

School Dropout in a Rural Educational Unit in Manabí

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Summary

School dropout is a social problem that significantly affects the most depressed areas of the population, such as rural areas. The objective of the research was to determine the causes of school dropout in the Alajuela fiscal educational unit in the rural area of the province of Manabí, Ecuador. A mixed approach methodology, non-experimental design, descriptive and explanatory level, was used through the application of a survey structured in 24 questions to an intentional sample of 30 former students, who could be accessed, given the considerable distances from homes in this rural community; An interview was conducted with an education professional and was used in the discussion of the results. 11 causes of school dropout were identified, of which the precarious economic situation due to lack of money and work tops the list of causes, lack of pleasure in studying, emotional situations of pressure due to living with family members, learning problems, pregnancy, free union, loss of the school year, work at home, absences from school, parental problems, and traffic accidents. As a conclusion, it is necessary that the economic measures that are established in each new government significantly affect the income of households, particularly in rural sectors, which do not have a fixed income, and which depend on the sale of agricultural products according to the summer or winter season, making minors who study in rural schools, are forced to make the decision to abandon them because of the expenses they incur to be able to educate themselves.

Keywords: school dropout, low economy, academic performance, rurality, educational unit.

Introduction

The importance of education today implies, in addition to contributing to the living conditions of a population, the strengthening of educational spaces for the integral formation of students, popularly known as the school, the most appropriate place to exercise personal, social, civic and identity learning, which goes beyond academic learning. but which is nevertheless abandoned when interest, motivation and desire for knowledge are lost, a scenario equivalent to what is called school dropout. (Erira & y Yarcé, 2021)

School dropout in rural populations is a problem that has been dragging on for several decades in the various countries of Latin America, data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean denote that it occurs during the course of the primary cycle and only a very low percentage of children and adolescents manage to complete it. A worrying situation that also reveals the immediate reasons why more than 70% of them abandon education, who have pointed out the economic shortages required by their work in the fields helping the family in the sowing and harvesting of agricultural and livestock products, their marketing and sale. (CEPAL, 2021) (Gajardo, 2013)

Based on this information from ECLAC, another important world organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization made a projection of the population school-age children who are at risk of not returning to schools after the COVID 19 health emergency, which would amount to 24 million children and adolescents, due to family or economic situations or simply a lack of interest in the curricular content offered by educational institutions. (UNESCO, 2021)

Early school dropout has various causes that have intensified over time, which generate serious consequences for children and adolescents, ranging from the lack of personal development of children to a high probability of being affected by different social and family problems caused by the scarce job opportunities that exist for an out-of-school population. the most vulnerable group being the rural educational population (Ruiz et al., 2014). (Quishpe & y Yupangui, 2018)

Failures in annual curricular planning, study programs, specific regulations that are adjusted each year school, are added to "deficiencies in the preparation and updating of teaching staff, family difficulties that the student must face or the lack of a life objective or project". (Rochin, 2021)

Other difficulties that manifest themselves prior to school dropout have to do with learning the letters of the alphabet, writing words and reading paragraphs, that is, reading and writing (Torres et al., which for a segment of the child population has become difficult to assimilate when didactic techniques of teaching and learning that promote linguistic and narrative skills in children are not used, detecting them in time would largely mean that they can stay in the educational unit and do not want to leave it (Cedeño et al., (2017) (2019)

The first year of high school or university in an educational institution can become conflictive in a student, compromising their academic performance, but above all their mood when they do not feel part of the group, and do not experience motivation or support from a member of the faculty who can positively guide them to continue their training (Macías et al., ; it is healthy for educational institutions to implement effective psychological help programs through the corresponding area, involving parents or relatives in charge, as fundamental support elements for young people (Donoso et al., 2018). (2020)

The current reality of Ecuadorian education continues to face this academic and socio-cultural threat, both in infants, adolescents and young learners, since they also combine several elements of both individual and social groups, such as poor study habits, learning problems, educational needs, special educational needs, extended families, early and early pregnancies, child labor, the consumption of psychotropic substances, alcohol, among others. (Estrada, Hidalgo, Silva, & Abril, 2022)

In the rural areas of Ecuador and coastal provinces such as Manabí, where the winter season becomes severe due to the flooding of estuaries, streams and other waterbeds such as rivers, affecting many educational establishments that do not have a solid infrastructure that can withstand the inclement rains, which also destroy neighborhood roads and make it a challenge to get to school, given the distances that must be traveled to get there, since in rural places the houses are quite far from each other. (Macías, 2021) (Imbaquingo, 2021)

