Dropouts and its Reasons in a Community Campus: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

This study has predominantly explored the primary challenges associated with the dropout rates in higher education institutions. Furthermore, this research paper seeks to analyze the dropout rates within bachelor's degree programs at Myagdi Multiple Campus (MMC) and delve into the underlying causes for these dropouts. Among the four primary factors contributing to the dropout rate under investigation in this study, the personal-related factor is identified as the most influential. It has explored a variety of the reasons of the dropout: the pursuit of foreign employment, not getting suitable job at homeland, low motivation rate for higher study and parental socio-economic status. Moreover, the objective of this study is to identify the reasons of the dropout in bachelor level fundamentally at a community campus, and attempt to recommend the positive feedbacks to the concerned authority for upliftment of the present situation. This study has employed interpretivism as the research paradigm, phenomenology as research design and narrative inquiry as research methodology. The theories that I have employed the dominant motivational theories in this study: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Tinto's model. For the purpose, I have applied Google forms to collect forty participants' opinions through non-random judgement sampling and the phone calls for the interview with seven participants as the tools for collecting the required data for the designated study. Question included in form regarding student's background and credentials, parents' education level, current educational status, occupation, income, specific reasons for dropping out, family support, satisfaction with MMC, and opinions on the duration of the bachelor's program. The implications of this study are to improve and boost up higher education policy for controlling and monitoring the existing dropout rate of the community campuses.

Keywords: dropout rate, higher education, narrative inquiry, personal factors, quality education, socio-economic status

Introduction

University dropout is a dominant issue that has affected students in many countries across the globe due to its high occurrence. It can be noted that the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019) indicates that 20% of students entering tertiary education do not finish their programs. It is believed that this type of dropout leads to the feelings of the failure in terms of the students, resulting not only in psychological distress but also influencing negatively in their various family issues. Nonetheless, higher education institutions face challenges as dropouts raise concerns about the sustainability of their teaching staff, curriculum structure, and resources. Additionally, higher dropout rates cause instability in the higher education system and affecting society as well. This instability resulting in considerable economic costs for the state and large investments in education do not contribute the desired educational outcomes for the population (González et al., 2007).

It can be argued that the dropout rate of the students in bachelor's degree is increasing around our country, so it is one of the concerns with Myagdi district as well. Likewise, dropouts have become one of the most difficult barriers in developing countries, and it is also a major concern for universities in Nepal). The dropouts are those who leave school, college, etc., without completing their studies. Quality education is essential for every youth, and it is the duty of the state to provide it (UNESCO, 2020). With quality education, students can learn well and help to find employment opportunities (Liu & Hossain, 2020). As the constitution of Nepal 2072 B.S., education is free and compulsory in foundation level whereas it is only compulsory in the secondary level. But higher education is neither free nor compulsory in the sense of receiving it in the Nepalese context. My research is centered on the context of MMC along with institutions having similar conditions under different domains.

MMC, established in 2048 B.S. with the slogan "Quality Education for Successful Life," is a community campus founded by local residents, social workers, intellectuals, and business entrepreneurs in Beni, Myagdi district. According to the Tracer Study Report (February 2022), the campus receives financial support from local contributors and government grants. Affiliated with Tribhuvan University, MMC offers bachelor's and master's degrees in Humanities and Social Sciences, Management, Education, Business Studies, and other programs. It serves students from Myagdi district and parts of Parbat and Baglung districts, focusing on providing quality education to lower and middle-class communities. For over three decades, MMC has contributed significantly to education but also faces challenges related to dropout rates in community campuses. In western countries to the most extent it is noted that students drop out of the bachelor's degree programs deforms due to unreasonable fees and starting their own businesses to make fast money like Bill Gates, the Microsoft Founder, Mark Zuckerberg, the Facebook Founder and Steve Jobs, the Apple Founder. Many students who enroll in college do not complete their degree due to the lower financial status and the personal phenomena. Furthermore, household's issues, economic obstacles and the craze for foreign materialistic lifestyle are the major factors to be enticed toward the journey of dropout rate that is being existed in Nepal. They prefer foreign employment to immediate decent paying jobs in Nepal for the purpose of supporting their families financially. Additionally, lack of academic preparedness and poor quality of education also contributes to high dropout rates (Hussein, 2020). The government of Nepal has implemented various policies to increase access to higher education, such as providing scholarships and stipends for students from marginalized communities However, it can be noted that more needs to be done for addressing the root causes of high dropout rates and explore the reasons for poverty and lack of employment opportunities in order to ensure the quality education in lower cost. Nevertheless, it is obvious that all the students of Nepal have faced the opportunity to complete their quality education in higher institutions (UNESCO, 2020).

