Education and Territory: The Family and Sociocultural Environment in Rural Contexts as a Possible Cause of University Dropout

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Abstract

This research examines university dropout in rural contexts, using the Tigre II community in Manabí, Ecuador, as a case study. Through a mixed-methods approach, the community context was characterized, family dynamics and sociocultural factors were evaluated, and strategies to mitigate educational abandonment were designed. Surveys, interviews, and evaluation matrices (EFI, EFE, and INCIDE) were applied, revealing low academic expectations within households, the influence of traditional gender roles, limited educational and technological infrastructure, and weak connections between families and the university system. The findings allowed for the prioritization of critical dropout factors and the validation of intervention strategies such as e-mentoring and family digital literacy. The study concludes that in rural settings, family and sociocultural environments significantly influence and increase the likelihood of university dropout, exacerbated by a web of structural and symbolic conditions that require contextualized, comprehensive, and sustainable actions.

Keywords: *Higher Education, University Dropout, Rural Contexts, Family Environment, Sociocultural Factors*

Introduction

University dropout is a complex and normalized phenomenon observed worldwide. However, according to (Castro & Machuca, 2023) its prevalence depends on various factors that vary according to geographic regions and their respective higher education systems. Moreover, university dropout is also a process involving decision-making, and therefore, it is influenced by psychological factors. According to (Uribe, et al., 2022), in Latin America, on average, 50% of students who enter higher education withdraw before completing their studies. Scholars such as (Ávila, Cepeda, & Aucancela, 2024) attribute this trend to variables related to socioeconomic, academic, and especially personal factors. (Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo División de Educación, 2023) warns that dropout rates are exacerbated by "high inequality in access, quality, and completion of secondary education," disproportionately affecting students from low-income rural areas.

In countries such as Ecuador, where, according to (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INEC), 2024) 36.9% of the population lives in rural areas and the poverty rate stands at 24.2%, the university dropout rate reaches 20.46%, as reported by (Delgado, 2024) in a study on student attrition. Although access to higher education increased by 7.5% between 2010 and 2022, this progress has not ensured students' retention or continuation of their academic paths. For this reason, (Meryem, Hicham, & Driss, 2024) argue that the study of university dropout requires a comprehensive approach due to the multidimensionality of factors driving withdrawal behaviors, especially in rural areas, where there is a lack of information. (Zambrano & Zambrano, 2022) point out that this scarcity is due to a cultural absence of data generation, which increases barriers to development by limiting the training of qualified professionals who could help transform the social realities of their own communities.

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Although higher education is considered a fundamental right and a cornerstone for the socio-economic development of any region(Chalela, Valencia, Ruiz, & Cadavidd, 2020), (Salgado, 2025) asserts that inequalities in opportunities, the influence of family environments, and prevailing socio-cultural behaviors between urban and rural areas remain key determinants of university dropout. For (Blanco & Carruyo, 2022) the sociocultural precepts or worldviews held by members of an individual's immediate social circle shape their concepts and, to some extent, guide their way of life. This notion also applies to educational abandonment. In fact (Orozo, 2022) demonstrated that the family environment and its sociocultural factors play a critical role in either supporting students' persistence or contributing to their eventual withdrawal from higher education, particularly in rural contexts.

(Castillo, Yañac, & Castro, 2021) demonstrated through a study on the factors determining access to higher education in rural areas that in 44% of the cases, support from the family nucleus and its sociocultural influence determine both the access to and completion of university studies. However, according to (Rojas, 2020) since most parents of university students from rural areas work as day laborers, stewards, or in other agricultural-related occupations, they directly or indirectly influence young people's decisions to pursue and complete higher education. Family responsibilities, limited financial resources, and the considerable distances between urban and rural centers—combined with students' limited knowledge of technological tools—also contribute to university dropout, as noted by (Guzmán, Barragán, Cala, & Segovia, 2022).

Although higher education is currently more accessible due to new information and communication technologies that have enabled the development and evolution of virtual learning platforms (Martínez, Laínez, Bravo, Cevallos, & Vera, 2024). However, (Rahmani, Groot, & Rahmani, 2024) warn that dropout rates in online higher education are on the rise, posing major challenges—particularly in rural areas where connectivity and access to technological resources remain limited. As a result, (Mendoza, 2025) argues for the implementation of more comprehensive student retention strategies, which should not be limited to the scope of higher education institutions but must also involve families and prospective university students through vocational guidance and psycho-academic support, in order to reduce dropout rates.

