

# Dropout in music conservatories: analysis of causes and possible solutions from teachers' perspectives

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**ENG Abstract:** Dropping out of studies in conservatories in Spain presents worrying figures. For this reason, recently it has begun to attract the interest of the educational and scientific community. However, this phenomenon has been addressed by few authors who have already analyzed the causes and possible solutions of this dropout in different regions. The need to carry out a national study is identified through a questionnaire aimed at teachers of Elementary and Professional Music Education. A sample of 284 is given out of an estimated population of 11,607 teachers. The results obtained show that the main causes of dropout are excess teaching load, lack of motivation of the students and the study plan. Among the best-rated possible solutions are: encouraging collective activities and groups in conservatories, integrating Higher Artistic Education in the university and opening conservatories to society. In the discussion, the results obtained are contrasted with the previous studies presented in the theoretical framework. Finally, the urgency of taking action is highlighted, especially by educational administrations, conservatories and teachers, to stop the leak of thousands of students who leave music conservatories every year.

**Keywords:** dropout; conservatory; music education; musical instruments; educational systems.

**Table of contents:** 1. Introduction. Music Conservatories in Spain: A System with Lights and Shadows. 2. Previous Research on Educational Dropout in Conservatories. 3. Methodology. 4. Results. 5. Discussion: Causes and Proposed Solutions. 6. Conclusions and Final Considerations. 7. References. 8. Appendices.

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## 1. Introduction. Music Conservatories in Spain: A System with Lights and Shadows

Currently, Spain has an extensive network of music conservatories that offer regulated artistic education. These conservatories fall under the so-called Special Regime Education. This system consists of three levels: Elementary Music Education (EME), Professional Music Education (PME), and Higher Music Education (HME). HME is equivalent to undergraduate university studies. According to data from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEVT) for the 2024-2025 academic year, this network includes 371 EME institutions (246 public and 125 private), 298 PME institutions (206 public and 92 private), and 38 HME institutions (22 public and 16 private).

Although students pursue music conservatory studies for diverse reasons, a primary challenge emerges: aligning educational offerings with students' motivations and needs. Conservatories face the issue that most students do not pursue a professional music career (Navas et al., 2012); yet, this non-compulsory pathway makes intrinsic motivation crucial for persistence (Evans et al., 2013). When instruction fails to address students' ambitions, dropout follows—a consequence that highlights the need to understand and respond to these motivations (Cain, 2013). Compounding this, the current PME qualification provides fewer professional and academic opportunities than previous systems (Ponce de León, 2017), further weakening its attractiveness.

Although general education in Spain has shown a clear trend—from the LOGSE to the LOMLOE—towards adapting methodologies to the needs of 21st-century students through more active pedagogical approaches,

such changes are rarely introduced or adapted within instrumental instruction at music conservatories. In this context, the traditional teacher-student relationship, repetition, and the cultivation of virtuosity continue to dominate the learning process, without evolving toward a student-centered model that promotes active engagement and holistic development (Pozo et al., 2020).

According to Domínguez-Lloria and Pino-Juste (2021), regarding teacher training, “despite the legal requirement to hold a Master's Degree in Teacher Training to access teaching positions, in practice, it is not a mandatory prerequisite for faculty in Music and Performing Arts” (p. 45). Consequently, they advocate for mechanisms that ensure pedagogical training for future music educators, as is already the case in other regulated educational fields.

Within the scope of these programs—EME and PME—dropout rates have reached as high as 80%, sparking growing interest in this issue among the national scientific and educational community (Bautista, 2020; Alcázar & Sánchez-Escribano, 2022). Moreover, among those who complete professional music education, only 10% go on to finish higher music education (Querol, 2017). This reveals a significant disconnect between the educational reality of the classroom and the current legislative and curricular framework.

In this context, the aim of this study is to identify and share the various causes and potential solutions to dropout in elementary and professional music education, and to validate these findings from the perspective of the teaching staff themselves.

## 2. Previous Research on Educational Dropout in Conservatories

Unlike higher education, pre-university music education in Europe lacks standardization and equivalence in educational models across countries, according to information provided by the European Association of Conservatories (n.d.). Consequently, making direct comparisons between different music education systems regarding educational dropout at this level is highly complex. Nevertheless, specific studies from various European countries address dropout in specialized music education; among the most recent are those by Gonçalves et al. (2018) in Portugal, Ruth and Müllensiefen (2021) in the United Kingdom and Germany, Kavčič-Pucihar et al. (2024) in Slovenia, and Wieser et al. (2024) in Austria.

