

Factors of Intention of University Dropout: What Does Literature Teach Us?

Fatores de Intenção da Evasão Universitária: O que a Literatura nos Ensina?

Rafael Pereira Faustino
Thiago Bruno de Jesus Silva

ABSTRACT

Dropout in higher education is a global concern, with negative repercussions that generate substantial costs for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), students, families, and society in general. With the aim of preventing this phenomenon and supporting HEIs in their decision-making, this study conducted a systematic literature review on the factors and variables that influence the intention to drop out of university. Based on the most recent and highest-impact literature from articles published in national (Qualis A) and international (Q1 or Q2) scientific journals, from 2019 to 2024 (the last 5 years), using the scientific-constructivist method and the Knowledge Development Process-Constructivist (ProKnow-C), the bibliographic portfolio consisted of 127 articles. The results revealed a higher incidence of predictors related to psychological factors and institutional, academic, and social integration, while a lower incidence was found in studies at the level of pre-entry attributes and financial factors. This study broadens the understanding of the interactions between academic, psychosocial, and contextual factors in discussions about the intention to drop out of university. In practice, this study helps higher education institutions focus their efforts on the most frequently identified factors and proposes strategies to mitigate them.

Keywords: dropout; higher education; literature review.

RESUMO

A evasão no Ensino Superior é uma preocupação de caráter global, com repercussões negativas que geram custos substanciais tanto para as Instituições de Ensino Superior (IES), quanto para os alunos, família e sociedade em geral. Com o objetivo de prevenir esse fenômeno e apoiar as IES em sua tomada de decisão, este estudo realizou uma revisão sistemática de literatura sobre os fatores e variáveis que influenciam a intenção de evasão universitária. Com base na literatura mais recente, e de maior impacto de artigos publicados em periódicos científicos nacionais (Qualis A) e internacionais (Q1 ou Q2), no período compreendido de 2019 a 2024, últimos 5 anos, com o método científico-construtivista a utilização do *Knowledge*

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Rafael Pereira Faustino 
leafardelfaustino2@gmail.com
Master's degree
UFGD
Dourados / MS – Brazil

Thiago Bruno de Jesus Silva 
thiagobrunojs@gmail.com
Doctor
UFSC
Cruz das Almas / BA – Brazil

ABSTRACT

Development Process-Constructivist (ProKnow-C). O portfólio bibliográfico foi representado por 127 artigos e os resultados revelaram uma maior incidência de preditores relacionados a fatores psicológicos e de integração institucional, acadêmica e social, enquanto uma menor incidência foi encontrada em estudos ao nível de atributos de pré-entrada e fatores financeiros. O estudo amplia a compreensão das interações entre fatores acadêmicos, psicossociais e contextuais nas discussões sobre a intenção da evasão universitária. Na prática, este estudo facilita as IES a direcionar esforços nos fatores mais identificados e propõe estratégias para mitigá-los.

Palavras-Chave: evasão; ensino superior; revisão de literatura.

Introduction

University student dropout has been a subject of scholarly inquiry since the twentieth century (Bardach et al., 2020). Its occurrence imposes substantial costs not only on students who leave higher education prematurely but also on institutions and society as a whole (Rußmann et al., 2023; Sharif-Nia et al., 2023; Cocoradă et al., 2021; Buizza et al., 2024; López-Aguilar et al., 2022; Singh & Alhulail, 2022). Consequently, reducing dropout rates has become a major policy priority in many countries (Rußmann et al., 2023; Cocoradă et al., 2021; Casanova et al., 2023; Enguídanos et al., 2023; Singh & Alhulail, 2022; Galve-González et al., 2023). Achieving this goal, however, depends on a comprehensive understanding of the processes and factors that lead students to withdraw from higher education.

Dropout intention is generally understood as a gradual process of disengagement from academic goals (Mostert et al., 2023). It refers to students' thoughts, considerations, and intentions regarding the possibility of leaving their degree program or withdrawing from a higher education institution before graduation (López-Angulo et al., 2023; Díaz-Mujica et al., 2019). Rather than representing an isolated decision, dropout intention develops progressively throughout students' academic trajectories and is shaped by a dynamic interplay of personal, academic, institutional, and contextual factors (López-Angulo et al., 2023; Mascia et al., 2023; Bernardo et al., 2022). Accordingly, university dropout has been conceptualized as a complex decision-making process (Sharif-Nia et al., 2023; Casanova et al., 2023; Buizza et al., 2024) comprising successive stages, including the perception of academic mis-

match, contemplation of withdrawal, deliberation, information seeking, and the final decision to leave higher education (Bäulke et al., 2022).

Against this background, this study aims to identify the factors and variables associated with dropout intention based on the most recent and influential literature. It seeks to advance the theoretical understanding of dropout by synthesizing the evidence on its underlying determinants and identifying the variables most frequently examined in previous research. In addition, the study explores the contexts in which these variables have been investigated and proposes a systematic categorization of the evidence reported in the literature. By doing so, it identifies knowledge gaps, highlights promising avenues for future research, and encourages the incorporation of emerging variables into the analysis of dropout intention, thereby contributing to both the theoretical development of the field and the design of more effective institutional strategies to promote student retention.

Methodological Procedures

Systematic literature reviews (SLRs) have become an established methodological approach in management research (Kraus et al., 2020). Beyond synthesizing existing knowledge, they help identify research gaps, guide future research agendas, and support theory development (Koufteros et al., 2018). Nevertheless, conducting a rigorous SLR remains challenging. Researchers often encounter difficulties in systematically synthesizing evidence, consistently applying review protocols, and transparently justifying methodological decisions throughout the review process (Paul et al., 2021). Although numerous SLRs have been published, relatively few provide a detailed account of the methodological choices underpinning the review.

Accordingly, this study adopts the Knowledge Development Process–Constructivist (ProKnow-C) methodology proposed by Ensslin et al. (2022), owing to its constructivist perspective, methodological rigor, and alignment with the objectives of this research. The SLR was conducted in five sequential stages: **i)** selection of the Bibliographic Portfolio (BP); **ii)** bibliometric analysis of the core variables; **iii)** analysis of advanced variables; **iv)** systems analysis; and **v)** formulation of future research questions. The BP was compiled through a structured search for studies