There can be different perspectives toward dropout in Nepal. Scholars have argued that education should be more practical and skill-based for livelihood and higher lifestyle. However, the Nepalese campus education is not being

trusted from our stakeholder for quality education and sustainable education in the process of acquiring the quality education. Likewise, it is believed that our education imparting to multiple students has been blamed as only theoretical education. However, college graduates make more money for materialistic pleasure and live a better-quality life ahead in comparison to the college dropouts on average Dropout is a growing concern in the field of educational institution. One of the prominent reasons behind the dropout is economic implication that has becoming a cross cut issue in higher education awarding institutions. According to the report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD,2019), individuals who do not complete their education have lower lifetime earnings and likely to face unemployment and poverty than those who complete their education. Additionally, dropouts also have a negative impact on the society as a whole. As a result, they are unlikely to engage in criminal activities and rely on social welfare programs. Furthermore, high dropout rates can also affect the quality of the workforce and lead to a skills gap in the job market. Therefore, it is important to identify that the root causes of high dropout rates and implementation of effective strategies is to address them (OECD, 2014).

This research study aims at inquiring the reasons of dropout especially in higher education and analyzing its factors on the basis of students' responses for the causes behind quitting the college education in Nepal.

Literature review

In the literature review section, we delve into existing research and scholarly works related to student dropout in higher education. This comprehensive review explores various studies that have investigated the causes and implications of dropout, shedding light on the complex interplay of various factors that contribute to the students' decisions to leave their studies prematurely.

Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretical frameworks are discussed in the research articles on the dropout students to comprehend the factors influencing the students' persistence and develop an effective intervention for the improved retention. These frameworks offer the valuable insights into the academic, social, psychological, and institutional aspects which influence students' decisions either stay in or leave higher education.

Tinto's integration model

Tinto's model of student integration is a widely recognized theoretical framework that is used to explain the factors whish attempt to contribute to students' persistence in higher education. The model is based on the premises that the student integration into the academic and social aspects of the campus community is critical to their success in higher education. Tinto's model identifies three key components of student integration: academic, social, and institutional. The academic component refers to students' engagement with the academic requirements and expectations of their program of study. The social component indicates students' engagement with the social and cultural aspects of the campus community, connecting to the extracurricular activities and interactions with peers and faculty. Concludingly, the institutional component refers to the extent to which the institution supports students in their academic and social integration. (Tinto, 1975)

In addition, Tinto's model recognizes the role of pre-college characteristics, such as academic preparedness and socioeconomic status, as predictors of student persistence. (Tinto, 1993). The model has been widely used to guide research and practice in higher education, particularly in the areas of student retention and student success. It has also been adapted to address the unique challenges faced by specific student populations, such as first-generation college students and students from underrepresented groups. (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a psychological theory that can help to explain why some students may drop out of college. The theory proposes that human needs are arranged in a hierarchy, with basic physiological needs at the bottom, followed by safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs at the top. (Maslow, 1954).

