Approaches to college dropout in Chile

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Abstract

Enrollment in evening college education in Chile has grown markedly. However, the interruption of studies by those who study at this time, that is, from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. has exceeded the average dropout rate in the Chilean university system. These students combine family, work and academic responsibilities, and show higher dropout rates than those of the students who enter college day programs, due to the particularities and situations that surround them. This research aimed to investigate the factors which intervene in the decisions to drop out of college students with non-traditional characteristics, who attend evening study programs. Methodologically we opted for a qualitative and exploratory research design due to the scarce research on this issue in Chile. To this end, semi-structured interviews were carried out with ten evening dropout students. After information was systematized, four dimensions of analysis emerged, which synthesized the logics and meanings which intervene in the phenomenon that affects this specific group. Findings on dropout decisions of evening students with non-traditional characteristics reveal the following factors according to relevance: personal conditions and characteristics, capital and academic performance, contretemps and adverse circumstances, and experiences with the institutional offer.

Keywords

Evening college dropout - Dropout factors - Evening students.

Introduction

In the last decades, the Chilean higher education system has undergone major transformations at the structural and regulatory levels. Since December 1980, legislation has sought to replace the state provision model which had characterized Chilean education by one regulated mainly by the market (BENAVENTE; ÁLVAREZ, 2012). The regulatory framework aimed to stimulate private initiative. Thus, since 1980, the number and nature of institutions of higher education has changed rapidly. The establishment of private non-

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profit universities authorized to grant academic degrees and professional degrees was allowed (HUEPE; FIGUEROA, 2012).

According to data from the Ministry of Education (CHILE, 2012), in 1980 there were eight traditional universities; ten years later the participation structure and the number of institutions had drastically changed. In this new context, the new institutions began to compete and devise strategies to obtain financing, via diversification of supply according to the structure of demand. Other institutions offered options for incorporating new students into the system: careers of more limited duration or of more general training were created, offices were opened in different locations, and evening academic programs were established to attract the population that needed higher education, who had sufficient resources to afford it, but who could not enter day programs because they had to reconcile various activities (HUEPE; FIGUEROA, 2012).

The latter strategy was gradually generalized within university institutions. Thus, in 2014, practically nine out of ten institutions of higher education in Chile provided evening programs (SIES, 2014b), that is, programs from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. A similar phenomenon happened with evening college enrollment. In the last decade, the total enrollment of students in evening programs grew by 112.0%, a figure well above the 38.8% achieved by day programs (SIES, 2014a).

Increases in coverage were accompanied by low rates of persistence, as it can be seen in the official dropout statistics at the national level. According to figures from the Ministry of Education (SIES, 2014a), in the last five years, day careers have presented dropout rates ranging from 24% to 27%; in sharp contrast, the evening ones reached 43% of the 2012 cohort; that is, four out of ten students entering this modality drop out of their studies.

At the national level, several studies have been carried out to understand and and assess the problem of college dropout. Nevertheless, these have generally focused on students attending day college programs (CANALES; DE LOS RIOS, 2007; CENTRO DE MICRODATOS, 2008; DONOSO; SCHIEFELBEIN, 2007; GONZÁLEZ, 2005; GONZÁLES AFONSO et al., 2007; HIMMEL, 2002; MIZALA, 2011; OECD, 2009; SANTELICES et al., 2013) and left aside students who attend evening classes.

Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011) indicate that evening students have to constantly balance and combine different types of responsibilities and activities, which increases their risk of dropping out. In this sense, inquiring about the causes, motivations associated with the dropout of evening students is fundamental, due to the high dropout rates of this modality of studies (SIES, 2014a) and the consequences that this situation entails. According to Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean] (CEPAL, 2002), college dropout impairs the acquisition of the human and educational capital necessary for the population to have access to better paid jobs, which help them out of poverty. In addition to the above, withdrawal has individual implications when the occupational goals and the project of life of the subjects who drop out are affected (GONZÁLEZ, 2005). In this context, this study sought to answer the following research question: What are the factors involved in evening college students' decision to drop out? And

it aims to investigate the factors of dropout of college students attending evening study programs.

