because it made him strive for his goal which was obtaining a bilingual job as soon as he could. After all, he gave up as he found attending classes a waste of time for him and set out to learn English on his own.

In our own experience, there was a time when we thought about dropping out because of our personal issues adding the fact that we were not sure if we had the vocation of being a teacher. But we loved languages and we had already studied more than a half of the career; however, the main reason that led us to persist and finish was the teaching experience we had with the subjects such as; teaching experience with children, teaching experience with teens and adults. Standing in front of students and doing the social service where we had to translate and transcript many documents was significantly a positive experience. We consider that no one knows how liking teaching actually happens until it happens.

Likewise, there are some cases in which students decided to stay. For that reason, we wanted to investigate more and develop a focus group with seven participants who

chose this career as a second option. Two of these participants were taking the last subject of the curriculum. This means that they would conclude their studies earlier than the others. For this reason, we think it is important to address in a brief form these two particular cases to present the counterpart of drop out.

The case which most stood out comes from a student who decided to study music as a first option and then decided to study English at the same time. She opted for LEI career because the language was not so difficult to her. After a while, she began to feel like quitting. She did not know what the curriculum was focused on. She thought she would study many languages and travel, but she bumped into subjects related to the teaching area just as pedagogics and didactics. It is worth noting that these subjects are mainly taught in Spanish. For this reason, she began to doubt about whether to continue or not. Teachers always asked her about her main reason to study there, to what she responded she wanted to learn languages. Teachers said she was wrong "she had to be teacher". So, she felt no support and lost motivation.

Despite she did not want to be teacher, she found great opportunities attached to the LEI career which led her to remain studying. She got interested at the international student exchange programs and the Spanish teaching programs. The student said she took it as a challenge; she aimed to finish something already started. At that time, she said it was just under obligation, but after giving her first classes in the subjects of teaching experience with children, teenagers and adults respectively, she found out that it was not that bad to be teacher. That was a worthy reason for her to finish this career.

1.2 Significance of the study

As students from a language teaching school, we were interested in knowing more about what our classmates' expectations and perceptions were about the career because many of them decided to leave their studies even when they had already accomplished two academic years long of the career curriculum. On the other hand, we wanted to know why other classmates decided to continue studying even when they had chosen this career as a second option.

It is important to know the factors which arise from this phenomenon as future language teacher who can innovate with useful strategies to make students more comfortable in school in that way; we can help students and make them think of the consequences of dropping out.

We consider that this research is useful and relevant both for the school in which we study and as for academic purposes as this research has identified dropout factors which can be taken into account by the school, in that way a solution can be implemented and eventually mitigate this current problem.

1.3 Theoretical context of the research

The areas that are related to our research are: drop out and permanence in Higher education, English Language Teaching in Mexico, Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation and Self-determination theory.

Many theories about human motivation are mostly based on a basic tendency; people tend to perform better when rewarded. However, this traditional concept is falling behind and becomes more obsolete. Ryan & Deci (2000) elaborated the Self Determination

Theory (SDT) which explains that all human beings have three main psychological innate needs, and when those needs are fulfilled, we are motivated, more productive and happier.

Such theory explains the three psychological needs; competence which entails the will to become more effective in dealing with the environment we are at. Autonomy, having the sense of free will when doing something out of our interests and values. Finally, relatedness which implies interacting, being connected to and caring for other people.

1.4 Location of the research

This research was focused and carried out of an English Language Teaching bachelor (LEI) Licenciatura en Enseñanza del Inglés at a well-recognized public university; Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla "BUAP". The participants who kindly accepted to be involved in this research were seven LEI students and 5 other people who were once enrolled in this bachelor. The LEI program mainly entails to develop and improve teaching skills that go along with pedagogical techniques to perform a high-quality language teaching session. The context, program and profile of participants perfectly matched our research needs.

1.5 Research Aims

This research is mainly focused on exploring the reasons that lead students to drop out and in some cases finish school even though it was not their first career option. Thus, it is important to define the difference between persistence and retention, according to Hagedorn (2012), the National Center for Education Statistics defines "retention as an institutional measure and persistence as a student measure" (p. 6). That is, institutions attempt to retain students and students attempt to persist. For this research our participants

will be students which have chosen LEI career as a second option and decided either to persist or not.

We aim to know what the true reasons were and the why this type of students chose this career and why they decided to stay even if they were not convinced about this degree. Therefore, we will use mixed methods which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approach which according to Hancock B., Windridge K., and Ockleford E. (2007) focuses on how people or a specific group of people can have different ways of looking at reality, usually social or psychological reality. By using survey strategies and phenomenology research the information will be clearer about the dropout phenomenon as well as staying reasons.

The purpose of this research is to investigate what factors make English Language Teaching students drop out of school as well as the reasons that made students who chose ELT as a second option stay to conclude their career.

The specific objectives of this research are:

To determine the most important reasons to dropout and retention factors.

To identify the school characteristics that motivated students to continue their studies.

1.6 Research questions

The goal of this research is to answer these questions:

What are the reasons that lead students to drop out of an ELT career?

What are the reasons that make students who chose ELT as a second option to stay in a second-choice career?

CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is about the theoretical framework of our research, we will give a general overview of the topics and subtopics that are relevant to our study, and each section is significant to answer our review question.

The first section will briefly define what is education in Mexico and how it is organized, it will take a look at the national development plan of Mexico in order to know what is expected about education in the current governmental period, also this section will delineate the general fields that are appropriate to our research which are; Higher education in Mexico, English as a foreign language in Mexico, language learning, language teaching and finally drop out.

The second section will centralize the main factors of dropping out and the third section will describe the counterpart of the problem focusing on the retention factors and programs.