In the context of dropouts, some students may drop out because their basic physiological needs that are not being met, such as access to adequate food, shelter, and healthcare. Safety needs may also be a factor, as some students may drop out due to safety concerns on campus or in their surrounding community. Belongingness and love needs may play a role, as students who do not feel connected to their campus community, may be more likely to drop out. Esteem needs may also be a factor, as students who do not feel valued or respected may lose motivation and drop out. Finally, self-actualization needs can also be a factor in dropouts, as some students may not see college as a path to fulfilling their personal goals or aspiration.

Review of Related Empirical Literature

This sub-section provides an overview of literatures associated with the dropout rate in higher education. In order to provide context for this study, the review identifies and discusses the factors impacting the dropout rate on campuses. A review of the numerous components that have been found to have an impact on dropout rates on various campuses is mentioned. Since there haven't been many research done specifically on dropout students in context similar to mine, I don't think it suits in order to confirm or refute the conclusions of this study. A summary of the few research on college students' dropout rates is given in the paragraphs that follow:

According to the research done by Lorenzo-Quiles, Galdón-López, & Lendínez-Turón (2023) of statistical analysis of the researches published in internet, it was found that the main causes for dropout was personal aspect of the students. Those cases involved psychological and social factors like frustration, demotivation, stress, anxiety and socio-economic level. The psychological factors prevailed in the causes of dropouts due to poor adaptation to university or due to their own perception of themselves.

The research done by Nurmalitasari, Awang Long, & Mohd Noor (2023) identified the four major factors affecting dropouts in private universities in Indonesia. First factor was personal economic factor which included individual income, time allocated for study. Students who were working simultaneously were in high risk of dropping out. Second factor was academic satisfaction which included relationship with lecturer and lecturer quality satisfaction. Third factor was academic performance which includes CGPA and interest in program. Final factor was the socio-economic condition of family. Poor economic condition led to high risk of dropping out.

The researchers Wells, Bechard, and Hambly (1989) created a framework that categorized factors of student dropout into four main categories. The factors Influencing Dropout Rates can be studied under four major factors:

1 Personal-related factors

Personal-related factors encompass an individual's distinct characteristics and experiences that contribute to dropout rates. Students who encounter academic difficulties, experience disengagement, lack motivation, and face other related challenges are more prone to discontinuing their studies. Academic performance, motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy serve as crucial determinants influencing student persistence. (Rumberger,2011).

2. Family-related factors

The influence of family dynamics on student dropout cannot be understated. Family-related issues such as inadequate financial support, familial obligations, and a low socio-economic status have been identified as influential factors in students' decisions to leave their studies (Choy, 2001). The financial burden of education, coupled with familial

responsibilities, can create significant barriers for students, hindering their ability to fully engage in their studies. These external pressures often contribute to the difficult decision to withdraw from higher education.

3.Campus-related factors

Campus-related factors refer to the aspect and conditions within educational institution. The quality of teaching faculties, availability of academic support services, and overall campus climate can fundamentally influence student satisfaction and engagement. Students who feel connected to their peers, faculty, and the overall campus community are more likely to persevere in the face of challenges. The absence of a supportive campus environment can exacerbate feelings of alienation and contribute to decisions to withdraw from higher education. (Tinto,1975).

4.Community-related factors

Community-related factors encompass the broader social context in which the educational institution operates. Regional disparities, geographical location, and migration patterns can impact students' access to higher education and their ability to persist. The availability of employment opportunities and societal perceptions of the value of education may also influence dropout rates.

Research Gap

Most studies exploring the dropout rates in higher education have predominantly focused on universities and colleges in urban settings; however, it lacks the study that attempts to explore and examine the dropout rate, like MMC, which serves as crucial educational institution working in semi-urban area. The existing literature on student's dropout rates primarily stems from studies conducted in Western countries, making it important to bridge this gap by examining the factors within the local context of Nepal. Likewise, this study attempts to explore and examine in comparing and contrasting the issues raised in this article in terms of the position of the urban area as indicated in previous researches and the position of semi-urban areas connecting to the issues of dropout rate of the universities such as community campuses existing in present scenarios.