Focusing on Spain, the concept of school dropout is clearly defined within general and compulsory education (Martínez & Álvarez, 2005). In artistic education—which is voluntary and has a distinct structure—defining dropout is more difficult. Some authors refer to students who begin a stage but do not complete the so-called “musical career,” meaning they do not finish Higher Music Education (HME). This can lead to dropout rates as high as 80% (Bautista, 2020). However, Sánchez-Escribano (2020) argues that this concept is not entirely appropriate. These programs are divided into independent educational levels, and some students may aim to complete and obtain certification in only one of them. Therefore, in this study, dropout will mean not completing a stage that was started, for two reasons: (1) it is the most widely used definition among authors who have addressed the topic, and (2) it aligns best with the current three-stage structure—EME, PME, and HME.

As noted by Alcaraz and Sánchez-Escribano (2022), several studies have examined dropout in Spanish music conservatories. Some are qualitative, while others employ a mixed-methods approach that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data. Although their methodologies vary, these studies share a qualitative focus on identifying possible causes or solutions—parameters central to this research. The next section presents a chronological summary of the studies identified in the literature review, along with some more recent works.

Firstly, Escandell et al. (2003) focus on the Elementary Grade stage—now known as Elementary Music Education (EME)—at the Conservatory of Music in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. They identify several dropout causes: (1) the requirement to pass an entrance exam to advance; (2) not being able to choose the desired instrument from the start; and (3) excessive academic load when balancing regulated music studies and general education. The authors do not propose specific solutions but suggest fostering motivation early in students and expanding the number of available places in instrumental specialties, so every student can choose their preferred instrument.

Secondly, Perelló (2003) offers a comprehensive study within the Valencian Community. The main dropout causes are: (1) excessive academic load when combining music and general education, especially at the secondary level; (2) lack of curriculum flexibility, with students required to enroll in full academic years; (3) teachers' dissatisfaction with students' academic effort; (4) the need to reinstate free enrollment exams and remove limitations on years at the institution; and (5) the lack of integration of Higher Music Education (HME) into the university system. Perelló (2003) proposes several measures to improve conservatories and reduce dropouts: (1) expand integrated centers that combine music and general education; (2) offer flexible enrollment, free-study options, and September exam sessions; (3) align teaching with students' real expectations; (4) redirect students not intent on HME to music schools; (5) ensure music schools can prepare students for intermediate PME courses; (6) allow students in the “Musical Baccalaureate” access to university studies, not just HME; and (7) strengthen music schools for those who do not wish to pursue HME.

Thirdly, Pina (2007) studies the PME stage in the Valencian Community. According to the author, main dropout factors include: (1) excessive academic load when combining general and regulated music education; (2) fear of lower performance in general education; (3) not passing exams and entrance tests between stages; (4) family, social, and emotional instability; (5) teacher-student relationship issues; and (6) low self-esteem. Pina (2007) proposes three action lines: (1) the educational administration should implement a more flexible enrollment system than the LOGSE; (2) institutions should work to integrate music education (conservatories)

and general education (schools and high schools); and (3) teachers should be more involved in organizing and guiding students' time management.

Fourth and fifth are the studies by Lorenzo (2013) and Lorenzo et al. (2016), which were conducted in the Canary Islands across all levels of regulated music education. Both works identify various factors that may cause dropout in music conservatories; these factors are categorized by the perspectives of different educational stakeholders, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Causes of Dropout from Music Studies According to Lorenzo (2013)

GROUP	CAUSES OF DROPOUT OR CONTINUANCE AT SCHOOL CENTER
Students who still remain at the school center	1) Limited involvement of students' families with the educational institution; 2) Inadequate curriculum; 3) Lack of financial support to pursue these studies; 4) Few professional opportunities from music studies; 5) Inability to choose the desired specialty; 6) Lack of pedagogical training of teachers; 7) Excessive academic workload and need for more flexible schedules; 8) Low student motivation
Students who dropped out	1) Difficulty in balancing general and regulated music education; 2) Overlap of assessment dates between general and regulated education; 3) Late start of music studies; 4) Lack of family support; 5) Not obtaining a place in professional music education programs; 6) Lack of motivation toward music studies; 7) High tuition costs and lack of scholarships; 8) Not having chosen the desired specialty; 9) Excessive academic workload and lack of enrollment flexibility.
Teaching staff	1) Low cultural level of parents; 2) Lack of family involvement; 3) Limited financial resources of families; 4) Low pedagogical and didactic training of teachers; 5) Problems in the teacher-student relationship; 6) Low student integration into the educational institution; 7) Few career opportunities; 8) Lack of motivation and study habits; 9) Non-compulsory nature of music education; 10) Need to integrate general and music education.
Graduated Students	1) Engaging in music only as an extracurricular activity; 2) Having started music studies at the appropriate age; 3) Having chosen the right instrument; 4) Possessing the necessary attitudes and aptitudes to pursue these studies; 5) Studying music out of personal desire rather than family pressure; 6) Having clear goals regarding their musical education; 7) Being able to afford the studies; 8) Having had good teachers.