2.1 Education in Mexico

It is well known that education is the cornerstone of any society, because it is the major resource to guarantee a future and a great social development. In Mexico, the education system is organized into three levels: *Basic Education* which involves kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school; U*pper Secondary Education* which involves high school; *Higher Education* which involves technical, bachelor's degree, specialty, master's degree and doctorate. All of them administered by the Ministry of Education, the Secretaría

de Educación Pública (SEP) which is also responsible of creating, scheduling and designing all educational plans and school standards.

According to the National Development Plan (NDP) of Mexico (2013-2018), the educational system should be improved to fit for the needs of a globalized world. A country with quality education demands to implement new state policies that guarantee the right of having a quality education available for all, fortify the articulation between educational levels and link them with the scientific area, the technological development and the productive sector with the aim of generate a quality human capital that detonates the national innovation.

The NDP establishes the importance of reducing drop out in higher education as there are 3.3 million of students entering to college which represent the 29.2% of the entire population; the NDP also highlights the significance of implementing favorable retention programs in the educational system.

2.1.1 National Development Plan

The national development plan of Mexico has the purpose to settle down the national objectives, strategies and preferences about the integral and sustainable development of the country.

The current national plan established by the President Enrique Peña Nieto's government has as a general objective the development of the maximal potential of the nation turning it into a rights society where every citizen has the effective access to all rights granted by the National Constitution.

As general objectives the NDP looks five National goals: Mexico in peace; Inclusive Mexico; Successful Mexico; Mexico with global responsibility; Mexico with

quality education. In this research, we will focus on the last goal (Mexico with quality education) to define what it is expected about education in the current government administration (Mexico, 2013).

2.1.1.2 Mexico with Quality Education

The aim of this proposal is to guarantee the integral development of every Mexican and drive students to their best human potential. This goal seeks for the increase of education quality to have everyone get the opportunity to write their own success story. In order to get closer to our principal research aim it is important to define all development plans addressed for education that will drive us to a less general outlook of our topic.

2.1.2 State Development Plan (Puebla, 2011-2017)

The educational sector is strategic in every social and governmental activity, for this reason it is important to increase the attention required by all educational levels improving the usage of the new technologies and communication resources, that's why the major goal is to give everyone equal opportunities and make education in Puebla renew. In its election platform the State Development Plan (SDP) presents the reasons why changes and improvements are needed in the different indicators of the state, there, we can find education. In the election platform different proposals are made with the purpose to improve education, culture and sport taking into a count the percentage of educational voids in the state, according to the CONEVAL (National Council for Evaluation of Social Development Policy by its Spanish acronym) the population percentage with educational delays is 24.1% in the state, that is 1, 4 million of people. In addition, in concordance with INEGI (National Institute of Statistic and Geography by its Spanish acronym) information, 274k inhabitants of Puebla can neither read nor write. For this reason the SDP establishes

the need for increasing the opportunities for students who attempt to enter college with the purpose of reducing drop out and encourage retention (De Puebla, 2011).

2.1.3 Institutional Development Plan (BUAP, 2013-2017)

(Avilés & Hernández) Evaluate the educational approach in the upper secondary and higher education is a significant step to fasten relevance, quality, coverage and international rating with participation of all university community. The specific objectives of the BUAP Institutional Development Plan (IDP) are:

- Increasing the number of graduate students per educational program, level and school modalities.

- Strength the student support programs as the tutoring or mentoring with the purpose of reduce the rates of educational delays, drop out and school failure.

2.1.4 Institutional Development Plan (Facultad de Lenguas, 2017-2021)

The deployment of new strategies and actions on the work plan to maintain strengths, lessen weaknesses and take advantage of the areas of opportunity is one of the main objectives of the school IDP which has as general administration policies the importance of boosting academic development of every area of the school; taking advantage of infrastructure and equipment; endorsing a friendly and healthy environment; giving priority to students, teachers and administrative staff above any process. In general, the IDP aims to improve the school characteristics (making a better curriculum, evaluating teachers, improving infrastructure, etc.) which have an influence on students about deciding to drop out or not (Azcárate, 2018).

2.1.5 Higher Education

According to Santibañez, Georges & Razquin (2005) higher education is mostly delivered at large public universities. In addition to the large national higher education institutions each state has its own state university or state teachers' college. Public universities are autonomous, which means that even though they are publicly funded, their administrative and educational management is left to university boards and officials.

Higher Education could be obtained in Mexico in state and private institutions, which prepare technical workers with high university degrees, bachelors' degrees, specialists, masters and doctors. Higher Education Institutions occupied themselves in the following activities: teaching, scientific, humanitarian and technological researches, conservation and promotion of national Mexican culture and traditions (Zhizhko 2015). The Mexican Higher Education System is represented by more than 1500 state and private institutions, such as universities, autonomous universities, technological universities, technological institutes, research institutions, postgraduate education institutions, pedagogical higher education institutions, etc. All of these institutions are part of National Association of Universities and Higher Educational Institutions (Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior). Private Higher Education Institutions are part of Federation of Private Higher Education Institutions (Federación de Instituciones Mexicanas Particulares de Educación Superior).

2.1.6 English as a Foreign Language in Mexico

English as a foreign language (EFL) is used for non-native English speakers learning English in a country where English is not commonly spoken. In Mexico, English is very important because in the competitive job market, speaking English is a necessity not an

option. English is the language of business and globalization. English opens more doors in the world because it is the dominant language worldwide, as the British Council in Mexico (2015) establishes in their research about English in Mexico:

> The Sub-Secretariat of Basic Education acknowledges the necessity to incorporate English as a subject to the curricula of pre-school and primary education, and make suitable adjustments to secondary school English curricula, with the purpose of facilitating the instruction of this foreign language in all three levels of basic education. This is designed to ensure that by the time students complete their secondary education, they have developed "the pluri-lingual and pluri-cultural competence necessary to successfully handle the communicative challenges of the globalized world and respect their own culture as well as that of others".

