

Student Dropout and Academic Management: Critical Factors for Institutional Effectiveness in Universities

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the association between academic management and student dropout rates at a university in Lima, Peru, aiming to identify critical factors to enhance institutional effectiveness. It is grounded in key concepts such as curriculum planning, teaching-learning processes, comprehensive student support, and institutional resources, contextualized with previous research highlighting the importance of social and academic integration in reducing student attrition. A quantitative, non-experimental, correlational approach was utilized with a sample of 270 students, collecting data through Likert-scale-based questionnaires and analyzed using Spearman correlation and regression techniques. The results revealed a significant positive correlation ($Rho=0.577$, $p<0.001$) between effective academic management and lower dropout rates, indicating that curriculum planning, comprehensive support, and support resources are determinant factors. The discussion links these findings with previous studies and emphasizes the need to consider socioeconomic and emotional factors. The research provides practical guidelines for implementing university policies aimed at optimizing academic management and promoting student retention.

Keywords: Academic management, student dropout, higher education, student retention, University of Lima

INTRODUCTION

Student dropout in Peru's universities has become a critical problem that impacts students' personal development as well as institutional effectiveness. This situation has a negative impact on the future of students, hindering their professional desires; In addition, it means a failure for educational

institutions, which see their effectiveness diminished by failing to meet the objectives of training professionals.

This research aims to identify the aspects of academic management that determine, in some way, the dropout of students. The university, as a training entity, has the responsibility to implement strategies that facilitate access, continuity and completion of studies. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how academic, financial, and emotional support programs can minimize dropout rates.

The rationale for this study is based on the need to improve the quality of education and ensure that students successfully pass their academic courses, thereby promoting the economic and social progress of a nation. A detailed analysis of the problem will enable higher education institutions to improve their academic management.

The phenomenon of student dropout is conditioned by a series of situations, with academic performance being one of the most referred. Students who demonstrate poor performance during the initial phases of their educational trajectory are more likely to interrupt their studies. This low performance is associated with the lack of basic academic preparation or difficulties in adapting to the requirements of higher education, thus initiating a cycle characterized by a decrease in motivation and reluctance towards educational progress.

A key element, necessary to take into account, is the degree of social integration in the university environment. Lack of social support and inadequate interpersonal relationships with both peers and educators can culminate in rejection and isolation. This hostile environment, rather than fostering a sense of belonging, increases the likelihood that students will choose to drop out of college. Support networks at the personal and academic levels play a crucial role in student retention (Cruz-Campos et al., 2023).

Zúñiga (2006) describes dropout as a form of dropout, in which students who leave universities without having completed their studies are called dropouts. This phenomenon occurs when students interrupt their training, either temporarily or permanently, and those who leave before concluding fall into this category. Similarly, Tinto (2012) points out that when students have positive relationships within the university at the academic and social levels, they are more likely to stay until they obtain their degree. However, when that integration is weak, they are more likely to drop out. A better prepared society has a better chance of prospering.

Academic management is the set of processes that allows the different aspects of the curriculum to be administered, thus supporting pedagogical practice (Inciarte et al., 2010). Thanks to this management, the profile of the ideal student that each institution is looking for can be shaped. In other words, academic management is closely linked to how classes are taught, since good management of curricular resources ensures that the sessions are of quality and that the student develops according to the objectives of the institution.

Academic management refers to the set of actions aimed at improving institutional educational projects and pedagogical processes, with the aim of meeting educational needs at the local and regional level. Academic management includes aspects such as research, strategic planning of academic activities, curricular design and programming, production of teaching materials, and coordination, execution, and evaluation of teaching and learning processes (Blanco & Quesada, 2013).

Institutional support coupled with effective academic management is essential to weaken dropout rates. Universities that use proactive methodologies of tutoring and permanent advice obtain better results in terms of student retention rates. However, it is necessary to recognize that, in addition to these elements mentioned above, personal problems or the disparity between students' interests and the reality of university life that they discover can also have a significant impact on the decision to interrupt their studies, indicating that retention strategies should be adapted to the different needs of students (Kulesh, 2022).