In light of the above, the phenomenon of university dropout cannot be fully understood without analyzing the influence of the family and, more specifically, the sociocultural environment of students in rural areas. According to (Hernández & Álvarez, 2024) there is a limited perception of the benefits of higher education among most families in agrarian contexts, due to high poverty levels, low educational attainment, and the deep-rooted cultural emphasis on agricultural labor. For instance, (Toala & Alpizar, 2024) highlight that among the key factors influencing dropout rates in rural areas of Manabí are the students' involvement in socioeconomic activities to support their households—often driven by financial pressures—and the lack of educational encouragement or support at home. These elements foster behavioral patterns that tend toward academic disengagement, which eventually extends into higher education. Similarly, (Gonzáles, 2024) emphasizes that this absence of an academic continuity culture within rural families generates low professional aspirations and interest among youth. Consequently, the family environment not only influences the decision to enroll in higher education but also significantly affects dropout rates and the likelihood of completing academic programs. In this sense, it becomes a structuring factor of university attrition among students from rural backgrounds.

n rural contexts such as the Tigre II community in the Bolívar canton (Manabí), university dropout is the result of a complex interplay of sociocultural, economic, and educational factors. Families, often large and with low levels of formal education, sustain themselves through subsistence farming. [6] From an early age, gender roles are deeply embedded: women assume domestic responsibilities and often experience early motherhood, while men inherit land and engage in agricultural labor. This traditional worldview diminishes the perceived value of higher education, which is regarded as unnecessary or disconnected from their productive realities.

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[6] (M. Rivera, Principal of Benjamín Carrión Educational Institution, directed interview, January 13, 2025.)

To this must be added precarious structural conditions: inadequate educational infrastructure, impassable roads during the rainy season, a shortage of specialized teachers, and limited institutional support. These factors undermine student motivation and foster a sense of abandonment, which—when combined with the limited exposure of rural youth to external professional role models—restricts their academic and career aspirations. In this context, initiatives such as e-mentoring emerge as viable alternatives to connect these students with external mentors who can inspire and guide them, thereby supporting educational continuity.

On the other hand, while the community demonstrates cohesion in matters related to health and mutual support, internal divisions and material deprivation diminish its organizational capacity around educational issues. The lack of basic services and the devaluation of agricultural production negatively affect household economies, making it difficult for families to afford higher education. Finally, the digital divide represents a critical barrier. Limited technological training in schools and parents' lack of familiarity with digital tools hinder the academic performance of university students, who find themselves at a disadvantage compared to their urban peers. This technological gap has a negative impact on their self-esteem and contributes to higher dropout rates in the university system.

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

As discussed earlier, university dropout is a complex issue due to the multidimensionality of the factors involved. However, in order to objectively understand how family and sociocultural environments in rural contexts influence the decision to abandon higher education, this study draws on the methodological contributions of (Guzám, Barragán, & Cala, 2022), (Pusztai, Fényes, & Kovács, 2022) and (Nurmalitasari, Awang, & Mohammad, 2023) These authors provide a range of tools and techniques including: the use of surveys to gather information for the socio-demographic, institutional, and territorial characterization of rural areas; statistical correlation analysis among study variables through mixed-method approaches to contextualize the phenomenon of student dropout; and, most importantly, the application of comprehensive evaluation models of family environments and sociocultural factors to inform intervention strategies such as e-mentoring models.

Accordingly, this research adopts an exploratory, non-experimental design with a mixed-methods approach. It is structured in three methodological phases aimed at understanding social realities from the perspective of the actors involved, with the objective of determining the influence of the family and sociocultural environment in rural contexts on university dropout.

Phase I. Comprehensive characterization of the community and educational context: This phase involved a comprehensive analysis of the sociodemographic, cultural, and educational context of the study area. The characterization included the collection of secondary data (demographic statistics, dropout rates, access to educational and technological services) and the conduction of interviews with key stakeholders such as community leaders and teachers. Additionally, the EFI (Internal Factor Evaluation) and EFE (External Factor Evaluation) matrices were employed to quantify and rank the strengths and weaknesses affecting educational continuity in rural areas. This analysis enabled the identification of contextual factors that shape the behavior of families and students in relation to higher education.

Phase II. Analysis of the family environment and sociocultural factors: The second phase focused on understanding family dynamics and students' individual perceptions. A total of 75 surveys were administered as follows: 50 surveys to students in the first, second, and third years of high school at the Benjamín Carrión Educational Unit in the rural community of Tigre II, and 25 surveys to their families. These surveys aimed to evaluate educational expectations, family roles, perceived barriers, and attitudes toward higher education. Additionally, data collection in the field was complemented with semi-structured interviews to explore in greater depth the sociocultural and economic factors that influence university dropout. This approach allowed for the identification of patterns and recurrent behaviors within the family environment that ultimately affect educational retention.

