
Factors Influencing Dropout Rate in Bachelor's Degree at Nilkantha Multiple Campus

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Abstract

This paper primarily aimed to investigate the factors influencing dropout rate in bachelor's degree and explore the reasons behind students' dropout. A survey research design had been taken to describe the dropout rate and 30 dropout students of bachelor's degree were selected as the respondents through judgmental sampling under non-random sampling procedure. Telephone interviewing was used as the tool for collecting the required information. This study based on the theoretical tenets of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Motivation and Engagement, and Cognitive Load Theory. This study found that student-related indicators, campus-related indicators and family-related indicators play significant role in determining dropout rate. The main reasons of dropout explored from student-related indicators were their low academic achievement in examination and irregularity in class; campus-related indicators were lack of academic support, feedback, motivation and encouragement from teachers, and problem of institutional information system; and lastly, family-related indicators were lack of financial support from home and, different family problems. The implication of this study is to solve the problem of dropout in the development of higher education programs in Nepal.

Keywords: cognitive load, dropout, hierarchy of needs, higher education policy and motivation and engagement.

Introduction

Dropout of higher education is a global phenomenon and it affects in all universities (UNESCO, 2004). That is why; higher education institutions have researched the kinds of dropouts, their causes and consequences ever since the early 20th century and in particular since the 1970s. It is argued that university dropout can be classified under one of three heads: voluntary (voluntary or forced dropout); temporary (whether initial, early or late); scope (internal, institutional or from the

education system) (Duran Aponte and Pujol, 2012). However, research currently under way on the phenomenon tends to focus on initial or early voluntary dropout (that is to say, during the first year of university) (Castano et al., 2004, Willcoxson, 2010; Belloc et al., 2011). Also, for practical reasons most studies focus on internal dropout (or change of degree) and institutional drop-outs (where students leave the university concerned but do not necessarily stop studying, whether at a university or other institution). There are various types of opinion on factors influencing dropout rate in higher education in Nepal that create a debate on whether college education should be in open learning mode or not. Some people argue that college education should be skill based or technical. So, this study tries to explore the factors which affect dropout rate in bachelor's degree at Nilkantha Multiple Campus, in Dhading.

Detailed study of the factors involved in university dropout has given rise to different explanatory models of the phenomenon and revealed its complexity. Some models focus solely on the possible influence of economic variables (Jensen 1981; Donoso and Schiefelbein 2007). Other models focus on the various psychological characteristics of students who dropout (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1977; Belloc et al., 2011). Yet others stress the influence of sociological factors that go beyond the individual (Pincus, 1980) or that affect the education institution itself (Kamers, 1971).

There are several reasons of dropout in Higher Education. For instance, students make their decision to enter college based on limited information, and some students on the margin of college entry may need to experience one year of college to obtain more information. Alternatively, students may experience unforeseen shocks during college that cause them to exit early. However, failing to complete a degree may negatively affect student outcomes. Students lose years of workforce experience and may graduate with student loan debt, yet have not earned a wage-increasing credential to justify these sacrifices. The current high college dropout rate is likely harmful to both students and the economy.

Higher Education Policy

Higher Education (HE) is the sign of economic and social development in the country. It helps in preserving and developing the historical and cultural heritages of the nation (UGC Annual Report, 2018/19). Similarly it helps in producing competent manpower in the global context and it promotes research in different areas of education. As per the multi-universities policy adopted by the Government of Nepal, altogether eleven universities and six academies, as equivalent to deemed universities, are

currently in operation (UGC Annual Report, 2018/19).

With the increase of colleges, the number of university constituent campuses has reached 137. Whereas, there are 508 community and 780 private colleges affiliated to universities. Thus, the total number of colleges has reached 1425. The number of students leaving the country in search of quality education and subsequent employment is increasing due to the lack of quality of education and the opportunities to study technical subjects. The data of 2017/18 B.S. shows that 60000 students left the country for higher education abroad. This figure will reach 90000 if those students who have gone to India for higher education is added. This has led to an increased flight of huge amount of capital to foreign countries. Unless quality education and assurance of employment is not available within the country, the trend of students leaving the country to pursue higher education abroad is less likely to abate. (UGC Annual Report, 2018/19).