It should be noted that the study of dropout in higher education is complex, as it considers not only a variety of perspectives, but also a range of multiple definitions that account for the complexity, variability of the phenomenon, and the existence of nuances and different types of dropout. For this study we will adopt Tinto's definition of college dropout "[...] Voluntary or compulsory interruption of college studies that may occur temporarily or permanently during the program if they manage to complete the study program [...]" (TINTO,1982, p. 17).

Theoretical foundation

Evening college students

The panorama of higher education has changed in recent years. Currently, people access higher education at very different stages of their lives and careers, a situation that has had a major impact on the modification of the educational transition pathways and in the composition of college students. In this regard, evening college education has played a fundamental role; as according to Servicio de Información de Educación Superior (SIES [Information Service of Higher Education], 2014b), the number of people who enroll in evening programs grows every year.

As for the characteristics of people attending evening programs, we can point out that it is a heterogeneous student population and that it has different needs in comparison to those who attend day programs (GILARDI; GUGLIELMETTI, 2011). First, there is a higher proportion of men than women; they are generally 25 years or older (SIES, 2015), do not come directly from secondary education, and on average three or more years have passed since they completed it. Another relevant aspect is that they work to pay for their education and require more pedagogical and academic support (SEGOBIA, 2014).

The literature has coined a concept associated with this new student profile – non-traditional students – in attention to the characteristics of this group. According to Kerka (1989), non-traditional students are characterized by a wide range of circumstances and life experiences that affect their participation in college education: most of them have stopped studying for several years before resuming their studies (STRECKFUSS; WATERS, 1990). In addition, since they generally combine work and academic activities, they focus more on the practical application than on the theory of the content of the program, and display greater self-determination and acceptance of responsibility (WYLIE, 2005).

On the other hand, Astin (1985) indicates that traditional students attend and persist in the university for social and academic reasons, whereas non-traditional students have limited possibilities of institutional integration due to having little spare time available (PACHECO, 1994). Thus, the intensity and duration of their interaction with the social and academic structures of the university is affected. Wylie (2005) argues that non-traditional students generally work during the day, and do not receive sufficient support or benefits, and are therefore forced to work and pay for their studies. These elements have the

potential to increase the risk of dropout, since they are adversely related to student persistence and to university retention.

Studies on this issue have shown that non-traditional students face more risks and have a higher dropout rate than traditional students (BEAN; METZNER, 1985; GILARDI; GUGLIELMETTI, 2011). This group of students has to constantly face the challenge of finding a balance between their academic (institutional) activities and external (personal, work and family) activities in order to maintain a sufficient level of commitment to complete their degrees.

College dropout

Understanding the dropout of students from higher education has been framed in a broad set of theories and perspectives of analysis, which have generally had as a starting point the characteristics of traditional students (SHARPE; GREENE, 2012). In addition, studies have been carried out in educational and social settings other than the Chilean ones, and the knowledge at national level about the factors that affect the dropout of evening college students is scarce.

In this context, Bean and Metzner (1985), recognizing the lack of theoretical foundations to guide the research on college dropout among non-traditional students, developed a conceptual model aimed at this type of student population. The structure of the model indicates that the decision to leave or continue in the university is directly related to a set of variables: background and individual characteristics of the student, psychological, academic, institutional and environmental variables (KHUONG, 2014).

The Bean and Metzner model (1985) addresses an environmental dimension and points out that it has a direct impact on student retention. These factors come from the personal conditions and circumstances of the students both at the point of entry and during the study process. Among them, the model highlights the lack of financial resources to cover the costs of education and life and of family and work responsibilities. External factors, over which universities do not have sufficient control, may be relevant elements that may trigger the student's decision to drop out.

Bean and Metzner (1985) establish that the social integration dimension, in the case of non-traditional students, is less relevant to explain dropout than the environmental ones. In this regard, Prather and Hand (1986) pointed out that the main difference between the process of dropping out of traditional and non-traditional students is that the latter are more affected by the external environment and academic integration than by social integration. Pascarella and Chapman (1983) grounded these differences in multi-institutional studies conducted with various universities. When academic and environmental factors positively impacted this type of students, their level of persistence increased.

