


Academic evasion in the Dentistry course of a public institution and actions to mitigate student dropout

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Received: Sept 28, 2021

Approved: Oct 02, 2022

Last revision: Mar 02, 2023



Abstract The study investigated aspects of evasion and evaluated the satisfaction of freshmen in the Dentistry course at a public higher education institution, in addition to reporting interventions to combat academic dropout developed during this period. This is a study with an observational, cross-sectional, descriptive, quantitative and qualitative phase, with the application of questionnaires; and another interventionist, with activities aimed at combating evasion. 74 students were interviewed, enrolled in the first year of the course, aged between 15 and 30 years old. Data were expressed as absolute and percentage frequencies and analyzed using Fisher's exact test or Pearson's chi-square test ($p \leq 0.05$). Variables with significant association were submitted to the multinomial logistic regression model (RLM). It was observed that the degree of dissatisfaction with the course was higher among students with a lower age group (between 15 and 20 years old) and lower family income (up to 2 minimum wages). In addition, around 66% of possible dropouts had not yet had any kind of practical dental experience, while 69% of those intending to complete the course had already had some contact with clinical experiences. The RLM revealed that Dentistry not being the first option increases the probability of dropping out of the course by 7.96 times, regardless of the semester. There was also a reduction in dropout rates as interventions were carried out (lab coat ceremony, guided clinical visit and sponsorship of freshman students) were performed. It is concluded that the actions implemented to combat dropout in the Dentistry course had a positive impact on the dropout rates of the course in the analyzed semesters.

Descriptors: Education, Dental. Student Dropouts. Health Strategies.

Evasión académica en la carrera de Odontología en una institución pública y acciones encaminadas a mitigar la deserción estudiantil

Resumen El estudio investigó aspectos de la evasión y evaluó la satisfacción de los estudiantes de primer año de la carrera de Odontología de una institución de enseñanza superior pública, además de relatar las intervenciones para combatir la deserción académica desarrolladas en ese período. Se trata de un estudio con fase observacional, transversal, descriptivo, cuantitativo y cualitativo, con aplicación de cuestionarios; y otra intervencionista, con actividades encaminadas a combatir la evasión. Fueron entrevistados 74 estudiantes, matriculados en el primer año de la carrera, con edades entre 15 y 30 años. Los datos se expresaron como frecuencias absolutas y porcentuales y se analizaron mediante la prueba exacta de Fisher o la prueba de chi-cuadrado de Pearson ($p \leq 0,05$). Las variables con asociación significativa fueron sometidas al modelo de regresión logística multinomial (RLM). Se observó que el grado de insatisfacción con el curso fue mayor entre los estudiantes de menor franja etaria (entre 15 y 20 años) y menor renta familiar (hasta 2 salarios mínimos). Además, alrededor del 66% de los posibles desertores aún no habían tenido ningún tipo de experiencia práctica en odontología, mientras que el 69% de los que pretendían completar el curso ya habían tenido algún contacto con experiencias clínicas. El RLM reveló que el hecho de no ser Odontología la primera opción aumenta en 7,96 veces la probabilidad de deserción de la carrera, independientemente del semestre. También hubo una reducción en las tasas de deserción a medida que se realizaron intervenciones (ceremonia de bata de laboratorio, visita clínica guiada y patrocinio de estudiantes de primer

año). Se concluye que las acciones implementadas para combatir la deserción en la carrera de Odontología incidieron positivamente en las tasas de deserción de la carrera en los semestres analizados.

Descritores: Educación en Odontología. Abandono Escolar. Estrategias de Salud.

