UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

THE ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC FACTORS RELATED TO THE
SUBJECT FAILING AND ATTRITION AT THE LITERATURE
DEPARTMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR,
SEMESTER I – 2000.

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A: Crosstab " Students Academic Performance"

B: Questionnaire for students who had dropped out.

C: Questionnaire for students who had failed subjects.

INTRODUCTION

Imídeo G. Neríci (1985) points out in his book, " Hacia una Didáctica General Dinámica", that university teaching should avoid four things. First of all, universities studies should not only aim at preparing students to pass exams. Second, university students should not limit themselves to just take notes and then memorize them. Third, University students should neither play passive roles nor limit themselves to know just what the teacher gives them. Fourth, university students should not be kept away from the problems their community and country face. Some of these factors and some others have been studying in the school of Arts and Sciences at the University of El Salvador with the objective of finding out the main problems of studying at the university and to be analyzed and find some solutions to the subjects failing and attrition problems.

The project contains different aspects that can be closely related to the Academic and Non- Academic factors that might have influenced subject failing and attrition at the Literature Department at the University of El Salvador in semester I-2000.

This document includes the antecedents and the statement of the problem researched; a list of research questions and objectives that guided the research, a theoretical framework which contains the theoretical aspects related to the topics, based on the consulted literature;

Hypotheses and methodology used; sampling section that describes not only the population and the sample of the study. But also the statistical procedure to calculate that sample,

the instrument used to collect the data, an analysis of the data in the Literature Department. Finally a list of all the bibliographical material consulted is included.

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Inadequate results in national education- both public and private- are not a recent phenomena, but instead have deep roots. Yet the critical situation we find in education today was exacerbated during the 1980s, when all social development indicators were depressed by the economic recession and the use of the most public resources for the war effort. Nevertheless, education today would still continue to require priority attention, with or without the impact caused by the war. The consequences of failing to reform the meaning and results of education are already apparent. El Salvador has had some of the least successful education level in Central America in attracting foreign investment. This contrast sharply with the case of Costa Rica, whose efforts in education have borne fruit in the form of enormous investments in advanced technology industries. Furthermore, our country is hardly prepared to address its wide range of environmental and social problems with such a poorly- educated population. In general terms, the educational system does not fulfill its role because the efforts made are inadequate, and its approach is deficient.

Nowadays, the students' subject failing and attrition constitute a problem for educational institution at any level. So new academic advising programs and new teaching methodologies have been put into practice in order to control the phenomenon in different American Colleges such as the University of Missouri at Kansas city (Blame R. A; DcBurhr L; and Martin DC.1983).

According to the information obtained from the Academic Administration of the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS), for the year 1995 to 2000 an average of 3195 students register each first semester, and only an average of 447 students graduate each year. If we compare these figures, it can be stated that only 15% of the registered population graduates from this school each year.

Based on the important of this phenomenon the research tries to answer the following general questions: What are the Academic and Non-Academic factors that influenced students' subjects failing and attrition in the Literature Department, in the School of Arts and Sciences of the University of El Salvador, Central Region, in the first semester of the year 2000?

II-OBJECTIVES

A. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. Find out if students' subject failure was influenced by their academic performance.

2. Relate professors' methodology and interest to the students´ subject failure.

3. Determine the relationship between class schedules and failing subject in the Literature Department during semester I- 2000.

4. Determine the relationship between students' economic situation and the subject failing.

5. Determine the relationship among the infrastructure, material, and human resources of the Literature Department that influenced students' subject failure.

6. Analyze if there is a difference between women and men's subject failure during semester I-2000 in the Literature Department.

7. Determine if the identification of students with the University of El Salvador was related to the students´ subject failing phenomenon in the Literature Department during semester I- 2000.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The phenomenon of subjects failing and attrition are issues of concern for all educational institutions regardless the rate it may reach, for the fact if they exist, it questions the quality of the processes and programs that educational institutions offer, the quality of its teachers and the particular characteristics of every students.

The efficiency of an educational system is measured by its capacity to preserve and retain its students by permitting them the achievement without any delays of the activities established in the curriculum. In addition, every institution should focus on improving the teaching learning process as well as assisting students as much as possible.

These days, the students' subject failing and attrition establish a problem for educational institution at all levels. For that reason, new academic advising programs and new academic teaching methodologies have been implemented in order to control these phenomenon's in several institutions of Tertiary Education like the University of Missouri at Kansas city for instance. (Blanc R. A. Dc Buhrl and Martín Dc,1983).