2.1.7 Dropout and Retention

There are differences in the two concepts of dropout and retention as they are both two extremes of a continuum. On the one hand, retention occurs when a student enrolls in school until its completion. He studies full-time, and graduates in about four years or depending on the length of the career. This is called normal progression, a stayer, or retained student (Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013). On the other hand, when the student enrolls on school but leaves before graduating and neither takes his studies back nor returns to any other school is considered a dropout or a leaver (Glennie, Bonneau, Vandellen & Dodge, 2012)

Traditionally, there is a negative perception when it is said a student has dropped out of school as this word has been coined and represented as an undesirable event which

leads to the idea of error and failure. As expected, a deserter is a person in most of the cases a student who has disappointed the community and society (Álvarez, 1997)

Researchers have found the dropout concept both contradictory as confusing with regard to the factors that cause leaving higher education. Tinto (1989) has analyzed other researches which maintain that students do not leave school because of the lack of the student's capacity but the students who are the most intelligent have a greater tendency to dropout.

According to Vélez (2004) who carried out a desertion research in the Social Communication and Journalism Faculty in the University of La Sabana, Colombia found that dropping out from higher education is a current, serious and worldwide existing problem being faced in universities of Latin America, Europe, and North America, being these universities both public and private.

In accordance with the National Development Plan 2013-2018 the enrollment in higher education had a 3.3 million student rate which represents coverage of 29.2%. Inasmuch, as the enrollment in Higher Education rate increases and the desertion in High School rate decreases, the enrollment in university will be greater. Regarding to higher education dropout has been considered as a pressing concern to universities, government, parents and academic staff. For example, in countries such as Spain, United States, France and Austria the rate of desertion ranges between 30% and 50%, while in Germany, the rate is between 20% and 25%, Switzerland between 7% and 30 %, Finland 10% and Netherlands between 20% and 30%. All these results prove that this existing desertion problem must be eradicated from higher education as soon as possible (Vélez, 2004).

In this research on one hand we state the dropout problem as the phenomenon which makes students cast aside their studies because of related factors either academic or social without ever attending classes at this or any other school. On the other hand, we state student retention as the student who decides to stay to complete his studies and obtain a certificate or diploma.

2.2 Student Retention Theories

Factors related to student retention in higher education have been the subject of an enormous amount of research over the last decades (Braxton, 2002). Some theories of student retention have been developed by researchers to identify and analyze the factors involving student retention, and the majority of these derive from studies within the US higher education system. They are mentioned below.

2.2.1 Self-Determination Theory

Deci & Ryan (2000) determined as a Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a broad framework for the study of human motivation and personality. SDT articulates a meta-theory for framing motivational studies that defines the causes of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and a description of the respective roles of intrinsic and types of extrinsic motivation in cognitive and social development and in individual differences. The SDT propositions mainly focus on how social and cultural factors facilitate people's sense of willingness and initiative, in addition to their well-being and the quality of their performance. Conditions supporting the individual's experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are mainly considered to foster the most volitional and high quality forms of motivation and engagement for activities, including enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity.

2.2.2 Student Integration Theory

Tinto (1993) has suggested three main conditions, which need to be met in order to achieve student persistence. The first condition is that students should have access to retention programs, which aim to support them rather than the institution. The second condition is that retention programs need to not only focus on a particular student population, such as low-income or minority students, but instead to focus on all students. The third condition is retention programming. A successful retention program must offer a degree of integration for students in both social and academic communities.

The essential points of Tinto's (1993) student integration theory are social and academic integration in relation to a student's commitment to the institution and/or outside efforts. Students bring to university prior schooling, skills and abilities. When these three things are combined, they lead to a set of commitments, goals and intentions from and to an institution. In other words, students are aware of what they want to achieve prior to their enrollment in their first academic year. This means that institutions must set out student expectations, which in turn, aid student success. It is also very important that students have the ability to develop social and academic integration skills in both informal and formal ways. Formal academic integration includes researching topics in the library, attending labs and classes and engaging in various activities related to academic success. Informal academic engagement is equally important and includes student interaction with both staff and faculty. Student interaction with staff and faculty members outside the class hours can have a positive effect on student retention. Such interactions can have a normalizing effect on students' socialization to the attitudes and values of their institution.

Interactions like these can also lead to an increased bond between students and their university (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1983). In terms of social integration, informal social integration involves interaction with peers, whilst formal social integration involves extracurricular activities. Higher levels of interaction can lead to higher levels of student persistence and graduation (Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto's (1993) student integration theory, if students manage to have informal and formal social and academic integration, they can re-examine their commitments, goals and intentions from and to the institution, and see them as external commitments. External commitments are considered to be personal desires, family, jobs and peers mainly outside the university environment. Based on these commitments, and levels of success and integration, students can decide if they want to remain at university. Dropping out, in this context, means the student leaves that particular university, rather than abandoning higher education altogether. Tinto (1993) also states that when students access university, they incorporate a set of background characteristics.

These characteristics involve individual attitudes, pre-entry attributes and family background. Individual attitudes include gender, race, age and aptitude. Pre-entry attributes include characteristics such as qualifications and achievements. Family background characteristics include family education level, family expectations and family social status.

This set of characteristics directly affects students' initial goals and institutional commitments. Students' goal commitments address the extent to which they are motivated to enter university and students' institutional commitments describe the extent to which they are committed to graduating from a particular university.

2.2.3 Retention factors strategies

Every school no matter what level of education administrates should develop and work on retention programs, therefore effective strategies must be included in those programs in order to be successful and have higher retention rates which would lead to a greater number of graduate students.

For instance, Roberts and Styron (2010) conducted a research at the University of Southern Mississippi in which they consider there are 7 factors that can greatly influence students' retention: academic advising is the first factor to consider, they consider this might be the most important aspect in retention as this involves direct interaction and engagement with the staff of the school. The next factors are social connectedness and student involvement, social connections make students have a bond with other students to achieve the same goal; graduate of school. It is crucial for students to involve in school activities and organizations; they show reluctance to leave after joining school activities.

