

Student Dropout and Institutional Preventive Measures in Tribhuvan University's One-Year ODL Programme

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Abstract

The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Programme offers opportunities for learners to enhance their academic qualifications without leaving their jobs or professions. In 2019, Tribhuvan University launched a one-year ODL Programme in M.Ed Science and PGD in Social Studies Education at Mahendra Ratna Campus, Kathmandu. This study aims to investigate the reasons for student dropout and propose prevention strategies, specifically focusing on the one-year ODL Programme of Tribhuvan University. Data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire using a Google Survey form, targeting all 103 students enrolled in the 2019 ODL Programme. A total of 45 students participated in the Google survey form. Frequency table and cross tables were employed to analyze data using SPSS 20. Out of 45 respondents, two-fifths dropped out at the master's level and two-thirds at the PGD level. Major causes were institutional (58%) like overloaded assignments (32%) and centralized exams (26%), and non-institutional (42%) like poor internet access and family issues (10.5% each), and work-study balance (21%). Institutional dropout prevention measures, including scholarships, support, altered schedules, tutoring, and counseling, were inadequate. Urgent changes needed include modifying assignment patterns, providing flexible deadlines, and establishing an online or decentralized exam system. Effective measures are crucial to prevent dropouts and keep students enrolled.

Key Words: ODL, dropout, pedagogy, digital literacy, assignment, dropout prevention measures

Introduction

The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Programme caters to learners who, for various reasons, are unable to participate in conventional higher education Programmes. Additionally, this Programme aims to address both technical and pedagogical learning needs by integrating e-learning components into conventional mode Programmes, thereby enhancing learning opportunities in higher education. In 2019, Tribhuvan University launched a one-year Open and Distance Learning Programme offering an M.Ed. in Science and a PGD in Social Studies

Education. The enrollment eligibility criteria for the one-year M.Ed. Programme in Science require a M.Sc. degree, while the PGD in Social Studies Education requires a bachelor's degree in any discipline.

Dropout students are individuals who discontinue their education before completing their studies. According to Shankar (2015), dropout rates are influenced by factors such as accessibility, affordability, quality, and relevance of education. For universities, student dropout is a significant concern as it affects efficiency evaluation and funding (Belloc et al., 2010). In Nepal, higher education typically begins after 12 years of schooling, with a four-year duration for a Bachelor's degree followed by a two-year (four-semester) Master's degree and then a Doctoral or Ph.D. degree (Devekota et al., 2015). Only 6.8 percent of Nepal's population has achieved an educational level equivalent to graduate or postgraduate degrees (NSO, 2021). However, there has been notable progress in Nepal, as indicated by UNICEF (2012), with the number of students completing Bachelor's degrees increasing from 1 out of 100 in 1980 to 14 out of 100 in 2011.

In Europe, dropout rates vary among countries. According to Eurostat data from 2016, over 3 million young Europeans dropped out of university. France ranks first in the EU with a third of the total number of dropouts, followed by Italy with a total dropout rate of 15.8 percent, and the United Kingdom in third place with 12 percent.

Various factors contribute to student dropout, including inadequate orientation, the need for immediate employment, and difficulties with specific courses of study. Factors such as first-year academic performance, exam failures, social background, and academic preparation, adjustment to university life, instructor qualifications, and lack of interaction with instructors can all influence the decision to drop out. According to Westrick et al. (2015), first-year academic performance is a critical predictor of student persistence. Students who perform well in their first year are less likely to drop out. Additionally, research suggests that students may be more inclined to quit after examination periods, particularly if they have experienced exam failures. High dropout rates are often observed among students with poor pre-university education results and those who realize that their university Programme does not align with their expectations (Paura & Arhipova, 2014).

According to Paola et al. (2019), the primary reason for university dropout is the challenge of passing exams, which can diminish motivation and confidence. Camila et al. (2018) suggest

that dropout factors can be social (e.g., student background and income level), psycho-pedagogical (e.g., inadequate academic preparation, inconsistency between prior education and university studies, and lack of counseling services), and personal (e.g., poor adaptability to university and low socio-emotional intelligence). Yılmaz and Karatas (2022) stress the importance of the educational process, particularly after enrollment, in students' dropout decisions, emphasizing instructor qualifications and student-instructor interaction. Yuan and Kim (2014) argue that a lack of interaction with instructors can lead to feelings of isolation and increase dropout likelihood. Four main themes regarding dropout factors were identified by Netanda's (2018) study: dropout factors related to the personal circumstances of students, lecturers, and institutions; dropout factors related to those circumstances determined by the circumstances of other units of analysis (other research contexts). The study also showed that some elements are uncontrollable, even though most of them are.