Students do not lack the intellectual capacity to succeed at University, however, they lack the skills, attitudes and habits essential for effective performance. While students are ultimately responsible for their attitudes and habits, the College can provide guidance and structures conducive to

developing good study and work habits and serious, positive attitudes towards school works.

Some of the most difficult transition issues faced by first year students involve to the teaching learning environment at universities with maybe very different from that which characterized their high school life and to which they have become accustomed.

University students are typically expected to take substantially more responsibilities for their studies than in high school; workloads can be much more demanding; rules and customs (for example, regarding late assignments, makeup possibilities for missed or failed tests and assignments) may also be quite different.

By the time first year students realize that the rules and expectations from their high school years no longer apply, they may already be in serious academic difficulty. By way of illusion, students said how they wrongly assumed that they could continue to do in university what they had done in high school: Let their studies slide until well into the year and still manage good grades through a strong effort at the end. Similarly, in high school, students often come to depend on someone seeking them out to ask why their were falling behind, missing classes or failing to complete assignments; without such reinforcement, some first year students are lulled into unwarranted complacency about how well they are doing until it is too late.

A quite separate set of problems faced by first year students relates to course selection. Incoming students are often unsure about what they want to do at the university, or have unrealistic or inaccurate perceptions about

particular programmes or courses, still others choose their courses on the basic of limited information.

The result is that many first -year students find that their courses were not what they expected, that they do not like what they are studying or that they are not particularly well suited to certain disciplines. In turn this leads to students losing interest and faring poorly in their courses or dropping out altogether.

There have been studies that intent to explain the attrition problem from academic variables. According to Vincent Tinto (1986), the attrition phenomenon is provoked by academic variables since he established that a great deal of researchers have shown that failing or passing students' subjects are determining factors for predicting whether students will keep on studying in the university or not. An example, it was the research done in the " *Instituto Tecnologico de Itparral* (ITP)," in Mexico. The sample of this research consisted of a hundred of students who entered the Major Electric Engineering of ITP from August to December 1992. The results effectively exhibited that there was a significant relationship between attrition and failure in this major.

According to a research done in the Argentinean Pre-University System, "the academic background that the students have when they enroll in the University is very low and it attempts against student's performance. Besides, it contributes that students spend

more time to finish their career. All this represents a major economic budget for the University. The work project for the CODEP (*Comision de Desarrollo Propedeutico)* is based on recognizing the complexity of the problem, and to assume the need to plan at least a consecutive year of work to help students to overcome their main difficulties during their learning process".

As literature shows, there is a relationship between student's attrition and subject failing; hence, it is necessary to state that failure of subjects is part of this study; thus, it is **defined as the student's lack of success in achieving the average of six, which is the lowest passing grade, in any specific subject at the end of the semester.**

Based on the theory studied in regard to causes that provoked students to drop out from different Tertiary Institutions, the researchers have made the following model that will be used in order to study the phenomenon of attrition at the School of Arts and Sciences of the University of El Salvador during semester I-2000.

The model includes two majors categories : *Academic factors and Non- Academic factors.*

A. ACADEMIC FACTORS

These factors have been sub-divided into *Students'* *Professor's* and *Institutional areas.*

1. The student's area includes students' academic background as well as performance, and student's participation in campus activities. These are the most common factors related to attrition according to the theory read. The aim of this area is to find out to what extend the students' academic background, performance, and student's participation in campus activities influenced in students' attrition.

2. The professor's area includes professor's interest in the teaching learning process and the teaching learning methodology used in the subjects that present the highest number of failures. This particular area will be devoted to relate professor's methodology and their interests in the teaching learning process of the students.

3. The last one is the institutional area. This one contains class schedules, curricular changes, administrative processes, and university policies related with admission and permanence in the institution. This area specifically is aimed at

determining the relationship among students' attrition and all this factors previously mentioned.

B. NON- ACADEMIC FACTORS

These factors have also been sub- divided into two areas as follows: Student's and Institutional areas.

1. Regarding student's area, it includes students' economic situation, health problems, parenthood, career benefits, student's sex, and their identification with the institution. The purpose of this area is to determine to what extend all these factors influenced in the students' withdrawal of the university. Furthermore, to identify the relationship between their attrition cycle, and the health problems that they might have had.