The above is increased by another reality of these schools, in which there is only one teacher for all levels of training, hence most rural educational centers are single-teacher, and it is a single professional who must teach the different subjects to all students, and is the one who must overcome multiple obstacles from physical to educational to be able to bring teaching to all of them. this is a panorama of teacher responsibility; however, the opposite situation occurs of the teacher who eventually attends excused in all the adversities indicated, causing the desertion by the students to be accelerated, as they feel little motivated by learning. (Garofalo & and Villao, 2018) (Blanco & y Carruyo, 2022)

This situation is painful and alarming for parents, teachers and school administrators, who are limited in reducing this problem that threatens the formation of the most important sector of the population, children, conceived as the present and future of a nation, although, achieving the objective of reintegrating them into the classrooms, although it is an arduous task, It is not impossible when the necessary means are dedicated to ensure that more children and adolescents can complete their basic general education and high school. (Pérez & y Chong, 2020)

The purpose of this research is to analyze the causes of school dropout in a fiscal educational unit in rural areas of the province of Manabí, Ecuador.

The causes of school dropout in rural schools involve socioeconomic factors, limited access to education, and demotivation and lack of support.

Socioeconomic factors are determinants of school dropout in rural schools. These factors include the lack of economic resources, the need to work to help at home, and the low quality of life in the rural community (Gómez et al., 2022), which hinder access to quality education and limit development opportunities for students in these schools (Calero et al., 2023).

The lack of financial resources prevents many families from covering basic school expenses, such as uniforms, materials, and transportation (Lino et al., 2020). The need to work to support the household forces many students to drop out of school to seek employment; the low quality of life in the rural community negatively affects both the educational infrastructure and the motivation of students to continue with their education (Juño, 2021). Many families in these communities do not have enough income to cover basic school expenses, such as uniforms, books, and transportation (Barboza, 2023). This problem is further aggravated since, apart from these expenses, they also have to face other essential needs such as food, housing and health, which severely limits students' access to education and forces them to leave school prematurely, thus truncating their future opportunities (Gangotena et al., 2023).

In addition, it affects the quality of education, as rural schools are unable to invest in adequate infrastructure and quality educational programmes. The lack of technological equipment, up-to-date laboratories, well-stocked libraries, and trained teachers leaves students at a clear educational disadvantage compared to those in urban areas (Sulca, 2020). It is therefore essential to be able to implement policies that provide economic support to low-income families in rural areas; investing in adequate school infrastructure, providing equipped classrooms, up-to-date laboratories, and technological resources, along with teacher training and professional development (Gómez et al., 2022).

All children and young people, regardless of their socioeconomic background or geographical location, deserve to have equitable access to education and to have the necessary resources to develop their full potential (Juño, 2021), as investment in education is the key to building more just, equitable and prosperous societies, where everyone has the opportunity to achieve a promising future (Maldonado et al., 2023).

The need to work to help at home is another important factor that contributes significantly to school dropout in rural schools; many students find themselves in the situation of having to abandon their studies in order to contribute to the family income or perform household chores at home (Matos, 2023); these additional responsibilities greatly hinder their ability to attend school regularly and become a considerable obstacle to their educational progress (Gavilanes, 2023).

Another trigger for school dropout is the low quality of life in the rural community, as they lack basic services such as drinking water, electricity and access to quality medical services, as well as decent employment opportunities and a limited supply of services in these areas can generate deep demotivation and hopelessness among students and their families (Romero, 2024). The lack of adequate educational infrastructure also contributes significantly to the low quality of life, as rural schools often have precarious facilities and limited resources to ensure quality education, which requires ensuring equitable access to safe drinking water, electricity, and quality health care (Pérez, 2020).

The implementation of economic development programs that generate sustainable employment opportunities and substantially improve the quality of life of rural inhabitants can also promote economic diversification, encourage local entrepreneurship and support agricultural and artisanal industries, improve educational infrastructure in rural schools, implement training and teacher support programs to strengthen the skills and knowledge of teachers who work in rural schools. work in these marginalized areas (Ariza & Durán, 2022). When students and their families have access to the opportunities they deserve, the foundation is laid for a prosperous and equitable future in these communities (Prado & Luna, 2022).

