



Reasons for university dropout in Chile: does student gender play a role?

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ABSTRACT

Students who drop out of university cite various reasons for their decision. Female enrolment has significantly increased over the past few decades and is now higher than male enrolment. In terms of performance, it is recognised that women perform better than males do, and fewer women drop out of university than men do. However, the relationship between specific reasons for dropping out and students' gender is unknown. This study explores a variety of dropout factors and how they relate to student gender in Chilean universities. The investigation uses information from a survey conducted in 2021 among former students from 11 universities. The survey was applied to 707 students who left their university studies and belonging to the entry cohorts of 2010, 2016 and 2017. Different entry cohorts were considered in order to make a comparative analysis based on the existent data. To ascertain the degree of associativity between reasons for dropouts and the gender of the students, statistical significance tests were utilised in the second step. Subsequently, ten logistic regression models were fitted, the results of which are presented using the odds ratio. The results show that gender has a statistically significant link, mostly with dropouts due to vocational reasons. The findings of this research allow us to reflect on the effectiveness of gender equity actions and policies that favour women.

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Introduction

University dropout is a complex phenomenon that affects students around the world, with significant repercussions at the individual, institutional and socio-economic levels (Bordón et al., 2015; Donoso & Schiefelbein, 2007). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states that, on average, one third of students entering university drop out without a degree (OECD, 2019). Greater understanding of the factors that contribute to dropout will improve retention and promote educational equity. Equity is a major concern, especially considering the worldwide recent decades' large increase in female enrolment in higher education (Bar-Haim et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2021).