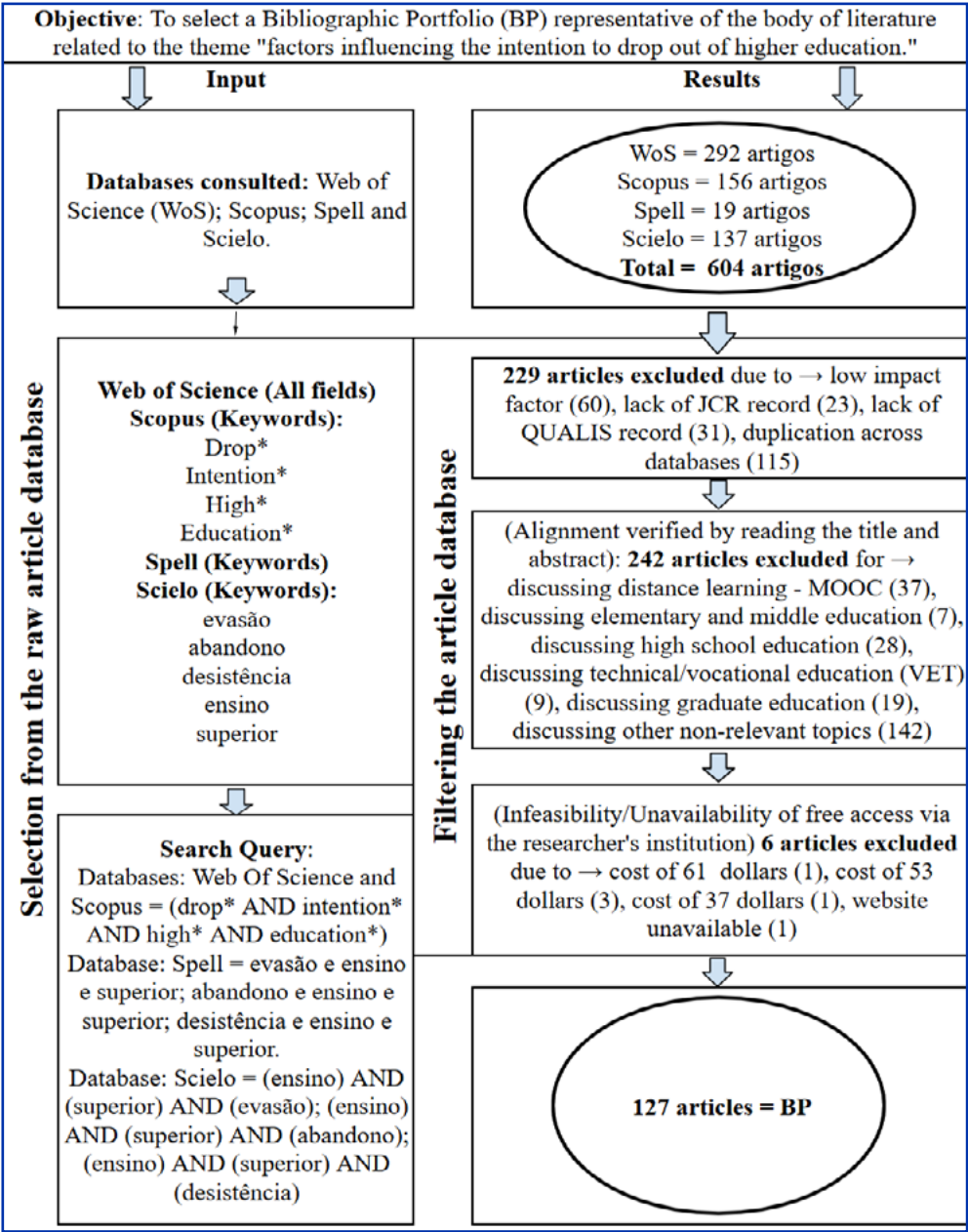
on dropout intention in higher education, drawing on multidisciplinary scientific articles indexed in the Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, Spell, and Scielo databases. The search strategy prioritized nationally and internationally recognized publications with established scientific impact, as reflected by their citation performance (Munaro et al., 2024). The operational procedures adopted during this stage are presented in Figure 1.

The search command in the WoS and Scopus databases was performed as follows and in English: *drop ** and *intention ** and *high ** and *education **. In Spell, the initial command was: *evasão e ensino e superior*. In Scielo: (ensino) AND (superior) AND (evasão). The search was limited to the publication year filters of the last 5 years (2019-2024) in all databases, however, only in Scielo was manual filtering necessary because the database filter did not work correctly. Furthermore, in Scopus it was necessary to limit the search by area of social sciences and psychology for the purpose of optimizing the findings. After reading the title, five works representing the research topic were randomly selected and the adherence of the keywords was verified. It was found after the test that it would be necessary to include two more descriptors, widely typified in the study of dropout, “abandono” and “desistência” in the Latin databases Spell and Scielo. In this regard, it was necessary to conduct a set of three searches in Portuguese across the aforementioned databases so that the BP would represent, as faithfully as possible, the segment of literature intended for study.

Thus, in Spell the final search command was: *evasão e ensino e superior; abandono e ensino e superior; desistência e ensino e superior*. In Scielo: (ensino) AND (superior) AND (evasão); (ensino) AND (superior) AND (abandono); (ensino) AND (superior) AND (desistência). The searches in WoS took place between March 9th and 14th, 2024, and in Scopus between March 14th and 24th, 2024. 292 articles were found in WoS and 156 articles in Scopus. In Spell, the searches took place between September 12th and 13th, 2024, and in Scielo between September 16th and 20th. 19 articles were found in Spell and 137 articles in Scielo.

After the keyword fit test (Munaro et al., 2024), the systematic review considered the following inclusion criteria: i) articles whose subject matter is explicitly related to intentions to drop out of higher education; ii) articles published between 2019 and 2024; and the following exclusion criteria: i) works that are not articles; ii) duplicate

Figure 1. Steps for selecting a Bibliographic Portfolio guided by ProKnow-C.



Source: Author's own elaboration.

articles; iii) articles whose subject matter is linked to primary education, secondary education, vocational education and training (VET), postgraduate studies (PhD), and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC); iv) articles that are not from areas relevant to the subject of interest, such as the medical field; v) articles found in the WoS and Scopus databases published in journals that do not have JCR registration; vi) articles found in the Spell and Scielo databases published in journals that do not have Qualis registration; vii) articles found in the WoS and Scopus databases that do not belong to the Q1 and Q2 quartiles of the JIF impact factor or, in the absence of this factor, do not belong to the Q1 and Q2 quartiles of the JCI citation factor; viii) articles found in the Spell and Scielo databases that do not belong to the Qualis A classification; ix) articles that require financial availability from the researcher for access.

After applying the aforementioned criteria, the references of the selected articles were analyzed to identify relevant studies that might have been excluded during the title-screening phase. Although the final BP was intended to comprise 128 articles, the paper by German researcher Mouton (2020) titled “German university student’s reasons for dropout: Identifying latent classes” was inaccessible because the link to the journal’s website appeared to be broken. Despite multiple attempts to access it on different days, the effort was unsuccessful. Consequently, the BP consisted of 127 scientific articles, which constitute the dataset analyzed in this study. These articles were used to present the most frequently discussed factors regarding dropout intention in higher education, including associated variables and proposed approaches for future research.

Analysis and Discussion of Results

BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF BASIC VARIABLES (PROKNOW-C)

This section presents the results of the bibliometric analysis of the 127 articles included in the bibliographic portfolio on dropout intention in higher education. The analysis began by examining the ten most prolific authors and their respective institutional affiliations (Table 1). Half of these researchers are affiliated with European higher education institutions, whereas (20%) are based in Oceania, (10%) in Africa, (10%) in North America, and (10%) in Asia.