A student that is adequately provided with school information is more likely to persist to graduation; faculty and staff approachability is other factor that offers the student the opportunity of interaction to make him feel more comfortable when having an interaction with a professor or career advisor. In order to conclude any school level, students must go through an established process, the researchers found that institutional procedures is a factor in which student can feel overwhelmed even become disillusioned when students have an unsupportive experience with school units like advisor or administration offices.

Learning experiences is the sixth factor standing out in the research; overall the school and mainly the classroom are the places where students begin to engage with other

students and school staff. Roberts and Styron (2010) mention that the classroom is where retention initiatives would take place. Lastly they found student support service as the last factor, they think that having an academic support center for developing their skills can help ensure students.

2.2.4 Dropout Factors

Álvarez (1997) states that there is misguided idea at assuming that the student is the main source of the dropout action and thinking that this pupil makes mistakes due to endogenous features leading student to clash in a very easy way with the academic system, out of adjustment by elements of its own, the student is indeed the carrier of limitation, but is not itself the cause.

There are different reasons which may lead students to have either a temporary or definitive dropout as behind this dropout there are factors influencing such as academic, social and motivational factors. However a research carried out a few years ago detected more factors that provoke students' dropout; Himmel (2002) led a research in which he was able to discover factors such as economical, psychological, sociological and organizational and interactional, making the former have a connection between student and the school.

Dropout factors have been broadly investigated and different researchers have a dissimilar point of view about these factors. Specifically there were two groups of authors who explained the reasons they considered were the most relevant to drop out. These authors (Jordan, Lara & McPartland, 1994) determine the students can be led to dropout because of push out, pull out, or fall out factors. Jordan, Lara & McPartland (1996) clarified that push and pull factors lobby the students. On one hand, it is understood as a push factor when this involves unfavorable situations within the school environment

resulting in dropout. As the push out factor can be interpreted as academic factor a brief explanation will be given; this entails any academic related situation such as tests, discipline policies, attendance and also poor behavior. On the other hand, the pull-out factor is defined as the aspect inside the student diverting him from graduating. All this happens when the student faces economic problems, out of school unemployment, illness, family issues and changes, marriage, pregnancy or even childbirth making these reasons an important problem for student to concentrate on his studies.

Later on, a third factor was added by Watt and Roessingh (1994) who called it falling out factor, this takes place when the student does not show an academic development in school and the encouragement and illusion starts decreasing making student stop from school completion. Principally, the difference that is pointed out in push factors is; the school turns into the main cause of dropout as the student can be detached from school as a result of academic disengagement, behaviors and finally leading as previously said to definitive dropout when it comes to pull factors the students is involved in extracurricular activities which make him distracted from studies. As a final point, the falling out factors involves circumstances which cannot be handled by the school or by the student resulting in a bad communication with school and eventually in dropout.

2.2.5 Academic Factors

As said before, there may be different, if not, hundreds of factors that may cause students leave their studies and stop from completion. Vélez (2004) said the act of dropout most of the times is not in the student himself but his environment such as the academic factors. These include the curricula offered, positive interaction either in the class itself or out of the class, vocational orientation, advising, general skills programs (e.g., basic skills, study

skills, math, and English tutoring/help centers), campus resources (e.g., computer, library, athletic, college union), teacher absenteeism, certainty of major, and academic integration. Factors affecting minority students may include warm classroom climate and faculty role models, and those affecting nontraditional students include the expectation for individual faculty member attention.

2.2.6 Environmental Factors

In comparison to academic factors, these are out of the student's control. They range from financial resources, which most of the times it ends up being the most significant reason why students leave school, to family responsibilities, illness , marriage , and a job off school which clash the school schedule. Factors affecting minority students also include the availability of grants.

2.3 University Student Retention

Retaining a student is fundamental to the ability of an institution to carry out its mission. A high rate of attrition is not only a fiscal problem for schools, but a symbolic failure of an institution to achieve its purpose. To reduce attrition, some institutions have their own retention programs where students receive academic support in order to conclude their studies.

2.3.1 Retention Factors

Lofstrom (2007) carried out a research in which students whose economic, social and educational level is higher are the least likely to leave college, while students who find difficult to obtain one of the former aspects are the most likely to leave. On the other hand, community colleges, regardless of their quality or value, are the lowest status institutions and have the lowest rates of retention.

Other essential factors discovered in previous research conducted by Makuakane & Hagedorn (2000) identified academic performance as a predictor for college persistence is greatly considered in college matriculation and retention. In their study, they found that grade point average was the most significant predictor of persistence for both liberal arts and vocational community college students of Hawaiian ancestry, while financial aid was the second most significant predictor.

In addition to academic performance, student attitudes and satisfaction also have a great effect on retention. Nes, Evans, & Segerstrom (2009) found that willingness and academic optimism were associated with better motivation and adjustment, reduced dropout rates, and better grades. They determined that with increased self-efficacy and a belief in a positive outcome, students can succeed in the academic world, regardless of whether or not they are optimist.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

3.1Introduction

The objective of the following chapter is to provide information about the approach and research methods that allowed us to carry out our study. In addition to that, the participants and the collection data process that was followed will be presented. This research used a qualitative approach as this facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. Creswell (1994) adds that one distinctive of a qualitative research is the social phenomenon being investigated from the participant viewpoint. The qualitative case study approach was chosen due to the wider opportunities range to explore through the individuals' experiences.

3.2 Setting

This research was carried out at Faculty of Languages of BUAP which is a public and highly prestigious university located in Puebla City, this faculty offers a bachelor degree in English language teaching where students develop and acquire skills to become teachers. The population that was part of this research was only current students and ex-students of the same career and the same faculty in order to explore their experiences. The location was chosen due to the environment related to our topic which is dropout and permanence from ELT. It was mainly focused on this bachelor as we are students of ELT.