2. Within the Institutional area are found the infrastructure itself and its resources related to the educational process such as material, financial and human. The main objective of this is to determine the university resources that influenced students to drop out.

IV. HYPOTHESES

A. CORRELATIONAL HYPOTHESIS

1. The professors' methodology and interest in the teaching -learning process influenced students' Subject failing during semester I-2000.

2. Students who have a family support in their studies get a higher rate of subject failing in the Literature Department during semester I-2000.

3. The infrastructure, material and human resources of the Literature Department influenced the student's failing during semester I-2000.

4. Pregnancy and marriage responsibilities mainly influenced female Students' attrition and subject failing in the Literature Department During semester I-2000.

5. The student's academic background influenced the students subject failing and attrition cycle in the Literature Department.

6- The lack of interest in the studies influenced students subject failing in the Literature Department during semester I-2000.

V. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to find out the Academic and Non Academic factors that influenced students' subject failure at the Literature Department of the School of Arts and Science during the first semester of the year 2000.

There was the need to measure and explain the subject failing and attrition cycle phenomenon; for that reason the survey research method was used. This was a sample survey since the nature and the purpose of the study was related with Education and Social Sciences and it studied only a portion of the population.

The most challenging type of survey was the one that seeks to measure intangibles such as attitudes, opinions and values, or the sociological and psychological constructs, like the reason our students population had for withdrawing from college as well as the implications relative to University entities such as Faculty and Administrators, teaching- learning methodology, students' economic factors, job related reasons, students' preparation for entering college.

The opinions, attitudes, and values were not directly observable but they were inferred from responses given by the subjects to the questionnaires specially designed for this purpose. Since it was a survey of

intangibles it was limited by the fact that the data that was collected was only indirectly be measuring the variables the study was concerned about. This limitation depended on how well the observations measured the intangible variables.

The steps involved in this survey research were:

1. Planning

The survey research began with the question that could be answered by means of the survey method. The question of our study was:

What are the academic and non-academic factors that influenced students' subject failing and attrition in the Literature Department of the school of Arts and Sciences of the University of El Salvador, Central Campus in the first semester of the year 2000?

In order to find out the answer to this question, the research was divided into two areas: one dealing with the academic factors and the other with the non-academic. The area of the academic factors was subdivided into students' factors, teachers' factors, and institutional factors. The area of the non-academic factors consisted of: students' factors and the institution resources factors. (For more information refer to the theoretical framework).

2. Sampling:
   a. The population of this study was formed by the students who

failed one or more subjects and those who withdrew from the Literature Department of the School of Arts and Sciences of the University of El Salvador during the semester I-2000.

b. The sample included students who fulfill the characteristics determined for our study. The subjects were selected according to a simple random sampling with one substitution that was designed for the Literature Department of the School of Arts and Sciences. (Please, refer to the Sampling Section for more information).

3. Conducting the survey:

a. Pilot study

Once the data-gathering questionnaire was ready, two pilot studies were administered to determine if the designed questionnaire provided the expected data.

b. Field work

The steps that were followed for gathering the information were:
Phone calls: they were made in order to set a date with the subjects of the sample for an interview. In case one of the subjects could not be contacted or refuses to be interviewed, the substitute was taken. ii. Visiting their workplaces or houses: After contacting the subject of the sample they were visited, either at their jobs or their houses to administer the questionnaires.

4. Data processing

The steps that were followed for processing the data were:

a. Designing the data base using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)

b. Coding the information.

c. Entering the data into the database.

d. Analyzing and interpreting the data.

e. Report writing.

f. Socializing the results.

VI. SAMPLING

A. Population

The population of this research project was formed by all of the students of the Literature Department of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of El Salvador that failed and or dropped out one or more subjects in semester I-2000.

B. Sample

A sample of 40 students was taken in relation to the number of students that failed or dropped out one or more subjects in the Literature Department of the School of Arts and Sciences. The samples had been calculated for each academic unit in the School of Arts and Sciences, using the following formula:

$$n= \frac{Z^2PQN}{E^2(N-1) + Z^2PQ}$$

Where: n = sample; N = population ; Z = score; PQ = percentage to be included or excluded; E = standard error.

This formula was because the Department of Literature had its own population, which was not formed by more than 5000 individuals. For instance, the following procedure shows the way the sample of the Literature Department was calculated.