Evasão acadêmica no curso de Odontologia de uma instituição pública e ações voltadas para mitigar o abandono discente

Resumo O estudo investigou aspectos da evasão e avaliou a satisfação de calouros no curso de Odontologia de uma instituição de ensino superior pública, além de relatar intervenções de combate ao abandono acadêmico desenvolvidas neste período. Trata-se de um estudo com uma fase observacional, transversal, descritiva, quanti-qualitativa, com aplicação de questionários; e outra intervencionista, com atividades voltadas ao combate à evasão. Foram entrevistados 74 alunos, matriculados no primeiro ano do curso, com idade entre 15 e 30 anos. Os dados foram expressos em frequências absoluta e percentual e analisados pelos testes exato de Fisher ou qui-quadrado de Pearson ($p \leq 0,05$). Variáveis com associação significativa foram submetidas ao modelo de regressão logística multinomial (RLM). Observou-se que o grau de insatisfação com o curso foi maior entre os alunos com menor faixa etária (entre 15 e 20 anos) e menor renda familiar (até 2 salários mínimos). Além disso, cerca de 66% dos possíveis desistentes ainda não haviam vivenciado nenhum tipo de experiência prática odontológica, enquanto 69% dos que pretendem completar o curso já passaram por algum contato com vivências clínicas. A RLM revelou que a Odontologia não ser a primeira opção aumenta em 7,96 vezes a probabilidade de desistência do curso, independente do semestre. Observou-se, ainda, redução nos índices de evasão a medida em que intervenções (cerimônia do jaleco, visita clínica guiada e apadrinhamento de alunos calouros) foram realizadas. Conclui-se que as ações implementadas para o combate de evasão no curso de Odontologia impactaram positivamente nos índices de abandono do curso nos semestres analisados.

Descritores: Educação em Odontologia. Evasão Escolar. Estratégias de Saúde.

INTRODUCTION

Dropout is defined as dropping out of a course before completion, resulting from a student's decision based on their motivations, financial difficulties, personal choices, or a combination of school factors: curricular structures and pedagogical methods that fail to awaken their interest¹.

The losses of dropout students are reflected in the academy, economy, and society since they cause damage to the use of invested public resources that will not bring a return, in addition to the impact on the reduction of qualified human resources for society¹. Some studies²⁻⁴ suggest that factors such as financial reasons, dissatisfaction with the pedagogical curricular structure in the first grades, and frustration with the choice in the entrance exam can lead students to drop out of higher education.

Despite the impacts of evasion being widely known, Brazil still produces few systematic studies to obtain national data on the issue⁵, which increases the need for higher education institutions (HEIs) to carry out an adequate investigation of the profile of students and the reasons that have led them to academic evasion and demands the implementation of solid institutional programs to combat this adversity, with action planning and monitoring of their results.

When this article was written, Fortaleza, in Ceará, had nine undergraduate courses in Dentistry in progress⁶. In 2021, the Dentistry course at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC) had 410 students enrolled, 146 males and 264 females; 204 from private schools, 185 from public schools, and 21 students did not inform the nature of the school where they studied; 50 academics aged between 15 and 20 years old, 339 from 21 to 30 years old, and 21 over 30 years old.

In addition, the course has the Tutorial Education Program (PET - Dentistry), an initiative currently managed by the Ministry of Education (MEC) and aims to support and contribute to the consolidation of the political-pedagogical project of the course⁷. The PET Dentistry group at the Federal University of Ceará has 12 undergraduate students and one tutor professor and proposes, together with the course coordinator and the Pro-Rector of Graduation (PROGRAD), to implement strategies to combat dropout at the institution.

In this context, some activities are carried out by the PET group, highlighting the sponsorship and the white coat ceremony. In the first, PET students are divided into pairs, and each pair is responsible for sponsoring a group of 5 to 6 first-year students. From that moment on, students not only help new entrants to adapt to the university routine but also organize a rotation of visits to the course's dental clinics (Radiology, Oral Surgery, Laboratory Dentistry, Operative Dentistry 1, and Stomatology).

It is important to emphasize that during the visit through the clinics, the first-year students do not perform any clinical procedure and only follow the cases in progress. Thus, the activity is of paramount importance since it is a propitious moment to solve doubts about dental specialties, in addition to familiarization with biosafety principles and the routine of dental practice.

Given the growing dropout, this study aimed to analyze its aspects in the Dentistry course at the Federal University of Ceará and to outline the profile of students entering this course, in addition to reporting interventions to combating course dropout.