Limited access to education, there are several reasons that contribute to limited access to education, one cause being the few schools in rural areas, which hinders access to education for many students, together in many cases with the difficulties in getting to school, the lack of adequate infrastructure and the insufficient offer of educational programs (Monge et al., 2020).

The distances that students must travel to reach the nearest school imply costs and difficulties for families, this is due to the lack of public or private transportation in these areas, as well as the distance and complicated terrain (Álvarez & Gómez, 2021). The costs associated with transportation can also be prohibitive for some families, these difficulties in getting to school negatively affect student attendance and engagement, contributing to school dropout (Escobar & Soto, 2022).

The lack of adequate educational infrastructure is a major challenge faced by rural schools around the world (Bonilla & Muñoz, 2022). In many rural areas, educational institutions are struggling to provide students with adequate facilities that promote an optimal learning environment, this includes the need for spacious and well-lit classrooms that can accommodate all students adequately and comfortably, as well as, the lack of adequate classrooms, many rural schools also lack well-equipped libraries (Meléndez et al., 2021).

Libraries are a critical resource for learning, providing access to a wide range of books and educational resources. However, in rural areas, it is common to find libraries with a limited number of books, which restricts access to information and the development of reading skills in students (Álvarez & Gómez, 2021). Another area in which rural schools face challenges is the lack of adequate laboratories to conduct experiments and put into practice what they have learned in class (Marquínez & Muñoz, 2022).

The insufficient supply of educational programs is another significant challenge in rural schools, as it is observed that the variety of educational programs and courses available in these areas is considerably limited compared to urban schools (Tapia et al., 2022). This disparity in educational provision makes students feel demotivated by not having access to an education that is adequately aligned with their interests and future goals (Cavagnoud, 2020).

This lack of educational options can seriously affect students' level of engagement and increase the likelihood that they will drop out prematurely. The problem becomes even more worrying when one considers that quality education is essential to promote the personal and professional development of students (Fernández, 2024).

Demotivation and lack of support, these are experienced by many in rural areas and are due to factors, such as lack of interest in education on the part of parents, the absence of role models in the community and the lack of emotional and academic support from teachers, which can generate a loss of interest in learning and difficulties in staying focused and committed to education (Miranda et al. al., 2022). However, it is important to note that demotivation and lack of support are not insurmountable problems, there are strategies and actions that can be implemented by both teachers and educational institutions to counteract this situation, being essential that teachers develop a relationship of trust with their students, this implies providing emotional support and showing a genuine interest in their well-being (Álvarez et al., 2020).

Teachers must be aware of the individual needs of each student and adapt their teaching according to these needs, provide them with additional study material, offer personalized tutorials, or implement more dynamic and motivating teaching methods (Peña, 2023). On the other hand, involving parents in the educational process of their children is an alternative to demotivation, which can be addressed through constant communication and the realization of activities that promote their active participation in their children's education, through informative meetings, workshops or extracurricular activities in which parents can be present and be part of their children's learning process (Rivera et al., 2023).

The creation of role models in the community is an effective strategy to promote motivation, this involves identifying successful people who come from similar environments and who can serve as inspiration for students (Beltrán, 2024). These role models may be invited to give motivational talks, participate in school events, or even mentor the most vulnerable students (Guachamín, 2023). Another aspect to consider is academic support, which requires the willingness of teachers to provide additional help to students who need it, through tutoring sessions, study groups, or the implementation of mentoring programs among students of different academic grades (Guillén, 2022).

Some parents may not fully understand the great importance and benefits of a strong, quality education, sometimes due to economic, cultural, or social constraints; it is also possible that these parents have other priorities within the community, which can cause them to relegate their children's education to the background (Juncay, 2023). This lack of understanding and prioritization can lead to a lack of support and motivation from parents for their children to continue studying and complete their education, causing that, without support, encouragement and adequate supervision, students may find themselves unmotivated and disoriented, which can significantly influence their decision to leave school prematurely (Caicedo and Pinzón, 2021).

The lack of cultural relevance in the school curriculum also contributes to school dropout, since the contents do not reflect the reality and identity of rural students. Discrimination and stigmatization also add to the exclusion and marginalization of children and adolescents due to their ethnic, socioeconomic or geographical origin (Idrovo, 2024).