Valencia et al. (2023) conducted research on university dropout rates in Colombia. It was framed within a quantitative methodology that used an exploratory-descriptive cross-sectional design. The main instrument for information acquisition consisted of a 37-item questionnaire, developing nine critical dimensions that contribute to student dropout. For the study, an exploratory factor analysis was performed with varimax rotation, with the aim of discerning the most significant variables within each of the dimensions. In addition, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine the internal

consistency of the dimensions. The findings showed that social integration (0.405) and family history (0.402) emerged as the variables with the most significant influence on the decision to interrupt university education. It was determined that students who had greater family support and a wide social network were less likely to abandon their academic activities. In addition, it was observed that the lack of professional guidance (29.13%) and distance from the university environment (37.08%) were determining factors that encouraged dropout. However, institutional interventions, such as academic tutoring and resource availability, contributed positively to student retention.

The study conducted by Kulesh (2021) aimed to analyze the influencing factors in freshman retention at a public university in the northwestern United States, focusing on how data-informed decisions can improve persistence. A sample of 2,766 first-year students was used, where 27% were first-generation and 20% received Pell grants. Using exploratory logistic and factor regression analyses, variables such as the use of residence cards, academic advising, and performance warnings were examined. The results showed that students with low-performance warnings or on academic probation were less likely to continue, while those who spent more than 50% of their weekends on campus and held meetings with academic advisors had higher retention rates. This underscores that social and academic interaction within the university is crucial for permanence, overcoming the influence of demographic factors. The study concludes that university policies should focus on motivating social participation and academic support to foster a sense of belonging and improve retention rates.

In a similar vein, Canty et al. (2020) promoted research to address the problem of student dropout in online higher education programs at the University of Tasmania, Australia. They implemented a collaborative strategy based on a community of practice framework. The sample included a variety of online programs, nursing, dementia care, and education, all of which are characterized by high dropout rates, attributable to the remote delivery format of the courses. The methodology consisted of semi-structured dialogues over a period of ten weeks, during which professionals from various disciplines outlined the preponderant challenges and proposed solutions to reduce dropout. Through an analysis, four main challenges were pointed out: the importance of understanding student profiles, the obstacles related to the acquisition of reliable data, the need to cultivate a sense of community among students, and the accessibility of a level academic faculty. The results indicated that students who maintained close communication with their academic advisors and participated in integration initiatives showed high retention rates. In summary, while there is no one-size-fits-all solution, the implementation of collaborative intervention methodologies, the promotion of a sense of belonging, and individualized interaction, have the potential to improve student retention.

Kehm et al. (2019) investigated the factors that determine university dropout in Europe, based on an exhaustive review of 44 studies. The dataset included studies conducted in different European countries and using international databases to determine the underlying variables that contribute to student dropout. The methodology consisted of a systematic review of quantitative and mixed-methods research, focusing on nine dimensions: academic conditions, social integration, and previous academic achievement. The findings reveal that both academic and social integration, together with institutional support, are essential to enable student retention. For example, improving academic performance and increasing satisfaction with the educational environment substantially reduce dropout rates. In short, it is necessary for universities to implement policies that promote greater integration and support for students, in addition to increasing institutional resources to reduce dropout rates.

The approach applied by De la Cruz et al. (2018) on the determinants of academic dropout in university education in the Andalusian context was a systematic review of the literature according to the PRISMA protocol (preferred reporting elements for systematic reviews and meta-analyses). This review was conducted with the aim of identifying studies published between 2010 and 2022. Two main databases were explored: Scopus and Web of Science, using search strategies that incorporated terminology such as "academic dropout", "higher education" and "causes". The selected research was adjusted to well-structured inclusion and exclusion criteria. The procedure ended with a collection of 120 relevant studies. The results indicated that the main factors that impact student dropout are inadequate academic performance, limited social support, financial difficulties and lack of personal motivation. Challenges related to pedagogical approaches, which often did not respond to the needs of students, were also identified, leading to high dropout rates. In conclusion, the incorporation of

students into the academic and social environment, together with the availability of institutional support mechanisms, represent fundamental elements to mitigate academic dropout.