METHOD

The present study has an observational, cross-sectional, descriptive, and quantitative-qualitative nature and was approved by the Ethics Committee for Research involving human beings (Opinion nº 5.058.952, CAAE: 51921521.9.0000.5054). Through a preliminary survey through the application of questionnaires to assess satisfaction variables among first-year students in the Dentistry course, it was possible to correlate these factors with the dropout rate, as well as verify the results of interventions carried out (coat ceremony, sponsorship of first-year students and visits to the clinics of the University) during the analyzed period.

The target population consisted of 120 students from the Dentistry Course at the Federal University of Ceará, regularly enrolled in the first and second semesters of 2018 and the first semester of 2019, totaling three classes.

The non-probabilistic sample was obtained by convenience. In this way, the researcher responsible for this phase of the research explained the content of the questionnaires and the purpose of the study, including only those students who were in the classroom and agreed to fill in the questionnaires by signing the Term of Free and Informed Consent.

The forms were divided into two parts. The first part had demographic variables (age, state of origin, and primary and secondary education) and socioeconomic variables (family income). The second part had questions about the reasons for choosing the course, taking other entrance exams, staying on the course, areas of expertise and their specialties, professional aspirations, and course load, among other aspects. Also noteworthy are the analyzes of the degree of satisfaction of the students regarding the course and the possibility or not of dropping out. These data allowed crossing items such as age and family income with satisfaction and dissatisfaction levels. Previously, a pilot study was carried out with five students to test the research instrument and make possible adjustments so that students could better understand the questions.

Data collection took place in two stages: the first stage consisted of applying the questionnaire to the first and second semesters of 2018, from August to October of the same year, and the second stage consisted of applying the questionnaire to the first half of 2019, in May of that year.

The following data were requested from the course coordinator to understand the general context of academic dropout over the last five years: the total number of students who entered the first and second semesters per year,

the number of transfers carried out (internal and external), and the number of enrollment suspensions and withdrawals.

In the end, 74 responses to the questionnaires were collected (61.66% of the total number of eligible students), 27 students from the 2nd semester in 2018.1, 22 from the 1st semester in 2018.2, and 25 attending the 1st semester in 2019.1. Data were tabulated and organized for further analysis.

To reduce dropout rates, the PET Dentistry UFC group and the course coordination developed specific strategies that were applied to students in the evaluated semesters.

The first activity developed concerns the sponsorship of first-year students by veteran students. In this activity, each student in the first semester of the course is under the responsibility of a student from the PET group. In this way, PET members assist students who are starting graduation, providing help and support in all areas that make up the progress of the course.

The second activity was the lab coat ceremony which also proposed to encourage these students. In this event, the first-semester students participate in a symbolic ceremony with their families, receiving and wearing their lab coats for the first time. It means the start of a long journey of growth and development, awakening and motivating the stimulus to the beginning of professional training.

Finally, the third activity was carrying out guided visits to the clinics of the Dentistry course, in which first-year students get to know the clinical reality of the course in the first semesters since these visits took place during practical classes with clinical care, carried out by various subjects.

Questionnaire data were exported to SPSS v. 20.0 software (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA), which calculated the absolute and percentage frequencies of each variable, crossed with dissatisfaction and intention to remain in Dentistry using Fisher's exact test or Pearson's chi-square test, adopting a significance level of 5% ($p \leq 0.05$). Variables with significant association were submitted to a multinomial logistic regression model.

RESULTS

The dropout rate from the Dentistry course at the Federal University of Ceará was analyzed by comparing and relating specific variables predetermined in the questionnaire applied with the degree of dissatisfaction and the possibility of dropping out of the course. All participants answered both phases of the questionnaire. In this way, it was possible to correlate demographic and socioeconomic items, in addition to graduation factors (such as course load, presence or not of contact with clinical activities), thus allowing the crossing of these data with the information gathered about the possibility of withdrawal and degree of dissatisfaction. In all, 74 students were interviewed, distributed between the two initial semesters of the course, aged between 15 and 30 years old.