According to Grote (2000), the "problem of drop-out" in open and distance learning has been exaggerated in comparison to that in face-to-face instruction, and a direct comparison between the two methods of delivering higher education is not possible. Lee and Choi (2011) revealed that one of the biggest issues facing online educators and administrators is dropout, since the rate of student dropout in online higher education (OHE) courses is much greater than in traditional courses. However, the issue of dropout has gained significant importance for stakeholders in higher education (HE) and OHE. According to Xavier and Meneses (2021), online learning typically causes conflicts between the domains of work, family, and study, which frequently results in time constraints and course dropout. This kind of problem is usually fueled by flexible, open entrance, which lets in unprepared students who aren't ready.

Consequently, the majority of the research in this area of study indicates that dropout rates are a serious problem that has detrimental long-term effects on both people and countries, wasting money and time. The aim of the current study is to identify dropout causes and institutional preventive measures, particularly in Tribhuvan University's open and distance learning programs.

Methodology

This research focuses on the one-year ODL Programme in Science Education and the PGD in Social Studies Education offered by the Faculties of Education at Tribhuvan University, hosted by Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal, Kathmandu. The study utilized a cross-sectional

and descriptive research design. All 103 students enrolled in the ODL Programme in 2019 were contacted for participation, but only 45 responded, resulting in a response rate of 44 percent. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire distributed through an online survey using Google Forms over a three-week period, from March 1 to March 22, 2023. Frequency tables and crosstables were employed to analyze data with using SPSS 20.

Results and Discussion

This section concentrates on the general socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, including their status of teaching learning activities, causes of dropout and institutional dropout prevention measures. Furthermore, it analyzes participant's causes of dropout based on their socio-demographic characteristics, teaching learning activities, and institutional dropout prevention measures.

Characteristics of the Study Population

More than half (58%) of the respondents were aged 35 years or older, with the mean age being 35. The majority (84%) were male, and 68 percent were urban residents. Most respondents (96%) identified as Hindu, while 4 percent were Buddhist. Over 90 percent reported having family support for enrolling in the ODL program, and teaching was their primary profession. Of the respondents, 93 percent were enrolled in the M.Ed. Science program, with 7 percent in PGD Social Studies.

Regarding digital literacy, 76 percent had good literacy, 22 percent had fair literacy, and 2 percent reported poor literacy. Additionally, 93 percent were proficient in using computers, and 82 percent had the technical knowledge to connect to online classes, while 18 percent did not. Most respondents (84%) reported having a conducive home learning environment, and 49 percent said their internet quality was good, while 24 percent rated it poor and 27 percent fair.

Over 90 percent felt their studies were important for their career, and 73 percent had caregiving responsibilities. Managing work and studies was challenging for 79 percent, with 11 percent finding it very difficult, while 11 percent reported no difficulty at all.

Table 1. *Characteristics of the Study population*

Characteristics of the Study Population		Total N	%
Age group (Mean Age =35 years)	Less than 35 years	19	42
	35 years and above	26	58
Sex	Male	38	84

	Female	7	16
Place of residence	Rural	15	33
	Urban	30	67
Religion	Buddhist	2	4.4
	Hindu	43	96
Family support in enrollment	No	4	8.9
	Yes	41	91
Primary profession	Teaching	41	91
	Non-teaching	4	8.9
Enrolled subject	M.Ed. Science	42	93
	PGD in Social Studies	3	6.7
Status of digital literacy	Good	34	76
	Fair	10	22
	Poor	1	2.2
Knowledge of using computers	No	3	6.7
	Yes	42	93
Technical Knowhow to be connected in an online class	No	8	18
	Yes	37	82
Favorable home environment for learning	No	7	16
	Yes	38	84
Quality of the internet	Good	22	49
	Fair	12	27
	Poor	11	24
Importance of degree for career	Important	41	91
	Fair	3	6.7
	Not important	1	2.2
Have to care for a family member	No	12	27
	Yes	33	73
	Very difficult	5	11
Management of job and study	Somehow difficult	35	78
	Not difficult	5	11
Total		45	100