The policy has prioritized on the establishment of the institutions in the areas like forestry, bio-diversity, renewable energy, small and medium sized industry, and tourism development, which have direct link to the economic development of the nation. The HE policy has focused on technical and vocational education, which is good in the overwhelming context of current general education.

As the innovation in HE is concerned, the research, development, and innovation as well as the establishment and operation of Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) system are the milestones for the overall quality enhancement of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and their education in the country. In relation to impart innovative higher education, the policy has focused in the coordination by the higher education commission to conduct the following seven different types of studies:

- Agriculture and forestry
- Water resources and hydroelectricity
- Natural disaster management
- Climate and balance in natural environment
- Biodiversity
- Tourism and mountaineering
- Natural heritage, culture and tradition

Thus, quality higher education is an innovation in Nepalese higher education sector (Higher Education Policy, 2072).

Today's colleges and societies have serious consequences for high dropout in

higher education level. It impacts on the high risk of unemployment and lowers earning rate than the student who passes the higher education. The findings of this study focus on the dropout problem and the best strategies for building an early warning system that can signal institutions need for controlling dropout problem. On the other hand, the study is helpful for the guardian of the students to understand the internal and the external reasons of dropout and to give them ideas about their roles to minimize dropout at different levels of students. An effective measure to control drop out significantly improves our overall education system and the nation will be benefited from it.

The researcher is very keen to undertake this study and take up this challenge to investigate specific issues from the perspective of students who left campus without completing their education in bachelor's degree.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory is that every person has basic needs that must be met. Within the campus building, the students' needs are what educators are striving to accomplish. These needs are self-actualization, self-esteem, love and belongingness, safety and security, and physiological. According to the theory, the HEIs should fulfil the needs of students to minimize dropout rate (Maslow, 1954).

When looking at the theory of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a student's needs must be provided by the campus through teacher-student engagement, campus climate, and the learning environment. If these needs are lacking, then many times it results in students lacking success, and failing to complete high school (Carter, 2013). According to Fisher & Roster (2016), Maslow's needs of self-actualization, self-esteem, safety and security, and physiological needs play vital role in the success of students.

Motivation and Engagement

It is a theory that grew out of researchers Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan's work on motivation in the 1970s and 1980s. According to motivation theory, theorists within the field of psychology have conducted studies on motivation in order to learn about human behavior. Throughout these studies they have found ways to encourage positive behaviors as well as eliminate negative behaviors. Educational psychologists have used these studies to get a deeper look at what motivates students to learn. They have identified that the motivation to learn is broken up into two groups--intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is a yearning to learn for natural reasons, self-fulfillment, and to master the skill. Extrinsic motivation is a desire to perform for an incentive or specific outcome (Huitt, 2011). Educators often try to learn as much about

student motivation and student engagement in order to improve student achievement.

According to Glasser (1998), behaviors are chosen, and as humans we are driven to meet five basic needs: love and belonging, survival, freedom, power, and fun. The construction of these five necessities forms the core for behavior and motivation of a person. Students store pictures in their brains that create their “quality world,” and individual needs can be satisfied only by creating those pictures, choosing to act, at that time, the way they think will fulfil their needs as shaped by these pictures.

In this way, motivation plays one of the largest roles in academic success and completion of graduation. Teachers are one of the leading resources for motivating students, and motivation comes from certain aspects that the teacher portrays such as: teacher body language, behavior, style of instruction, relationships with students, and assignment relevancy. When searching through the literature linked to campus dropouts, student engagement appeared to be a reoccurring aspect that contributes to the dropout problem. Student engagement is not a solo activity, and it is about interaction and relationship. It involves participation during instruction and campus work along with the overall community life of campus. Behavior indicators of engagement are participation in class, attendance, effort in classroom activities, and low number of disciplinary problems.