Gender roles and social expectations are significant and important factors that have a direct and decisive impact on school dropout in rural schools. In many rural communities around the world, unfortunately, the belief and practice of assigning girls domestic and care responsibilities from an early age still persists, which, sadly, restricts and limits their access and full participation in the educational field (Caicedo & Pinzón, 2021).

It is commonly accepted and widespread that girls must mainly fulfill secondary roles compared to boys, a situation that unfortunately entails an evident lack of support and encouragement necessary for girls to continue their studies uninterruptedly (Beltrán, 2024). These entrenched social patterns and expectations directly generate and promote alarming inequities that, in turn, contribute to significantly higher school dropout rates for rural girls compared to other contexts (León, 2023).

Materials and methods

The research was carried out in the Alajuela Fiscal Educational Unit, located in the rural parish of Alajuela in the Portoviejo canton, which has been operating for 44 years in the town, providing basic general education from second to tenth grade and also the unified baccalaureate. Its organizational structure includes 1 rector in the administrative part, 50 teachers in the operational part; having a total of 902 students by 2024, of which 287 are in high school.

The research approach corresponds to the qualitative-quantitative descriptive and explanatory level, the analytical-synthetic method that facilitated the interpretation of the data obtained with the information collection techniques, as well as the construction of the theoretical foundations and the discussion of the results (Feria et al., 2019).

For the information collection process, a survey was used aimed at former students to analyze the causes for dropping out of high school studies, since the survey is an "empirical method". that uses a printed or digital instrument or form, intended to obtain answers about the problem under study, and that the subjects who provide the information fill out by themselves" (Feria et al., 2020, p. 65); The questionnaire consisted of 36 questions classified into 8 categories, namely: academic performance, relationship with teachers, health, friendship relationships, mobility, emotions, economic situation and family.

An interview with a professional with practical knowledge on the subject of school dropout was also used, with which it was possible to contrast the results of this work, argue them and interpret them based on the experience of these professionals, and of the authors as a teacher of a fiscal educational unit in the rural area of Manabí. The interview it has a potential that allows access to a vital part of people through which their daily lives and the social relationships they maintain are discovered" (Fernández, 2021, p. 81).

For the validation of the instrument, it was put at the discretion of the expert, once the questionnaire with the questions was prepared, they were distributed in 5 categories, which when reviewed by the experts was adjusted according to the construct school dropout, including the most important causes that cause it, since this process guarantees that the information of results that is obtained is valid, reliable and that it leads to decision-making with the expectations of the researcher". (Martínez, 2019, p. 4)

Bearing in mind the research objective that corresponds to analyze the factors that affect school dropout in the educational unit, the population of dropout students from the period 2020-2021 to 2023-2024 was considered, of which an intentional sample of 30 dropout former students was taken, due to the considerable distances in which their homes are located with respect to the educational center, since this type of sampling focuses on the specific characteristics of the population of interest by efficiently answering research questions, so that valuable information can be obtained from the study subjects (Reales et al., 2022).

Analysis and discussion of results

As a result of the survey applied, the sociodemographic characterization of the dropout students is shown in Figure 1.