In the same vein, Braxton, Hirschy and Mcclendon (2004) developed a retention model in which they identified a set of economic, organizational, psychological, and sociological

forces that influence the persistence of this type of students. In addition to the economic factor, the authors included five psychological factors (degree of motivation, locus of control, self-efficacy, empathy, and need for bonding), four sociological constructs (parental education, support from others, participation in learning and early socialization communities), two organizational constructs (commitment to student well-being and institutional integration) and four factors extracted from Tinto's model (1982) (characteristics of students at the point of entry, initial and institutional commitments, and academic integration).

According to Khuong (2014), one of the main differences between the models of Braxton, Hirschy and Mcclendon (2004) and that of non-traditional students of Bean and Metzner (1985) is the description of the academic dimension in the university experience of students. In addition, Braxton, Hirschy and Mcclendon (2004) describe participation in academic communities as a central construct to explain the mechanisms that connect the academic experience and the persistence of students in the university. The authors postulate that the more students participate and become involved in academic activities and in learning communities, the less likely to drop out they will be, due to their commitment to the institution. This proposition is supported by research results from Astin (1985), Kuh and Love (2000), and Tinto (1997).

On the other hand, DeRemer (2002) found that the variables of experiences with the institution, financial concerns and unexpected crises may be the main drivers (or causes) of dropout. In addition to the above, the ability to manage time, particularly with regard to the demands of work, studies and family, presses individual student retention logics. If the student can not withstand stress and fatigue, or determines that the costs associated with persisting are greater than the benefits, s/he may decide to leave the study program.

Terribili-Filho and Quaglio (2016), in turn, indicate that the feeling of insecurity perceived by students in the evening, when moving from one place to another, is also a dropout cause.

Wylie (2005) presented a theoretical model of dropout for non-traditional students in higher education that integrates elements of the works of Tinto (1982), and of Bean and Metzner (1985) in order to theorize the factors that affect this type of students. The theoretical model of Wylie (2005) consists of two phases. The first one describes the evaluation procedure carried out by the student before or at the time of enrollment, which ends with the student committing to study. At this stage five groups of factors (characteristics of the student, academic and environmental variables, perceptions of usefulness of the studies, and self-esteem) converge. The second phase begins with the process of reevaluating one's participation in the course and ends with the withdrawal from the study program. The author postulates that this action begins after enrollment in the course. This facet of the model comprises groups of factors: adjustment of academic and social self-esteem, reevaluation of participation and the process of disengagement. Every time the students' academic and social self-concepts are negatively influenced, the process of reevaluation of their commitment to the study program is affected, which increases separation behavior patterns. The process is cyclical and continues until disengagement from their study project.

Methodology

Type of study

We used an exploratory qualitative research methodology. Although college dropout is a recurring theme in different investigations, the dropout phenomenon is scarcely addressed in Chile from the perspective of evening college students.

Participants

The participants of this study were ten students who dropped out of evening college careers for longer than two years, from five private universities and a public university, from the provinces of Valparaíso and Metropolitana, a central region of Chile. It was difficult to locate the participants: only twelve out of the 350 students we contacted thanks to the data provided by universities agreed to take part in the research. The choice of the participants was intentional and voluntary considering confidentiality criteria (NOREÑA et al., 2012), and based on selection criteria (PATTON, 2002), four criteria were defined. The first sought to obtain a sample that proportionally integrated men and women. The second considered the variable family responsibilities, which aimed to select students with and without children and who also had different types of marital status. The third was age range: from 22 to 52 years old when they dropped out and from 29 to 56 years when they took part in the research. The fourth criterion was to integrate students from programs in different areas of knowledge, with and without day jobs during their studies. The characteristics of the study participants are described in Table 1 below.

