ABSTRACT

This paper approaches the problem of higher education attrition and retention from a conceptual viewpoint. Different categories of attrition and retention are analyzed in order to suggest that the concepts used within studies on the subject are clearly defined, so to make the results comparable. In addition, a synthesis is included of diverse theoretical approaches that have been used in research on the subject over the last 25 years. These models were developed emphasizing either psychological, economic, sociological or organizational dimensions or factors related to the interactions between the student and the institution. The variables included in the different models have been proved to be predictive of the withdrawal and the persistence of students. The most recent approaches on student attrition have evolved towards a more inclusive model, which integrates variables related to a range of the previous approaches, and emphasizes variables modifiable by the institutions to reduce the attrition.