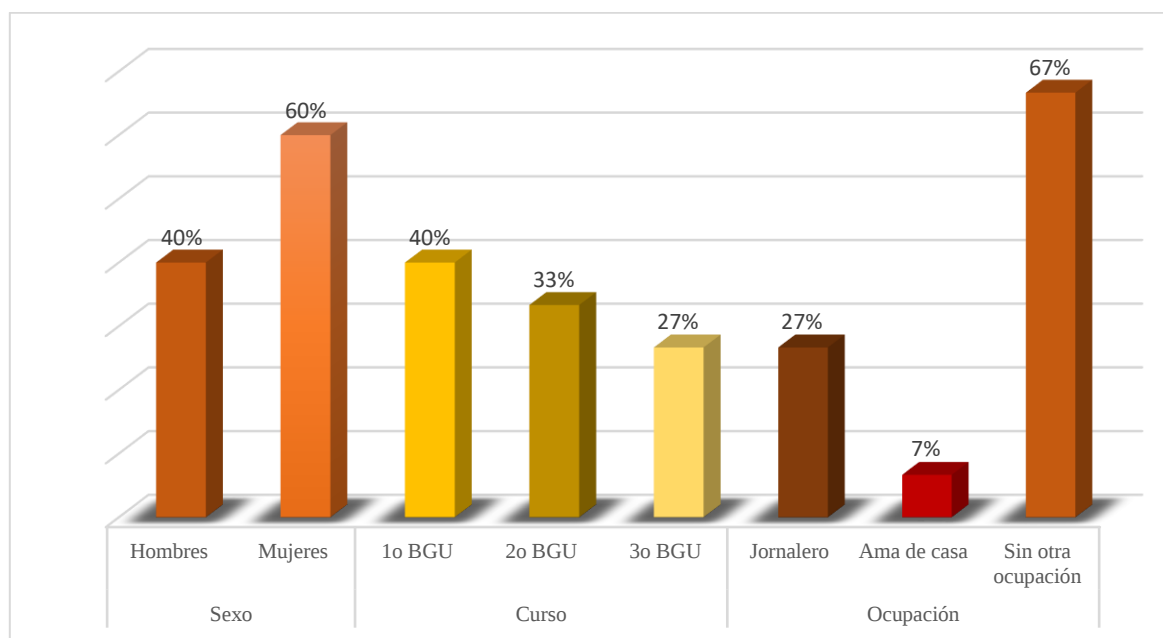


Figure 1

Sociodemographic characterization

Note. The data reflect the sex, level they were studying and occupation that the former students had. In original language Spanish

As can be seen in Figure 1, it was possible to survey a total of 30 dropout students, 12 girls and 18 men, of which 12 were in the first year of high school, 10 in the second year and 8 in the third year of the unified general high school in the Alajuela Fiscal Educational Unit, 8 of them worked as day laborers on a temporary basis. 2 were dedicated to household chores as housewives and the remaining 20 had no economic activity.

In relation to the dimensions analyzed, it was found that in the family dimension, 8 carried out economic activity, of which only 2 could not afford their study expenses, the remaining 22 did not work because they were dependent on their parents. Of these situations, only 4 students dropped out of high school due to pregnancy and consequent common-law union.

Inherent to the economic situation, 20 former students did not carry out any economic activity, since they lived in their parents' house, however, 8 worked daily and 2 did household work. In such cases, the economic activity to which they were engaged did not allow them to pay for their studies and/or support their family. Of the situations named, 4 dropped out due to lack of work and money, 2 due to free union, 2 due to pregnancy, 2 due to work.

Regarding the emotional aspect, 8 dropout students felt emotionally bad when they lived at their relatives' homes, 4 felt a type of pressure during cohabitation and 2 felt a little pressure. Of all the situations exposed, 1 student revealed that he had dropped out of school due to his parents' problems, 1 because of the economic situation and 2 because of the pressure that made him feel emotionally bad. The remaining 14 former students stated that they had not had adverse emotional situations that made them abandon their studies.

In terms of mobility, 12 were on foot, 8 by bus, 10 by school bus. It took 10 of them 1 hour to get to school, 6 took 30 minutes, 4 took 10 minutes, 4 took 20 minutes, 2 arrived in 45 minutes, another 2 in 25 minutes and 2 did it in 5 minutes. Of the total number of former students, 6 were very frequently late to class, 18 were very late, and 6 never did. 16 missed a lot of classes, and 14 rarely. Arriving late to classes caused difficulties with teachers and academic performance for 14 students and a little difficulty for 4.

Of the above situations, 2 students dropped out of school because they missed school a lot and 2 were absent because they did not have money.

Regarding friendship relationships, it was good for 29 former students and bad for 1 former student, who also had problems with another classmate within the educational unit and did not share with anyone during breaks; although none experienced bullying, or pressure to use drugs by other classmates. Due to these situations, 1 student dropped out of school because she felt excluded from the group.

Corresponding to the health dimension, only 4 former students suffered from an illness when they were studying, 2 had a sick father or mother, 4 experienced medical emergencies with a family member. Because of these aspects, only 1 student dropped out of school due to a motorcycle accident.

Regarding the relationship with the teachers, this was good for 20 former students and average for 10. The educational environment was rated as good for 20, 8 average and 2 very good. 12 did not understand the teachings, 12 only a little, and a minority of 6 did. Of these situations, only 6 students dropped out because they did not understand the classes taught by the teachers.

Regarding the dimension of academic performance, 15 considered it average, 7 classified it as bad and 8 rated it as good. The subjects in which 8 former students presented learning difficulties were in Chemistry 6, Physics and Mathematics equally, 4 in all subjects and 12 in none of them. For 2 students the subject of Chemistry made them leave school and for 6 of them the subjects of Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics equally.