Phase III. Design of strategies to address university dropout. The final phase aimed to implement a systematic process for identifying, evaluating, and designing strategies that address the factors driving

university dropout in rural contexts. Consequently, the Contextual Incidence Index Matrix for Educational Dropout (INCIDE) was applied. This methodological tool enabled the evaluation and prioritization of potential dropout factors through a multi-criteria weighting approach (on a scale from 1 to 5) based on five core criteria:

1. **Impact (I):** Degree of direct influence of the factor on the decision to abandon or continue university studies.

2. **Frequency (F):** evel of recurrence of the factor within the studied community.

3. **Feasibility of Intervention (FI):** Technical and practical possibility of addressing the factor with available resources.

4. **Urgency (U):** Level of immediacy with which the factor must be addressed to avoid negative consequences.

5. **Strategic Relevance (SR):** Importance of the factor within the overall educational intervention strategy.

To calculate the **Incidence Index (II)** of the evaluated factors regarding educational dropout, the following formula was applied:;

$$II = (I \times 0.30) + (F \times 0.20) + (FI \times 0.15) + (U \times 0.20) + (RE \times 0.15)$$

The INCIDE matrix allowed for a quantified synthesis of the criticality of each evaluated factor, facilitating the identification of the most influential family and sociocultural variables posing dropout risks for students. As a final activity, strategies were designed to reduce the likelihood of university dropout among students in rural areas. These strategies were subsequently subjected to a validation process using the expert judgment validation matrix, following the guidelines proposed by (Herrera, Calero, Gonzáles, Collazo, & Travieso, 2022).

Results and Discussion

Comprehensive characterization of the community and educational context

Tigre II is a rural community located in the Bolívar canton, in the province of Manabí, with an estimated population of fewer than 500 inhabitants distributed across areas of difficult geographical access. According to (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, 2024) 46.2% of rural households in Ecuador consist of family units of 3 to 4 members, with monthly incomes below 90 US dollars. These indicators place a large portion of the population within the poverty and extreme poverty thresholds, characterized by severe deficiencies in the coverage of basic services. Tigre II exemplifies the multiple structural vulnerabilities present in the country that affect rural areas and, above all, directly condition access to development and educational opportunities.

To comprehensively characterize the community and educational context of the rural community of Tigre II, an analysis was conducted from a territorial, sociodemographic, educational, and cultural perspective using data obtained through primary information collection, semi-structured interviews, and the application of the SWOT matrix. These tools enabled the identification and understanding of the structural conditions that negatively influence post-secondary university dropout.

Sociodemographic conditions of the territory: Local records based on interviews with community leaders suggest that Tigre II comprises approximately 115 families, of which 78% have incomes below the unified basic salary. Additionally, 64% of household heads have not completed basic education, while only 8% have partially completed university studies. Subsistence agriculture is the predominant economic activity, based on the cultivation of plantain, cassava, and corn, typically carried out by men. Women are

dedicated to complementary domestic tasks at home, often from a very early age. A high index of economic dependency was identified, with the average family unit consisting of 5 to 6 members—nearly double the national average reported by INEC.

Statistics reveal an intergenerational trend of educational poverty in the community. The lack of educational experience among household heads has led to a significant absence of cultural capital based on positive prior educational experiences, which helps explain the low expectations regarding the value of university education for their children. These findings suggest that policies aimed at increasing access to higher education cannot be the same as those designed for urban contexts. It is essential to recognize the clear structural differences and limitations of rural areas and the way they impact students' educational trajectories. This construct calls not only for the expansion of coverage and access to higher education but also for the awareness and transformation of the territorial and sociocultural conditions that either enable or limit it within the rural context.

Educational and technological conditions: The community of Tigre II has only one educational institution that offers basic and high school education, serving students from the community and surrounding areas. The school has an enrollment capacity of 200 students, of which only 25%—that is, 50 students—are enrolled in the high school level. The institution faces multiple limitations that affect the quality of education provided: it lacks science and computer laboratories, has no internet access, and has a limited teaching staff, often requiring teachers to instruct subjects outside their professional area of expertise.

Approximately 55% of students use motorcycles to reach the school, 5% travel by car, and the remaining 30% walk or use non-conventional means such as horses or mules. During the rainy season, it is estimated that around 40% of students are recurrently absent due to river overflows and road collapses. This confirms that the geographical conditions of the area generate significant learning discontinuity, which affects students' educational attainment and, consequently, their ability to remain in higher education institutions during their initial university semesters. The findings also show that only 18% of households have regular internet access, and even this is affected by frequent service interruptions. Furthermore, 71% of students do not have access to a mobile device or computer to complete their schoolwork.