Method

Research means finding new knowledge that is existing in the society but I find several voices regarding the issues raised in terms of the dropout rate in the community campuses. Moreover, single value never exists in this situation; and my experiences and perception as a Lecturer working in community campuses more than two decades attempt to justify it as multiple voices mingling together in the issue of the dropout rate of the community campuses in semi-urban areas. I mostly argue that several voices can address the horizon of knowledge at the moment. This is how I believe qualitative research can address the value of multiple voices raising in present situation regarding the phenomena of dropout rate of the students at community campuses under different domain. Furthermore, narrative is a way of telling personal stories that can convince the readers in particular situation. Regarding the dropout rate at MMC area, it corporates different stakeholders and they opine differently under their perception and experience. As a researcher I have collected the views of the stakeholders of the community campuses and endeavored to analyze the issues from my perspective for contributing to the study.

Both primary and secondary sources were utilized to gather data, including information from the campus administration on the number of students who dropped out between 2072-2078 B.S. at MMC. Additionally, a google form was created and distributed to almost all available dropout students from various bachelor's degree programs at the campus among them, there are forty responses which have been incorporated in this study. To collect the narrative telephone and online interviewing using messenger was used.

Despite the fact that this research may represents the overall picture of the dropout problems of the community campuses in the semi-urban areas of Nepal. In addition, it chiefly presents the data of the dropout students in regards to MMC, Beni, Myagdi as dominant domain.

Data Analysis and Presentation

In this section, the discussion and findings of our study on students' dropout at MMC have been presented. The investigation that has been employed qualitative approach along with relevant numerical data; and to delve into the reasons influencing dropout rates among students who were enrolled in various bachelor's degree programs. I have applied the purely qualitative approach that deepens our understanding of the multifaceted dynamics. Similarly, this study attempts to highlight connecting to the student attrition and undergoes valuable enhancing students' retention strategies at the institution.

The participants expressed their experiences and reasons for dropping out in telephone and online interview. I have tried to include the major narratives of those voices of students. I excluded repeated information and included each unique reasoning once. One of my participants expresses this way:

"To financially support my family, I decided to work abroad. Their well-being is my priority, so I chose this path to provide for them in despite my further education in MMC. (April,2022)"

One of my Beni, Pulachaur participants argued that she desires to go to abroad in order to support her family financially in spite of continuing her higher study in the community campus. I mean she does not feel financial security in studying in campus; however, she finds the certainty and financial security in the foreign employment due to her weak financial status. Therefore, she leaves her study and decides to go to aboard for supporting her family.

Another Mangala, Babiyachaur participant stated her reasons for dropping out in this way-

"Not only did I become a parent and get married, but my family and I also had to relocate, which added further complexity to the situation. These changes required me to focus on my new roles and responsibilities, prompting me to temporarily put my education on hold".

The participant argued that the main reason for her to leave campus was that she became a parent due to which there were more responsibilities on her and on the top her entire family migrated far from here so that she put her education on hold and take her responsibilities in her first priority. What I mean is that the student had mainly focused in her roles to her family more than the importance of education. Also, we can say that she was too busy to continue her education from the new responsibilities.

Next respondents from Myagdi, Malika, Muna said his reason for dropping out in following manner-

"The four-year bachelor's program felt too daunting, so I returned to my village. Now I'm teaching young kids, which feels more fulfilling."

The student means that the 4 years' bachelor's program is too long and he didn't want to waste his young time in studying so he left campus and started teaching young kids. He represents all the business minded student who want to earn money by doing something rather than studying and wasting time. From my point of view, the student wants to earn money and get financially strong too early due to which the 4 years bachelor's program is long and he hardly earns and studies at the same time.