The objective of the research by Zambrano et al. (2018) was to analyze the determinants of university dropout rates in the contexts of Ecuador and Latin America. The study sought to delineate the socioeconomic, educational, and psychological variables that exert a significant impact on the phenomenon of student retention. It focused on the experiences and challenges faced by students. The methodology used was based on a review of the existing literature to aggregate data related to school dropout rates and associated influencing factors. The findings make it clear that economic problems, personal and family background, as well as deficiencies in secondary education, are frequent obstacles that culminate in high dropout rates. It also highlights that the implementation of retention strategies and monitoring programs can mitigate dropout rates, as demonstrated by successful cases in Latin American countries. In conclusion, the need for universities to adopt specific programs to address these factors is highlighted, as there is a significant gap in effective policies aimed at curbing student dropout rates. The findings suggest that while there is considerable interest in understanding the dropout phenomenon, the lack of cohesive strategies and policies remains a challenge for higher education institutions.

To know a diagnosis of the relevant factors that condition university dropout in Peru, Escalante et al. (2023) conducted a quantitative approach, under a basic, descriptive and non-experimental design. The random sample was 1,950 participants. The interview technique was used, the instrument being a questionnaire validated by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (0.88), structured in ten criteria with five questions each. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics through the Statgraphics 5.1 plus software, applying Spearman's rank correlation test. The results indicate that the factors that contribute to dropout are related to economic and family problems, followed by lack of motivation, vocation and poor study techniques. A statistically significant relationship was identified between these variables and the tendency of students to interrupt their studies. The results highlight the need for higher education institutions to apply strategies that prioritize student well-being and retention throughout the educational process. The phenomenon of university dropout not only impedes the personal development of the student, but also has adverse implications in the social and economic context, which suggests the need to address this problem from a holistic framework.

In the Peruvian context, Pereyra (2023) analyzed the factors that impact the phenomenon of university student dropout in the northern region of Lima in 2022. The sample included 579 participants from four private universities in the town. The methodological approach applied was quantitative in nature, employing a descriptive and non-experimental design paradigm. To collect information, a questionnaire was administered using the Likert scale to explore personal, socioeconomic, academic, and institutional variables. The results indicated that the factors contributing to dropout were personal in nature, such as lack of motivation and inefficient time management, followed by economic factors. In addition, academic problems, including the absence of vocational counseling, were shown to be associated with institutional determinants, such as inflexible class schedules and inadequate support from higher education institutions. In conclusion, the urgent need to establish university policies that are more inclusive and adapted to the socioeconomic situations of students is highlighted, with the aim of reducing the dropout rate.

A case study examined the determinants that impact on students' university dropout (Garrido & Pajuelo, 2023). The participating cohort was made up of 113 first-year students from the Faculty of Education of the National University of San Marcos (UNMSM), located in Peru. The methodology used included surveys to collect data on the personal, academic, economic, and institutional factors that affect students' decision to drop out. The results revealed that personal factors were perceived as the most influential, with 28% of students reporting having a high level of impact, while institutional factors were considered the least influential. Among the academic factors, the most significant was the volume of academic work, which affected 67% of students, followed by career guidance and academic performance, which were also considered important. In economic terms, family income stood out as the main factor contributing to dropout, while the number of family members and economic dependence had a less significant influence. In conclusion, college dropout is a complex problem intensified by

various factors that requires collaborative efforts by institutions, educators, and families to address this challenge effectively.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative approach with a non-experimental, correlational and cross-sectional design. The research was carried out with a non-probabilistic sample of 270 students from a private university in Lima. Two questionnaires based on the Likert scale were used, each with 20 items. The variable "Academic management" included aspects such as Curriculum planning and design, Teaching-learning processes, Accompaniment and integral development of the student, Management and development of the body and Infrastructure and support resources. On the other hand, the variable "Dropout" included the Academic Dimension, Economic Dimension, Personal Dimension, Institutional Dimension and Social Dimension.

The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive and correlational statistical techniques, in order to identify the association between the variables analyzed. Tests such as Spearman's correlation coefficient (Rho) were applied to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between academic management and student dropout. A regression analysis was also carried out to examine possible predictors within the dimensions evaluated.

RESULTS

In this section of the study, the results obtained from the analysis of the data collected are presented, using statistical techniques that included both descriptive and inferential methods.