Table 1. Authors with the highest productivity.

Author	University	H-index	Number of times cited	Number of Publications
Gillet, Nicolas	University Institute of France (France)	34	3528	140
Morelli, Mara	Sapienza University of Rome (Italy)	20	1057	126
Mostert, Karina	North West University (South Africa)	18	1385	60
Hamid Sharif-Nia	Mazandaran University (Iran)	18	1201	187
Matos Bernardo, Ana Beatriz	University of Oviedo (Spain)	17	761	46
Cazan, Ana-Maria	Transylvania University of Brasov (Romania)	16	712	61
Li, Ian	Curtin University (Australia)	15	1190	85
Inheritance, Brody	University of Western Australia (Australia)	14	699	50
Buizza, Chiara	University of Brescia (Italy)	12	337	46
Pitas, Nicholas	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (USA)	9	330	31

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The findings indicate that these authors have produced multidisciplinary research that has achieved broad international recognition. This is evidenced by the publication of their studies in journals ranked in the first or second quartile according to the Journal Impact Factor (JIF). Brazil, Germany, Spain, Romania, and Chile emerged as the countries with the greatest research output on dropout intention in higher education, collectively accounting for more than half of the studies included

in the review (Table 2). The remaining publications originated from Hungary, Iran, the Netherlands, Mexico, Ethiopia, Switzerland, Malaysia, and Thailand, as well as one multicountry study conducted by Berei and Pusztai (2022), entitled Learning through Digital Devices—Academic Risks and Responsibilities, which analyzed data from university students in Slovakia, Serbia, Ukraine, Romania, and Hungary.

Table 2. Countries that conduct the most research on dropout intentions in higher education.

Country of Research	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total	Percentage (%)
Brazil	4	9	8	9	9	2	41	32,28
Germany	2	4	3	8	6	-	23	18,11
Spain	1	3	1	3	4	-	12	9,45
Romania	-	-	2	1	2	-	5	3,93
Chile	1	-	-	2	2	-	5	3,93
USA	-	-	1	-	3	-	4	3,15
Italy	-	-	-	-	3	1	4	3,15
Colombia	1	-	1	1	1	-	4	3,15
Portugal	-	-	1	1	1	-	3	2,36
Australia	-	-	1	-	2	-	3	2,36
South Africa	-	1	-	1	1	-	3	2,36
Norway	-	1	-	2	-	-	3	2,36
Belgium	1	-	1	-	-	-	2	1,58
France	-	1	-	-	-	1	2	1,58
England	1	-	-	-	-	1	2	1,58
Peru	-	-	-	1	-	1	2	1,58
Other Countries	1	-	1	5	2	-	9	7,09
Total	12	19	20	34	36	6	127	100,00%

Source: Author's own elaboration.

When the geographical context of a study could not be identified, the country of the corresponding author's institutional affiliation was used as the reference. Based on this criterion, Europe accounted for the largest share of the studies, with 60 publications (47.24%), followed closely by the Americas, with 57 publications (44.88%). The remaining 10 studies (7.88%) were conducted in Africa, Asia, and Oceania.

ANALYSIS OF ADVANCED AND SYSTEMIC VARIABLES (PROKNOW-C)

This section presents an in-depth analysis of the advanced and systemic variables associated with dropout intention. The analytical framework is grounded in the concept of university dropout proposed by the Special Commission for Studies on Dropout (BRAZIL, 1997, p. 19), which defines dropout as **“the definitive departure of a student from their original degree program before its completion.”** Building on this definition, the analysis explores how previous studies have examined the variables associated with students' intention to withdraw from higher education.

To organize the evidence, the findings, discussions, and conclusions of the selected studies were synthesized into four analytical dimensions: i) pre-entry attributes (Tinto, 1975); ii) psychological factors (Bean, 1980); iii) institutional, academic, and social integration factors (Tinto, 1975); and iv) financial factors (Bean, 1980). The following sections discuss each of these dimensions separately, emphasizing the variables most frequently associated with dropout intention across the reviewed studies. By identifying the factors with the highest frequency of occurrence in the literature, this review provides higher education institutions with evidence that may help prioritize intervention strategies and allocate resources toward the predictors most consistently associated with students' intention to leave higher education.

Pre-entry attributes

The evidence synthesized in this SLR indicates that pre-entry attributes exert a significant influence on dropout intention. Variables such as **age**, **prior educational background**, and **previous academic achievement** have been consistently associated with students' trajectories in higher education (Casanova et al., 2023; González-Nieto & Rodríguez-Hernández, 2023). In particular, older students (Li & Jackson, 2023), non-scholarship recipients, and students with lower prior academic performance exhibit a greater likelihood of intending to withdraw from higher

education, suggesting that these characteristics constitute important predictors of dropout intention (Casanova et al., 2023). Evidence from Australia and South Africa further indicates that Indigenous students (Li & Jackson, 2023) and Black students from working-class backgrounds (Masutha, 2022) are more likely to report dropout intention due to family- and community-related challenges, particularly those associated with housing and financial constraints.

Overall, the reviewed studies reported 71 occurrences involving pre-entry variables associated with dropout intention, as summarized in Chart 1.

Chart 1. Relationship between pre-entry attributes and intention to drop out of studies.

Pre-entry attributes		
Variables	Incidents	%
Gender	16	22,52
Previous GPA (Grade Point Average / High School Academic Performance / Entrance Exam Grade)	9	12,67
First-year students	8	11,26
Older students	7	9,86
First-generation students (parents with disadvantaged educational background)	7	9,86
Transnational Students / Migrants	5	7,04
Black Students	4	5,64
Indigenous Students	3	4,23
Students in relationships before enrollment.	3	4,23
Students who start a new relationship after enrolling.	2	2,82
Students with physical/mental limitations	2	2,82
Students with compromised health	2	2,82
Children	2	2,82
Time between finishing high school and entering higher education.	1	1,41
TOTAL	71	100

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The pre-entry variables most consistently associated with dropout intention include: **i) gender; ii) prior academic achievement; iii) first-year status; iv) age, and v) first-generation student status.**

The evidence consistently indicates that older students (Casanova et al., 2023; Li & Jackson, 2023) and male students (Cocoradă et al., 2021; Baalman et al., 2022; Del Savio et al., 2022; Kox et al., 2022; Năstasă et al., 2022; Pusztai et al., 2022) are more likely to report dropout intention than their younger and female counterparts.

International studies suggest that older students often experience greater challenges in organizing their learning activities because they have typically spent longer periods away from formal education and must reconcile academic demands with professional, family, and other adult responsibilities. These competing demands are associated with higher absenteeism, reduced participation in collaborative learning activities, and fewer opportunities to interact with peers and faculty members, thereby increasing the likelihood of dropout intention (Casanova et al., 2023; Li & Jackson, 2023). By contrast, several studies report that female students generally demonstrate higher levels of resilience and motivation, facilitating academic adjustment and sustained engagement throughout their studies (Del Savio et al., 2022; Kox et al., 2022; Năstasă et al., 2022).