After analyzing the data that I had acquired from my methodological tools, the result of my study seems to be challenging in terms of the trends of dropout. About 55% of the students described going abroad for employment or education as the main reasons for dropping out. In contrast, other researches that the researchers have studied the result of this research is very different. It may be due to the fact that foreign employment has become very popular among the +2 graduates in Nepal and in addition to that Myagdi district has its huge foreign employment and remittance culture.

Students in Nepal exhibit a significant level of pessimism about their future prospects within the country, leading many to favor opportunities for employment abroad.

The following are other key findings from this study:

- Academic challenges were the primary reason for dropout, with 27% of the respondents indicated that they were unable to cope with the academic demands of their program.
- Financial constraints were another significant factor, with 20% of the respondents stating that they were unable to afford the cost of tuition and other expenses.
- Personal reasons among the four categorized reasons; such as job opportunities, migration and marriage problems and health issues were cited by 57.5% of the respondents as the reason for dropout.
- Among the academic challenges, the most commonly cited issues were difficulty in motivation towards study (22.5%), inadequate support from instructors (10%) and high workload (2.5%).
- The four-year duration of the bachelor's program was being excessively long was strongly agreed by 51.4% of students, leading to reduced motivation and subsequent dropout.

In addition, we asked the participants to choose their reasons for dropping out in four categories: personal-related, family-related, campus-related and community related. The result of this response is displayed in figure 1.

Figure 1

Factors Related to Droupout
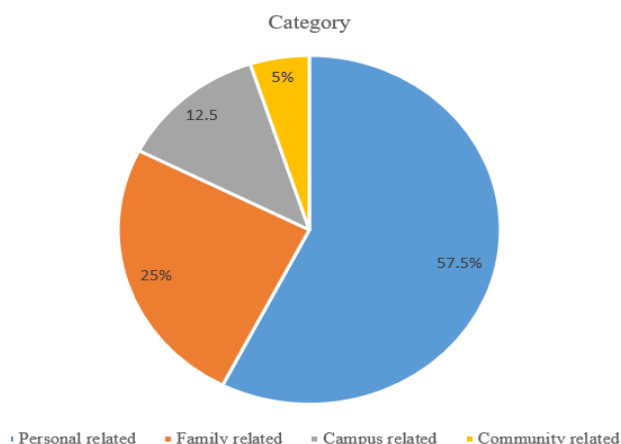
57.5% of students described the reasons of dropping out as their personal problem. Some of the common factors included the need to learn English, Korean, or Japanese language for working abroad, low academic achievement, irregularity in attending classes, employment opportunities in the student's village or getting a permanent job and inability to pay campus fees due to poor financial condition. Other factors such as health problems, involvement in business, lack of motivation towards studies, and difficulty in coping with academic demands were also reported. Additionally, issues related to distance from home to the campus, getting married, childbearing, and child-caring problems were identified as factors that could significantly impact a student's engagement in campus activities.

25% answered that family related problems were the reasons for dropping out. These factors encompass family composition, socio-economic status, and drug use within the home. Parental support, family obligations, and home life-related factors significantly influence a student's academic success or failure. Additional factors include inadequate financial support from the family, family issues such as illness of family members, marriage, pregnancy, and child-caring responsibilities. Furthermore, respondents highlighted a lack of support, motivation, and encouragement from family members, insufficient parental awareness of education, family obligations, and family migration. It is crucial to understand and address these family-related factors to enhance student engagement and academic success. By acknowledging the challenges and needs of students and their families, educators and institutions can offer appropriate

support and resources to help students overcome these obstacles and achieve their academic goals. Providing support to families with low socio-economic status can particularly help reduce the financial burden on students, allowing them to concentrate on their education.

12.5% answered that campus related problems led them to dropout. Campus-related factors play a significant role in a student's engagement and success within the academic environment. These factors include the learning environment, teacher-student engagement, campus structure etc. Some of the other factors included the lack of sufficient academic support, feedback, motivation, and encouragement from teachers, problems with the institutional information system, and a lack of understanding of students' expectations and follow-up services from campus administration. Lack of financial support for needy students, difficulty in understanding the course material, dissatisfaction towards the examination system and library facility, and indifferent behavior of administrative staff were also reported. Also, students were not happy with the evaluation of 3-hour examination system as it merely reflected students' actual quality and real-life applications.