Table 1- Characterization of research subjects during the dropout phase

Participants*	Gender	Evening Program	Age / Study	Year of Entry	Year of Dropout	Marital Status	Number of children	Occupation / Study
M1EU	F	Business Administration	30	2013	2013	Married	3	Personal assistant
M2MJ	F	Psychology	22	2004	2007	Married	1	Personal assistant
M3PC	F	Basic Education	26	2011	2012	Single	0	Personal assistant
M4AS	F	Commercial Engineering	23	2003	2004	Married	1	Supermarket cashier
H1BG	M	Law	23	2010	2012	Single	0	Waiter
H2MA	M	Construction Engineering	35	2005	2006	Married	1	Chemical Technician
H3MD	M	Business Administration	52	2012	2012	Married	2	Administrative assistant
H4DC	F	Commercial Engineering	26	2013	2014	Single	0	Computer Technician
H5JPU	F	Law	37	2014	2014	Married	1	FFAA civil servant
H6MH	M	Agricultural engineering	22	2005	2006	Single	0	Unemployed

* Identification of participants: M (mujer [woman]), H (hombre [man]), number (indicates place of interview), 2 or 3 letters (initials of the name).
Source: Study database.

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## Data collection techniques and procedures

Field data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews recorded by an audio equipment, with the authorization of the participant. Field notes on what was observed during interviews were also recorded.

Information analysis strategy

In this study, the content analysis technique was used. Interviews and field notes were transcribed verbatim, and later coded with N Vivo 10 software. The analysis process was performed in two stages. The first one involved a deep reading of the information and the segmentation of the body of texts into units of meaning associated with the objectives of this study. In the second stage, categorization was carried out taking into account the deductive categories raised from the literature and then, as the analysis progressed, new inductive categories emerged, which enriched it.

After the categorization and clustering process was completed, four categories of factors emerged. The first regards student personal and situational conditions and characteristics that affect the persistence of evening students. The second examines the academic factors that influence the decision to drop out. The third investigates circumstantial factors, which occur unexpectedly impacting the continuance of students. Finally, the fourth one refers to the experiences that the students had with the university offer, during the study period at the institution.

Figure 1- Categories of emerging factors for evening college dropout
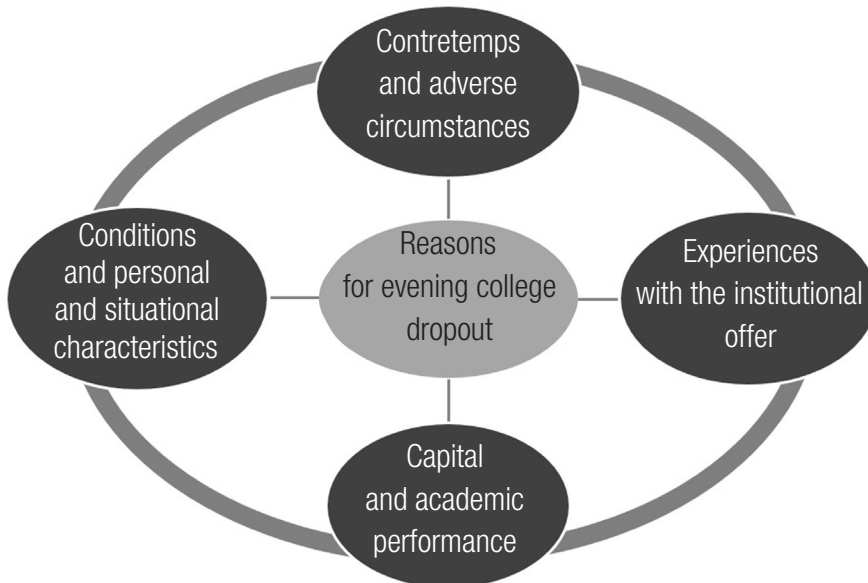
Source: Study analysis phase using N Vivo 10 software.

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Findings

Next, we present the findings of the research for each of the factors of analysis.