$n = \dfrac{Z^2 PQN}{E^2(N-1) + Z^2 PQ}$ $\qquad$ $n = \dfrac{(0.68)(40)}{0.39 + 0.68}$

$n = \dfrac{(1.65)^2(0.5)(0.5)(40)}{(0.1)^2(40-1) + (1.65)^2(0.5)(0.5)}$ $\qquad$ $n = \dfrac{27.2}{1.07}$

$n = \dfrac{(2.72)(0.25)(40)}{(0.01)(39) + (2.72)(0.25)}$ $\qquad$ $n = 25.4$

$\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\quad n = 25$

C. Instrument

The instrument was a questionnaire. The questionnaires were classified into two: questionnaire "D" and questionnaire "R". R was used for students who had failed subjects, and D was used for students who had dropped out from the university. (See annexes A and B). These questionnaires contained questions related to the areas included in the model designed to study the subject failing of the School of Arts in semester I-2000. These areas are academic background and performance of the sample students. The professor's interests and methodology, and the role of the university as an institution in the students' failure.

VII. DATA ANALYSIS

A. SAMPLE CHARACTERIZATION

The sample characterization for this research was composed of students who were studying at the Literature Department of the SAS of the University of El Salvador during semester I-2000. There were 14 students as whole, 12 students who were women and two who were men. Furthermore 10 female students as well 1 male failed subjects. In regard to attrition, 3 students dropped out, 2 women and a man. Regarding to the career they were studying, it can be said that the whole sample was studying " Profesorado en Lenguage y Literatura".

	SEX		SUBJECT FAILING		ATTRITION		CAREER	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%
Women	12	85.7	10	92.4	2	66.6	12 Profesorado	85.7
Men	2	14.3	1	8.4	1	33.3	2 Profesorado	14.3
Total	14	100	11	100	3	100	14	100

B. RESULTS

1. SCALE USED FOR ANALYSING THE METHODOLOGY CONSTRUCTS.

In order to measure the methodology constructs, the scales of Likert was used:

The data was measured taking as a starting point the means; understanding that the closer to 1.0 more positive the results are and the farther from 1.0 less positive they are.

For these scales two groups of categories were made: the first one containing the following aspects: (1) Excellent (2) Very good (3) Good (4) Regular and (5) poor. This scale was designed for the professor's methodology in which students have failed subjects, and also for the professor's methodology used in the subject that the students felt the most satisfied with. And the second one containing these aspects, (1) always (2) usually (3) sometimes (4) almost never and (5) never, this scale is related with the students participation in extra – curricular activities.
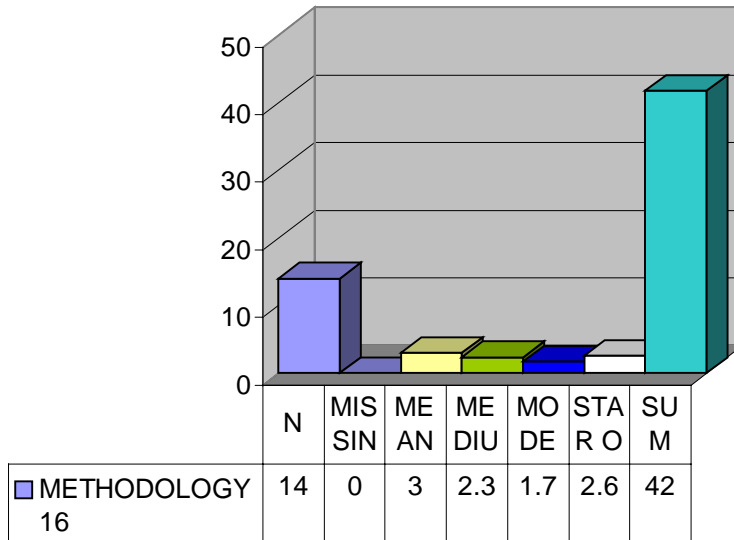
2. Teaching Learning Methodology

Graph Nº 1: Evaluatión of the methodology
used in the sujects students had failed

	N	MISSIN	MEAN	MEDIU	MODE	STAR O	SUM
METHODOLOGY 16	14	0	3	2.3	1.7	2.6	42

The methodology construct refers to the strategies, techniques, interest and available resources that professors used to teach classes in the literature department.