Reliability

Table 1
First variable reliability test

Variable/Dimension	Items	Cronbach's alpha	Level
Var 1: Academic Management	30	0.949	Very high
D1: Curriculum planning and design	30	0.704	Very high
D2: Teaching-learning processes	30	0.854	Very high
D3: Accompaniment and integral development	30	0.863	Loud
D4: Faculty Management and Development	30	0.850	Very high
D5: Infrastructure and support resources	30	0.844	Very high

According to the study by Tupanta et al., (2017), when analyzing the data in Table 1, it is observed that the environment and its five dimensions present a high reliability in an initial group of 30 participants, which suggests that the instrument used is reliable.

Table 2
Second Variable Reliability Test

Variable/Dimension	Items	Cronbach's alpha	Level
Var 2: Student dropout	30	0.812	Very high
D1: Academic	30	0.755	Loud
D2: Economical	30	0.843	Loud
D3: Personal	30	0.780	Loud

D4: Institutional	30	0.769	Loud
D5: Social	30	0.769	Very high

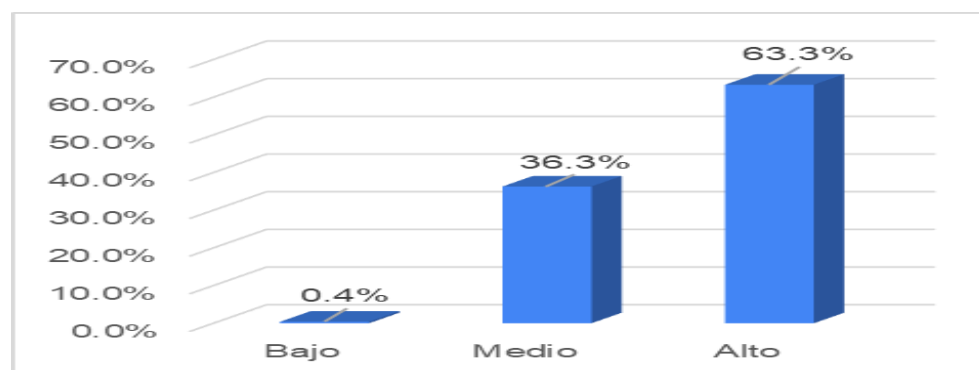
According to the research of Tupanta et al., (2017), when examining the results presented in Table 2, it is observed that the data related to the dropout variable and its five dimensions, collected from an initial group of 30 participants, show significant reliability. This indicates high confidence in the accuracy of the instrument used.

Results of the variable mean academic management

Table 3
Levels of academic management

Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Low	1	0.4%
Middle	98	36.3%
High	171	63.3%
Total	270	100%

Figure 1
Percentages of the academic management variable



At the low level, only 1 case was recorded, which represented the lowest number of participants in this category. In contrast, the medium level showed a frequency of 98 cases, constituting the majority of the sample. The high level was the most represented, with 171 cases, which corresponded to 63.3% of the total of 270 registered participants.

Table 4
Levels of the dimensions of academic management

	Curriculum planning and design	Teaching-learning processes	Accompaniment and comprehensive development	Faculty Management and Development	Infrastructure and support resources
Low	2.6%	1.5%	1.5%	3.0%	2.2%
Middle	48.5%	48.5%	42.6%	44.0%	39.3%
High	48.9%	50.0%	55.9%	53.0%	58.5%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Figure 2
Percentages of the dimensions of the academic management variable