Figure 2 shows in detail the causes that caused the surveyed students to drop out.

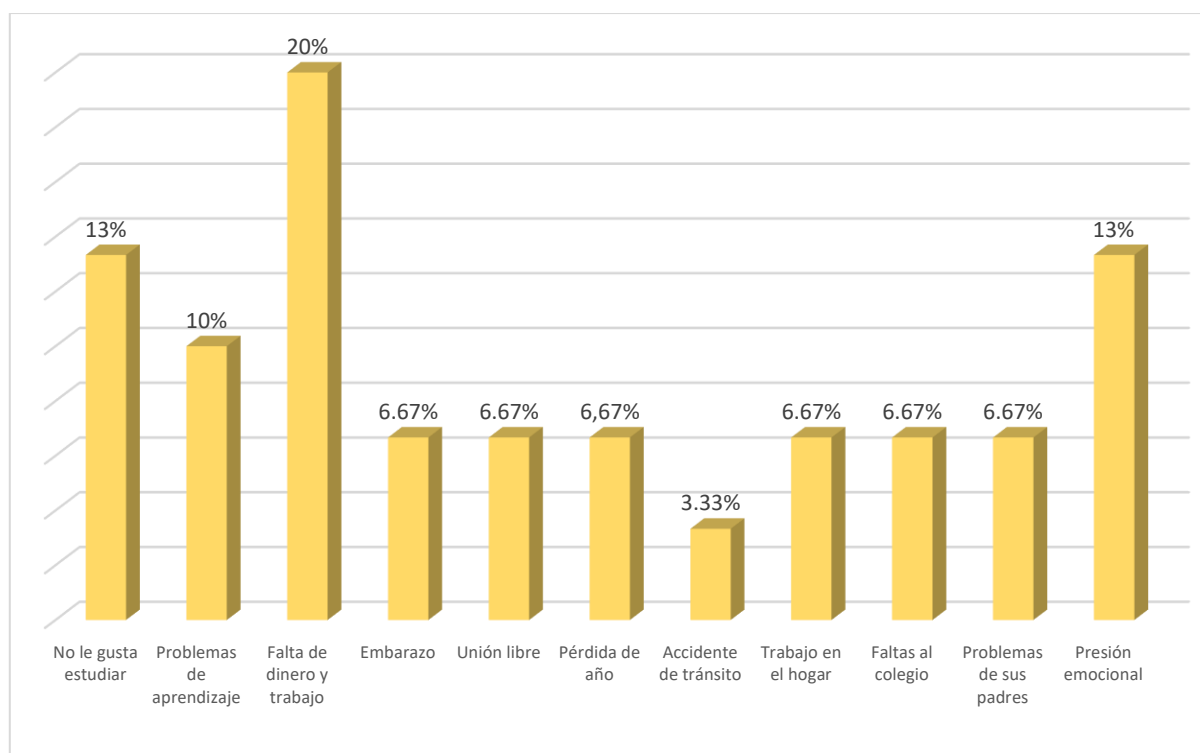


Figure 2

Causes of school dropout

Note. Retrieved from the alumni survey. In original language Spanish

As can be seen in Figure 2, 11 causes of school dropout were identified. Of the total of 30 students surveyed, it was found that the main cause of dropping out of studies was due to the decadent economic situation generated by the lack of work and money, followed by 13% who did not like to study and another 13% who dropped out due to the emotional situation of pressure they went through during living with their families. 10% dropped out of education due to learning problems; In a smaller percentage (6.67% in each case) the dropout was due to pregnancy, free union, loss of the school year, work at home, absences from school and parental problems, finally it was found that a student dropped out due to suffering a traffic accident.

With regard to the interview conducted with a professional in educational sciences who has been both teaching and directing in fiscal educational units of the Ministry of Education in rural areas, the desertion in rural educational units of young people, that is, of high school students, in most cases occurs due to some situations, One of them is the fact that at an early age they fall in love, they start a family and have to solve the economic issue of having a new family.(Zambrano, 2023)