Based on the date presented in the table above it can be stated that the professor's methodology in the subject students had failed was not good enough since it shows a mean of 2.98 (Remember that the farther from 1.0 the mean is the worst the evaluation is).

Graph Nº 2: "Evaluación of the methodology used in the subject students felt the most satisfied with".

|	N	MISSING	MEAN	MEDIUM	STARO	RESV.	SUM
☐ METHODODOGY 71	14	0	1.2857	1.1818	1.09	0.3064	18
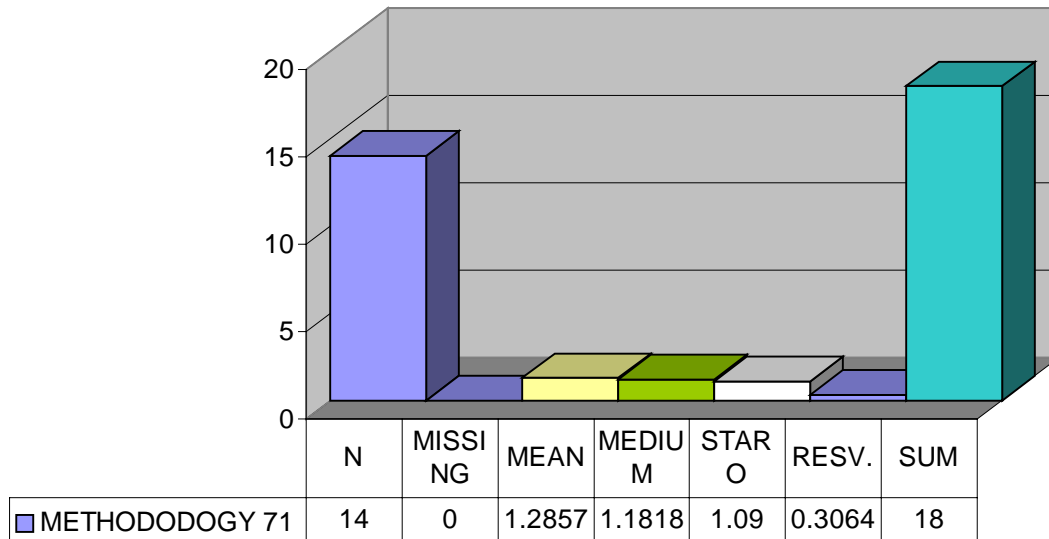
This table shows clearly that students consider the professor's methodology in the subject they felt most satisfied with better than with the methodology used the Literature Department, because, the mean shows a 1.18. Therefore, due to the results obtained in the methodology used by the professors, it is understood that was very important and supports the students to succeed or fail subjects.

The previous finding match with the hypothesis in regard to the methodology of the professors since in the first construct the methodology of the professors influenced in a way students failed the subject. And in the second one, the methodologies of the professors express a satisfactory idea because it determined the students´ success.

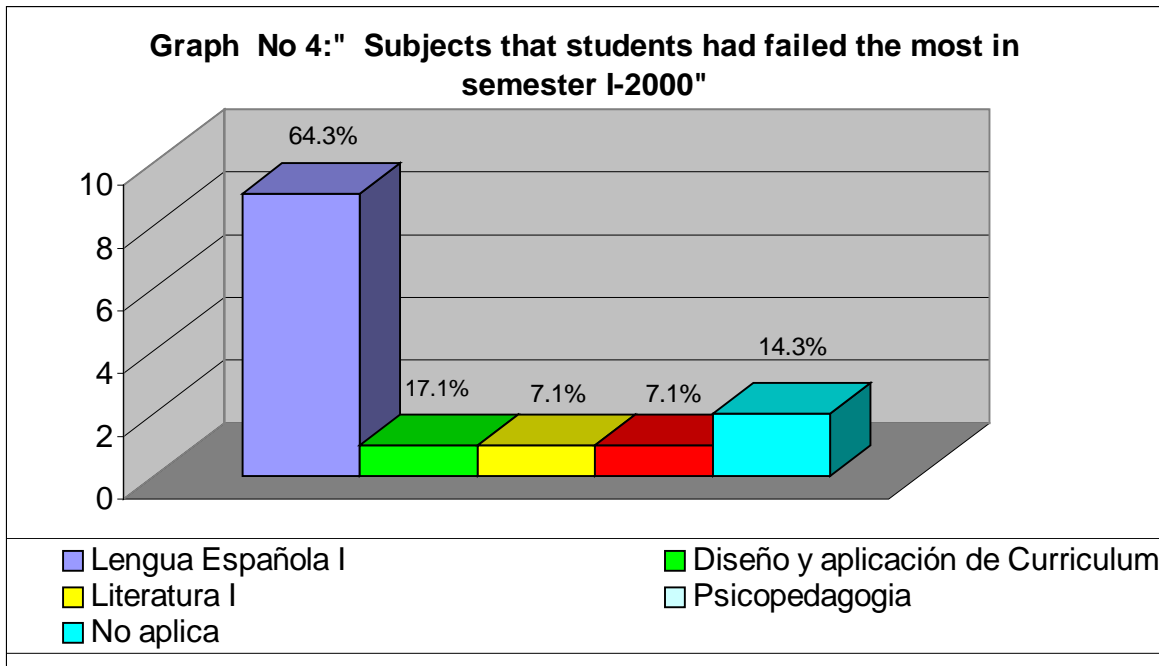# 3. Student's participation in extra-curricular activities