3.3 Participants

In this study, we identify two groups of participants, the first group of participants decided to stay due to different reasons in spite of no having chosen this career as first option which means this group of people is still enrolled in the career. On the other hand, the second

group of people that participated in the study called droppers, decided to drop out of the career due to diverse causes that are further explained.

The participants consisted of two groups: the first group was formed by seven students whose decision was to conclude their ELT. Four of those participants are about to finish their curricula and the remaining participants are students taking research seminar II which is one of the last subjects of the career.

This group was previously detected in the classes we attended to and where we had the opportunity to meet these people whose experience was quite the same what we went through. At school, there is a social environment which allows you to get along with other students and share these types of experiences. These students faced the same situation; they were feeling like dropping out, lack of motivation and regardless of these they decided to finish the career. That is why we made the decision of taking these students into account for our research.

The second group consisted of 5 people who used to study the same career but whose decision was to drop out due to different circumstances. At the beginning of the career we felt like dropping out but at the end we did not due to personal reasons. Eventually, we found interesting this career and decided to stay on the opposite these people did not find the reasons to stay. These 5 participants used to take class with us, in that way it was easier to locate them, and therefore, we are interested in exploring the factors which made them leave. Finally, we made them part of this research.

3.4 Instruments

Considering the needs of our research, we designed two instruments to collect data: a questionnaire and a focus group. The questionnaire was applied to the group of participants that were considered droppers. The focus group was applied to the group of people whose decision was to conclude the career, the stayers. Both focus group as questionnaire instruments were applied in Spanish which is the mother tongue of most participants, for the second group a native English speaker was involved therefore the questions were asked in English. The purpose of having an instrument designed in Spanish was for participants to express their immediate thoughts and experiences more easily. The following section will describe why these instruments were selected to explore the drop out causes as well as the factors to conclude the career.

3.4.1 Focus Group

Focus group is a form of group interview that capitalizes on communication between research participants in order to generate data. Although group interviews are often used simply as a quick and convenient way to collect data from several people simultaneously, focus groups explicitly use group interaction as part of the method (Kitzinger, 1995). This means that instead of the researcher asking each person to respond to a question in turn, people are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view which in this case explores the factors related to dropout as well as concluding the career in spite of having chosen this bachelor as second option. In addition, Morgan (1997) explains that focus group project includes a number of decisions about how the data will be collected. Considering the

impact and nature of the data, the first decision concerns with who will participate in the groups. The next decision determines how structured the groups will be, including the level of moderator involvement. After that, there are further decisions about the size of each group and the number of groups in the total project.

Considering the above definition, we designed a set of questions for the focus group. This instrument was elaborated by deciding first who our participants would be; we had previously detected the students being part of our research, finding a recording device, setting meeting particulars such as facilities and date and selecting the proper questions to reach our research questions goals. The questions are mainly focused on their involvement through the career and what contributed to their decision to stay, reasons to choose ELT, if teaching changed the perspective on ELT. (See appendix A).

3.4.2 Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a set of systematically structured questions used by a person whose interest is in a certain topic for the purpose of collecting information from a group of respondents which may also be self-administered, posted or presented in an interview format. O'Leary (2014) defines it *as* the process by which the researcher collects data through a questionnaire. On the other hand, a *questionnaire* is the instrument for collecting the primary data. *'Primary data'* by extension is data that would not otherwise exist if it were not for the research process and is collected through a questionnaire or interview (Cohen, 2013).

Questionnaires are frequently used in quantitative researches considering their facility to obtain information from bigger groups, perhaps, we decided to use a qualitative approach due to some difficulties we had at the moment of bringing the 6 participants

together. According to Rivano Eckerdal & Hagström (2017) the answers to qualitative questionnaires consist of memories, opinions and experiences. Most archives working with questionnaires have regular informants who have enrolled because they are interested in sharing their knowledge of and views on everyday life.

An open-ended mail questionnaire which is easy to complete and allows questions and answers to be well thought out was elaborated in order to explore the participants' responses. This questionnaire was sent to the respondents and they would answer at their own time, based on their own understanding. It is not as controlled as with the case of a standardized interview. The general outline of this questionnaire was structured around four basic questions: (1) what led to you dropping out of school? , (2) In your opinion what could have stopped you from dropping out? (3) Which factor do you consider influenced the most on your decision to drop out? (4) Was it your first option? If so, why did you select ELT? (See appendix B).

They can be carried out face to face, by telephone or e-mail and provide a relatively cheap, quick and efficient way of obtaining large amounts of information from a large sample of people. Data can be collected relatively quickly because the researcher would not need to be present when the questionnaires were completed (McLeod, 2018).

Considering the above definition, we designed a qualitative questionnaire with open-questions in order to obtain in depth answers out of a small number of participants. This instrument was designed; first, by researching on how questionnaires work and the best way to use them, having done that, the second step was to set the factors we wanted to explore so that the questions included the key to provide a better explanation about drop-out reasons. It was hoped that those questions would lead the participants to widely express

their experiences. The questions were elaborated to find the reasons that made students leave their studies such as economic, personal, pedagogic; extrinsic or intrinsic motivation, and family, institutional or social factors. (See appendix B).

3.5 Data Collection

The instruments we decided as most useful to collect our data were a focus group for stayers and a questionnaire for droppers. In stayers' case our participants agreed to be part of a focus group, on the other hand, for our droppers' participants we decided to send a questionnaire via internet due to some difficulties when setting a date to make a face to face interview. The following sections will describe how data was collected for both scenarios.

3.5.1 Data collection from focus group

Mainly, the interaction that focus groups allow to have between researchers and participants is more flexible and comfortable. Besides being a data collection method. Our data is collected through a semi-structured group interview process having them moderated by a group leader. A variety of data was collected in an attempt to answer the research questions. Data was collected during a week in the language school. During this time we had the opportunity to talk to our participants and ask for their participation, and then a date was scheduled to apply the instruments.