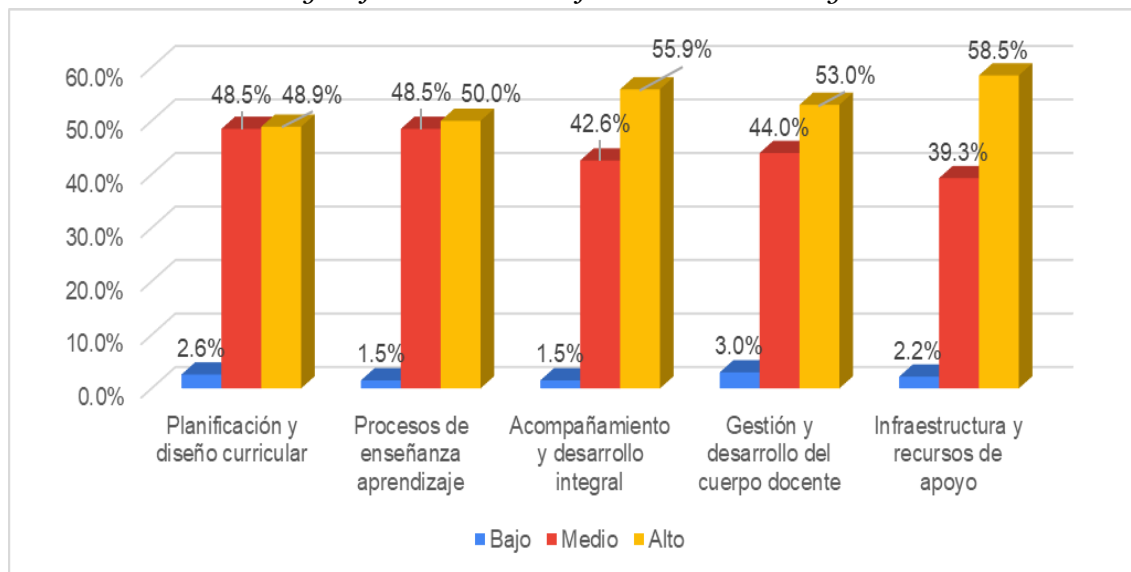


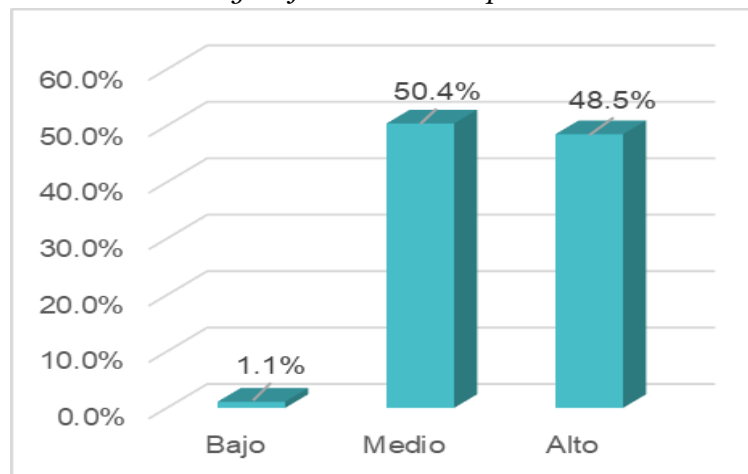
Table 4 shows that the lowest percentages were recorded at the low level in each category evaluated: Curriculum planning and design with 2.6%, Teaching-learning processes with 1.5%, Accompaniment and comprehensive development with 1.5%, Management and development of the teaching staff with 3.0%, and Infrastructure and support resources with 2.2%. At the secondary level, more balanced percentages were observed: Curriculum planning and design reached 48.5%, Teaching-learning processes 48.5%, Accompaniment and integral development 42.6%, Management and development of the teaching staff 44.0%, and Infrastructure and support resources 39.3%. In contrast, the high level showed the highest percentages in all categories: Curriculum Planning and Design with 48.9%, Teaching-Learning Processes 50.0%, Accompaniment and Integral Development 55.9%, Management and Development of the Teaching Staff 53.0%, and Infrastructure and Support Resources 58.5%.

Results of the student dropout variable

Table 5
Student dropout levels

Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Low	3	1.1%
Middle	136	50.4%
High	131	48.5%
Total	3	1.1%