A structural gap was identified between the discourse of educational equity and the actual reality of the rural community of Tigre II. The results are conclusive in demonstrating how the lack of adequate infrastructure limits both the learning and teaching processes and undermines the trust of rural households in the educational system as a tool for development and social mobility. It is essential to design strategies that go beyond equipment provision and address digital, pedagogical, and cultural gaps as significant factors influencing the likelihood of university dropout.

Cultural Environment and Educational Perception: Through interviews conducted with key stakeholders in the El Tigre II community, several cultural patterns were identified that tend to discourage students—especially young women—from enrolling in or remaining within higher education. Approximately 56% of the teachers reported that adolescent girls interrupt their studies primarily due to two reasons: early marriage and pregnancy. Similarly, it was noted that 84% of the parents of students enrolled in the local educational unit have never had any prior contact with institutions of higher education. This reinforces a mistaken perception that local dynamics and university life are entirely disconnected—an idea further perpetuated by the lack of professional role models within the community. In fact, less than 5% of El Tigre II graduates in the past five years have accessed university education, with only one student having completed a university degree.

From a critical perspective on the findings, it is concluded that although cultural factors are not directly considered barriers, they are key elements that must be acknowledged within educational accompaniment processes. These processes should aim to shift local perspectives on the development opportunities afforded by higher education. The current challenge lies in reducing the gap between universities and the realities of rural communities, promoting experiential engagements such as mentorship or contextualized

academic and career guidance. The core lies not only in creating opportunities but in ensuring sustained, tailored support throughout the educational journey.

Strategic Diagnostic Matrix – IFE and EFE Matrices: Based on the results of the comprehensive analysis of the community and educational context, both the Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) and External Factor Evaluation (EFE) matrices were applied to quantify and prioritize the strengths and weaknesses that influence access to and continuity in education within the El Tigre II community. The following table summarizes the IFE results:

Table 1. IFE Matrix (Internal Factor Evaluation)

Internal Factor	Type	Weight (0–1)	Rating (1–4)	Weigh
Presence of an educational institution (basic and secondary levels)	Strength	0.10	4	0.40
High community cohesion	Strength	0.10	3	0.30
Active community leadership	Strength	0.05	3	0.15
Limited educational infrastructure	Weakness	0.10	2	0.20
Low educational level of households	Weakness	0.15	1	0.15
Lack of technological connectivity	Weakness	0.20	1	0.20
Low parental involvement	Weakness	0.10	2	0.20
Weak links with higher education institutions	Weakness	0.20	1	0.20
TOTAL		**1**		**1.8**

Source: Author's own elaboration

The IFE matrix results indicate an internal structure characterized by a predominance of weaknesses over strengths, with a total weighted score of 1.80. Although positive elements were identified—such as community cohesion and the presence of a basic and secondary school—they are insufficient to counterbalance critical issues such as weak linkages with higher education institutions, lack of technological connectivity, low household educational attainment, and limited parental involvement. These findings highlight the urgent need for strategies focused on strengthening human capital and promoting a family-centered educational culture that enhances the likelihood of a successful transition for rural students into higher education.

Table 2. EFE Matrix (External Factor Evaluation)

| External Factor	Type	Weight (0–1)	Rating (1–4)	Weighted Score
Partnerships with government programs, academia, and NGOs	Opportunity	0.10	4	0.40
Potential to implement mentorship strategies	Opportunity	0.10	3	0.30
Teachers' interest in educational innovation	Opportunity	0.05	3	0.15
Early youth labor migration to urban areas	Threat	0.15	1	0.15
Teenage pregnancy and traditional gender roles	Threat	0.20	1	0.20
Devaluation of higher education	Threat	0.15	2	0.30
Digital divide between urban and rural areas	Threat	0.15	1	0.15
Lack of continuity in community-level education policies	Threat	0.10	2	0.20
TOTAL		**1**		**1.85**

Source: Author's own elaboration

The EFE matrix yields a total weighted score of 1.85, indicating that the external environment is predominantly threatening for the educational development of youth in the rural community of El Tigre II. While there are significant opportunities—such as forming strategic partnerships with state agencies, academia, and NGOs to support the implementation of innovative methodologies aimed at enhancing learning processes and university access—these are counterbalanced by major threats. These include student migration for work, teenage pregnancy, a persistent digital divide, and cultural undervaluation of higher education. The solution lies in the capacity to design and implement adaptive and locally grounded educational policies that can leverage existing opportunities to create sustainable conditions for educational retention and progression.

Analysis of Family Environment and Sociocultural Factors

This second phase aimed to study family dynamics, perceptions, and particularly the sociocultural factors present in the rural community of El Tigre II that significantly influence the decision to continue or abandon higher education. A total of 75 surveys were administered 50 to students in the first, second, and third years of upper secondary school (bachillerato) at the Benjamín Carrión Educational Unit, and 25 to parents of those students. The study variables included educational expectations, perceived barriers, attitudes toward higher education, and the household roles assigned to students.