The focus group took place on Wednesday, September 28th, from 12:30 to 1:35 pm. For the focus group, a classroom was assigned in consideration of avoiding any noise or distraction in the school. At the moment, we carried out our instrument the participants were informed in advance that, according to the type of the instrument we were applying we would need to record the session and they agreed. During the session, participants were

placed in a semi-circle and a chair in the middle on which we placed two electronic devices to record their responses.

The classroom was provided by a classmate who used it for social service. All participants agreed with the recording of the session. The focus group was carried out using the participants' mother tongue in order to get a convenient environment. At posing the questions to participants, they felt comfortable sharing their experiences and commenting about other's answers.

Before the instrument was applied, a previous schedule was set as well as the questions were previously elaborated and validated by our thesis director. The questions posed were a total of 9.

3.5.2 Data collection from questionnaire

Five participants were contacted via Facebook and asked for their participation, after they agreed; we tried to schedule a date to perform a focus group but we failed in our efforts because all of our participants had different schedules since they were not attending school anymore. That is why we went ahead to elaborate a questionnaire and ask them to answer, once done, they sent it back to our email. Once we received all data from our participants we proceeded to analyze it.

3.6 Data Analysis

At this point, the type of analysis was selected, which allowed to carry out this research, the data analysis consists of studying the information obtained from our instruments, and this information is linked with our main goal as to answer our research questions. Finally, once the information of each instrument had been processed the adequate examination of each

instrument was made as well as the translation of participants' answers to English, given that instruments were answered in Spanish.

3.6.1 Data analysis of focus group

The first step to organize our data was to record our participants responses. Secondly, we had to transcribe the audio previously recorded; we had a total of 10 pages of transcription. Finally, we listened as many times as needed to detect the most important patterns and place them in a chart. This research method strongly helped us to explore the reasons why they enrolled in such career. The table below shows a summary of the responses of the students who stayed. According to their perception they described three main aspects. They are; the reasons to choose a career, their perception for students dropping out and the reason to stay (see table 1). These categories will be explained in detail in chapter four.

	Reasons to choose a career	**Did you consider dropping out of the career? Why?**	**Reasons to stay**
Student 1	Easiness	No	Avoid time wasting
Student 2	Comfort	No	Language certification
Student 3	Future work	Yes, economic solvency	Learn more languages
Student 4	Future work and personal needs	Yes, teaching dislike	Avoid time wasting
Student 5	Languages liking	Yes, teaching dislike	Intrinsic motivation

Student 6	Languages liking	Yes, teaching dislike	Avoid time wasting
Student 7	Easiness and travelling	Yes, teaching dislike	Commitment

Table 1: Stayers focus group data analysis

3.6.2 Data analysis of questionnaire

This section describes the analysis of the questionnaire applied to the group of students who dropped. This group was formed by the participants who did not conclude their studies in ELT bachelor. The main goal was to discover the main reasons that made them make a final decision on their higher education status and the table below shows a pattern of each response of the students who dropped out. The analysis of the questionnaire was also structured following key question: (1) main reasons to drop out (2) likelihood to stay (3) possible factors for dropping out. In order to analyze the data, we read carefully the responses each of the participants wrote. We divided the patterns to make a better analysis and take it under a drop-out-factor category, we finally took into account the patterns that stood out the most and placed them in a table. The participants' responses are summarized below in table 2.

	Main reason to drop out	**Likelihood to stay**	**Possible factors for dropping out**
Participant 1	Teaching aversion	School program	Intrinsic motivation

Participant 2	Pregnancy	Better future planning	Time Schedule
Participant 3	Extrinsic Motivation	School program	Extrinsic motivation (Money)
Participant 4	Teaching dislike Competence	School program	Intrinsic motivation
Participant 5	Teaching dislike Economic factors	Economic solvency	Economic factors Competence

Table 2: Droppers questionnaire data analysis

The most remarkable reasons found in our first and most important category were teaching dislike, followed by economic factors, extrinsic motivation; as to what a teacher can earn in a public or private school, pregnancy and lastly the ability to perform as a teacher. Our second key question gave patterns which stood out the most relevant was the school program which is linked to those participants who chose teaching dislike, next pattern was economic solvency and make a better planning about social and school life. The last key question provided patterns such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, economy solvency and time schedule.

This chapter described the methodology and instruments used for this research. As to those results, they will be further explained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV RESULTS

4.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter presents the results of the study from the participants, both the students who chose English Language Teaching as second option and decided to complete the career and former students who dropped out of the career and stopped their studies completion.

4.2 Research questions

The purpose of this section is to respond to the research questions that guided this study: A) what are the reasons that make students who chose, English Language Teaching as a second option conclude the career? B) What are the reasons that make students drop out of an English Language Teaching career?

4.3 Reasons for students who chose ELT as second option to stay

This section will present the results from the focus group instrument. This segment has to do with the responses of students who chose ELT as second option and decided to stay, the reasons such as avoid wasting time, obtain a language certification, acquisition of more languages, intrinsic motivation and commitment were detected and will be better explained in this chapter. Each student from table 1 will have a code assigned; e.g. Student1= S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7. The code will be present in the reasons to stay explained below, which indicates the student related to that factor.

4.3.1 Avoid time wasting

Fortunately, the results showed a sort of positive and valid reason. This pattern refers to productivity students have through university life. It does not necessarily mean to get things properly done but about using their time wisely, being more productive and avoid time wasting can help them advance in their career and personal goals. Time wasting at this point refers to staying at home and doing nothing at all except for leisure activities.

Three out of seven students (S1, S4, and S6) agreed on preferring to stay and conclude the career instead of wasting the time and dedication they put during 4 career years. It would have been a great waste of time as they were advancing in their curricula map.