Evidence from Brazil closely mirrors these international findings. Sousa et al. (2024), in a study conducted with students from a public university in Brazil's Midwest region, identified age as a significant predictor of dropout, showing that the probability of remaining enrolled decreases as students grow older. Their results indicate that each additional year of age is associated with an approximately 40% increase in the likelihood of dropping out of higher education. Likewise, Nierotka et al. (2023a), analyzing students from southern Brazil, found that those entering university between the ages of 17 and 20 exhibited the highest probability of degree completion and the lowest likelihood of dropout. In contrast, students entering between the ages of 21 and 24 were 59% more likely to drop out than younger entrants, whereas those aged 25 to 28 had a 70% lower probability of graduating and nearly twice the risk of dropout compared with students aged 17 to 20. These findings suggest that increasing age is accompanied by greater professional, family, and social responsibilities, which may reduce students' capacity

to persist and successfully complete their degree programs (Lopes et al., 2023; Sousa et al., 2024).

The Brazilian evidence also corroborates international findings regarding gender differences. Sousa et al. (2024) reported that male students were 5.78 times more likely than female students to leave higher education. Similar results were observed by Cunha et al. (2023), who found that the dropout rate among male students at the Federal University of Recôncavo da Bahia (UFRB) was 1.25 times higher than that of female students. Overall, female students consistently exhibit lower dropout rates and higher probabilities of degree completion (Nierotka et al., 2023a). Among the studies included in the bibliographic portfolio, only Casanova et al. (2023), based on a sample of Portuguese students, reported findings that diverged from this pattern.

Another recurring finding concerns students' stage of progression within their degree program. The literature consistently shows that the risk of dropout is highest during the first semester or first year of undergraduate study, making this period particularly critical for student retention (Saccaro et al., 2019; Moura et al., 2020; Pena et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2021; Felizardo et al., 2022; Galve-González et al., 2023; Nierotka et al., 2023b). Early academic experiences therefore play a decisive role in shaping students' persistence and subsequent educational trajectories.

First-generation students whose parents have comparatively lower educational attainment also exhibit higher levels of dropout intention. The literature suggests that these students are more likely to perceive the university environment as unfamiliar, report lower academic self-confidence during the first year, and experience greater difficulties adapting to higher education (Cocoradă et al., 2021; Pusztai et al., 2022; Ko et al., 2023; Begum et al., 2024; Buizza et al., 2024). Conversely, higher parental educational attainment appears to contribute to student persistence by facilitating more informed educational choices and providing stronger academic and emotional support throughout the undergraduate experience (Sousa et al., 2024).

Additional evidence highlights the influence of students' social background and origin. Steele and Douglas (2021), studying students enrolled at an Australian university, found that transnational students reported lower levels of social and academic integration, weaker institutional commitment, and lower academic satisfaction than domestic students. As a result, they experienced a progressive

decline in their sense of belonging and were more likely to consider leaving higher education. Similar findings were reported by Cunha et al. (2023) in northeastern Brazil, where students experienced separation from their families, increased domestic responsibilities, and difficulties integrating socially and academically after entering university.

Finally, the literature also identifies racial inequalities as an important predictor of dropout. Studies conducted by Masutha (2022) and Nierotka et al. (2023a) indicate that Black students are more likely to leave higher education than their White peers. Supporting this evidence, the six-year longitudinal study by Nierotka et al. (2023b), based on a cohort of 1,391 students who entered a Brazilian university in 2013, found that Black students faced an almost 30% higher risk of dropout than White students, even after controlling for other explanatory variables.

Factors of Institutional, Academic, and Social Integration

Studies included in this SLR reported 193 occurrences involving institutional, academic, and social integration factors associated with dropout intention, as summarized in Chart 2.

Chart 2. Relationship between integration factors <-> Intention to drop out of studies.

Factors of Institutional, Academic, and Social Integration		
Variables	Incidents	%
Academic performance	21	10,88
Satisfaction with the choice of course/program	18	9,32
Relationship with friends/colleagues at university	16	8,30
Relationship with teachers	16	8,30
Sense of belonging	15	7,77
Satisfaction with education	14	7,25
Educational aspirations (opinion/support) of parents, family, partner or friends.	14	7,25
Academic engagement	10	5,18
Educational environment climate	8	4,14

Self-doubt in one's own abilities as a student	7	3,62
Academic dedication (Interest in studying, class attendance, etc.)	6	3,10
Lack of understanding of the content compared to other colleagues.	6	3,10
Job satisfaction	6	3,10
Academic procrastination	5	2,59
Loneliness	5	2,59
Perceived institutional support	4	2,08
Satisfaction with institutional strategies	4	2,08
University social satisfaction	3	1,55
First choice course	2	1,04
Digital exclusion	2	1,04
Victim of Bullying or Cyberbullying	2	1,04
Self-perceived competition and performance competition with colleagues	1	0,52
Group Consciousness (Social interaction as a form of academic support/help)	1	0,52
Second choice course	1	0,52
Academic maladjustment	1	0,52
Assessment Method	1	0,52
First half GPA	1	0,52
First choice institution	1	0,52
Relationship with non-university friends/colleagues	1	0,52
Time spent browsing online (Internet)	1	0,52
TOTAL	193	100

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The most prominent variables related to the intention to drop out concern:
i) **Academic performance**; ii) **Satisfaction with the choice of course/program**; iii) **Relationship with friends/colleagues**; iv) **Relationship with professors**;
v) **Sense of belonging**.

Among these, **academic performance** emerges as one of the strongest predictors of student persistence and dropout intention (Singh & Alhulail, 2022; Buizza et al., 2024). For example, Năstăsă et al. (2022), in a study involving Romanian students enrolled in agricultural programs, found that higher academic performance was negatively associated with dropout intention. According to the authors, high-achieving students experienced fewer negative emotional reactions to adverse academic evaluations than lower-performing students and those who had already withdrawn from higher education.

Another recurring finding concerns students' **sense of belonging**, which has consistently been identified as a fundamental psychological need and one of the most influential predictors of dropout intention (Sharif-Nia et al., 2023). The literature demonstrates a clear inverse relationship between these constructs: the stronger students' sense of belonging to their institution, the lower their likelihood of intending to leave higher education (Fourie, 2020).

Sense of belonging reflects the subjective perception of being accepted and valued within multiple social contexts including family, peer groups, educational institutions, workplaces, and broader communities and constitutes a fundamental motivational resource that shapes both cognition and behavior (Sharif-Nia et al., 2023). Evidence reported by Buizza et al. (2024) further suggests that universities capable of fostering a strong sense of belonging through their educational practices are more likely to retain their students.