The initial results obtained from the El Tigre II community support the hypothesis that family environments and entrenched sociocultural aspects of rural contexts play a substantial role in shaping students' educational behaviors regarding their decision to pursue or abandon higher education. The following chart presents the recurrent behavioral patterns identified within the family environment. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1. Recurrent patterns and behaviors within the family environment that eventually contribute to educational dropout.
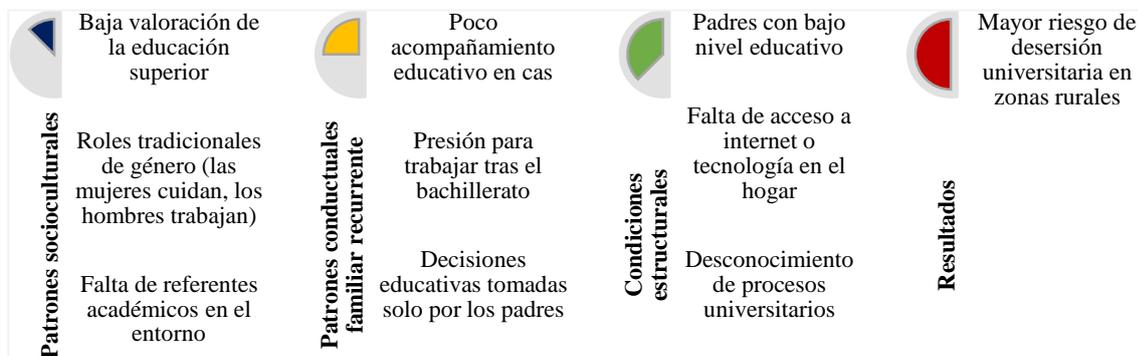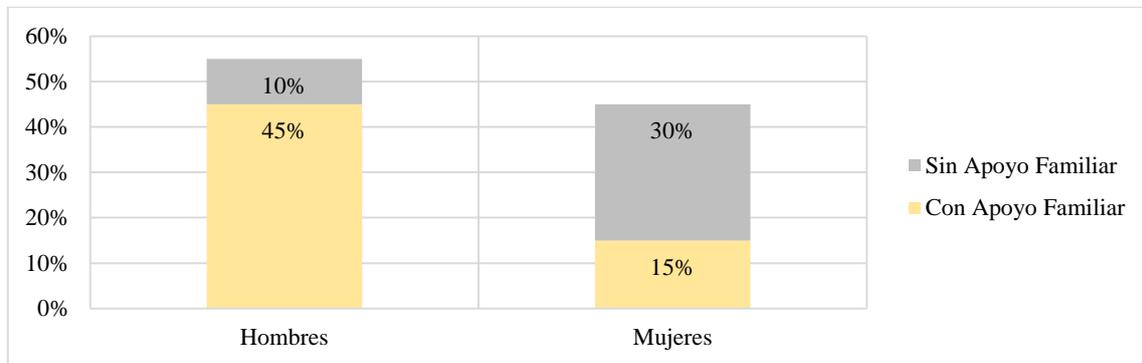

Source: Author's own elaboration

The evaluation of the family environment reveals a consistent pattern of low academic expectations. In fact, 72% of the surveyed parents believe that it is sufficient for their children to complete secondary school in order to acquire basic literacy skills. Alarmingly, only 12% demonstrate active interest in their children accessing university and pursuing a professional career. These figures reflect a clear disconnect between the formal education system and family aspirations—largely shaped by socioeconomic constraints and traditional imaginaries about productive work in rural settings.

Furthermore, 58% of students reported receiving no family guidance regarding higher education, while 36% indicated feeling pressured by their families to start working in agricultural or related activities immediately after graduation. Consequently, the findings reinforce a behavioral trend of non-continuation in higher

education among upper secondary graduates in El Tigre II, exacerbating the likelihood of educational dropout due to familial and sociocultural pressures from the students' immediate environment. Notably, 42% of students believe that their parents view university as a waste of time or consider their children academically unprepared to pursue it, based on the educational limitations of their territory.