4.3.2 Language Certification

A language certification is an international standardized test that measures language proficiency. Being able to demonstrate foreign language skills is currently becoming a must for a growing number of students who aspire for a better job as most companies require mastering a language; especially if the career is based on teaching, or for a student exchange program. Having a language certification can be a significant plus on a resume and open up a great variety of job opportunities. Only one out of seven students (S2) found having a language certification as an opportunity to stay as this would come in handy in the future.

4.3.3 Acquisition of more languages

This is the process by which people acquire the capacity to perceive and comprehend language, in other words, to gain the ability to be aware of language and to understand it, as well as to produce and use words and sentences to communicate. Different

goals cross student's minds, being a polyglot or proficient in a variety of languages is one of them as they can be use them for plenty of reasons such as traveling, work or business, music, films, arts, culture or even take it as a challenge. One student (S3) gave the response "*I just want to learn more languages as I consider that will be useful in the future*".

4.3.4 Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation refers to behavior that is driven by internal rewards. In other words, the motivation to engage in a behavior arises from within the individual because it is naturally satisfying. This occurs when we act without any external rewards and simply enjoy an activity or see it as an opportunity to explore, learn and update our skills. One student (S5) whose motivation grew out of his daily activities where he once saw a blind girl at our same school, making him think over the difficulties the girl deals with to learn a language. His motivation was to conclude the career as his greatest achievement and feel that personal satisfaction, obtain knowledge and succeed.

4.3.5 Commitment

It is defined as the act of intellectual or emotional binding to a course of action. In other words, making a commitment involves dedicating yourself to something as a person, activity or cause. Before committing to anything it must be thought carefully as it puts a sort of obligation on such commitment. Some of more used commitments are marriage, job, plans and school. Our participant's reason (S7) to stay was based on her obligation she felt with her parents; throughout the career they were her main economical and emotional support, she did not want to let them down by dropping out that is why commitment was

her main reason to stay. These are the factors we detected from students that stayed to conclude their career.

4.4 Reasons that make ELT students drop out

This section will present the results from the questionnaire applied. This segment has to do with the responses of students who enrolled in ELT and unfortunately dropped out, the reasons such as teaching aversion, pregnancy, extrinsic motivation, teaching dislike, ability to perform and economic solvency were detected and will be better explained in this chapter. Each participant from table 2 will have a code assigned; e.g. Participant1= P1, P2, P3, P4, P5. The code will be present in the drop out reasons explained below, which indicates the student that is related to that factor. It is worth to mention that P3 questionnaire was asked in English so none of his answers needed to be translated.

4.4.1 Teaching aversion

Aversion to something or someone is related to a negative feeling experienced by a disillusion. This feeling can have many characteristics; those are usually linked to pain, anger or sadness that is caused by certain events. When doing an activity we enjoy it is supposed to be done by expecting great results, on the contrary, it will lead to an unsuccessful activity. This was the first reason found that made a student (P1) drop out. This was his response *"I just did not feel like standing this anymore, although I liked teaching I found a job and I rather have money instead of studying a career I do not like."* He did not find the school program inviting, his lack of information about the benefits the university can provide was clearly not an option for him because his likelihood to stay was based on his other answer *"I may have liked it if I would have travelled more to learn the language, the programs the school offers do not fit my needs".*, otherwise having

approached to teachers or departments the facility has could have changed his mind. As a worth-mentioning point (P3, P4) said that would have thought twice dropping out if school program had been more engaging to them. Unfortunately, participants did not mention an appealing point of the program; however some peers of our first generation even before we started working on this research agreed that having classes in English, German and French since the first semester and having a complete bilingual environment out of classes would have made them feel motivated and engaged.

4.4.2 Pregnancy

Defined as the time during which one or more offspring develops inside a woman, it roughly lasts 9 months and makes more troubling to do daily activities. Just one out of five participants (P2) dealt with this factor. Although there are flexible schedules to conclude the curricula finding and adjust the time to take classes made it difficult for her. She responded, *"I got pregnant and finding the time to study and take care of my child ended up dragging me away."* The reason that made her drop out is absolutely not related to school or not being fond of teaching, but she just did not plan properly her priorities. *"Although there are flexible schedules to conclude the curricula, I do not think I had the time to focus on it."*

4.4.3 Extrinsic Motivation

This factor refers to behavior that is driven by *external* rewards such as money, fame, grades, and praise. This type of *motivation* arises from outside the individual, as opposed to intrinsic *motivation*, which originates inside of the individual. Extrinsic motivation is usually defined as our tendency to engage in activities in order to gain some type of known, external reward. It is important to note that these rewards can be either tangible or

psychological in nature. For this type of motivation, the money is the most common tangible reward and (P3) confessed *"I was born where this language is our mother tongue, I did not really need to learn it therefore I was just trying to find the right use of that knowledge. Being a teacher is not as well-paid as I thought."* He came across this factor as his main reason to drop out. Learning the language and teaching was not the problem; he did not feel that being a teacher would have rewarded him monetarily as he expected.

4.4.4 Teaching dislike

Teaching involves a person who helps others to acquire knowledge, competences or values. Informally the role of teacher may be taken on by anyone (e.g. when showing a colleague how to perform a specific task). On the other hand, using the same definition of 4.4.1 about dislike and on the contrary of P1, P4 was not fond of teaching at all, it is sort of contradictory given the name of the career the participant enrolled, English Language Teaching. *"I just did not see myself teaching for the rest of my life, teaching is not what I like to do, and I am not good at it."* was the participant response and key reason to drop out. Besides participant 4 not being appealed by teaching at all, participant 5 also found this reason to drop out giving this as a response; *"I do not like teaching at all so I did not want to waste more of my time so I rather looked for a job to help my parents with the expenses, besides I do not think I am good at speaking English.*