Table compiled by the author based on Lorenzo (2013)

Likewise, Lorenzo (2013) proposes several measures to reduce dropout rates in music conservatories: (1) greater coordination and communication between teachers and students; (2) increased involvement of the educational community in the detection and prevention of dropout; (3) bringing conservatory activities closer to society to enhance the visibility and recognition of music education; (4) promoting the integration of general and music education; (5) reviewing the relevance of curriculum content; (6) increasing curriculum flexibility; (7) full integration of Higher Music Education (HME) into the university system; (8) strengthening the presence and role of guidance departments within conservatories; and (9) ensuring students can pursue their desired instrumental specialty from the beginning of their music studies.

The sixth study, conducted by García (2019), was located in the region of Aragón. Broadly speaking, the author identifies student motivation as the most influential factor in the decision to abandon music studies in conservatories. Furthermore, García argues that the degree or development of student motivation is largely the direct responsibility of the teaching staff and their pedagogical approach. While other elements, such as academic workload, curriculum design, or individual student capacities, may also have an impact, these are considered beyond the direct control of the school community. As a primary measure to address this dropout phenomenon, García (2019) designs and implements a training course for conservatory teachers focused on pedagogy and educational psychology, with the aim of equipping them with motivational tools and strategies.

The seventh study, by Sánchez-Escribano (2020), is set in the context of the Community of Madrid. This research identifies three categories of factors influencing dropout: individual, social, and structural, along with a series of specific causes derived from each category, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Factors and Causes Influencing Dropout according to Sánchez-Escribano (2020)

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS	
Lack of vocation and aptitude for music	Lack of discipline and study organization
Lack of maturity to handle simultaneous studies	Incompatibility or prioritization of other academic or leisure activities
Lack of teacher involvement	Poor teacher-student relationship

<b>INDIVIDUAL FACTORS</b>	
Not studying the desired instrumental specialty from the beginning	Teachers' lack of aptitude and specific training in pedagogy
Teachers' dissatisfaction with the students' effort and study habits	Lack of time for students to prepare for classes
Motivation and self-esteem problems among students	Misconception of what regulated music studies mean and require
Not having started music studies at a "recommended age"	Lack of goals and objectives aligned with the rest of the educational agents
<b>SOCIAL FACTORS</b>	
Family pressure to study music	Lack of social recognition of music studies
Not participating in musical activities where what has been learned is put into practice	Lack of musical culture in the student's context
Distance between home and the educational institution	Lack of follow-up, support, and financial resources from families
<b>STRUCTURAL FACTORS</b>	
Non-compulsory nature of music studies	Oversupply – too many institutions
Excessive workload for students who combine music and general education	Lack of adaptation of the curriculum to the real needs of students
Lack of human, financial, and material resources in institutions	Limited flexibility of the curriculum regarding enrollment and assessment
Few professional opportunities given the excessive number of graduates	Lack of definition of higher music education compared to other university degrees
Limited number of integrated education centers	Requirement of entrance exams between stages
Low recognition of Elementary and Professional Music Education diplomas	High teacher turnover

Table compiled by the author based on (2020)

Additionally, Sánchez-Escribano (2020) concludes with a series of proposals: (1) restructuring the ten-year duration of non-university music education into six years of Elementary Music Education (EME) and four years of Professional Music Education (PME), or creating a new intermediate stage between EME and PME to accommodate students who wish to continue improving but do not intend to pursue Higher Music Education (HME); (2) establishing joint programs between conservatories and general education institutions; (3) offering more flexible enrollment options and reinstating free-study examinations; (4) providing teachers with specific training on dropout prevention; (5) stabilizing teaching staff and reducing employment precariousness in conservatories; (6) promoting collective activities and ensembles within conservatories; (7) strengthening and better resourcing the network of non-regulated music schools; and (8) encouraging the transformation of conservatories into integrated education centers.

Eighth and finally, the study by Martínez-Cantero (2023) examines the initial motivations that prompt students to initiate music studies and how these motivations shape divergent trajectories, including dropout. Through two empirical studies—one involving 159 participants aged 8 to 16, and another comparing students from the Alicante Youth Orchestra with former students who dropped out during EME—the author analyzes motivational, familial, social, and educational factors that shape the continuity or interruption of regulated music practice. The results reveal significant differences between those who persist and those who abandon. In the dropout group, "initial motivation was negative or very negative, became positive at the beginning, and later returned to its original level" (p. 198), whereas in the persistence group, motivation remained positive and was associated with a family environment characterized by higher cultural capital and frequent listening habits. The study also notes that, in both groups, aptitude tests are perceived as largely irrelevant, raising questions about their effectiveness as predictors of academic success. A key contribution of the research is the finding that the initial motivation "is only relatively important in the long term" (p. 197), as students' trajectories depend more on familial, social, and contextual support than on individual aptitude alone. In this regard, the thesis emphasizes the need to rethink access and initial guidance processes, and to reinforce educational and family environments that sustain students' autonomous motivation in regulated music education.