Figure 2. D Distribution of Family Support by Gender Regarding Continuity in Higher Education in the Rural Context
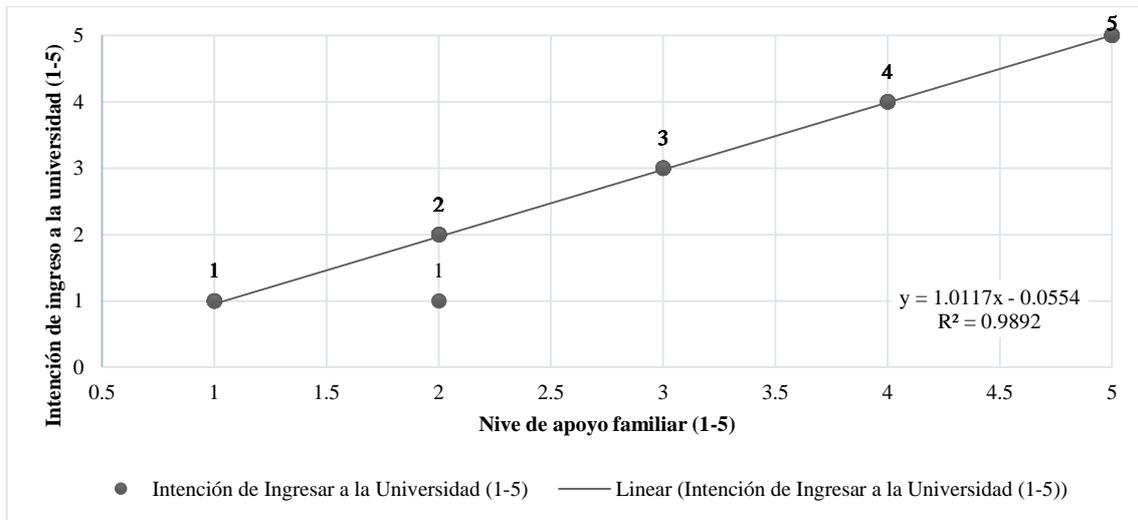

Source: Author's own elaboration

From a gender perspective, a significant disparity in household responsibilities was identified: 68% of surveyed female students reported that daily household chores reduce their study time, compared to only 24% of male students (see Figure 2). Similarly, results show that young women face greater familial restrictions when attempting to leave the community for academic purposes—limitations rooted in deeply entrenched traditional sociocultural norms. Gender gaps identified in the educational context not only hinder women's access to higher education but also erode their motivation for professional development and personal growth.

Moreover, 76% of surveyed parents reported lacking knowledge of higher education admission processes, which limits their capacity to support their children during the academic transition phase. This lack of information has fostered a symbolic disconnect within the families of El Tigre II between rural life and the university sphere, where the absence of human capital plays a critical role. The data suggest that the limited presence of academic role models in the rural community directly affects young people's sense of self-efficacy and belonging with respect to higher education, as 85% stated they do not know anyone in their immediate environment who has had a successful university experience to serve as an educational reference.

In this context, 14% of students indicated they have received no vocational guidance, information, or other essential tools at their educational institution to help them plan for their academic future. Instead, misinformation and uncertainty about higher education have been exacerbated. From a critical standpoint, one possible explanation for this phenomenon lies in the existence of family environments characterized by traditional sociocultural traits, where university studies are not considered part of everyday cultural life.

The issue lies in the reproduction of these traditional patterns which, when combined with the structural configuration of the territory, generate an ecosystem that is not conducive to the stable development of university academic trajectories. As a result, educational practices, aspirations, and, above all, the decisions made by young students are deeply influenced by the cultural traits of the household, the prevailing social imaginary, gender norms, and the educational level of the parents.

Figure 3. Correlation Between Family Support and Intention to Enter Higher Education.

Source: Author's own elaboration

The scatterplot with a linear regression line shows a directly proportional relationship between the level of family support and the intention to pursue higher education among upper secondary students at the Benjamín Carrión Educational Unit in the rural community of El Tigre II (see Figure 3). As students perceive stronger practical and motivational support from their households or immediate social environments, their willingness and expectations to continue along an academic path in higher education significantly increase. This observed trend reinforces the central findings of the study, suggesting that both emotional support and household involvement play a decisive role in students' academic continuity. Consequently, such factors reduce the likelihood of university dropout among rural youth.

Design of Strategies to Address University Dropout

The primary objective of this final phase was to prioritize the most critical factors influencing university dropout from familial and sociocultural perspectives, to subsequently design context-specific strategies based on the findings from previous stages. For this purpose, the INCIDE Matrix (Contextual Incidence Index for Educational Dropout) was applied, incorporating five weighted criteria: impact, frequency, feasibility of intervention, urgency, and strategic relevance. The results are presented below (see Table 3).