The degree of dissatisfaction with the course was higher among students between 15 and 20 years old (50%) compared to students between 21 and 30 years old, who showed only 16,6% dissatisfaction. Another statistically significant difference can be observed in the family income variable, whose data suggest that students with lower purchasing power (family income of 0 to 2 minimum wages) were more dissatisfied with the course (52,3%) when compared to students who had higher family income (above two minimum wages) (Table 1).

When analyzing the possibility of dropping out of the course, the data show that students who were in the initial semester of graduation (1st semester) were more inclined to drop out (75,8%) when compared to students in the subsequent semester (2nd semester), with only a 24,2% chance of withdrawal. Another data concerns the possibility of dropping out related to the process of choosing the course. Students whose first choice was not Dentistry were more likely to drop out of the course during graduation, with 87,9% tending towards this decision (Table 2).

Table 1. Correlation between dissatisfaction with the course and the analyzed variables (n=74).

Variables	n (%)	Insatisfação com o curso		p
		Yes n (%)	No n (%)	
<i>Semester</i>				
1st	47 (66.5)	16 (34.04)	31 (65.96)	0.231
2nd	27 (33.5)	13 (48.15)	14 (51.85)	
<i>Age</i>				
15-20 years	50 (67.6)	25 (50.00)	25 (50.00)	0.029*
21-30 years	24 (32.4)	4 (16.67)	20 (83.33)	
<i>Form of entry</i>				
Enem/SISU	64 (86.5)	24 (37.50)	40 (62.50)	0.152
Other	10 (13.5)	5 (50.00)	5 (50.00)	
<i>Family income</i>				
Up to 2 minimum wages	21 (28.4)	11 (52.38)	10 (47.62)	0.050*
2 to 4 minimum wages	17 (23.3)	4 (23.53)	13 (76.47)	
4 to 7 minimum wages	20 (27.4)	10 (50.00)	10 (50.00)	
>7 minimum wages	15 (20.5)	3 (20.00)	12 (80.00)	
<i>Dentistry as a 1st option</i>				
Yes	25 (34.2)	13 (52.00)	12 (48.00)	0.106
No	49 (65.8)	16 (32.65)	33 (67.35)	
<i>Contact with UFC Scholarship Program</i>				
Yes	29 (39.2)	10 (34.48)	19 (65.52)	0.768
Partially	37 (50.0)	16 (43.24)	21 (56.76)	
No	8 (10.8)	3 (37.50)	5 (62.50)	
<i>Contact with clinical activities</i>				
Yes	40 (54.0)	20 (50.00)	20 (50.00)	0.038*
No	34 (46.0)	25 (73.53)	9 (26.47)	
<i>Performs paid activity</i>				
Yes	5 (6.8)	1 (20.00)	4 (80.00)	0.362
No	69 (93.2)	28 (40.58)	41 (59.42)	
<i>Did another degree</i>				
Yes (completed)	2 (2.7)	1 (50.00)	1 (50.00)	0.711
Yes (not completed)	19 (25.6)	6 (31.58)	13 (68.42)	
No	53 (71.7)	22 (41.51)	31 (58.49)	

*p<0,05, Fisher's exact test or Pearson's chi-square test.

This relationship can also be observed in those students who were waiting for the results of other entrance exams since all those who were in this waiting process did not intend to finish the Dentistry course. Regarding the way of entering the university, the data did not show statistically significant differences for the evasion criteria evaluated (Table 2).

The workload and excess of activities were also analyzed as possible variables associated with the dropout and evasion process. However, the results showed that, although 42% of the evaluated students found the workload excessive, 51% did not indicate this factor as the main reason for dropping out of the course (Table 2).

However, contact with clinical activities in the early stages of graduation was an extremely relevant variable for the study. About 66% of potential dropouts had not yet had any clinical experience or dental practice, while 69% of those intending to complete a degree in Dentistry had already gone through some of these experiences.