The literature also highlights the detrimental effects of bullying and cyberbullying on students' integration into university life. Bernardo et al. (2020) found that experiences of bullying significantly undermined students' sense of belonging, thereby increasing the likelihood of dropout intention. Similar findings were reported by Sharif-Nia et al. (2023), who observed that bullying experiences were positively associated with dropout intention while simultaneously reducing both students' sense of belonging and their academic satisfaction. Their findings further demonstrated that academic satisfaction and sense of belonging partially mediated the relationship between bullying and dropout intention.

The quality of faculty student relationships also emerges as a significant protective factor. Studies indicate that supportive interactions with faculty strengthen students' motivational persistence and reduce dropout intention (Bostan et al.,

2021; Singh & Alhulail, 2022). In Romania, Bostan et al. (2021) identified a significant negative association between motivational persistence and early dropout intention, emphasizing the importance of educational environments that promote positive psychological development and sustained academic engagement.

Similarly, strong social support networks play a central role in promoting student persistence. Wittner et al. (2022), studying first-generation students in Germany, found that support from family members, friends, and teachers enhanced students' confidence in their educational choices and reinforced their commitment to completing their degree. Likewise, positive peer interactions (Maluenda-Albornoz et al., 2022; Pusztai et al., 2022; López-Angulo et al., 2023) and supportive faculty-student relationships (Enguidanos et al., 2023; Passeggia et al., 2023; Sharif-Nia et al., 2023) contribute to a more favorable university climate, increasing academic satisfaction, resilience, and social integration (Steele & Douglas, 2021).

Peer support also exerts an indirect protective effect by strengthening students' sense of belonging (Morelli et al., 2023). Students who perceive greater support from their peers tend to develop stronger institutional attachment and, consequently, report lower levels of dropout intention (Fourie, 2020). Likewise, the educational aspirations and encouragement provided by parents, family members, partners, and close friends are consistently associated with lower dropout intention (Baalmann et al., 2022; Wittner et al., 2022; López-Angulo et al., 2023).

Baalmann et al. (2022), investigating German university students, demonstrated that parental educational aspirations were negatively associated with dropout intention. The study further showed that students living with a partner generally exhibited lower dropout intention, whereas beginning a new romantic relationship during university was associated with an increased likelihood of considering withdrawal. In addition, close friendships established within the university environment reduced dropout intention, while maintaining predominantly non-university social networks was associated with a greater tendency to consider leaving higher education.

These findings underscore the importance of students' immediate social environment. When significant others express confidence in students' ability to complete their degree, this support strengthens both self-confidence and self-efficacy, thereby reducing dropout intention. Conversely, low educational expectations among

close social contacts may undermine students' confidence and increase their intention to withdraw (Baalmann et al., 2022).

The protective role of peer relationships is further reinforced by Morelli et al. (2023), who found that students with a larger network of university friends exhibited lower dropout intention, even when reporting low levels of self-efficacy. In this context, friendships functioned as a protective factor, buffering the negative effects of lower self-regulated learning self-efficacy on dropout intention. Similar conclusions have been reported in other recent studies (Bostan et al., 2021; Ekornes, 2022; Buizza et al., 2024).

Academic satisfaction also emerges as one of the most consistent predictors of dropout intention. Multiple studies have identified a significant negative relationship between satisfaction with the educational experience and students' intention to leave higher education (Scheunemann et al., 2022; Lindner et al., 2023; Buizza et al., 2024). In Spain, Bernardo et al. (2022) identified satisfaction with the degree program and the fulfillment of academic expectations as important predictors of dropout intention, demonstrating that multiple institutional and individual factors exert both direct and indirect effects on students' decisions to persist or withdraw.

Evidence from Brazil corroborates these findings. Bouças da Silva et al. (2020) reported that students' satisfaction with their studies is closely linked to their career expectations, particularly perceived employment opportunities and expected financial returns. Limited prospects for professional development were associated with higher dropout intention. Accordingly, greater satisfaction with the degree program appears to reduce institution-related reasons for withdrawal by providing students with educational conditions that foster academic development, engagement, and persistence (Ambiel et al., 2021).

Academic satisfaction is generally understood as students' overall affective evaluation of their university experience and is shaped by multiple institutional factors, including teaching quality, learning resources, technological infrastructure, and curriculum design (Steele & Douglas, 2021). Scheunemann et al. (2022), in a three-wave longitudinal study conducted in Germany, demonstrated that dropout intention mediates the relationship between both internal and external determinants of student withdrawal and actual dropout behavior. Their findings revealed that lower academic satisfaction was strongly associated with higher dropout intention

throughout the observation period. Extending this line of research, Lindner et al. (2023) conducted a three-year longitudinal study and provided more robust evidence showing that academic dissatisfaction predicts increasing dropout intention over time, while academic procrastination is negatively associated with academic satisfaction.

Psychological Factors

In the results of the analyzed studies, it was possible to identify 146 instances of conclusions regarding psychological variables related to dropout intention, as shown in Chart 3.

Chart 3. Relationship between Psychological Factors <-> Intention to drop out of studies.

Psychological Factors		
Variables	Incidents	%
Intrinsic student motivation (career decision, beliefs about their abilities, value of studies, etc.)	27	18,50
Self-Regulation Strategies (Ability to plan, monitor, evaluate, organize tasks, time management, perceived control, etc.)	18	12,34
Self-efficacy (Ability to adapt to changes/unforeseen events)	17	11,65
Persistence/Resilience	14	9,59
Anxiety	11	7,54
Stress (Tension/Nervousness while studying)	9	6,17
Well-being (Sense of belonging + Good academic performance)	7	4,80
Optimism about being a student	6	4,10
Self-esteem	5	3,43
Burnout (Emotional exhaustion resulting from overwork)	5	3,43
Boredom	5	3,43
Depression	4	2,74

Exhaustion	4	2,74
Frustration	3	2,05
The pleasure of learning.	3	2,05
Anguish	2	1,36
Extrinsic Motivation of the Student (External pressure from family/society)	2	1,36
Cynicism	1	0,68
Hopelessness	1	0,68
Fear of failure	1	0,68
Suffering while studying (High perceived cost)	1	0,68
GROUP SUBTOTAL	146	100

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The psychological variables most consistently associated with dropout intention include: **i) intrinsic motivation; ii) self-regulated learning strategies; iii) self-efficacy; iv) persistence and resilience; and v) anxiety.**

A substantial body of research has examined individual student characteristics—including personality traits, motivational processes, and goal commitment—to explain dropout intention, giving rise to the psychological perspective on student persistence. Recent evidence consistently identifies **motivation** as one of the most influential individual determinants of dropout intention (Díaz-Mujica et al., 2019; Bargmann et al., 2022; Morelli et al., 2023; Buizza et al., 2024).

Academic motivation has been shown to be positively associated with academic performance (Bostan et al., 2021; Singh & Alhulail, 2022; Buizza et al., 2024) and negatively associated with dropout intention (Bargmann et al., 2022). Students who are strongly motivated to complete their degree and achieve academic success are considerably less likely to consider leaving higher education (Fourie, 2020).