Behavioral engagement is another factor that is linked with campus dropouts. If students are engaged in behaving according to the rules and expectations of teachers and administrators, they are more likely to have higher academic achievement (Hammond, 2001). Other indicators for psychological engagement are interests and enthusiasm, a feeling of belonging, and identifying campus relation with community. Academic engagement is defined as being actively involved within class. Successful participation in class and attending class consistently are interrelated with academic engagement (Hammond, 2001). Engaging academically can portray indicators that signal lack of interest in school including lack of eagerness, dropping grades, and feelings towards campus. The combination of behavior in the classroom, dealings with the subject instruction and the teacher are critical to academic engagement. Professional development on how to detect early signs and how to further engage students during instruction can assist in decreasing a lack of academic engagement (Hammond, 2001).

Psychological disengagement involves a feeling of uncertainty. A feeling of “not belonging” and a “dislike in campus” are also indicators of psychological disengagement (Hammond, 2001). He recommended that additional study on those who

succeed, in spite of psychological engagement, could provide information on how campus can mediate when there is a lack of belonging and student behaviors and attitudes are poor (2001).

Engagement portrays that attachment to campus is vital for students to have success in the classroom. Students who feel secluded from parents, teachers, and peers lack any encouraging relationships. Peer groups that unite students and campus have the potential to decrease the dropout rate (Brewster, & Fager, 2000). As research has shown, student engagement is an important and seemingly instrumental issue when looking at factors that cause students to dropout. HEIs need to create favorable environment for students' motivation, good personality, and academic skills in order to minimize dropout rate.

Therefore, the dropout problem is a complex and multifaceted problem that is not easily resolved. An analysis of research showed that student engagement and motivation play huge roles in academic achievement. Engagement can be broken up into four different categories namely academic engagement, behavioral engagement, psychological engagement, and social engagement. The research showed that engagement in campus was what kept students motivated to learn. As soon as disengagement began, the downward spiral is what causes students to fall behind and eventually leave campus. Understanding what causes the different types of disengagement and how to prevent them from occurring are the stepping stones to solving the epidemic of dropouts. Motivational theories also support the need to create environments that encourage successful students. Motivational theories can show how some educational practices are detrimental to students' future.

Cognitive Load Theory

Cognitive Load Theory states that learning is initially processed in working memory (Sweller et.al 1994). Working memory is short term, low in storage capacity and can only process a very limited amount of new information at a time. Learning complex or technically demanding material requires building mental models or cognitive schemas about the subject being studied or the skill being developed over time. New material processed in working memory is progressively added or incorporated to these schemas. The schemas or mental models provide a knowledge structure into which the new learning can be fitted and integrated. This cognitive architecture is built through a lifetime of learning and experience and serves to free up resources in working memory.

Learning new material or a skill, for which a schema in long term memory is undeveloped or nonexistent, can cause working memory to quickly overload its limited capacity. This overloading can result in a learner becoming highly anxious and losing confidence, which in turn can lead to the learning process, in effect, freezing and the learner being unable to continue.

While Cognitive Load Theory has mostly been concerned with how instructional design of learning materials, assessment activities and teaching approaches can mitigate cognitive overload in the learning of new and complex material, it is argued here that it applies equally to the multiple learning tasks that form the early part of the learning journey of a first time learner. It stands to reason that the scale and scope of the new learning required can easily overload a learner's working memory.

Methodology

The study was carried out in a qualitative research design. This is why; the nature of the study was analytical and descriptive. A descriptive approach to research had been taken to describe the dropout rate in bachelor's degree. A survey research design was judged to be the most appropriate for the study. For this study, I collected data from both primary and secondary sources. 30 dropout students were the primary source of data. I selected 30 dropout students of bachelor's degree at Nilkantha Multiple Campus as the sample for this study. Telephone interviewing was used as the tool for collecting the required information. As the collected data were qualitative in nature, the data have been analyzed descriptively. As per the need, some of the related data have been presented in the table and graph. Thus, systematically collected data were analyzed, interpreted and presented descriptively.