Different Characteristics of the Respondents and Dropout Status

The dropout status of respondents was analyzed based on various factors, including socio-demographic characteristics, teaching and learning activities, and institutional dropout prevention measures, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Different Characteristics of the Respondents by Dropout Status*

Different Characteristics of Respondents		Status of Dropout					
		Dropout		Regular		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Socio-demographic characteristics:							
Age group (Mean Age =35 years)	Less than 35 years	11	57.9	8	42.1	19	100.0
	35 years and above	8	30.8	18	69.2	26	100.0
Sex	Male	16	42.1	22	57.9	38	100.0
	Female	3	42.9	4	57.1	7	100.0
Place of residence	Rural	7	46.7	8	53.3	15	100.0
	Urban	12	40.0	18	60.0	30	100.0
Religion	Buddhist	1	50.0	1	50.0	2	100.0
	Hindu	18	41.9	25	58.1	43	100.0
Family support in enrollment	No	3	75.0	1	25.0	4	100.0
	Yes	16	39.0	25	61.0	41	100.0
Primary profession	Teaching	16	39.0	25	61.0	41	100.0
	Non-teaching	3	75.0	1	25.0	4	100.0
Enrolled subject	M.Ed. Science	17	40.5	25	59.5	42	100.0
	PGD in Social Studies	2	66.7	1	33.3	3	100.0
Status of digital literacy	Good	17	50.0	17	50.0	34	100.0
	Fair	2	20.0	8	80.0	10	100.0
	Poor	0	0.0	1	100.0	1	100.0
Knowledge of using computers	No	0	0.0	3	100.0	3	100.0
	Yes	19	45.2	23	54.8	42	100.0
Technical Knowhow to be connected in an online class	No	0	0.0	8	100.0	8	100.0
	Yes	19	51.4	18	48.6	37	100.0
Favorable home environment for learning	No	4	57.1	3	42.9	7	100.0
	Yes	15	39.5	23	60.5	38	100.0
Quality of the internet	Good	10	45.5	12	54.5	22	100.0
	Fair	3	25.0	9	75.0	12	100.0
	Poor	6	54.5	5	45.5	11	100.0
Importance of degree for career	Important	18	43.9	23	56.1	41	100.0

Have to care for a family member	Fair	1	33.3	2	66.7	3	100.0
	Not important	0	0.0	1	100.0	1	100.0
	No	8	66.7	4	33.3	12	100.0
	Yes	11	33.3	22	66.7	33	100.0

Teaching Learning Activities:

Effectiveness of the orientation class	Fair	9	47.4	10	52.6	19	100.0
	Insufficient	3	42.9	5	57.1	8	100.0
	Sufficient	7	35.3	11	64.7	18	100.0
Have to move around while studying	No	2	16.7	10	83.3	12	100.0
	Yes	17	51.5	16	48.5	33	100.0
Overload in job	No	5	71.4	2	28.6	7	100.0
	Yes	14	36.8	24	63.2	38	100.0
Comfortable of class time	No	3	33.3	6	66.7	9	100.0
	Yes	16	44.4	20	55.6	36	100.0
Class work/assignment was too overloaded	Not load	2	100.0	0	0.0	2	100.0
	Overload	7	70.0	3	30.0	10	100.0
	Somehow	7	25.9	20	74.1	27	100.0
	Very overloaded	3	50.0	3	50.0	6	100.0
	Difficult	6	60.0	4	40.0	10	100.0
Class works and assignments difficult	Not difficult	4	40.0	6	60.0	10	100.0
	Somehow	9	37.5	15	62.5	24	100.0
	Very difficult	0	0.0	1	100.0	1	100.0
Classes not going to help in real life	Yes	11	33.3	22	66.7	33	100.0
	No	18	43.9	23	56.1	41	100.0
Expectation fulfilled from teacher in learning	Yes	1	25.0	3	75.0	4	100.0
	No	4	33.3	8	66.7	12	100.0
flexibility in deadline of the assignment	Yes	15	45.5	18	54.5	33	100.0
	No	4	44.4	5	55.6	9	100.0
	Yes	15	41.7	21	58.3	36	100.0