Personal and situational conditions and characteristics

This category of factors includes the particularities of the students and the interactions that they have in their social, family and finance-labor plans. The interviewees report a series of situations that they experience and that result in their physical and mental deterioration. Labor worries, associated with fatigue, with having a job and studying, with the responsibility with their families, with being the head of the household, are mentioned by students as reasons that weaken their ability to persist:

> It was mostly because of tiredness (dropping out the program) for example as my daughter was a baby [...], I was in this stage of not sleeping, which meant in itself physical, mental exhaustion. (Interview woman2 M2MJC[3]).

Another element that appears in the discourse of dropout students alludes to the financial resources necessary to cover the costs of the study career. In this sense, the loss of work constitutes a fundamental barrier to persistence when they are the ones who finance their studies, since this not only implies the loss of a source of income but also limits the possibility of obtaining credit or financial support from banking entities:

> We began to postpone (the studies) due the economic crisis at the time, I had to find something stable (work), and there I was with temporary jobs. (Interview woman 2 M2MJC).

> Yes, then when I was late, I was sent to DICOM, which does not help have access to another credit to pay these (studies); so it's a vicious circle. (Interview man 3 M3PC).

In the case of the interviewees with family responsibilities, the lack of financial resources also impacts on their commitments with their family environment. Since several participants have a family to support, they are forced to choose between their studies and meeting the financial demands of their family:

> I had money in the bank for the house I was applying for and I started to draw it from the bank to cover the university. Until I said "I'm not touching this money anymore, this can't go on." (Interview woman 4 M4AS).

This difficulty is related not only to the economic barriers that affect the possibility of paying for their studies, but also to the process and the emotional component that this situation entails for the students, as some participants point out

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3- Table 1 shows the identification of each participant.

that educational institutions pressure them and place restrictions on their continuing to attend their study programs:

> I took a legal technician of higher level program until I ran out of money and I went through everything students go through: the list of the ones could not enter, I had to go to the inspector's office to get a pass to take the test, because I had financial problems. (Interview man 1 H1BG)

Interviewees emphasize that support structures from one's family, peers and friends are relevant aspects for the generation of positive environments and of trust capitals that serve as a basis for meeting the various demands of their educational process. In this sense, the lack of emotional support negatively influences their level of motivation and commitment to studies:

> I didn't want to study anymore at the time, I got discouraged, I didn't want to go, I got depressed, I realized that my mom was alone at home, I knew she was crying, I tried to distract her, I took her out and in that lapse I didn't study. (Interivew man 6 H6MAA).

The interviewees point out that all the previous elements gradually configured a setting of personal imbalances. The loss of the balance between the benefits and the costs of studying refers mainly to the daily activities they must leave aside, such as rest, leisure and the moments they used to share with their family and friends. This situation is viewed negatively by students because they feel that personal costs are higher than the benefits they can get from their studies:

> I think I'm leaving them aside a lot, I'm not going to trade this (my family), that is, I know that studying brings a long-term benefit, but I'm not going to trade my family for money. (Man interview 5 H5JPO)

In this respect, students feel that the demands and the effort that they must dedicate to their studies is sometimes a very high cost in comparison to the benefits they perceive, a situation that is reinforced when the actors state that their initial expectations about the career were too great;\: "People enter with an expectation and then find things in the career that do not go with what they want to study" (Entrevista hombre 5 H5JPO).

Capital and academic performance

This category includes academic capital, the perception of performance, the gaps of skills necessary to tackle the studies, time management and the incorporation of learning techniques and habits which affect the students' decision to drop out.

For the interviewees, the most important reason, which crosses each of the dropout stories, has to do with time management. Participants point out that their time should be distributed between studies, family and work. Sometimes they manage to balance the different demands. However, in other times, there is little time left to study since they have to dedicate themselves mainly to work activities:

> I couldn't choose a schedule other than the evening one. I start work at 8.30 in the morning, perform functions until 7 p.m. and then at 7.05 I had to start classes [...], I would get home at 2 in the morning and then get up at 6 am to come and fulfill my duties. (Interview man 3 H3MD).