Table 3. Contextual Incidence Index for Educational Dropout

Variable	Impact (I)	Frequency (F)	Feasibility of Intervention (FI)	Urgency (U)	Strategic Relevance (SR)	Incidence Index (II)
Family expectations regarding higher education	5	5	4	5	5	4.85
Condition of community roads and transportation	5	4	3	5	5	4.50
Family communication on academic goals	5	4	4	4	5	4.45
Availability of basic services at home	4	4	4	5	5	4.35

Perceived uselessness of university in the rural context	4	–	3	5	5	3.40
Number of children studying simultaneously	4	3	3	5	5	4.00
Emotional support from the family	5	4	4	5	3	4.35
Geographic accessibility to higher education institutions	5	5	3	5	3	4.40
Perceived quality of prior education	5	4	3	4	4	4.15
Traditional beliefs about women's educational roles	4	4	3	5	4	4.05
Educational level of parents	5	5	4	3	5	4.45
Presence of family conflicts	4	3	3	4	5	3.80
Monthly household income	5	5	3	3	4	4.15
Parents' main occupation	4	5	4	4	4	4.20
Housing conditions	3	4	4	5	4	3.90
Youth migration for work purposes	4	5	2	3	5	3.85
Access to social programs for educational support	4	4	3	3	5	3.80
Presence of university role models in the community	3	3	4	4	5	3.65
Community social capital	4	3	4	4	3	3.65
Prior access to vocational guidance	4	3	4	4	3	3.65
Grade repetition or academic lag	4	4	3	3	4	3.65
Negative experiences within the educational system	4	4	3	3	4	3.65
School infrastructure and local technological resources	4	4	4	3	3	3.65
Government intervention in educational matters	3	3	3	4	3	3.20
Parental participation in school meetings	3	3	4	3	3	3.15

Source: Author's own elaboration

The results from the INCIDE matrix indicate that the factor with the highest incidence in university dropout is the low expectations of families regarding higher education (II = 4.85). This suggests that within the family environment, educational continuity is not considered a priority for personal or professional development. Similarly, the lack of communication within the household regarding academic aspirations (II = 4.45) and the educational level of parents (II = 4.45) are determining factors that negatively impact the formative support that young people receive, thereby increasing the risk of dropping out during the initial stages of university studies.

The low level of parental involvement in school meetings among families in rural areas (II = 3.15) and the limited intervention of local government in educational matters (II = 3.20) reflect a clear disconnection between current educational policies and the real context of the local community. Additionally, it was found that students in the rural community of Tigre II face a significant territorial barrier limiting their access to higher education. These limitations are both sociocultural and, more critically, infrastructural—particularly in the poor condition of roads and the absence of a community transport system (II = 4.50).

The findings are conclusive and highlight that the likelihood of university dropout is not solely the result of individual student decisions in rural areas, but rather a convergence of symbolic and structural factors. These include family values, perceptions and expectations of higher education, future outlooks, and the conditions of territorial infrastructure, such as road access, availability of basic services, and connectivity. All these factors act as conditioning variables that increase the risk of university dropout. Therefore, dropout is best understood as the result of both individual decision-making and territorial and cultural limitations.

Upon analyzing the family environment and sociocultural factors in rural contexts as potential causes of university dropout, strategies were proposed at three levels: psychoeducational support, improvement of local conditions, and cultural transformation. These strategies were subsequently validated by a panel of experts based on four criteria: relevance (Re), coherence (Co), feasibility (Fe), and sustainability (Su). The following table presents the results of the expert validation process, in which the level of expertise was assessed based on the following indicators: Knowledge of the subject (Kc), Use of reference sources (Ka), Argumentation coefficient (Ca), and Competence coefficient (K) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Expert Selection Validation

Expert	Knowledge of the Subject (Kc)	Reference Sources Used (Ka)	Argumentation Coefficient (Ca)	Competence Coefficient (K)	Knowledge Level
Expert 1	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.85	High
Expert 2	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.85	High
Expert 3	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.90	High
Expert 4	0.7	0.9	0.8	0.80	High
Expert 5	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.80	High
Expert 6	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.90	High
Expert 7	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.75	Medium
Expert 8	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.85	High
Expert 9	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.75	Medium
Expert 10	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.80	High
Expert 11	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.65	Medium
Expert 12	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.85	High

Source: Author's own elaboration

Twelve experts were selected and subjected to an evaluation process. The results yielded competency coefficients (K) ranging from 0.75 to 0.90, indicating that the panel of evaluators possesses medium-high to high levels of expertise in basic and higher education, mentoring, soft skills, and social development. Consequently, the analysis supports the technical and academic validity of the evaluation process for the strategies developed. The strategies and their corresponding validation results, based on expert judgment criteria, are presented below.

Table 5. Validation of strategies to reduce the impact of family and sociocultural factors on university dropout through expert judgment.