The literature further distinguishes between **intrinsic** and **extrinsic motivation**. Several studies demonstrate that intrinsically motivated students are more likely to persist in higher education (Díaz-Mujica et al., 2019; Cocoradă et al., 2021; Morelli et al., 2023; Buizza et al., 2024). Conversely, motivations driven primarily by external pressures or expectations are positively associated with dropout intention, suggesting that students whose educational decisions depend largely on external

influences are more likely to consider withdrawing from university (Díaz-Mujica et al., 2019; Fourie, 2020).

Students who pursue higher education for personal fulfillment, intellectual development, or career aspirations generally achieve better academic outcomes than those primarily motivated by external expectations, such as meeting parental or social demands (Morelli et al., 2023; Díaz-Mujica et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the encouragement provided by parents, family members, and close friends remains a crucial source of social support, influencing students' persistence throughout their academic journey (López-Aguilar et al., 2022).

Self-efficacy also emerges as one of the most robust psychological predictors of dropout intention. Buizza et al. (2024), in a study conducted with Italian university students, examined the relationships among learning strategies, motivation, self-efficacy, and dropout intention. Their findings showed that **academic self-efficacy**—defined as students' beliefs in their capacity to successfully perform academic tasks and achieve educational goals—was negatively associated with university dropout. More specifically, higher levels of **self-efficacy for self-regulated learning**, encompassing planning, monitoring, task organization, time management, and self-evaluation, significantly reduced students' likelihood of considering withdrawal from higher education. Conversely, low confidence in one's academic abilities undermined intrinsic motivation and increased dropout intention (Fourie, 2020; Cocoradă et al., 2021).

Another psychological construct receiving growing attention is **self-regulated learning** (Castro-Lopez et al., 2022; Galve-González et al., 2023). Highly self-regulated students actively plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning, selecting strategies appropriate to their goals and adapting them when necessary in response to academic feedback (Mascia et al., 2023). Components such as time management, effort regulation, and metacognitive regulation have consistently been identified as important determinants of academic success in higher education (Castro-Lopez et al., 2022). Supporting this evidence, Kryshko et al. (2020), in both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses of German university students, found that academic performance was significantly predicted by self-regulated learning strategies together with previous academic achievement, measured by secondary school GPA.

Persistence and **resilience** likewise represent key protective psychological resources. López-Aguilar et al. (2023) found that resilient university students were better able to overcome academic setbacks while maintaining satisfactory learning outcomes. These students demonstrated greater capacity to cope with anxiety, low self-esteem, stress, and limited social skills—factors frequently associated with dropout. Similar findings were reported by Van Hoek et al. (2019), who showed that resilience significantly predicted academic success among Belgian university students. Resilient individuals were more likely to engage in adaptive coping behaviors while avoiding harmful responses to stress, including excessive alcohol consumption and self-harming behaviors.

Among the psychological barriers to persistence, **anxiety** has emerged as one of the most influential. Characterized by persistent feelings of worry, nervousness, and fear during periods of academic and personal transition, anxiety compromises students' ability to cope effectively with university demands (Cocoradă et al., 2021). Bäumle et al. (2022), for example, identified a positive association between anxiety, procrastination, and dropout intention, indicating that elevated anxiety substantially increases students' propensity to consider leaving higher education.

Evidence from Brazil reinforces these international findings. Eisenberg and Duarte (2024), investigating students at a public university in Rio de Janeiro, found that although students primarily sought institutional support for academic concerns, their most significant difficulties were socio-emotional. These findings suggest that psychoeducational support services provide an appropriate setting for interventions aimed at strengthening self-regulation, preventing stress, and addressing emotional difficulties that may hinder academic progress. Such initiatives are particularly important for students from historically underrepresented groups, who often face structural inequalities, limited educational opportunities before university, and unfamiliarity with academic culture.

Similarly, Rosendo et al. (2022), studying students from three Brazilian universities, demonstrated that resilience developed through educational experiences positively influenced psychological well-being and served as a protective factor against depression, stress, anxiety, and loneliness. The authors further argued that investments in interventions promoting self-awareness—such as psychotherapy—as well as programs designed to strengthen self-efficacy, coping strategies, and

collaborative peer relationships may substantially enhance students’ well-being, academic success, and future professional satisfaction.

Finally, satisfaction of the three **basic psychological needs** proposed by **Self-Determination Theory**—relatedness, competence, and autonomy—has consistently been identified as a central determinant of students’ well-being and educational success (Gillet et al., 2020). Academic satisfaction reflects students’ overall evaluation of their educational experience, including aspects such as their degree program, learning conditions, and the extent to which their expectations are fulfilled (Scheunemann et al., 2022). When these psychological needs remain unmet, students become more vulnerable to burnout, diminished engagement, and, ultimately, stronger dropout intention (Gillet et al., 2020).

Financial Factors

Studies reveal a total of 45 instances of conclusions regarding financial variables with the intention of evasion, as shown in Chart 4.

Chart 4. Relationship between Financial Factors <-> Intention to drop out of studies.

Financial Factors		
Variables	Incidents	%
Financial scarcity	23	51,11
Unfavorable socioeconomic situation.	11	24,47
Paying university tuition fees / fees	3	6,66
Students without scholarships	2	4,44
Students with scholarships	2	4,44
Unwanted housing	2	4,44
Employment Situation	2	4,44
GROUP SUBTOTAL	45	100

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The financial variables most consistently associated with **dropout intention** include **(i) financial hardship, (ii) socioeconomic disadvantage, (iii) tuition payment, (iv) scholarship status, and (v) housing conditions.**

Socioeconomic resources play a fundamental role in students' adaptation to higher education and constitute one of the main determinants of academic persistence (Pusztai et al., 2022; González-Nieto & Rodríguez-Hernández, 2023). Financial support policies including scholarships, grants, and other forms of student aid are particularly important for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, as they facilitate access to higher education while strengthening engagement, persistence, and degree completion (Casanova et al., 2023).

Evidence from Brazil reinforces this relationship. Kroth and Barth (2021), analyzing students enrolled at a federal university in southern Brazil, demonstrated that financial aid substantially reduced the negative effects of family, individual, situational, and institutional disadvantages on student persistence. Their study followed **8.579** students over a four-year period, during which **3.334 students (38,9%)** withdrew from higher education. Among those who dropped out, only **20,6%** had received financial assistance, providing strong evidence that financial aid contributes to retaining economically vulnerable students in higher education.

Similar conclusions have been reported in other Brazilian studies. Machado et al. (2021), examining students who withdrew between 2009 and 2018, identified financial difficulties as the most frequently reported explanation for dropout, particularly in relation to health, time constraints, and economic hardship. Likewise, Bouças da Silva et al. (2020) found that students attending a federal university in northeastern Brazil often struggled to reconcile academic demands with employment and family responsibilities because of financial instability. Many students were required to maintain demanding work schedules to supplement household income, reinforcing the importance of scholarships, student loans, and public policies aimed at promoting persistence among economically disadvantaged students. Comparable findings have also been reported by Moura and Matos (2022).