Graph 3: Evaluation of the students participation in extra - curricular activities.

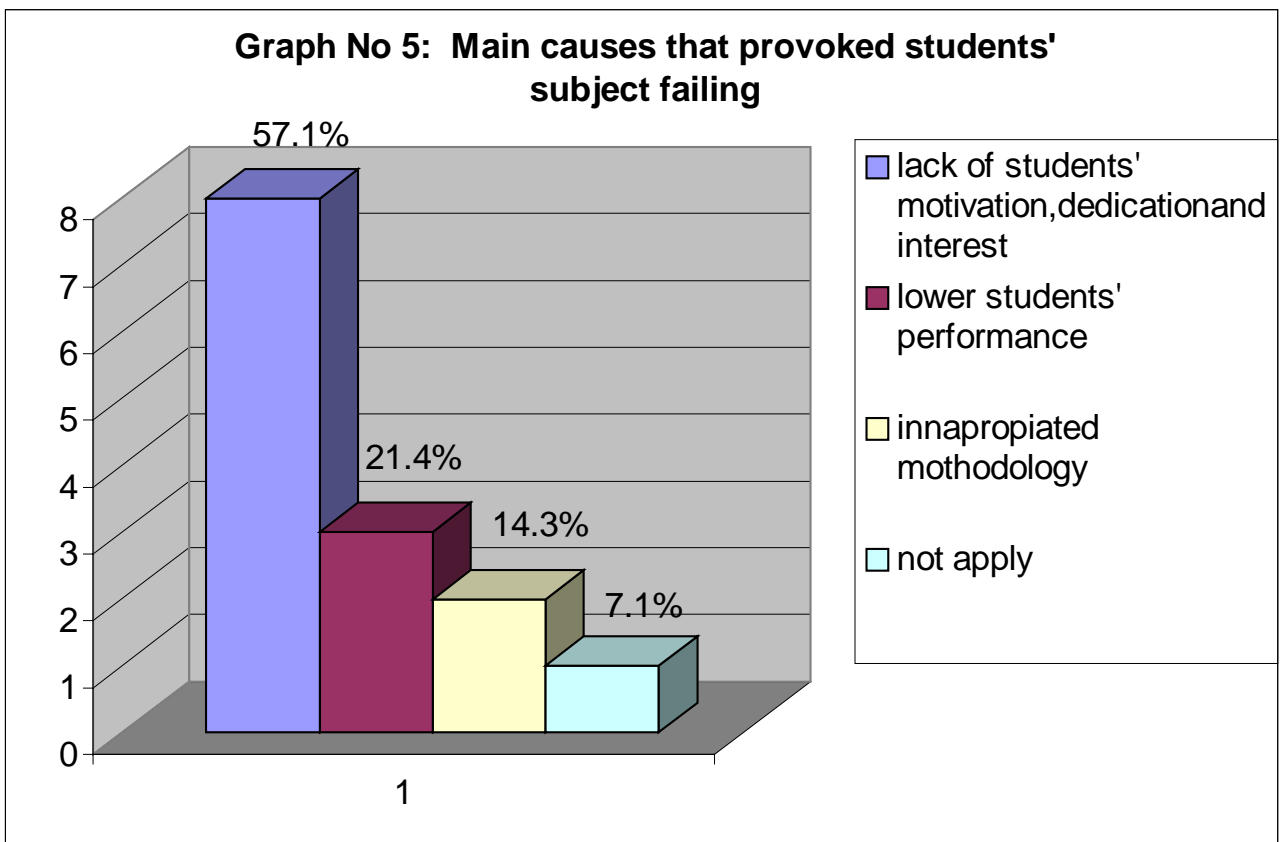|	N	MIS SIN	ME AN	ME DIA	MO DE	STA R O	SU M
☐ STRACURRICUL AR ACTIVITES	14	0	4.3	0.36	5	0.4	60.1
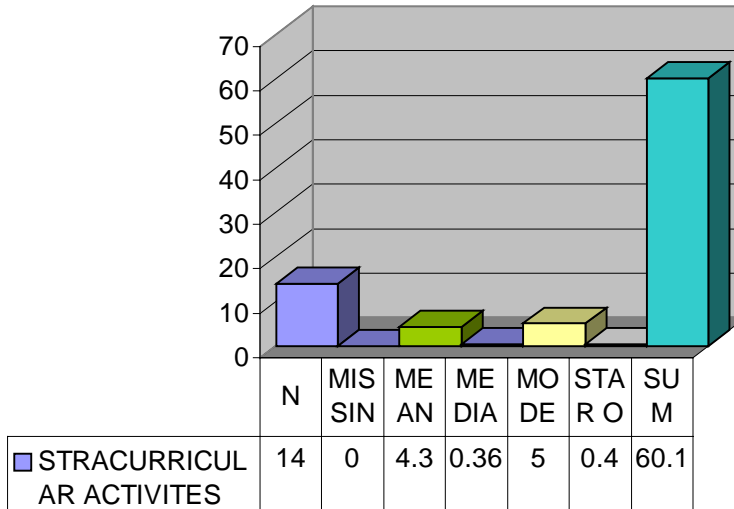
The construct of student's participation in extra-curricular activities had the following aspects: their participation in cultural activities, workshops, and associations as well as their participation as subject representatives.