4.4.5 Competence

It is the set of visible characteristics and skills that enable, and improve the efficiency of individual performance. Also defined as the combination of practical and theoretical knowledge, cognitive skills, behavior and values used to improve performance; or as the state or quality of being adequately or well qualified, having the skill to perform a

specific role. P4 did not just find one reason to leave but saw a second factor too, given that higher education is way more demanding and requires higher-quality standards to be met making use of all abilities learnt throughout school years *"Teaching is not what I like to do and I am not good at it. I fell behind on first subjects of curricula I also had bad grades."*

4.4.6 Economic Solvency

The economic solvency refers to the ability to meet the obligations contracted, such as being able to pay for a home, bills, a car, etc. That is, it refers to the ability of paying to comply with the relevant obligations. People who have economic solvency usually have enough money to cope with their daily or monthly commitments or debts. P5 unfortunately had not the economy solvency studying a bachelor requires *"Due to going through a hard-financial time at home I did not happen to have enough money for transportation, copies, food and what studying a career entails."* Thanks to participants answers we were able to determine the former factors described is what can make students decide to leave the career.

CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS

The following chapter concludes this research. A summary of the study is presented, and findings of the research are shown. The significance of this research about the reasons that made students drop out of an ELT career as well as the factors that chose ELT as second option and decided to conclude ELT are exposed.

5.1 Summary

The purpose of this research was to observe the phenomenon of dropping out of an ELT program as a thoughtful going-on problem, it was also noticed the different factors that led students to stay and conclude the career even though ELT was not their first option. This study worked along with the self-determination theory that stood out in the theoretical framework based on dropping out as well as student retention theory focused on students who stayed in the career. The study made use of a focus group and questionnaire as instruments to better explore such factors. It was found that many different reasons trigger student to make bad or well-thought decisions that can eventually influence on their future.

5.2 Main Findings

Although students set out to achieve a goal, their purposes can sometimes be overlooked with the rest of their planning, many schools know dropping out is a current problem seen in many countries and even though they happen to have a retention program it does not always work as we could find in our results. As to dropping out we found patterns extracted from our questionnaire instrument that we consider can be managed in advance in order to avoid this phenomenon. Such patterns are teaching aversion, pregnancy, and extrinsic motivation, teaching dislike, competence and economic factors. On the other hand, as to

retention factors detected taken out of our instrument; focus group, we discovered that factors influencing a change of mind are: avoiding time wasting, obtaining a language certification, acquiring more languages, intrinsic motivation and commitment.

5.3 Limitations

Throughout the research, we came across some limitations especially as to exploring drop out factors because that population no longer attended school, the challenge was to find those participants as they have other activities to fulfill but at the end we managed to be in touch with them to make them part of the study. The need to interview a larger population was the main limitation as our participants only consisted of 5 former students. A quality sample can be carried out by the number of participants as a larger sample results in better representation of the population as well as a clearer analysis. As a result of a low number of participants and the difficulty of meeting them, the second limitation of dropping out population was the instrument. As to retention factors, we did not face a challenge since that population was still attending classes and was easier to meet as well as the use of the instrument, although a larger number of participants would have been preferred. Access to official dropout rates from ELT would have helped us as well in the development of the research.

5.4 Recommendations

In order to get a deeper exploration why students drop out of ELT further research needs to be carried out. The necessity to entirely understand students' perceptions is crucial when it comes to drop out rates. The suggestions for future research would be to interview a larger population of drop out participants and students who stayed to conclude the career, the use of another face to face or a more in depth interview to provide clearer analysis of responses

is recommended for droppers. Another recommendation would be to investigate another theory related to motivation or drop out factors besides Self Determination Theory used in this study.

On the other hand, as to retention, we suggest early identification of high-risk dropout students and the creation of a monitor school retention program, this could get students to commit more and avoid failing in the curricula, this could eventually lead to a better graduate students' rate. Another recommendation would be to remind students that academic support is reachable at any time they need. The assistance of tutors, learning materials, group works, and instructional moments provided by teachers will never be rejected.

5.5 Implications

Despite having work experience and knowledge of the work field, there are some droppers that find it difficult to apply for a job because of the requirements nowadays most companies require, showing in the CV that high school education has not been concluded can be a very important point to take into account for companies to offer the job vacancy because it is known that people with higher levels of education have less difficulty to find a job. Students who drop out are more likely to be unemployed than students who have a diploma. Dropping out is not the smartest choice a student can make, that decision turns substantial and they may regret that choice later in life. In other words, if students do not conclude the career, there will be a low number of professionals which it can, eventually, affect the economy of the country. As to students who decided to stay in the career this can be the smartest choice ever made because the accomplishment of this degree will come in handy and will be crucial when it comes to finding a job or have a better future. We also

think the school should start their own fresh strategies to increase their graduated students' rates; designate or start a staff group that can address dropout student concerns in a specific department, a change in the curricula with more appealing subjects, implement the career for German language teaching would attract more students, we do not consider that English is antiquate or boring nor the faculty strategies are obsolete, however if the school wants to improve their retention rates and have successful students they need to work on the identification of dropout factors and address them as soon possible.

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APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

¿Por qué decidiste estudiar esta carrera?

¿Fue tu primera opción?

¿En algún momento de la carrera pensaste en desertar?

¿Cuáles eran tus motivos?

¿En qué momento decidiste quedarte y por qué?

¿Qué te motivó a continuar con la carrera?

¿Qué percepciones tenías acerca de esta licenciatura al recién ingresar?

¿Qué factores de la licenciatura te motivaron o te facilitaron a permanecer en la carrera?

¿Estudiar esta carrera hizo que cambiaras de opinión acerca de la docencia?

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONS

¿Esta carrera fue tu primera opción?

¿Por qué escogiste LEI?

¿Qué te llevó a salirte de la carrera?

En tu opinión ¿qué consideras que pudo haberte detenido para abandonar LEI?

¿Qué factor consideras que influyó más para que dejaras la carrera?

Basado en tu propia experiencia ¿qué recomendarías para reducir la deserción escolar?