Multinomial logistic regression was also carried out to more specifically assess the factors that previously showed relevant statistical differences and to verify how these factors interfere with the possibility of students dropping out. According to the data, Dentistry not being the first option increases by 7,96 times the probability of intending to drop out of the course, regardless of the semester, waiting for another entrance exam, or difficulties in the course (Table 3).

Table 2. Correlation between the intention to stay on the course and the analyzed variables (n=74).

Variables	Intend to stay on the course			p
	Total n (%)	No/Do not know	Total n (%)	
<i>Period</i>				
2018.1	15 (20.3)	9 (27.3)	6 (14.6)	0.118
2018.2	27 (36.5)	8 (24.2)	19 (46.3)	
2019.1	32 (43.2)	16 (48.5)	16 (39.0)	
<i>Semester</i>				
1st	47 (63.5)	25 (75.8)	22 (53.7)	0.049*
2nd	27 (36.5)	8 (24.2)	19 (46.3)	
<i>Age</i>				
15-20 years	50 (67.6)	21 (63.6)	29 (70.7)	0.517
20-30 years	24 (32.4)	12 (36.4)	12 (29.3)	
<i>Took pre-university course</i>				
No	30 (40.5)	13 (39.4)	17 (41.5)	0.857
Yes	44 (59.5)	20 (60.6)	24 (58.5)	
<i>Waiting for the result of another entrance exam</i>				
No	64 (86.5)	23 (69.7)	41 (100.0)	<0.001*
Yes	10 (13.5)	10 (30.3)	0 (0.0)	
<i>Entrance through Enem/SISU</i>				
No	10 (13.5)	2 (6.1)	8 (19.5)	0.092
Yes	64 (86.5)	31 (93.9)	33 (80.5)	
<i>Dentistry was the 1st option</i>				
No	49 (65.8)	30 (87.9)	19 (47.5)	<0.001*
Yes	25 (34.2)	4 (12.1)	21 (52.5)	
<i>Why did you choose Dentistry?</i>				
Second option	7 (10.1)	4 (12.9)	3 (7.9)	0.198
Affinity	35 (50.7)	16 (51.6)	19 (50.0)	
Health area	16 (23.2)	5 (16.1)	11 (28.9)	
Curriculum	2 (2.9)	2 (6.5)	0 (0.0)	
Job market	1 (1.4)	0 (0.0)	1 (2.6)	
What the note allowed to enter	1 (1.4)	1 (3.2)	0 (0.0)	
family influence	2 (2.9)	2 (6.5)	0 (0.0)	
Do not know	5 (7.2)	1 (3.2)	4 (10.5)	
<i>Difficulty in the course</i>				
No	15 (20.3)	11 (33.3)	4 (9.8)	0.031*
Workload/Too many activities	31 (41.9)	10 (30.3)	21 (51.2)	
costs	28 (37.8)	12 (36.4)	16 (39.0)	
<i>Where do you plan to work after graduation?</i>				
private office	21 (28.4)	9 (27.3)	12 (29.3)	0.733
Public service	24 (32.4)	10 (30.3)	14 (34.1)	
Teaching	4 (5.4)	1 (3.0)	3 (7.3)	
Do not know	25 (33.8)	13 (39.4)	12 (29.3)	
<i>Performs paid activity</i>				
No	69 (93.2)	29 (87.9)	40 (97.6)	0.099
Yes	5 (6.8)	4 (12.1)	1 (2.4)	
<i>Family income</i>				
Up to 2 minimum wages	21 (28.4)	10 (13.5)	11 (14.9)	0.574
2-4 minimum wages	17 (23.3)	9 (28.1)	8 (19.5)	
4-7 minimum wages	20 (27.4)	9 (28.1)	11 (26.8)	
> 7 minimum wages	15 (20.5)	4 (12.5)	11 (26.8)	
<i>Participated in the white coat ceremony</i>				
No	11 (34.4)	5 (31.3)	6 (37.5)	0.710
Yes	21 (65.6)	11 (68.8)	10 (62.5)	
<i>Contact with clinical activities</i>				
No	34 (46.0)	21 (65.7)	13 (31.1)	0.033*
Yes	40 (54.0)	11 (34.3)	29 (68.9)	

*p<0.05, Fisher's exact test or Pearson's chi-square test.