### 3. Methodology

The research is based on a bibliographic review of existing studies on the phenomenon of dropout. The possible causes and proposals for addressing this problem are presented in various studies. However, it

is worth highlighting the commentary Alcaraz and Sánchez-Escribano (2022) conclude: "The analysis of previous studies identifies the need to conduct studies at the national level, as all of them have a regional focus" (p. 72).

In order to delve deeper into the study and understanding of this problem, it was decided to design an exploratory or descriptive and explanatory research project, as well as a mixed approach, consisting of a questionnaire on dropout addressed to EME and PME teachers throughout the country (Alcaraz & Sánchez-Escribano, 2023).

### 3.1. Objectives

The objectives of this work are: 1) to review literature on the dropout rate in regulated music education, focusing on causes and solutions; 2) to present reasons for dropout and possible solutions based on this literature; 3) to gather teachers' assessments of dropout causes and suggestions for improvement in regulated music education.

### 3.2. Research instrument: design, reliability, validity and objectivity

The questionnaire aims to gather feedback from EME and PME teachers nationwide regarding potential reasons for EME and PME dropouts, as well as potential solutions. These causes or proposals presented in the questionnaire are the result of a bibliographic review of previous studies in the field of study.

Table 3. Relationship between blocks of questions and research objectives

BLOCK	OBJECTIVES
I. Possible causes of dropout in formal music education	2
II. Evaluation of measures to combat dropout	3

Author's own elaboration

The content of the research tool was developed in accordance with the stated objectives. The questionnaire is composed of two main sections, as shown in Table 3.

Before explaining the design and content of the questionnaire, it is important to note that the tool and its content are available in Appendix 1. Block I contains a single multiple-choice question: "Based on your own teaching experience, indicate from the following options at least seven main causes of dropping out of formal music education." In this question, the participant can select several options presented together, choosing at least seven from the twenty-two proposed options.

Block II, on the other hand, used twenty-four closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. Here, the participants' opinions regarding the various proposals for combating dropout were assessed. A question format that allows the degree of suitability of each proposal to be assessed, such as scales for measuring attitudes, is appropriate. Specifically, the semantic differential technique is used, where pairs of extreme adjectives are presented to help identify the participant's attitude toward an object (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2014). This questionnaire uses a scale where the value 1 equals 'Not at all useful' and the value 5 equals 'Very useful'.

Finally, the open question in Block II reads as follows: *Indicate other measures other than those presented that you consider, based on your experience and personal opinion, would have a significant impact on reducing dropout rates.*

According to Hernández-Sampieri et al. (2014): "Every measurement or data collection instrument must meet three essential requirements: reliability, validity, and objectivity" (p. 200). The details of how these parameters have been verified are detailed below.

Reliability is the degree to which an instrument produces consistent and coherent results (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2014). There are many methods for calculating the reliability of an instrument. Calculating *Cronbach's alpha coefficient* appears to be an appropriate method for assessing the reliability of the instrument, given that the responses are dichotomous, as is the case with scales (Rodríguez-Rodríguez and Reguant-Álvarez, 2020). The instrument used scales with values from 1 to 5 in block II. *IBM SPSS Statistics* software was used to perform the calculation. The  $\alpha$  obtained is 0.832; therefore, according to Rodríguez-Rodríguez and Reguant-Álvarez (2020), its reliability would be adequate, as the value obtained falls between 0.70 and 0.95.

To verify the validity of the designed instrument, we used the expert validation process, which "refers to the degree to which an instrument apparently measures the variable in question, according to qualified opinions" (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2014, p. 204). The *Delphi method* was used to validate the questionnaire, in which a total of seven experts related to the area of knowledge of the study's object were consulted. Two rounds of discussion with the participants were required to develop and conclude the process. The entire process was anonymous and ensured maximum autonomy for the participants (Astigarraga, 2003). The experts participating in the process rated each of the instrument's questions using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating the greatest degree of disagreement and 5 indicating the greatest degree of agreement with the question. They were also provided the opportunity to make observations

on each question and each block. At the end of the round, a report was prepared with the results of the consultation phase, and the relevant modifications were made to the questionnaire. In total, two rounds of consultation were conducted, as the questionnaire was validated by the participants at the conclusion of the second round of consultation. The process began in July 2022 and ended in November of the same year, resulting in the final questionnaire.

According to Hernández-Sampieri et al. (2014), objectivity is reinforced by standardizing the application of the instrument, evaluating the results, and employing trained and experienced personnel in its development. Therefore, the present study is characterized by broad objectivity, as these premises are met.

### 3.3. Population, sample, margin of error, and confidence level.

During the 2022/2023 academic year, when this study was conducted, a total of 14,546 teachers of Regulated Music Education (MEyFP, 2023) were identified; however, the available statistics do not provide a breakdown by stage –EME, PME, and HME–. To determine the teaching population corresponding to EME and PME, the number of HME teachers was subtracted from the total, and thus, the final sample proportion was obtained. To achieve this, the primary tool was a survey conducted among the management teams of HME centers via email, phone calls, and inquiries to active teachers at the respective centers. This resulted in a total of 2,939 teachers from centers that teach HME –public and private–. When subtracted from the statistics provided by the MEyFP (2023), this gives a total population of 11,607 teachers.