The importance of financial support extends beyond the Brazilian context. Masutha (2022), investigating working-class Black students in South Africa, found that financial aid mitigated many of the challenges associated with socioeconomic disadvantage and the simultaneous demands of employment and study. However, the study also demonstrated that inadequately designed or poorly managed financial aid policies may inadvertently intensify students' already difficult transition into higher education, thereby reducing their likelihood of completing their degree.

Socioeconomic disadvantage consistently emerges as a major predictor of dropout intention. Cocoradă et al. (2021), studying first-year university students in Romania, reported that students from economically disadvantaged families were significantly more likely to express dropout intention. Similarly, Pusztai et al. (2022) found that persistent students generally reported the most favorable financial circumstances, whereas students at risk of dropout experienced less favorable economic conditions, and those who had already withdrawn exhibited the greatest financial disadvantage. Collectively, these findings indicate that limited family income increases students' vulnerability to dropout by making it more difficult to meet living expenses and educational costs (Cocoradă et al., 2021; Masutha, 2022; Pusztai et al., 2022).

Tuition payment also represents an important financial barrier to persistence. Pusztai et al. (2022) demonstrated that students required to pay tuition fees even for only one academic semestre were almost twice as likely to consider leaving higher education as students enrolled in tuition-free programs. According to the authors, financial obligations reduce students' confidence in successfully completing their degree, thereby increasing dropout intention.

Employment status presents a more complex relationship with student persistence. Contrary to the assumption that employment necessarily hinders academic success, studies conducted in Germany and Hungary suggest that employed students generally report lower levels of dropout intention (Baalmann et al., 2022; Pusztai et al., 2022). Although the mechanisms underlying this relationship remain unclear, Baalmann et al. (2022) argue that employment does not inevitably reduce the time available for study or increase exhaustion. Instead, paid work may strengthen students' commitment to completing their degree efficiently, resulting in shorter times to graduation.

Housing conditions also influence dropout intention. Studies conducted in the Netherlands and Australia indicate that students living independently whether alone, with roommates, or with a partner face greater financial and residential responsibilities than those who continue living with their parents (Kox et al., 2022; Li & Jackson, 2023). These additional demands reduce parental support and may increase financial strain, thereby contributing to a higher likelihood of considering withdrawal from higher education.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE FIELD (PROKNOW-C RESEARCH QUESTIONS)

Based on the analyses, Table 3 summarizes the categories that showed the strongest association with dropout intention across the studies included in this review.

Table 3. Results by Category.

Category	%	Incidences
Pre-entry attributes	15.60	71
Factors of Institutional, Academic, and Social Integration	42.42	193
Psychological Factors	32.09	146
Financial Factors	9.89	45
GRAND TOTAL	100	455

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The findings indicate that **institutional, academic, and social integration factors**, together with **psychological factors**, accounted for more than **70%** of the variables identified in the most recent and influential studies. This pattern suggests a clear shift in the literature away from explanations based primarily on sociodemographic and financial characteristics toward a more comprehensive understanding of dropout as a dynamic and multidimensional process. Rather than viewing student withdrawal as the outcome of isolated individual circumstances, recent research increasingly emphasizes the interaction between individual psychological characteristics and students' experiences within the higher education environment.

The synthesis of the evidence also enabled the identification of important research gaps and opportunities for future investigation relevant to both the academic community and higher education practitioners, as summarized in Chart 5. These gaps provide the basis for a future research agenda by highlighting unanswered questions and emerging themes that may advance theoretical understanding of dropout intention while supporting the development of more effective institutional policies and student retention strategies.

Chart 5. Contributions and suggestions for future research.

Contributions/Suggestions for future research	Authors
To investigate variables related to family context and their implications for university dropout intentions.	(Wittner et al., 2022)
To analyze the predictive impact of a screening tool in mitigating the problem of university dropout.	(Gillet et al., 2020; Respondek et al., 2020; Casanova et al., 2021; López-Aguilar & Álvarez-Pérez, 2021; Menkor et al., 2021; Del Savio et al., 2022; Nemtcen et al., 2022; Singh & Alhulail, 2022; Brömmelhaus, 2023; Heritage et al., 2023)
Using qualitative techniques in conjunction with quantitative techniques to enable the identification of more subjective causes of dropout.	(Cunha et al., 2023; Felizardo et al., 2023; Nunes Rodrigues et al., 2023; Sousa et al., 2024)
To investigate socioeconomic variables and their implications for university dropout intentions.	(Bargmann et al., 2022; Masutha, 2022; Cunha et al., 2023; Lopes et al., 2023; Sharif-Nia et al., 2023; Begum et al., 2024)
To analyze and understand the academic outcomes of students with prior migration experience and their implications for university dropout intentions.	(Marksteiner et al., 2019; Steele & Douglas, 2021; Mishra & Müller, 2022)
To explore the diverse support needs of students in psychosocial environments as a predictor of dropout in higher education.	(De-Besa-Gutiérrez et al., 2019; Gillet et al., 2020; Respondek et al., 2020; Ekornes, 2022; Năstasă et al., 2022; Cădariu & Rad, 2023; Espinosa et al., 2023; Ngoc Hoi, 2023; Begum et al. al., 2024; Huyghebaert-Zouaghi et al., 2024)
To investigate institutional variables and their implications for university dropout intentions.	(Pena et al., 2020; Nierotka et al., 2023)
To investigate the behavior of variables related to dropout intentions over time in a longitudinal research design.	(Cownie, 2019; Gillet et al., 2020; Pena et al., 2020; Schnettler et al., 2020; Kroth & Barth, 2021; Schlusche et al., 2021; Steele & Douglas, 2021; Bäumke et al., 2022; Felizardo et al., 2022; Rosendo et al. al., 2022; Cobo-Rendón et al., 2023; 2023; 2023; Grabsch et al., 2024)