Results and Discussion

Structural Overview of Students' Dropout

Nilkantha Multiple Campus is a community based and leading higher educational institution of Dhading district established in 2057 BS and affiliated to Tribhuvan University. It has been offering various programs like Master of Education (M.Ed.) in English and Nepali Education, Master of Business Studies (MBS), Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS), and Bachelor of Arts (BA) in various subjects. Students' dropout rate is increasing every year.

Table-1: Number of students under the Faculty of Education

	Academic Year	Enrolled Students	Exam form filled up	Dropout Number	Dropout percentage
B.Ed. 1 st	2073 BS	193	164	29	15.02%
B.Ed. 2 nd	2074 BS	164	123	41	25%
B.Ed. 3 rd	2075 BS	123	111	12	9.75%
B.Ed. 4 th	2076 BS	111	96	15	13.51%
Grand total		193	-	97	50.26%

-Source of data: Campus Administration

Table-1 shows that 193 students enrolled in 2073BS under the Faculty of Education. However, only 164 students filled up final examination form and 29 students left campus in first year. As a result, there was 15.02% dropout rate in first year.

Similarly, 164 students enrolled in second year but only 123 students filled up final examination form and 41 students left campus in 2074 BS. Thus, 25% students left campus in B.Ed. second year. It is the highest number of year wise dropout rate. In the same way, 123 students enrolled in B.Ed. third year but only 111 students filled up final examination form and 12 students left campus. This indicates that 9.75% students left campus in 2075 BS.

Finally, 111 students enrolled in B.Ed. fourth year where 96 students filled up final examination form and 15 students left campus. This situation shows that 13.51% students left their study in 2076 BS. Therefore, there were 193 students in total in the batch of 2073 to 2076 BS but 96 students from total number of students left their study during four years period. Thus, 50.26% students left in bachelor's degree under the Faculty of Education. This structural overview shows that dropout rate is a serious problem at Nilkantha Multiple Campus.

Factors Influencing Students' Dropout

The researchers Wells, Bechard, and Hambly (1989) created a framework that categorized factors of student dropout into four main categories. The data collected during the interviews were analyzed within this framework. The four categories included: student related indicators, campus-related indicators, family-related indicators and community-related indicators. However, the researcher selected only three indicators except community related indicators.

Student-related Indicators

One of the listed categories of Wells et al. (1989) is student-related factors that the student can control. Student-related factors are most often described as student actions that occur both inside and outside of the campus setting. Disruptive behavior of students that cause them to become less engaged in campus. These factors included areas such as student behavior, academic achievement, and attendance (Wells et al. 1989). The researcher identified the following student-related factors during telephone interviewing:

- low academic achievement (failed in exam)
- unable to take regular class (irregularity in class)
- employment opportunity in village
- getting permanent job
- unemployment problem and inability to pay campus fee
- learning English, Korean and Japanese language for going abroad to study and work
- health problem
- change campus
- involving in business
- not motivated towards study and feeling difficulty
- long distance from home to campus
- getting married, childbearing and child-caring problems

Many students start campus with expectations of success. Unfortunately, many of them encounter obstacles or issues that lead them towards dropping out instead of graduation. Academic performance is one of the most influencing factors that cause students to quit campus.

When respondents were asked why they left campus and many reported that they were unable to take regular classes due to their personal problems and failed in more than two subjects out of six subjects in every year of final examination taken by Tribhuvan University. So, the main reason of dropout explored from student-related indicators was their low academic achievement in examination.