N°	Strategy	Pe	Co	Vi	So	Va
1	**Rural Family School:** Community workshops aimed at raising awareness among parents about the importance of higher education as a development tool.	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8	3.1
2	**Rural Mentoring Plan (E-mentoring):** Virtual support program with rural professionals serving as academic role models and guides for students.	0.9	0.8	1	1	3.7
3	**Safe Educational Routes:** Local coordination to improve school transport or establish shared routes to nearby higher education institutions.	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5	2.1
4	**Vocational Guidance Circles:** Periodic sessions with teachers and counselors to define clear academic and vocational goals from high school onward.	0.9	0.8	0.8	1	3.5
5	**Family and Community Support Network:** Formation of support groups among families, teachers, and community leaders to foster motivational and supportive home environments.	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.8	3.0
6	**Family Digital Literacy:** Basic training in technology use for students and parents to facilitate access to educational platforms and virtual communication channels.	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.6	3.1
7	**Strengthening School-Community Links:** Activities integrating teachers, families, and local leaders in academic follow-up, fostering trust networks for future mentoring programs.	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.7	3.0
8	**Rural Educational Connectivity:** Partnerships with institutions and companies to improve internet access in educational centers or community spaces.	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.7	3.2
9	**Community Academic Agenda:** Implementation of a shared and visible calendar outlining educational goals, deadlines, and commitments to promote joint planning and monitoring.	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.7	2.5
10	**Micro-Meetings with Graduated Professionals:** Talks or discussion sessions (virtual or in-person) with rural-origin university alumni to reinforce academic identity and future outlook.	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.9	3.4

Source: Author's own elaboration

Of the ten strategies proposed to reduce university dropout in rural areas, eight were validated by the experts, achieving scores between 3.0 and 4.0. This indicates that they meet the minimum criteria of coherence, relevance, feasibility, and sustainability. Among the most notable strategies are the implementation of a rural mentoring plan and the promotion of digital literacy processes for families, due to their contextual adaptability and the relatively low budget required for implementation.

Conversely, two strategies were rejected by the experts, as they obtained scores below 3.0. These strategies were considered weak in terms of immediate applicability due to their lack of alignment with territorial

context. In summary, the expert validation process allowed for the objective prioritization of the most impactful, contextually coherent, and realistically feasible actions. This contributes to a technically sound and consistent approach to reducing the likelihood of university dropout among students from rural areas.

Conclusions

The assessment of the community and educational context of the Tigre II community revealed that the structural conditions of rural territories—such as deficient educational infrastructure, limited access to technology, and, most notably, the low educational attainment of household heads—have contributed to the formation of an environment that is not conducive to the development of sustainable university academic pathways. These limitations negatively affect student performance and significantly influence the devalued perception of higher education as a tool for social mobility. This underscores the urgent need to promote comprehensive strategies grounded in differentiated educational policies that are tailored to the actual conditions of rural territories.

The analysis of the influence of the family environment and sociocultural factors allowed for the identification of behavioral patterns that strongly affect the continuity of education among students in rural areas. As previously discussed, the problem originates in the academic expectations present within the family nucleus, combined with limited vocational guidance and pronounced gender inequality due to domestic responsibilities in rural households—factors that negatively impact student motivation toward pursuing higher education. Furthermore, the lack of academic role models within rural families reinforces a symbolic disconnect between higher education and the development aspirations of these households. Thus, the findings suggest that this factor contributes to a behavioral tendency toward university dropout.

The prioritization and evaluation of the most influential factors associated with university dropout in rural contexts validated the theory that family environment, associated sociocultural factors, and infrastructural service limitations within the territory significantly increase the likelihood of abandoning university studies. Consequently, ten strategies were designed, eight of which were validated by experts based on their relevance, coherence, feasibility, and sustainability. These strategies aim to address the issue from a comprehensive approach, one that involves the rural community, students, key stakeholders, and various levels of government. Guided by a territorial perspective, this integrated effort seeks to implement coordinated actions to minimize the probability of university dropout. Among the most notable strategies are proposals for mentoring programs, the strengthening of ties between educational institutions and local communities, the promotion of digital literacy campaigns, and family awareness initiatives. These efforts are expected to help reverse the sociocultural and symbolic patterns within rural households that currently contribute to the perpetuation of university dropout among youth.

From a critical perspective, the findings of this study reaffirm the assertion that university dropout is a complex phenomenon influenced by a multiplicity of factors. However, in educational contexts within rural areas, this issue cannot be addressed through a homogeneous or exclusively institutional logic, as territorial realities differ widely. Therefore, strategies implemented in urban settings cannot be expected to yield the same results in rural contexts. In this regard, university dropout in rural areas reflects the historical and structural inequalities embedded in these territories, as well as the cultural and familial influences that shape an educational imaginary which directly impacts student retention.

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