As it can be seen in this table the mean for this construct is 4.29 which means that most of the students do not participate about extra - curricular activities.

Graph No 4:" Subjects that students had failed the most in semester I-2000"

Legend:
- ☐ Lengua Española I
- ☐ Literatura I
- ☐ No aplica
- ☐ Diseño y aplicación de Curriculum
- ☐ Psicopedagogia

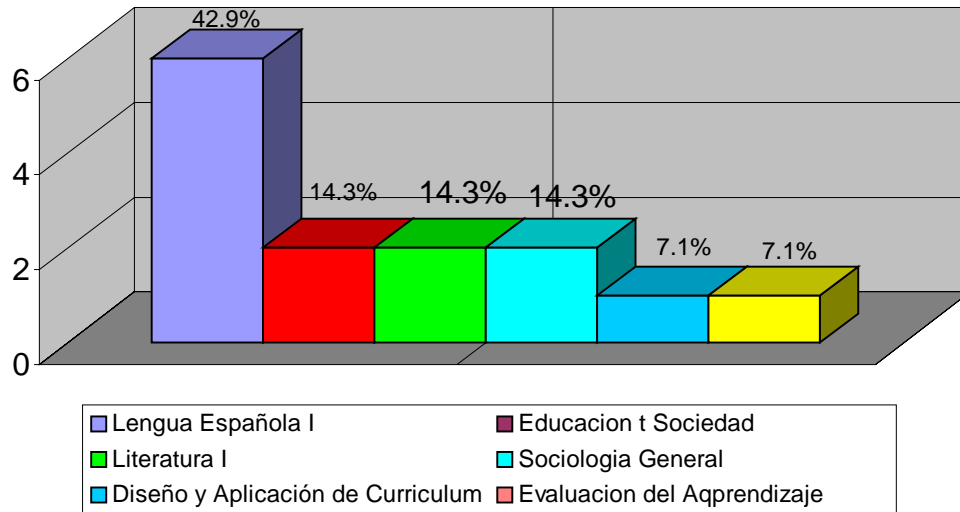Bar values: 64.3%, 17.1%, 7.1%, 7.1%, 14.3%

In the Literature Department the subject most often failed was Lengua Española I, showing a 64.3% (frequency of nine people). The evaluation given by the students to the methodology used by the teacher in these subjects was concentrated in the teaching process, which is shown in the evaluation (mean 2.98). Moreover, there were three subjects with a lower rate of failure, which were: Diseño y Aplicacion del Lenguage, Literatura I and Psicopedagogia, each one with a 7.1%. The methodology evaluation mean is for all the subjects that students said they had failed.