This situation worsens when it takes students a long time to commute indicate that to the institution. The participants point out that the travel times made their educational process difficult, since they were unable to reach their classes on time: "I studied, but the distance complicated it, I had to cross all Santiago city, then I arrived every day late to the first class" (Interview man 2 H2MA).

Another element mentioned by the participants refers to the perception of academic performance and the difficulties they had with some of the curriculum subjects: "I'd say that I was approved in 50% of the courses and failed the other 50%" (Interview man 2 H2MA).

This situation also implied students would have to stay longer than planned in the university and to increase the academic load due to having to take again the subjects they failed. This academic lag negatively influenced their decision to persist, a result of the academic and economic burden involved: "When you saw that you were not going to pass (the subjects), you were able to stope the academic part but not the financial one" (Interview man 2 H2MA).

Academic capitals and learning gaps, understood as the differences between the level of competences and skills required to pass, versus the effective level of learning, are also mentioned as a difficulty in achieving a positive academic performance that contributes to student persistence in their university careers:

> I left with the eagerness of completed only the fourth year of secondary education, I didn't have the experience to say, "I'm going to college" [...] I left the fourth year with an average 4.5 grade in math, from first to fourth years, 4.5, that is, very bad. (Interview man 1 H1BG).

The lack of techniques or strategies of study tends to become evident in the story of the evening students who dropped out when they describe the learning process and the efforts that they had to make to acquire the knowledge necessary for the study program in which they were enrolled:

> Yes, it cost me a lot, when I got to college, the hard part started, which were the subjects, the subjects and all that, and I was fed up with reading, I slept late, I had to get up very early not to miss work, I studied, came back home late, I stayed up late. It was all about sacrifice. (Interview woman 2 M2MJ)

Contretemps and adverse circumstances

The third factor visualized in the discourse of the students is associated to the contretemps and circumstantial conditions that may affect the decision to drop out. In this regard, participants indicate that situations that negatively affect student persistence levels can arise mainly in two areas:

a) Family: the occurrence of unexpected events in one's family, such as death or illness of children, parents or close relatives, and separation from partner or spouse, which influence student persistence.

Students must try to maintain a balance between all their activities. However, when faced with stressful and unforeseen family situations, they feel pressured to choose between assuming the responsibilities deriving from their different roles and continuing their studies: "Children start to get sick and one gives priority to caring for the child and begins to miss tests and to fall behind" (Interview woman 1 M1EU).

b) Work: they refer to the appearance of unforeseen situations at work, such as: sudden change of place of work, long trips, very demanding bosses, among others that affect the continuance of students in their programs. In this respect, the interviewees manifest the wear that this type of fact provokes:

> I wanted to continue my studies, but at the second year, because I was traveling on business, I collapsed, that is, I went through a panic crisis, when I got to the room, they started to ask me and I started to perspire. (Interview man 1 H1BG)

Another element highlighted by participants is related to the lack of support received from employers. The interviewees mentioned that bosses occasionally made it difficult for them to remain in the university: "When my boss then when she realized that I was studying, she began to make my life impossible" (Interview woman 3 M3PC).

Experiences with the institutional offer

This category includes aspects of the university offer that the student considers to be deficient, depending on the institutional experiences that s/he has had while interacting with the higher education institution. The reasons for dropout arising from this category indicate difficulties with the curriculum, teaching and support systems and benefits that the university entity delivers to students.

Students state that the curricula have little flexibility when it comes to programming courses, validating and taking subjects, and choosing elective courses:

> In my opinion, I think the great withdrawal/desistimiento of the career is that we enter with an expectation of curricula that can be a bit flexible at first and then we encounter something else. (Interview man 5 H5JPO)

In addition to the above, the actors perceive a lack of practical content and an imbalance between theoretical and professional training provided by their study programs:

> The career has too many things that are not focused on what one wants, because there often are branches that are like a little rice (a side dish), they're not focused on the career. (Interview man 3 H3MD)

The low quality of academic education perceived by the students also appears in the discourses of the interviewees, who focus mainly on two areas – teaching and the lack of career accreditation:

> Dropping out and finding something positive might mean to take the pressure off of something that you know in the end won't be worth it, and even more so when the quality falls short of what I want to receive, because it's not what I want. (Interview man 3 H3MD)

The quality perceived is also seen in the low pedagogical abilities of some professors, which affected the levels of motivation and commitment of students with their careers:

> Then the professors themselves, they told us, in fact, I don't know, as we studied in the evening they asked us "Do you have a job?", "How much do you earn?". (Interview woman 3 M3PC)

> [...] One day a professor told me "you have no presence, you look like a a hippie" [...] "How are you going to face the outside world?" Discredited. (Interview man 1 H1BG)

Another of the causes evidenced in this analysis concerns career accreditation. For students, the level of accreditation is an indicator of quality which assures a certain confidence and stability to the student once s/he has graduated; if it loses this credential, students prefer to analyze and evaluate their participation in the program; "[...] I left because the university lost its accreditation, then, when it lost its accreditation, I wasn't very confident" (Interview man 4 H4DC).

Another aspect that hinders the persistence of the interviewees is associated with the capacity of the aid and benefits systems of the institution to attend to evening students. The participants consider that the resources, scholarships and other learning supports or tutorials that the university offers to the students are insufficient and often fail do reach students who really need them:

> [...] We had problems, there wasn't much help from the university, it didn't stop charging college tuition and fees, it didn't say "Ok, you know this boy's house has burned down, let's stop for a while and later he can resume payments". (Interview man 6 H6MH)

Another element is associated with access to resources and infrastructure for evening students. They indicate that when they attended classes, many of the facilities were not available:

> The problem is that when we were leaving the room, the guy was outside with the keys because, of course, he had to leave, or there were people cleaning it, so it (the study place in the university) wasn't available. (Interview man 2 H2MA)

Full view of factor categories

Based on the analysis of content, it can be pointed out that the causes of evening college dropout follow not a single type of reason but rather various factors, as it can be seen in Figure 2.

Among the factors highlighted by the interviewees in terms of reasons for dropping out are the students' conditions and personal and situational characteristics. This result is due to the particularities of evening students regarding the deterioration that they experience at the physical and emotional levels, the worry they experience due to lack of financial resources, and the difficulties they face when family and social supports fail.

The second and third categories seem to be very similar in terms of occurrences. Regarding the *capital and academic performance* factor, the interviewees' references focus mainly on four elements: problems of time management, deficits of learning techniques and study habits, capitals and learning gaps, and a low perception of student achievement.

The factor *contretemps and adverse circumstances* accounts for the occurrence of unexpected crises in the family (pregnancy, sickness, etc.) and at work (changes of shift, etc.), which affect students' decisions to persist. Finally, we find the variables associated with the negative experiences students have with the institutional offer (teaching, teaching methodology, etc.), which negatively impacted their academic career.

In the literature, most of the factors that emerged from this study are shared by day students and non-traditional evening students, but with different and profound meanings, magnitude and consequences.

Among evening students, the contretemps and adverse conditions typical of the affective and work environment are stress triggers, which results in a drop in academic performance and in higher expenses. This destabilizes their finances, and, therefore, the tranquility they need to study, which often leads to the decision to drop out. This factor is particularly different for traditional day students, most of whom are usually financially supported by their families.

The set of emerging categories and subcategories account for a very significant experience since entry that affects their immediate future.

Discussion

Although admission to evening programs has allowed an increasing number of young people and adults who must combine diverse activities (such as labor, family and academic ones) to have access to higher education (which enables them to improve their quality of life), high dropout rates in this modality are worrying. Most of those who study in the evening are confronted with different personal, socioeconomic, contextual and institutional factors which may have a positive or negative impact on the decision to leave the evening study career. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence dropout among evening students is essential to ensure adequate levels of retention of the university system.