One of the respondents stated that: "when I enrolled in B.Ed. first year, fortunately, I got job in reconstruction office so I could not take regular classes. Anyway, I took the examination of B.Ed. first year but in result I failed in most of the subjects. I realized that without taking regular classes I could not complete bachelor's

degree. He further said that during second year, I got permanent job as a primary level teacher in village. The main reason I left my study was I failed in most of the subjects in first year."

Irregularity in class was another immense student-related factor that was mentioned many times throughout the interviews. In fact, most of the respondents said they frequently missed classes. These absences caused twenty out of thirty respondents to feel difficulty to understand the course and ultimately failed in exam. Therefore, irregularity in class also causes low academic achievement and lastly they compelled to leave campus. In relation to irregularity, one respondent who left in B.Ed. second year mentioned that: "In B.Ed. first year, initially I took regular classes but I could not continue regular classes due to my family problems after earthquake that I needed to go abroad. Therefore, I went Kathmandu to learn Korean language. Fortunately, I was selected to go Korea in working visa. I was able to take the exam of first year but my result was not good due to irregularity in class. I thought that without taking regular classes, it was very difficult to complete bachelor's degree."

In this way, the two main factors of dropout according to most of the respondents were namely low academic achievement and irregularity. However, other influencing factors related to students were: employment opportunity in village, getting permanent job, unemployment problem and inability to pay campus fee, learning English, Korean and Japanese language for going abroad to study and work, health problem, change campus, involving in business, not motivated towards study and feeling difficulty, long distance from home to campus, and getting married, childbearing and child-caring problems.

Campus-related Indicators

Campus related factors are those factors that occur during the campus and are related to the structures and activities within campus. These factors include things such as campus climate and learning environment, teacher–student engagement, campus structure, and campus vision. Throughout the interviews, respondents shared information that falls within this category as Wells et al (1989) created the framework. The researcher identified the following campus-related influencing factors during telephone interviewing:

- lack of sufficient academic support, feedback, motivation and encouragement from teachers
- problem of institutional information system (such as lack of timely information to

fill up exam form, registration form through SMS, telephone, etc

- lack of understanding students' expectations and follow up services from campus administration
- lack of financial support for needy students (such as scholarship)
- difficulty to understand the course (related to teaching-learning strategies)
- program not suitable with expectations
- dissatisfaction towards examination system and library facility
- indifferent behavior of administrative staff

The theory behind Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is that every person has basic needs that must be fulfilled. Within the campus environment, the students' needs are what educators are striving to accomplish. According to the theory, when students feel like these needs were not met they were more likely to dropout (Maslow, 1954). When students lack the feeling of achieving their full potential or success, it results in giving up.

Haki Elimu (2008) states that quality education is acquired by having colleges with conducive teaching and learning environment, adequate number of teachers, available infrastructure, curriculum that base on the community needs and proper management and examining systems. This helps to reduce various problems that are common in college such as absenteeism, dropout and other misconducts.

Many reasons given by the respondents came within the frameworks of Well's et al. (1989), Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Motivational and Engagement theories. Motivation along with engagement plays a role in student success. Student engagement is about interaction and relationships. It involves participation during instruction and classroom activities along with the overall community life of campus. Indicators of engagement are participation in campus activities, regularity, effort in classroom activities, and cooperation among students and teachers in teaching learning strategies.

Other indicators for psychological engagement are interests and enthusiasm, a feeling of belonging, and identifying with the campus community. Motivation and engagement both can be connected within teaching learning activities. When students lack intrinsic motivation, and they are not engaged in class instruction or classroom activities, they tend to fall behind (Huitt, 2011). So, the main reason of dropout explored from campus-related indicators was lack of academic support, feedback, motivation and encouragement. In relation to this indicator, one of the informants said: "I took regular

classes in first year however I became passive listener that no one asked me whether I understood or not. Most of the teachers came to class and delivered their lectures without any interaction. I was not good at study but I expected additional support, motivation, feedback and encouragement from teachers but I could not get so. Anyway, I took the final exam of first year but I failed in four subjects out of six. Then I thought that I could not complete bachelor's degree and I left campus."

