

Beyond Dropout: Innovation and Support in Early Childhood Teacher Education

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Abstract

Reducing dropout in distance higher education remains a major challenge, particularly during students' first year, when academic integration, self-regulation, and perceived support are especially critical. This communication presents the progress of two consecutive Teaching Innovation Projects developed at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED, Spain) in the first-year course *Learning and Development in Childhood*, within the Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education. The initiative aims to enhance student engagement, persistence, and academic success through a technology-mediated support model grounded in educational psychology, self-regulated learning, motivation, and transactional distance theory.

The intervention combines motivational videos featuring academic staff, tutors, and successful students with an interactive study calendar and automated reminders integrated into the virtual learning environment. The first project phase focused on identifying factors associated with dropout and designing audiovisual and organisational resources. The second phase, currently in progress, implements these resources and evaluates their impact through a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative indicators include participation, assessment completion, and academic performance, while qualitative evidence is collected from student comments, tutor observations, and virtual forum activity.

Preliminary qualitative feedback suggests that the videos help humanise the online learning experience, reduce feelings of isolation, and foster a stronger sense of academic belonging. Automated reminders also appear to support planning and study organisation. The project offers a transferable model for strengthening student support, emotional engagement, and persistence in distance teacher education.

Keywords: distance higher education; student dropout; teacher education; self-regulated learning; educational innovation