Figure 3
Percentages of the student dropout variable

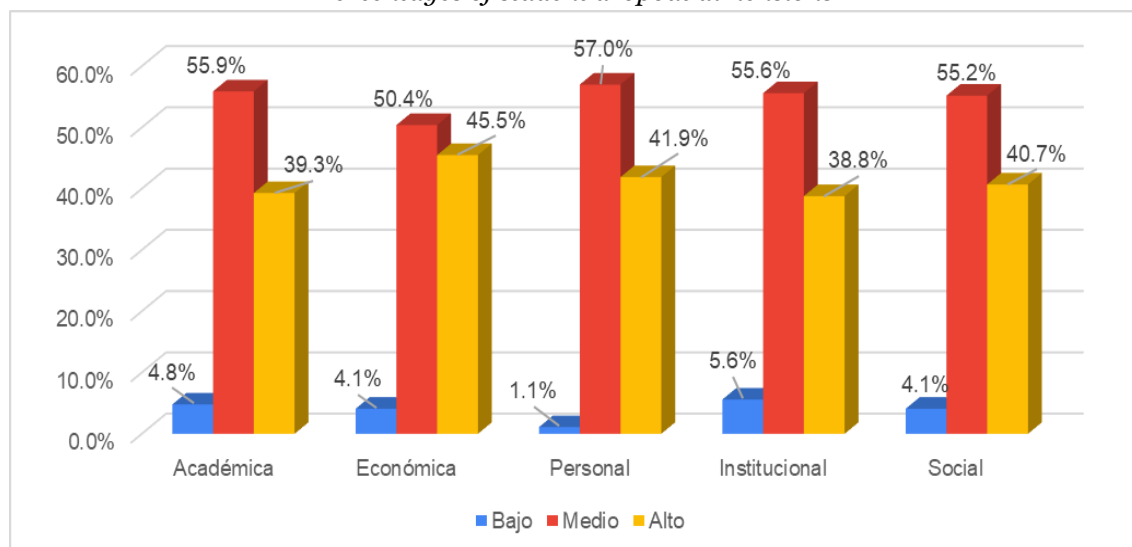


In the interpretation of the table, the low level did not register cases, which represented a percentage of 0.0% of the total sample. The medium level was the most predominant, with a frequency of 136 cases, covering 50.4% of the total of 270 participants. On the other hand, the high level showed a frequency of 131 cases, equivalent to 48.5% of the sample.

Table 6
Levels of student dropout dimensions

	Academic	Economic	Personal	Institutional	Social
Low	4.8%	4.1%	1.1%	5.6%	4.1%
Middle	55.9%	50.4%	57.0%	55.6%	55.2%
High	39.3%	45.5%	41.9%	38.8%	40.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Figure 4
Percentages of student dropout dimensions



The results of Table 6 reveal that, at the low level, the lowest percentages were observed in all the dimensions evaluated: academic well-being with 4.8%, economic well-being with 4.1%, personal well-being with 1.1%, institutional well-being with 5.6%, and social well-being with 4.1%. At the secondary level, higher percentages stood out in all dimensions: academic well-being with 55.9%,

economic well-being with 50.4%, personal well-being with 57.0%, institutional well-being with 55.6%, and social well-being with 55.2%. On the other hand, the high level showed more balanced evaluations with academic well-being reaching 39.3%, economic well-being with 45.5%, personal well-being with 41.9%, institutional well-being with 38.8%, and social well-being with 40.7%.

Table 7
Crossover between academic dropout according to academic management

Student dropout	Academic Management							
	Low		Middle		High		Total	
Levels	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Low	1	33.3	1	33.3	1	33.3	3	100
Middle	0	0	75	55.1	61	44.9	136	100
High	0	0	22	16.8	109	83.2	131	100
Total	1	0.4	98	36.3	171	63.3	270	100

Table 7 shows that, in the low level of student dropout and academic management, each category has a frequency of 1, which represents 33.3% of each level and 100% of the total in this category. At the secondary level, academic management has the highest frequency with 75 cases, representing 55.1% of the total in this category and 36.3% of the general total. In contrast, in the high level of student dropout, the academic management shows 109 cases, equivalent to 83.2% of the total in this category and 63.3% of the general total of 270 participants.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Table 8
Degree of correlation and level of significance general hypothesis

			Student dropout
Rho de Spearman	Academic Management	Correlation coefficient	0.577
		Sig. (bilateral)	0.000
		N	270

Table 8 shows a general Spearman correlation coefficient ($Rho=0.577$, $p<0.001$), indicating a significant positive correlation between academic management and student dropout. This finding is in line with what Tinto (2012) and Kehm et al. (2019) have pointed out, who highlight that academic and social integration, derived from proper management, reduces the chances of dropping out of university. Likewise, this result is in line with research such as that of Valencia et al. (2023), Kulesh (2021) and Canty et al. (2020), who highlight the importance of factors such as social integration, family and institutional support.

Table 9
Degree of correlation and level of significance specific hypothesis 1

			Student dropout
Rho de Spearman	Curriculum planning and design	Correlation coefficient	0.456
		Sig. (bilateral)	0.000
		N	270

Table 9 analyzes the relationship between curricular planning and student dropout, showing a correlation coefficient of $Rho=0.456$ ($p<0.001$). This result highlights the importance of a well-structured curriculum design to retain students, as indicated by Blanco and Quesada (2013), who argue that curricular planning must be aligned with the needs of students and the demands of the labor market.