Graph No 5: Main causes that provoked students' subject failing

57.1%

■	lack of students' motivation,dedicationand interest
■	lower students' performance
□	innapropiated mothodology
□	not apply

21.4%

14.3%

7.1%

8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0

1

As it is shown in the graph No 5, the main cause that provoked students' subject failing was the lack of students' motivation, dedication and interest toward the took part on students' failing too.

The second cause was the subject which presents a 57.1%. Nevertheless, an interesting finding is that the methodology used by the teacher in the subject that they failed low students' performance that represents a 21.4% in the table and the third one was the inappropriate teaching learning methodology, which has a 14.3%.

GRAPH No 6: " Subjects students said they felt most satisfied with".

Legend:
- ☐ Lengua Española I
- ☐ Educacion t Sociedad
- ☐ Literatura I
- ☐ Sociologia General
- ☐ Diseño y Aplicación de Curriculum
- ☐ Evaluacion del Aqprendizaje

According to the data above, the subject that students considered as the one that fulfilled their expectations and needs was Lengua Española I with 42.9%. It can be mentioned that the methodology used by the teacher in this subject was focused on the students' learning process, which is shown in the evaluation (mean 1.28). But at the same time there is a contrast, because most of the students mentioned the same subjects as the most often failed. (see graph No 4 about subjects most often failed)

4. STUDENT'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The relationship between age and the subject failing variables showed that from fourteen students from the Literature Department, twelve of them failed subjects in semester I-2000. As it is shown in table No 1 (See annex A),students who were eighteen and nineteen years old failed between one and two subjects, and students who were twenty years old had failed more subjects, three of them had failed around one and two subjects and the other two failed three and four subjects, also three students who were between twenty-one and thirty two years old failed between one and two subjects. And there were two students who have not failed any subject. As it can be seen in the table students who were twenty years old had the highest number of subject failures.

5. ATTRITION ANALYSES

The information gathered about the cases of people who dropped out from the Literature Department was important for the analyses. Outs of the total sample three cases were found; the three of them belonged to "Profesorado en Literatura". Two of the cases were women, one of them is married and the other is accompanied and the male student is single. The students were between 21 to 29 years old.

In the findings, there were two strong causes that students considered being the main reasons for dropping out, which were: Pregnancy and Marriage responsibilities and also the class schedules interference to work. The female students mentioned the first two cases and the second cause, which was (class schedule interference), was mentioned by the male. Moreover, the information gathered showed that one student had failed three subjects, and the failed subject during semester I-2000 was Lengua Española I. She said that the main reason for the subject failing was the lack of interest and motivation as the other cases of failures.

But also she expressed that this was not the foremost cause of her career abandonment: It was pregnancy and marriage responsibilities. (see the following information).

Causes of career abandonment

	Frequency	Percent
Pregnancy	2	14.3
Paternity		
Schedules interferences	1	7.1
Total	3	21.4
Missing	11	78.6
Total	14	100.0

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

After having analyzed the data in the research of what are the Academic and Non- Academic factors that influenced the students failing and attrition cycle at the Literature Department in the Semester I –2000.   The group arrived to the following conclusions:

- The professors' methodology and interest in the Teaching Learning Process was a cause why students failed subjects during semester I-2000.

- The main reason why students failed subject was the lack of interest and motivation in their studies.

- The subject that most of the students had failed was Lengua Española I, and at the same time it was the one they felt the most satisfied with.

IX. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

During the research process ,the researchers faced with several factors that affected the process, some of the factors were the following: the sample the researchers found was not enough to prove the hypotheses, it happened because the population from the Literature Department withdraw from the university without retired the subjects and even the semester, neither the classmates have their addresses and phone numbers, for that reason was impossible to obtain the whole population. Also students who were taking as a sample were not available during the administration of the survey, and the period administration was too long. For that reason, some students did not want to cooperate with the survey administration, during the process the researchers made some phone call to see if students accept the interview but it was impossible.

Another limitation the researchers faced was not to consider the teachers' point of view, to compare different opinions and understand different situations in the Literature Department. These were the limitation faced in the process of the survey in the Literature Department, semester I – 2000.

ANNEXES