Only 5% people pointed towards community related problems for dropping out. Community-related reasons for dropping out of campus includes factors such as peer pressure, negative community influence, lack of support from community members, and social or cultural barriers. Community violence, limited job opportunities, and poor transportation infrastructure can also impact a student's ability to attend campus regularly. Additionally, inadequate community resources and support for academic and extracurricular activities can negatively affect student engagement and motivation, leading to a higher risk of dropping out.

Structural Overview of Students' Dropout

Table1

Yearwise Droupout

Admission Year	Program	Total intake	1st year dropout	2nd year dropout	3rd year dropouts	4th year dropouts	Total dropouts
2072	BBS	161	13	48	27	13	101
	Bed	97	17	20	7	11	55
	BA	35	6	11	2	-	19
	Total	293	36	79	36	24	175
2073	BBS	149	22	39	20	10	91
	Bed	81	17	18	9	10	54
	BA	20	0	5	5	-	10
	Total	250	39	62	34	20	155
2074	BBS	175	46	37	14	10	107
	Bed	54	14	12	2	0	28
	BA	43	13	7	0	-	20
	Total	272	73	56	16	10	155
2075	BBS	91	21	14	8		43
	Bed	60	15	4	1		20
	BA	42	4	14	3	-	21
	Total	193	40	32	12	0	84
2076	BBS	179	39	29			68
	Bed	109	27	22			49
	BA	20	9	3			12
	Total	308	75	54	0	0	129
2077	BBS	262	74				74
	Bed	139	38				38
	BA	44	10				10
	Total	445	122	0	0	0	122
2078	BBS	172	26				26
	Bed	115	17				17
	BA	12	4				4
	Total	312	47	0	0	0	47
	Grand Total	2073	432	283	98	54	867

(*Source: Field survey, 2023.*)

Description of MMC and its faculties: Number of students under the different Faculty and dropouts by admission batch. Taken by Education Management Information System (EMIS) the report of MMC in Chaitra 2078 B.S.

From the table 1 the total number of students that took admission from admission year 2072-2078 was 2073. Among them the overall dropout number was found to be 867 counting to 41.82%. This rate seems to be alarming as it is very high compared to results shown by OCED data which was 20%. (OECD, 2019)

Figure 2

Droupout Rate

	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year
Dropout Rate	20.84	13.65	4.73	2.60
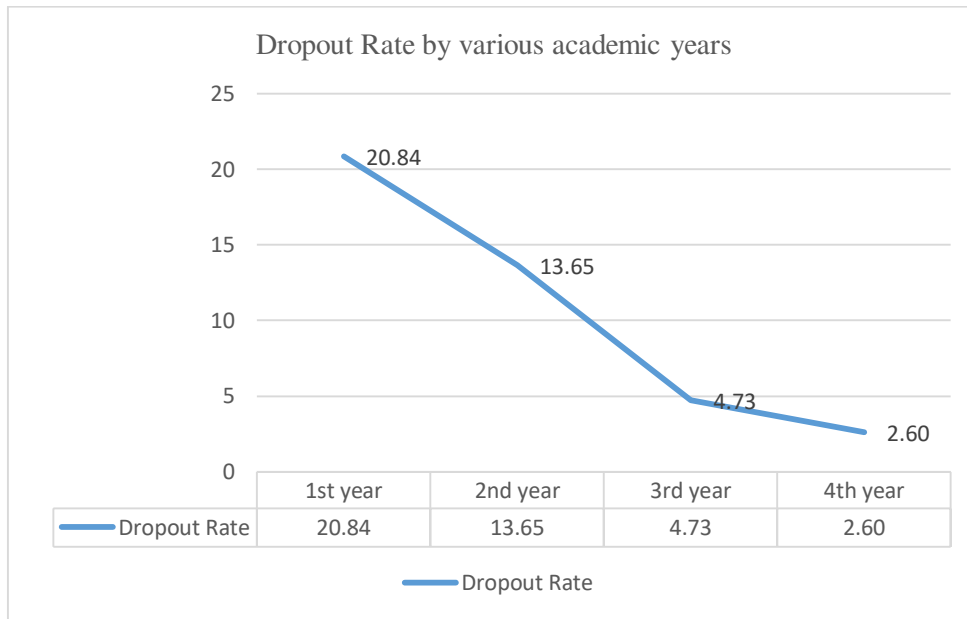
Table 1 and also visible in the above trendline it shows that the majority of the dropouts occur in 1st year followed by 2nd, 3rd and 4th years. It can be due to the fact that students who tend to drop out do it during first year itself. They seem to be not wasting any more time when they decide or feel that they will not be leaving campus as the graduates. And also, in the later years the students get filtered and the ones who are keen to graduate and complete the bachelors are left out decreasing the dropout rate.