Table 3. Evaluation of the dropout probability index with the significant variables.

	p	OR adjusted	IC95%	
<i>Intends to remain in the Dentistry course</i>				
First semester	0.082	3.15	0.86	11.46
Waiting for another exam	1.000	0.54	0.05	5.45
Dentistry was not the first option	*0.004	7.96	1.93	32.91
Has difficulty in the course	0.133	3.58	0.68	18.96

*p<0,05, multinomial logistic regression. OR: odds ratio. CI: confidence interval.

There was a correlation between dropout rates and intervention activities performed. When analyzing the dropout rate in the period from 2015.1 to 2020.1 (Table 4), it was possible to observe that in 2017.1 (the year in which the university started to make all materials and instruments for dental use available to students), there was a significant reduction in dropout rate from 5,71% in the previous semester to 2,12%. However, this rate increased in 2017.2 (4,25%) and dropped considerably in 2018.1 (2,77%) and 2018.2 (2,93%), the period of implementation and execution of interventions aimed at combating evasion. However, in 2020.1, a significant increase in the evasion rate (15,26%) can be observed. It coincides with the beginning of the pandemic caused by the new Coronavirus that broke out in Brazil in February 2020.

Table 4. The dropout rate of students of the Dentistry Course at the Federal University of Ceará – Fortaleza from 2015 to 2020.

Year - period	Enrollments (n)	Dropout rate (%)
2015.1	309	5,47%
2015.2	306	3,24%
2016.1	312	2,70%
2016.2	336	5,71%
2017.1	349	2,12%
2017.2	373	4,25%
2018.1	388	2,77%
2018.2	399	2,93%
2019.1	412	4,72%
2019.2	411	1,59%
2020.1	418	15,26%

DISCUSSION

Student dropout in higher education is a problem that affects educational systems since the loss of students who start and do not finish their graduation culminates in social, academic, and economic waste³. Thus, the results obtained from the questionnaires answered by the students of the first semesters of the Dentistry course at UFC made it possible to profile and understand the reasons for the evasion of these students.

From the analysis of the socioeconomic condition of the students, it was possible to verify that students with a family income of up to 2 minimum wages have a higher degree of dissatisfaction compared to those with higher income. Considering financial difficulty as a potential reason for academic dropout, the importance of student assistance is highlighted as a means of providing the necessary aid so that economically vulnerable students can continue in university, thus minimizing the percentage of dropouts⁸.

In this context, it is possible to highlight UFC's initiative to offer students the necessary instruments for clinical care during their course. This measure emerged from the mobilization of students with the Academic Center of Dentistry and

has occurred since 2017. From this, it is suggested that this deliberation allowed the entry and permanence of students with unfavorable socioeconomic conditions in a historically elitist course, favoring the diversification of student profiles and the reduction of the dropout percentage.

Another reason associated with the students' dissatisfaction is the lack of contact with clinical activity during the first semesters, considering that this period predominantly has theoretical disciplines. Regarding this perspective, the data obtained corroborate the literature³, with authors who claim that an excessively theoretical curriculum can cause newcomers to lose motivation and lack interest in the idealized object of the profession, built much more on known practices before entering. From this perspective, the development of extracurricular activities can help to involve students in the academic and clinical environment. The importance of strategies to combat evasion carried out by PET students is also highlighted, which enabled beginner students to approach dental practice.

The implementation of actions such as the white coat ceremony, visiting clinics, and sponsoring first-year students, which were interventions aimed exclusively at the initial semesters (from semester 2018.1), was possibly a stimulus for students to remain in the course due to providing practical experiences that are not lived during the basic cycle. It corroborates the dropout rates, which decreased considerably following the execution of these activities.