Table 10

Degree of correlation and level of significance specific hypothesis 2

		Student dropout	
Rho de Spearman	Teaching-learning processes	Correlation coefficient	0.529
		Sig. (bilateral)	0.000
		N	270

Table 10 presents the correlation between teaching-learning processes and student dropout, with a coefficient of $Rho=0.529$ ($p<0.001$). This finding supports the arguments of Bean and Metzner (1985) and Escalante et al. (2023), which highlight the impact of innovative pedagogical methodologies and the quality of teaching on student retention.

Table 11

Degree of correlation and level of significance specific hypothesis 3

		Student dropout	
Rho de Spearman	Accompaniment and comprehensive development	Correlation coefficient	0.527
		Sig. (bilateral)	0.000
		N	270

Table 11 reports a correlation of $Rho=0.527$ ($p<0.001$), indicating a moderate positive correlation between comprehensive accompaniment and student dropout. This coincides with the results of Valencia et al. (2023), Pereyra (2023), and Cruz-Campos et al., (2023), who found that personalized and continuous support, such as tutoring and academic counseling, contributes significantly to student retention, by reducing the emotional and academic barriers they face.

Table 12

Degree of correlation and level of significance specific hypothesis 4

		Student dropout	
Rho de Spearman	Faculty Management and Development	Correlation coefficient	0.529
		Sig. (bilateral)	0.000
		N	270

Table 12 shows a correlation of $Rho=0.529$ ($p<0.001$), which indicates a moderate positive correlation between faculty management and student dropout. This finding reinforces the conclusions of Blanco and Quesada (2013), Kehm et al. (2019) and De la Cruz et al. (2018), who argue that teacher professional development and adequate academic management have a positive impact on student performance and, therefore, on their permanence at the university.

Table 13*Degree of correlation and level of significance specific hypothesis 5*

		Student dropout	
Rho de Spearman	Structure and support resources	Correlation coefficient	0.489
		Sig. (bilateral)	0.000
		N	270

Finally, Table 13 presents a correlation of $Rho=0.489$ ($p<0.001$), indicating a moderate positive correlation between infrastructure and support resources and student dropout. This result shows the urgent need for adequate institutional resources, such as libraries, laboratories and technological platforms, as proposed by Inciarte et al. (2010) and Zambrano et al. (2018).

In summary, the findings of this research verify the existing academic literature and demonstrate that each dimension of academic management has a considerable relationship in student dropout. However, when comparing these results with other international studies, it is notable that the socioeconomic and cultural environment also plays an important role. For example, Zambrano et al. (2018) perceived that financial difficulties exert a more pronounced effect on dropout rates in Latin America, while Valencia et al. (2023) highlighted that social integration is the relevant determinant in Colombian contexts. These differences indicate the need to formulate academic management strategies that are adapted to local or national circumstances.

CONCLUSIONS

Effective academic management has a considerable impact on student retention rates in the university environment. The implementation of structured and effective policies and practices contributes to a supportive environment, which enables students to overcome challenges and participate in their academic activities optimally.

The dynamics of the teaching and learning processes are relevant to decide the options of students to continue or interrupt their educational activities. Educators who apply contemporary, pragmatic and interactive pedagogical approaches often promote greater student participation and motivation. In the same way, the professional development of the teacher produces positive results in the academic environment. These characteristics indicate that sound management and the continuous and up-to-date professional improvement of educators play a key role in influencing student retention rates.

The accompaniment and integral development for the benefit of students is of utmost importance in all academic activities. Counseling and tutoring sessions allow students to face academic and personal challenges, which contributes to decreasing the dropout rate. Likewise, the structure and support mechanisms of the university are significantly related to student retention. The availability of well-resourced libraries, state-of-the-art laboratories, and easy-to-use technology platforms gives students the essential tools needed for their academic success.

In conclusion, although the correlation between curriculum planning and curriculum design is relatively weak, empirical data indicate that a well-designed curriculum, according to students' expectations and requirements, can generate significant benefits. Therefore, when the curricular content is relevant and well organized, there is a greater possibility that students will continue with their university studies.

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