The dropout data of MMC, factors affecting the dropouts, the findings and analysis of the previous studies and the theories: Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Tinto integration model connect the issues that have contributed regarding the current situation of dropout in community campuses of Nepal.

Limitation

This study limits the time boundary between 2072-2078 regarding the data that holds the admission rate and the students who appear in final examination for six years in MMC. It is the personal study of just one of the Lecturers of MMC, as one of the dominant stakeholders who achieve the position of researcher. Similarly, it does not accurately reflect the total number of dropouts at MMC. Furthermore, the use of self-reported data is inaccurate in as a result of bias or social desirability. The findings that are applied to other situations or areas may not be effective. Furthermore, the results corporates and links the domains that are relating to the similar community campuses of the semi-urban areas as if the issues are fundamentally associating with MMC.

Conclusion

This study examined the factors influencing the bachelor's degree program dropout rates at MMC. The main causes of dropouts were found to be personal factors such as desire for foreign opportunities, poor academic performance, lack of motivation to continue the higher study; and parental and institutional financial limitations. Family socioeconomic issues and campus-related factors such as inadequate support also played a role.

In order to comprehend the interaction of factors influencing dropout decisions, the research applies motivational theories and contextualizes the dropout phenomenon in a semi-urban Nepali setting. The results of this study can contribute the administration and Campus Management Committee (CMC) at MMC support to improve policies and procedures that exhibit lower dropout rates and boost enrollment. Additionally, it is noted that this research bound to be beneficial while making decisions and creating educational policies to different stakeholders.

The shortcomings of this study, however, are relatively dominant resulting from different narratives of the stakeholder and phenomena existing in the community campuses in semi-urban areas enhancing with the support of the interpretation of the researcher. Larger, more representative data, the voices of the students' studying at MMC and institution-to-institution comparison and contrast analysis could be beneficial. A multifaceted strategy is needed to address student dropout, focusing on institutional, familial, societal, and personal data in order to improve retention and promote enrollment and positively improve dropout rate highlighting the different domain of this research.

Recommendations

Several suggestions are made to solve the problem of student dropout and enhance student retention at MMC based on the data and analysis provided in the study report. First, early intervention and support programs can help new students adjust to the demands of the classroom and create a feeling of community on campus. By looking into financial help and scholarship possibilities to support students in need, financial constraints a big factor contributing to dropout rates can be lessened. Enhancing academic support services like tutoring and extra teaching can also assist in addressing academic difficulties and raising student achievement. Establishing counseling and mental health services is essential for offering emotional support to students who are confronting personal issues. Finally, working with nearby companies to increase the number of internships and job opportunities enhance students' employability and sense of purpose in completing their degrees, thus contributing to improved retention rates.

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