While Cognitive Load Theory has mostly been concerned with how instructional design of learning materials, assessment activities and teaching approaches can ameliorate or mitigate cognitive overload in the learning of new and complex material, it is argued here that it applies equally to the multiple learning tasks that form the early part of the learning journey of a first time learner. It stands to reason that the scale and scope of the new learning required can easily overload a learner's working memory.

This shows that teaching learning strategies need to be changed into learner-centered by creating favorable environment with sufficient support, encouragement, motivation and feedback mainly for the students having low academic achievement. Problem of institutional information system was another immense campus-related factor that was mentioned many times throughout the telephone interviewing. One of the informants mentioned: "I took the exam of first and second year by taking regular classes. I could not take regular classes in third year due to my family problem. Anyway, I thought I had to take exam. I was in village and I came to campus to fill up exam form but it was too late and I could not fill up the exam form. I did not know about getting chance to fill up exam form even after publishing exam routine of TU. I expected that campus would provide every important notices and information through mobile SMS services because we didn't have internet access in village. Due to lack of form fill up information I was compelled to leave campus in third year."

In this way, the two main campus-related factors of dropout according to most of the respondents were: a. lack of sufficient academic support, feedback, motivation and encouragement from teachers and; b. problem of institutional information system. However, other influencing factors related to students were: lack of understanding students' expectations and follow up services from campus administration; lack of financial support for needy students; difficulty to understand the course; program not suitable with expectations; dissatisfaction towards examination system and library facility; indifferent behavior of administrative staff.

Family-related Indicators

Family-related factors include things like family composition, socio-economic status, and drug use in the home. Parental support, parenthood, and other home life related factors are the very ones that contribute to a student's decision to leave or stay in school/college (Wells et al., 1989). However, the researcher identified the following family-related influencing factors during telephone interviewing:

- lack of financial support from home
- family problems (such as illness of family members, marriage, pregnancy, child caring, loss of family members etc)
- lack of support, motivation and encouragement from family
- lack of parental awareness towards education
- family obligations
- family migration
- low socio-economic status of family
- lack of favorable environment for study

So, the main reason of dropout explored from campus-related indicators was lack of financial support from home, in relation to it, one of the male informants said:

"I had desire to complete at least bachelor's degree so, I admitted in B.Ed. first year though there were lots of problems in my family. Unfortunately, I lost one of my family members when I was in second year. Then I had to take whole responsibility of family. I went abroad due to financial problem and I stayed in abroad for two years then returned. Now I have been running small business in my village. The main reason I left campus was due to financial problem at home."

Family problem was another significant family-related factor that was mentioned many times throughout the telephone interviewing. One of the female informants mentioned: "When I studied in B.Ed. first year, I got married. I continued my study up to second year but in third year, I gave birth a baby. Then I had to spend much time to take care of my baby as well as other works at home. In addition to it, my family also did not support and encourage continuing my study. So, the main reason I left campus was due to my family problem."

In this way, the two main family-related factors of dropout according to most of the respondents were: a. lack of financial support from home and, b. family problems.

However, other influencing factors related to family were: lack of support, motivation and encouragement from family, lack of parental awareness towards education, family obligations, family migration, low socio-economic status of family, and lack of favorable environment for study.

Conclusion

Data through telephone interviewing were analyzed in order to explore major factors influencing dropout rate in bachelor's degree at Nilkantha Multiple Campus under the Faculty of Education. This study found that the three main indicators play a significant role in determining dropout rate. A variety of influential factors were identified as student-related indicators, campus-related indicators and family-related indicators. The main reasons of dropout explored from student-related indicators were their low academic achievement in examination and irregularity in class. Furthermore, this study identified the main reasons of dropout explored from campus-related indicators were lack of academic support, feedback, motivation and encouragement from teachers; and problem of institutional information system. Lastly, the study explored the main factors of dropout from family-related indicators were lack of financial support from home and, different family problems.

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