To investigate dropout intentions and correlate them with actual dropout rates among university students.	(Baalmann et al., 2022; Bäumke et al., 2022; Cunha et al., 2023; Enguídanos et al., 2023; Galve-González et al., 2023; Heritage et al., 2023; Rußmann et al., 2023)
To analyze sociodemographic variables and their implications for university dropout intentions.	(Turhan et al., 2022; Cunha et al., 2023; López-Angulo et al., 2023; Pitas et al., 2023; Turhan et al., 2023; Begum et al., 2024; Sousa et al., 2024)
Apply research on dropout intentions in other university contexts.	(Álvarez-Pérez & López-Aguilar, 2020; Bohndick, 2020; Bouças da Silva et al., 2020; Gillet et al., 2020; Mah & Ifenthaler, 2020; Ambiel et al., 2021; Garcia et al., 2021; Gonçalves et al., 2021; Machado et al., 2021; Murillo-Zabala & Jurado-de los Santos, 2021; 2022; 2022; Maluenda-Albornoz et al., 2022; Reinhold et al., 2022; Singh & Alhulail, 2022; Turhan et al., 2022; Wittner et al., 2022; Casanova et al., 2023; Cobo-Rendón et al., 2023; Cunha et al., 2023; Espinosa et al., 2023; Mascia et al., 2023; Enguidanos et al., 2023; González-Nieto & Rodríguez-Hernández, 2023; Heusel et al., 2023; López-Aguilar et al., 2023; Mostert et al., 2023; Pitas et al., 2023; Sharif-Nia et al., 2023; Turhan et al., 2023; Buizza et al., 2024; Eisenberg & Duarte, 2024; Huyghebaert-Zouaghi et al., 2024; Sousa et al., 2024)
To conduct research on university dropout intentions using a larger or more heterogeneous sample of participants.	(Bernardo et al., 2019; Cownie, 2019; Tentsho et al., 2019; Van Hoek et al., 2019; Bernardo et al., 2020; Bouças da Silva et al., 2020; Cielo et al., 2020; Gillet et al., 2020; Cocoradă et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2021b; Bäumke et al., 2022; Cobo-Rendón et al., 2023; Enguidanos et al., 2023; Espinosa et al., 2023; Galve-González et al., 2023; Ko et al., 2023; Li & Jackson, 2023; Lindner et al., 2023; Mascia et al., 2023; Morelli et al., 2023; Sharif-Nia et al., 2023; Begum et al., 2024; Buizza et al., 2024; Eisenberg & Duarte, 2024)

To investigate the variables that influence dropout intention in a multifaceted way using techniques that explore their mutual interaction.	(Gillet et al., 2020; Castro-Lopez et al., 2022; Cardona et al., 2023; Enguidanos et al., 2023; Galve-González et al., 2023; Heritage et al., 2023; Sousa et al., 2024)
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Source: Author's own elaboration.

The studies included in this review present several methodological limitations that also highlight important directions for future research. Common limitations include limited sample size and heterogeneity, the use of analytical techniques with restricted explanatory capacity, the scarcity of comparable studies conducted in different countries and educational contexts, and the limited availability of longitudinal research designs. Moreover, many studies examined dropout intention without comparing it with actual dropout behavior, restricting the possibility of assessing the predictive validity of this construct.

Future research should adopt a longitudinal perspective that conceptualizes dropout intention as a dynamic process evolving throughout students' academic and professional trajectories. Such studies should integrate individual, institutional, family, social, and cultural characteristics to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping students' decisions to persist or withdraw from higher education. Further efforts are also needed to develop and validate measurement instruments capable of capturing the multidimensional determinants of dropout intention. In addition, researchers are encouraged to employ analytical approaches that explicitly account for the complex interactions among explanatory variables, including multi-criteria decision-making methods and fuzzy-set techniques, as illustrated by Castro-Lopez et al. (2022).

These emerging research directions also create opportunities to strengthen collaboration among scholars working in the field of higher education. Expanding collaborative research networks may help address existing gaps in the literature, promote comparative and multicountry investigations, and generate more robust evidence to support institutional decision-making. Ultimately, these advances may contribute to the development of more reliable tools for monitoring dropout intention and to the design of more effective strategies for promoting student retention.

Final Considerations and Limitations

This study sought to identify the factors and variables associated with dropout intention in higher education by synthesizing evidence from the most recent and influential literature. It also aimed to examine emerging research trends and identify new directions for advancing knowledge in this field. To achieve these objectives, a systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted using the Knowledge Development Process–Constructivist (ProKnow-C) methodology.

The structured synthesis of the selected studies, despite a limited number of divergent findings, provided a comprehensive overview of the determinants of dropout intention and reinforced the multidimensional nature of this phenomenon. Overall, the evidence indicates that contemporary research has progressively shifted away from explanations based exclusively on students' pre-entry sociodemographic and financial characteristics toward a broader perspective that incorporates both individual psychological characteristics and institutional, academic, and social integration processes.

The review further demonstrated that psychological factors and institutional, academic, and social integration factors constitute the most frequently investigated predictors of dropout intention, whereas pre-entry characteristics and financial factors have received comparatively less attention in recent studies. Across the literature, the variables most consistently associated with dropout intention included **gender, previous academic achievement (GPA), first-year status, older age, first-generation student status, academic performance, satisfaction with the degree program, relationships with peers and faculty, sense of belonging, intrinsic motivation, self-regulated learning strategies, self-efficacy, persistence and resilience, anxiety, financial hardship, socioeconomic disadvantage, tuition payment, scholarship status, and housing conditions.**

From a practical perspective, these findings provide valuable guidance for higher education institutions seeking to strengthen student retention. Student support professionals particularly psychologists, counselors, and educational support staff should monitor early indicators of dropout risk and implement interventions that address both students' psychological well-being and their academic and social integration. **i)** Institutions may enhance student persistence by implementing mentoring

programs for first-year and first-generation students; **ii)** promoting self-regulated learning and time-management skills; **iii)** expanding academic and psychological support services; **iv)** strengthening peer mentoring initiatives; **v)** fostering a stronger sense of belonging through social and extracurricular activities; **vi)** encouraging supportive faculty–student relationships; **vii)** offering programs focused on resilience; **viii)** intrinsic motivation; **ix)** anxiety management; **x)** expanding financial assistance for economically vulnerable students; **xi)** establishing partnerships that facilitate paid internships and employment opportunities; and **xii)** improving access to affordable student housing.

Beyond identifying the most influential predictors of dropout intention, this review also organized the existing evidence into a coherent conceptual framework, highlighting how these variables interact and where important knowledge gaps remain. In particular, the synthesis points to promising avenues for future research involving factors that have received limited attention, including violence within university settings, students' perceptions of public safety, disruptions caused by labor strikes, health emergencies such as pandemics, and the educational consequences of climate-related disasters. Incorporating these emerging variables may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of dropout intention and its underlying mechanisms.

Future studies should continue to investigate dropout intention from a holistic and longitudinal perspective, recognizing that students' decisions to persist or withdraw result from the dynamic interaction of psychological, institutional, social, family, financial, and cultural factors throughout their academic trajectory. Additional efforts are also needed to expand the empirical evidence through the application of analytical approaches capable of modeling complex relationships among variables, including multi-criteria decision-making methods and fuzzy-set techniques, as illustrated by Castro-Lopez et al. (2022). Such advances have the potential to strengthen both theoretical understanding and evidence-based institutional strategies aimed at promoting student retention and successful degree completion.

This study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. The review was restricted to articles indexed in the Web of Science, Scopus, Scielo, and SPELL databases that were published between 2019 and 2024. For the international databases, only studies published in journals ranked in the Q1 or Q2 quartiles according

to the Journal Impact Factor (JIF) or Journal Citation Indicator (JCI) were included, whereas, for the Brazilian databases, only journals classified as Qualis A were considered. In addition, the review included only publications that were freely accessible through the researcher's institutional subscriptions. Finally, one potentially relevant study could not be included because access to the publication was unavailable at the time of the review.

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