The sampling method was probabilistic, as the questionnaire was administered to the entire study population, without selecting specific individuals. The sample consisted of volunteers from that population who completed the questionnaire. The sampling unit consisted of teachers working in the 2022/2023 academic year at public or private educational centers that offered EME or PME. Their participation was anonymous. The sample consisted of 284 participants. Given the sample obtained –284– and the estimated population –11,607–, and assuming a desired confidence level of 95%, the questionnaire's margin of error can be calculated using the STATS™ 2.0 application of *Decision Analyst* (Hernández et al., 2014). The margin of error obtained is 5.74%.

### 3.4. Dissemination of the questionnaire

Initially, all schools nationwide were invited to participate in the questionnaire via email, and their management teams were asked to disseminate it within their schools. After receiving only 62 responses between November 25, 2022 –the questionnaire launch date– and January 22, 2023, the decision was made to adopt new dissemination channels. Furthermore, on February 15, 2023, a video was launched on various social media platforms, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube<sup>1</sup>, to directly or indirectly reach new participants, resulting in 153 new participants.

In the final recruitment phase, schools from underrepresented territories were contacted by telephone. The sample consisted of 284 participants, representing all territories in the state.

## 4. Resultados

The results present teachers' opinions on the potential causes of dropout –Block I– in formal music education, as well as their evaluation of measures to combat dropout –Block II–.

Table 4 below presents the assessments obtained in Block I, in which each teacher identifies the seven most common causes of dropout.

Table 4. Possible causes of dropout in formal musical education.

POSITION	POSSIBLE CAUSES OF DROPOUT IN REGULATED MUSIC EDUCATION	PARTICIPANTS (TOTAL = 284)	%
1	Excessive academic workload (general education + regulated music education)	258	90,8%
2	Lack of student motivation	192	67,6%
3	Curriculum not adapted to students' educational needs	161	56,7%
4	Limited availability of integrated centers (General Education + Regulated Music Education)	159	56%
5	Decline in performance in general education	149	52,5%
6	Overly rigid curricula	143	50,4%
7	Few professional opportunities	137	48%
8	Teacher turnover and instability in teaching staff	105	37%

<sup>1</sup> Link to the broadcast video on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmlyszNPPz8>

POSITION	POSSIBLE CAUSES OF DROPOUT IN REGULATED MUSIC EDUCATION	PARTICIPANTS (TOTAL = 284)	%
9	Lack of family support	97	34,2%
10	Lack of flexibility in enrollment	89	31,3%
11	Lack of teacher motivation	85	29,9%
12	Unclear definition and positioning of Higher Artistic Education within the university system	85	29,9%
13	Family and/or social instability	67	23,6%
14	Not choosing the right instrument	66	23,2%
15	Failure to pass exams	65	22,9%
16	Absence of free-study examinations	63	22,2%
17	Lack of financial resources	51	18%
18	Lack of curricular adaptations for students with special educational needs	48	16,9%
19	Limitation on years of enrollment	48	16,9%
20	Poor relationship with teachers	36	12,7%
21	Inadequate facilities in institutions	35	12,3%

Author's own elaboration

Among the contributions provided by participants in the open-ended question "Other," two main themes emerged: teaching staff and students. Regarding the teaching staff as educational agents responsible for dropout, several comments included: "Teachers' limited pedagogical training," "Lack of modernization in subject delivery," "Insufficient professional development," "Teachers' lack of interest in teaching," and "Psychological abuse exerted by teachers." For students, several responses mentioned a lack of effort, discipline, or capacity for self-sacrifice. The remaining suggestions can, to varying extents, be considered already represented –although with a different wording– in other proposals included in the questionnaire.

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics of the results obtained in Block II, generated using *IBM SPSS Statistics* software. These results reflect the evaluation, on a scale from 1 to 5, of proposals identified in previous studies aimed at addressing dropout in formal music education. A full description of each proposal can be found in Appendix I.

Table 5. Block II Statistics: Proposals to Address Dropout in Formal Music Education.