With the sponsorship and the visit to the clinics, the students had the opportunity to get to know the areas of professional activity better, in addition to getting in touch with the dental clinical practice, and this seems to increase their interest in the course. And the lab coat ceremony allowed the new students to feel welcomed and belong in the academic environment. This feeling of welcome and belonging to the academic community makes first-year students overcome the feeling of exclusion and anxiety and feel like active subjects with the ability to produce their history, integrating themselves into the university environment in a relationship of ethical-political commitment, responsibility, and trust with the other individuals of the course, whether they are students, professors or technical staff.

Still, on the questions evaluated in the study, it was observed that there is a predominance of students aged between 15 and 20 years in the first semesters (about 67,6%), and this group is associated with a large percentage of dissatisfaction with the course. Possibly, it is due to the early choice of career, which causes a lack of identification, a perception of the wrong choice of profession, and a consequent disenchantment with the University⁹⁻¹¹.

Regarding the possibility of dropping out, the percentage of probable dropouts among those awaiting results from another entrance exam is significant. This data reinforces the high rate of 65,8% of students who did not have Dentistry as their first option. In those cases where a course change is likely to occur, avoidance will be apparent¹¹. That is, the student changes from one course to another, remaining in higher education, as opposed to actually dropping out. However, even in these cases, there is a burden for the institution since the change generates idle vacancies, social and professional losses, and, in addition, economic losses. The loss of students to other undergraduate courses can be fought with actions that show the several professional opportunities the course offers. In this way, the students can expand their professional vision, even if they are attending the initial semesters.

Additionally, the high workload and excessive activities may influence the decision to drop out of the course. However, in this study, these factors were not related to the possibility of dropping out. It is also necessary to highlight the importance of welcoming new entrants who, for the most part, come directly from high school to the HEI and need to get used to the academic environment and the new routine. Actions such as the white coat ceremony and sponsorship are of fundamental importance in the reception of new students, as they help to adapt to the new academic routine.

It is also noteworthy that the period of 2020.1 had the highest dropout rate in the last five years (15,26%), which may be directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The temporary closure of HEIs created a challenge never faced before, requiring Educational Institutions to plan and implement virtual teaching strategies¹². Unfortunately, this abrupt and sudden change has led to difficulties in the teaching and learning process since this way of offering classes disregards pedagogical and technological aspects, such as lower accessibility to the internet or electronic devices by some students. The advance in evasion observed in the semester of 2020.1 brought further challenges, among which the need for new studies to map, understand and plan new strategies to combat academic dropout stands out.

Furthermore, this change in teaching methodology is associated with stress, anxiety, and low motivation among students¹³, which may lead to an increase in dropout rates. It is worth noting that public HEIs are very content-oriented, without widely exploring interdisciplinary projects and active learning methodologies¹³⁻¹⁵. This characteristic was not considered when switching to virtual teaching, which was implemented on an emergency basis, generating an excessive load of activities while the students still were developing learning autonomy.

Therefore, this new increase in course dropouts also highlights the need for new strategies specifically planned for the virtual environment, given that students who entered in 2020.1 did not experience the intervention activities applied in previous years.

CONCLUSION

Young age and lower family income are factors associated with a greater degree of dissatisfaction in the evaluated course, and first-semester students, students awaiting results from other entrance exams, students who have not experienced dental practice, and students who have not chosen the Dentistry course as their first option are more likely to drop out of the course in this study. Additionally, when the Dentistry course is not the student's first choice, this increases the probability of dropping out by 7,96 times. Also noteworthy is the importance and impact of actions implemented to combat dropout in the Dentistry course, as these activities had a positive impact on the dropout rates of the course in the analyzed semesters.

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Conflict of Interests: The authors declare there is no conflict of interest.

Funding: No funding to declare.

Authors' Contributions: Study conception and planning: JACMRLM, MELA. Data collection, analysis, and interpretation: MCAE, VGBO, VMM, TFM, IFBR, JRPM, ACSB. Manuscript preparation or revision: JRLCF, MRLM, MELA. Final version approval: MRLM, MELA. Public responsibility for article's content: JRLCF, MRLM.