Figure 2 - Distribution of factors or categories of evening college dropout
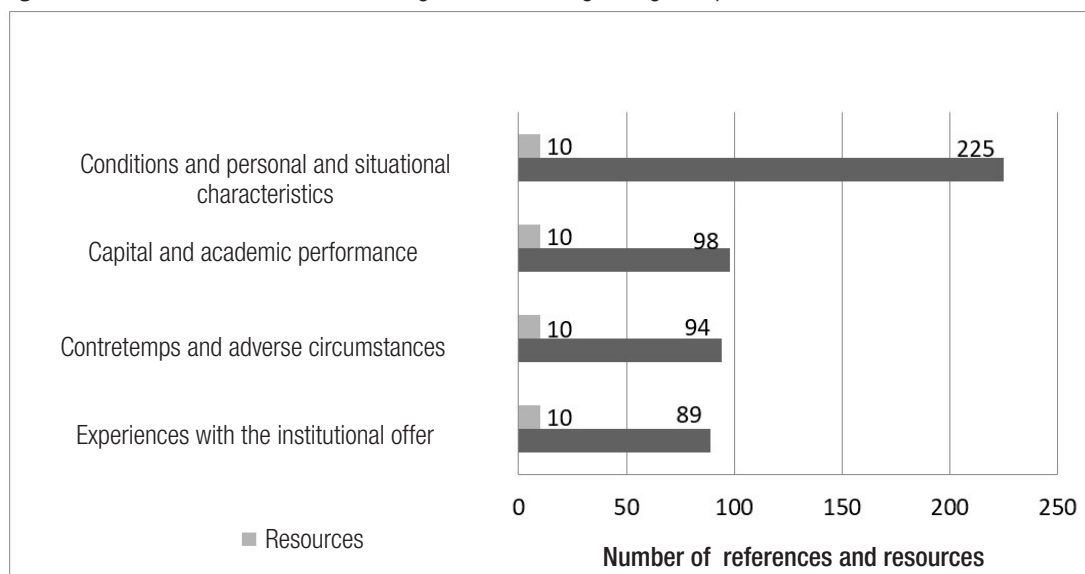
Source: Data analysis of the study using N Vivo 10 software

At the international level, the phenomenon of dropout has been approached from different perspectives of analysis, highlighting the research and models that focus on the so-called non-traditional students. The two main features of this theoretical line are: (1) it recognizes the unique characteristics that the non-traditional student has: the moment they enroll (generally several years after graduating from secondary education), age and the environmental pressure factors that surround them, such as work responsibilities, finances and possible dependents; and (2) it theorizes the environmental factors that can directly affect student persistence, in addition to the satisfaction and commitment to the institution and higher education in general (BROWN, 2007).

In this sense, Chilean evening college students as well as *non-traditional* college students defined by several authors, are characterized by a series of realities and particular situations that may increase the risk of college dropout. Consequently, it is evident, in the results of this study which confirm the findings of other studies regarding the multiplicity of variables of different nature that explain college dropout. The study suggests that, among the great variety of elements that influence evening college dropout, personal factors are very relevant when it comes to understanding this phenomenon, due to the characteristics and conditions surrounding evening college students. In addition to the above, academic, environmental and institutional factors are relevant in the dropout process experienced by this type of students, as they are more strongly affected by external, academic and institutional variables.

Most evening students are at a disadvantage due to academic gaps and economic difficulties, which affect their level of persistence, a situation that could be mediated by

the institutions. However, the studies of Canales and De los Ríos, (2007) and Pérez-Roa, (2014) argue that these disadvantages in day students. Nitri (2001) recognizes that many university institutions do not adequately address the satisfaction of the multiple and often contradictory demands that students have in relation to family, work and college. The evening college system in Chile does not appear to be sufficiently equipped or managed to meet the needs of this group of non-traditional students, which is constantly expanding, as it unfortunately continues to maintain a system designed for traditional day students.

Finally, it is essential to advance in the generation of knowledge that allows addressing the phenomenon of evening college dropout from a broader conception, in which the different variables and factors that can contribute to the understanding of the problematic are considered. It is fundamental to carry out more in-depth research and studies in this issue to help discover the triggers of evening dropout, especially with respect to those in which university institutions themselves can intervene through actions or lines of intervention that allow them to increase retention levels.

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