PROPOSAL	MEAN	STANDARD ERROR	MEDIAN	MODE	STANDARD DEVIATION	VARIANCE
1.	4,12	,068	5,00	5	1,144	1,310
2.	2,68	,077	3,00	3	1,2999	1,687
3.	3,21	,084	3,00	5	1,414	2,000
4.	4,41	,052	5,00	5	,875	,766
5.	3,86	,071	4,00	5	1,192	1,422
6.	3,68	,075	4,00	5	1,266	1,602
7.	4,38	,050	5,00	5	,843	,710
8.	4,16	,059	4,00	5	,999	,998
9.	3,84	,060	4,00	4	1,019	1,038
10.	4,42	,060	5,00	5	1,008	1,015
11.	3,29	,080	3,00	3	1,350	1,823
12.	3,83	,068	4,00	5	1,149	1,321
13.	3,58	,071	4,00	3	1,191	1,418
14.	3,80	,072	4,00	5	1,215	1,475
15.	4,20	,058	4,00	5	,978	,957

PROPOSAL	MEAN	STANDARD ERROR	MEDIAN	MODE	STANDARD DEVIATION	VARIANCE
16.	4,08	,059	4,00	5	,995	,990
17.	4,23	,054	4,00	5	,905	,818
18.	4,15	,054	4,00	5	,905	,819
19.	4,42	,050	5,00	5	,847	,717
20.	3,93	,058	4,00	5	1,146	1,314
21.	4,02	,061	4,00	5	1,029	1,060
22.	4,18	,061	5,00	5	1,035	1,071
23.	4,32	,054	5,00	5	,909	,826
24.	4,49	,045	5,00	5	,754	,589

Author's own elaboration

In the final open-ended question, 72 responses were collected. Many were similar to existing questionnaire items. However, some responses stood out for their originality or frequency: 1) organizing training and activities to address stage fright and anxiety; 2) using psychological tests in teacher selection to evaluate candidates' intrinsic motivation and suitability for teaching, beyond their technical and musical skills; 3) for singing, integrating teaching into drama schools, as conservatories often do not fully address students' needs.

In summary, Table 6 presents the ten proposals to combat dropout rates in Block II, which received the highest average ratings from teachers.

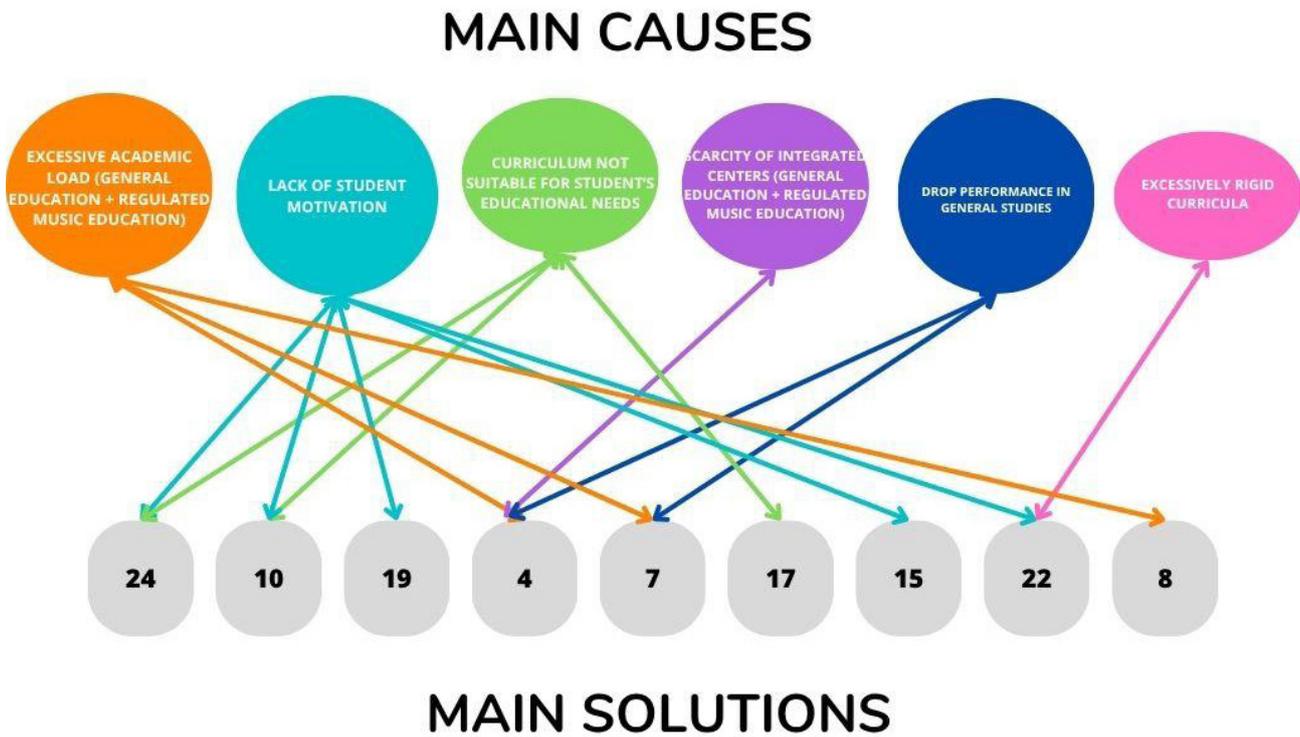
Table 6. Average Ratings of the Ten Most Highly Valued Proposals by Teachers.

