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Understanding Catalan University Dropout from a Cross-National Approach



This research analyses how university dropout is addressed in America and Europe in order to design actions aimed at increasing student retention and achievement. The results show the difficulty in creating a unified approach to this phenomenon, given the diversity of research methodologies. However, it was possible to detect an impact on the lives of students and their families. It is therefore necessary for retention policies to involve improvements in the quality of educational contexts and processes.

In the last two decades, the interest shown by Catalan politicians and university managers in dropout/persistence has increased as a consequence of the improvements in access to higher education and changes promoted by the Bologna Declaration of June 1999. The dropout rate has been quantified and used as a performance indicator and a number of research studies have focused on understanding the extent of the consequences of dropout on higher education.

The aim of this study, published in the international journal *Studies in Higher Education*, is to look in depth at how dropout is being studied and dealt with in a variety of contexts, in order to help design actions to increase student retention and performance in higher education institutions (HEI). In particular, it addresses the common reasons for this phenomenon in America, Europe and, more specifically, in Spain and Catalonia, and illustrates the difficulty of measuring dropout due to different countries and organizations using different formulas

and concepts, such as desertion, retention and survival rates, among others.

Our findings suggest the importance of contextualizing retention strategies to meet the particular needs of degrees, schools and universities and understand the potential influence of national policies, managerial priorities, learning traditions and organizational cultures. The data and research evidence obtained justify the need to improve vocational counseling practices and to rethink particular policies, such as university access, induction, tutorship and fellowship programs in order to counterbalance the main causes of university dropout.

In this international review, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that despite the diversity of research methodologies, which enormously hinders any general treatment or unified approach to the phenomenon, dropout itself has a severe impact on students' lives and those of their families and, in turn, on the skills of each country's workforce.

Retention is, therefore, considered a determining factor of the prestige, credibility and economic stability of universities and, consequently, of the university system. Retention policies not only contribute to the successful completion of studies by promoting student satisfaction and engagement, but also provide major benefits to the university and to society through keeping enrollments stable in order to guarantee the university budget.

However, retention is a necessary but non-sufficient condition. Retention policies must necessarily entail not only some skills and institutional support, but also improvements in the quality of educational processes and contexts.

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References

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