The situation that has been experienced in recent years, specifically since the earthquake of 16-A, then the covid-19 pandemic, are unfortunate catastrophes that have left painful consequences in the population and in families, currently having that many people such as informal workers in rural areas who go out to work in the cities, towns and in the countryside itself, because agriculture is no longer enough to solve the economic situation, all this has forced many students, adolescents from 16 to 18 years old, to abandon their studies to be able to support their family, not only the new one they have conceived, but that of mom, dad, grandparents, siblings, because they are the oldest and have the responsibility to contribute to their family environment. This is a matter of habit in rural rural areas, causing them to withdraw and not be able to complete their high school studies.(Zambrano, 2023)

For Zambrano, another factor influencing school dropout is geographical distances, perceived from the reality of people in the countryside, where educational institutions are very distant from the homes of students who are going to study and much more so when they go to universities or higher institutes, because they must leave their environment. and the economic situation reappears, that there are no resources to finance the tickets, the food, the very expense involved in studying away from home; This corroborates that the economic situation is essential for them to continue studying, at the present time, the economy is scarce

especially in families in rural areas who do not have property but work only for the day to day, and this together with the distance prevents them from continuing to study.

Finally, he states that the lack of confidence that young people have is decisive in school dropout, because when they finish their high school they opt for a place in the university and what they achieve is something very different from what they want to have a profession, this causes them to decline their aspirations to finish school, together with the low scores they achieve when taking the entrance exam to higher education institutions. because they are not previously prepared to give this test. Another derived issue is the apathy that young people have to finish their high school and not opt for higher education in the later years, since those who manage to obtain a place give up because of the distance and do not have the means to mobilize, support themselves and feed themselves.

Discussion

For Caicedo and Pinzón (2021), it is crucial to raise awareness among parents about the vital importance of education and to provide them with resources and tools so that they can support their children effectively. Governments must address the economic and social barriers that can hinder access to education in rural communities, ensuring that all children have equal opportunities to continue their education and reach their full potential. Only through a joint effort between parents, educators, local authorities and society at large, can the problem of school dropout in rural schools be effectively combated and a better and brighter future for all children and young people in these communities.

Pereira and Vidal (2021) refer to the idea that education is fundamental for the development of any country and it is everyone's responsibility to ensure that no child is left behind due to a lack of interest or support in their education. As a right, it is the obligation, mainly of government bodies, to give due attention to education as a state policy that must be complied with and implemented so that more and more children and adolescents have access to the public education system, especially in rural contexts, where it has been proven that there are the highest levels of school dropouts.

Pérez and Chong, for their part, emphasize that pedagogizing education can contribute to minimizing the problem of school dropout in schools, this includes the ability of the educational center and its teachers to interact pedagogically with students, that is, when this form of teaching and learning occurs, the causes of a student even thinking about dropping out of school are significantly reduced. This, taking into consideration that one of the most recurrent factors is the failure of subjects, which can be reduced when dynamic workshops are developed that involve family roles with the intrinsic responsibilities they demand and the consequences they cause, when they have to experience a role as a father or mother at an early age, for which they are not prepared.(2020)

Estrada et al., argue that the lack of student habits to carry out activities within the classroom in a set time hinders progress in the learning process and leads to school dropout in many children and adolescents, since a daily routine is not maintained by most teachers and a culture of personal and teamwork has not been created. that can contribute to their participation in classes. This difficulty is added to the habits that the student has formed from home, and that are deficient in most of them, being necessary that, within the institution, they must also be trained to acquire good habits, rules of civility and even good customs and values, which have not been learned and practiced at home. (2022)

Conclusions

It was found that the causes of school dropout in the Alajuela fiscal educational unit in rural areas of the province of Manabí, Ecuador, are based on different difficulties that go beyond being a social problem, to constitute an emotional problem that can significantly affect the lives of adolescents and young people who make the decision to leave their studies; Research on this topic reveals the a posteriori consequences of school dropout, which translate into fewer opportunities for employment, therefore lower family income, quite the opposite of what they initially believed when they left school.

There is no doubt that the economic measures that each new government implements will affect the less favored sectors, their incomes, their jobs, their family economies, their opportunities in the social environment, from which the rural sector suffers consequences of greater impact, given its economic activity that depends on the sale of seasonal agricultural products. summer or winter; a reality that generates another impact on rural education, conditioned in its substance and in its form, number of teachers, students per classroom, infrastructure, accessibility, making minors who study in rural schools, forced to make the decision to abandon them due to the expenses they incur to be able to educate themselves, all this is added to the individual needs of families that in some cases are dysfunctional and influence the emotional state of the students, who see a way out in the job that they can obtain if they give up training at the educational center.

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