POSITION	PROPOSAL	AVERAGE RATING (OUT OF 5)
1	24. Encourage collective activities and ensembles in conservatories	4,49
2	10. Complete integration of Higher Artistic Education into the University, with the social and academic recognition that this would entail	4,43
3	19. Open to society the institutions that provide Regulated Music Education in order to promote recognition of music education	4,42
4	4. Create simultaneous programs between conservatories and general education institutions	4,41
5	7. Allow students who choose the "Musical Baccalaureate" (different pathway from the Performing Arts and Music Baccalaureate) to also have the possibility of pursuing university studies, not only Higher Music Education	4,39
6	23. Stabilize teaching staff templates	4,32
7	17. Align with students' interests regarding their true vision of music and their expectations of it	4,23
8	15. Promote teacher training in student guidance and counseling, as well as provide all schools with guidance services and strengthen them	4,19
9	22. Provide greater teacher training in pedagogy and educational psychology	4,18
10	8. Conservatories should make an effort to integrate teachings, taking advantage of the proximity of schools that offer general education	4,17

Author's own elaboration

Regarding the relationship between potential causes and proposed solutions, a triangulation of the results has been carried out, linking the ten most frequently cited causes of dropout with the ten most commonly selected measures to address dropout, as identified by the participating teaching staff. This triangulation is clearly illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Relationship between possible solutions and more select possible causes. Author's own elaboration.



### 5. Discussion: causes and solutions under debate

Dropout from specialized music studies is a growing concern. Although academic work on this topic is limited, attention from educators and scientists is increasing (Vieira & Santos, 2024). As discussed in the theoretical framework, it is not possible to make direct comparisons between countries in pre-university music education. This is due to the highly different educational models that exist (Sánchez-Escribano, 2020; Gonçalves et al., 2018; Kavčič-Pucihar et al., 2024; Ruth & Müllensiefen, 2021).

In the specific case of learning musical instruments as an extracurricular activity, given its non-compulsory nature, students' intrinsic motivation emerges as a key factor in preventing disengagement (García, 2019). However, Martínez-Cantero (2023) argues that musical trajectories pursued outside the formal curriculum depend more on familial, social, and contextual support than on individual aptitude alone. Within this context, the work of Evans et al. (2013) is particularly noteworthy, as it explores how students are more likely to abandon music studies when the activity fails to meet their basic psychological needs—namely autonomy, competence, and social relatedness. Similarly, Wieser et al. (2024) investigate the factors that explain why some students persist in learning musical instruments while others drop out. According to their findings, students are more likely to remain engaged when: (1) they have a personal interest in the activity; (2) they experience autonomy in their involvement and decision-making; (3) they feel competent and perceive progress in their learning; (4) they are socially connected to others within the educational community; and (5) their families are positively involved and supportive. Nevertheless, in the absence of specific and comparable data across different types of activities and demographic contexts, the issue appears to reflect broadly generalized causal patterns within extracurricular activities at the international level (Hash, 2022; Roček, 2021).

Regarding the causes of dropout identified in the research instrument used in this study, the discussion will focus on the six factors selected by more than half of the participating teachers. The most frequently cited cause—*Excessive academic workload*—was selected by 90.8% of respondents. This finding aligns with the arguments presented by all the authors referenced in Section Two of this text. The second most cited cause—*Lack of student motivation*—was selected by 67.6% of participants and is also addressed, either directly or indirectly, in all previous studies, whether through explicit mention or through closely related parameters. In this regard, the contributions of García (2019) and Wieser et al. (2024) are particularly relevant, as both identify a lack of motivation as the primary reason for student dropout. The third most selected cause—*Curriculum not adapted to students' educational needs*—received 56.7% of responses and corresponds with the findings of Lorenzo et al. (2016), García (2019), and Sánchez-Escribano (2020), who classify it as one of the structural factors contributing to dropout. The fourth factor—*Limited availability of integrated schools*—was selected by 56% of respondents and is supported by Perelló (2003), Pina (2007), Lorenzo (2013), and Sánchez-Escribano (2020). The latter provides data indicating that dropout rates are significantly lower in institutions offering integrated music and general education compared to those that do not. The fifth cause—*Decline in performance in general education subjects*—was selected by 52.5% of participants and is explicitly mentioned by both Pina (2007) and Lorenzo et al. (2016). Other authors also refer to related factors that may indirectly contribute to this issue. Finally, the sixth most cited cause—*Overly rigid curricula*—was selected by 50.4% of

respondents and is discussed by Perelló (2003), Pina (2007), Lorenzo (2013), and Sánchez-Escribano (2020), all of whom emphasize the need for greater curricular flexibility.

It is worth highlighting certain causes which, although not identified by the participating teachers as among the most influential in students' decisions to abandon music studies, have nonetheless been emphasized by some authors. One such example is the cause "*Poor relationship with teaching staff*," which Pina (2007) identifies as one of the most significant. Another is "*Lack of family support*," linked to Martínez-Cantero (2023), who stresses the importance of a positive family environment in terms of cultural engagement and consumption habits.

Regarding the proposals presented in the questionnaire, there is a general degree of alignment with the participating teachers, as 21 out of 24 proposals received a rating of 3.5 or higher out of 5. Among the proposals that received lower ratings from participants, it is worth noting proposals #2 and #3, put forward by Sánchez-Escribano (2020): the restructuring of the duration of the EME and PME stages to six and four years respectively—rated 2.68 out of 5—, and the creation of an intermediate stage for students wishing to continue regulated training without pursuing HME studies—rated 3.21 out of 5—. Also highlighting the proposals by Perelló (2003) and Sánchez-Escribano (2020) to redirect students who do not intend to pursue professional music studies towards non-regulated music schools—#11, rated 3.29 out of 5—, along with the subsequent proposal to strengthen and better resource these institutions so they can accommodate students who prefer not to follow a professional music education pathway—#13, rated 3.58 out of 5—.

## 6. Conclusions and Final Considerations

The possible causes and solutions for dropout in music conservatories in Spain have been explored in various studies over the past two decades. After reviewing and compiling this information, the aim was to obtain an assessment from teachers involved in formal music education. Given the sample obtained, this assessment is considered to represent the views of EME and PME teaching staff. The following findings regarding the hypothetical causes and proposed solutions are thus highlighted.

Generally, there is a widespread sentiment among teachers expressing concern over the excessive academic workload that students typically endure, as well as the lack of flexibility and enrollment options within these programs. Teachers also call for greater training in pedagogy and educational psychology, along with the promotion of student guidance services. Notably, the most highly rated measure was the promotion of collective activities and musical ensembles, which is directly linked to opening up the institutions to society and fostering greater public recognition of these educational and cultural centers. There is also a demand to align more closely with students' genuine interests regarding their perception of music and expectations surrounding it. In parallel, it is worth reflecting on the proposed measure to expand the network of integrated schools offering both music and general education. Despite being an educational model with more than thirty years of history and significantly lower dropout rates, it remains in high demand among the educational community but is still scarcely represented within the national education system (Sánchez-Escribano & Gértrudix, 2019).

However, this entire network of causes and solutions seems nothing more than a tangled ball of yarn yet to be unraveled. While it would be valuable to expand research from the perspective of other stakeholders—such as students, families, or educational policymakers—the truly important and urgent task is to initiate real, concise lines of action capable of generating meaningful short-term impact. Some of these measures may include: organizing targeted activities to raise awareness about the issue of dropout within conservatories; offering teachers specific training programs in educational psychology and pedagogy; providing or improving guidance services for conservatory students and their families; and, among others, transforming conservatories into spaces where students and families genuinely want to be and feel they belong.

Looking ahead to the medium and long term, it would also be relevant to encourage regional administrations to promote the creation of integrated schools combining music and general education, to consider restructuring the EME and PME stages into a design more aligned with students' needs and expectations—such as six years of EME and four of PME, or the inclusion of an intermediate stage lasting two or three years—and to address in a practical and effective way the excessive academic workload involved in combining both types of studies during adolescence.

In this context, we call upon every educational agent—especially conservatories and teaching staff, as well as the educational administration itself—to begin working within their respective areas of responsibility to help stem the exodus of thousands of students who, year after year, leave the classrooms of music conservatories without completing the goal that once inspired them to embark on their educational and musical journey.

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## 8. Appendix

### Appendix I. Questionnaire Questions

#### Block I

Question #1: Based on your own teaching experience, please indicate seven main causes of dropout from formal music education from the list below:

- Excessive academic workload (general education + formal music education)
- Lack of student motivation
- Choosing an unsuitable instrument
- Curriculum not adapted to the student's educational needs
- Lack of family support
- Instability in teaching staff
- Limited career opportunities
- Lack of flexibility in enrollment
- Lack of teacher motivation
- Absence of external examinations
- Unclear status and positioning of higher music education within the university system
- Overly rigid curricula
- Limitations on years of enrollment
- Decline in performance in general education subjects
- Failure to pass exams
- Poor relationship with teaching staff
- Family and/or social instability
- Lack of financial resources
- Limited availability of integrated schools (General Education + Music Education)
- Lack of curricular adaptations for students with special educational needs
- Inadequate school facilities
- Other

#### Block II

Please rate the following proposals to reduce dropout in formal music education on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means *Not useful at all* and 5 means *Very useful*.

1. Increase the number of integrated schools offering both music and general education
2. Restructure the 10 years of non-university music education into 6 years of EEM and 4 years of EPM
3. Create a new intermediate stage between EEM and EPM for students who wish to continue regulated training but do not intend to pursue higher music studies
4. Develop dual-enrollment programs between conservatories and general education schools
5. Make enrollment options more flexible