Losing extra income opportunities	No	10	45.5	12	54.5	22	100.0
	Yes	9	39.1	14	60.9	23	100.0
	Fair	11	44.0	14	56.0	25	100.0
Fee structure	High	8	47.1	9	52.9	17	100.0
	Very high	0	0.0	3	100.0	3	100.0
Institutional dropout prevention measures:							
Offered scholarship from institution	No	19	42.2	26	57.8	45	100.0
Continuous support and instruction from Institution	No	12	41.4	17	58.6	29	100.0
	Yes	7	43.8	9	56.3	16	100.0
Offered altered class schedule	No	18	50.0	18	50.0	36	100.0
	Yes	1	11.1	8	88.9	9	100.0
Offer extended time for an assignment	No	6	50.0	6	50.0	12	100.0
	Yes	13	39.4	20	60.6	33	100.0
Offered to tutor for classes	No	14	50.0	14	50.0	28	100.0
	Yes	5	29.4	12	70.6	17	100.0
Offer recorded classes	No	7	35.0	13	65.0	20	100.0
	Yes	12	48.0	13	52.0	25	100.0
Provided with proper information about the Programme	No	8	40.0	12	60.0	20	100.0
	Yes	11	44.0	14	56.0	25	100.0
	Fair	0	0.0	1	100.0	1	100.0
Provided with proper guidance and counseling	No	12	48.0	13	52.0	25	100.0
	Yes	7	36.8	12	63.2	19	100.0
	Fair	5	50.0	5	50.0	10	100.0
Supportive teacher in learning	Not supportive	3	75.0	1	25.0	4	100.0
	Supportive	11	35.5	20	64.5	31	100.0
	Difficult	7	63.6	4	36.4	11	100.0
Level of difficulty in getting study leave for final exam	Not difficult	1	16.7	5	83.3	6	100.0
	Somehow difficult	6	35.3	11	64.7	17	100.0
	Very difficult	5	45.5	6	54.5	11	100.0
Total		19	42.2	26	57.8	45	100.0

Out of the total 45 study respondents in the one-year ODL Programme for M.Ed in Science and PGD in Social Studies at Tribhuvan University, approximately 42 percent were found to have dropped out from the Programme. The mean and median age of the study respondents were 35 years, ranging from 30 to 43 years. Among the respondents who dropped out, the majority belonged to the lower age group (<35 years, 58%), were rural residents (47%), lacked family support (75%), were in non-teaching professions (75%), enrolled in the PGD Programme (67%), had good digital literacy and technical know-how (50%), experienced an unfavorable home environment for learning (57%), had poor quality internet access (54%), and found it very difficult to manage their job and studies simultaneously (60%) compared to their counterparts.

The dropout statuses of the respondents were analyzed based on the academic activities offered by the host institution, as presented in Table 2. The majority of respondents who dropped out were related with factors such as having to move around while studying (51%), reporting overloaded class work/assignments (62%), finding class work and assignments difficult (54%), and facing high fee structures (60%).

The majority of respondents who dropped out from the Programme were associated with those who reported lack of teacher support in learning (75%) and difficulty in obtaining study leave for final exams from their workplaces (64%) compared to their counterparts.

Causes of Dropout

Out of the total study respondents (45), 42 percent dropped out from the Programme. The leading causes of dropout were identified as overloaded or inflexible Programme (32%), followed by the centralized exam system (26%), inability to manage work and study simultaneously (21%), and issues related to family problems and poor internet access (each at 10%). Institutional causes of dropout, including overloaded or inflexible Programmes and the centralized exam system, accounted for 58 percent, while non-institutional causes such as poor internet access, family problems, and the inability to manage work and study simultaneously covered 42 percent of the dropout cases.

Aydin et al. (2019) categorized the reasons for student dropout from the Open Education System into personal, system-related, and environmental factors. They argue that dropouts may result from unsatisfactory exam results, lack of knowledge about the system, time management issues, program unsuitability, interference of daily routines, and personal problems. These findings align with the present study.

Similarly, Street (2010) and Doherty (2006) indicated that time management is a crucial factor in system dropout, consistent with the current study, where one-fifth of students cited this reason. A study of Ashby (2004) also found that learners often drop out due to general personal, family, or employment responsibilities, as well as increases in these responsibilities. The present study supports this finding.

Table 3. *Causes of Dropout*

Causes of Dropout	Number	Percent
Non-institutional causes:		
Poor Internet access	2	10.5
Family problem	2	10.5
Unable to manage work and study simultaneously	4	21.1
Institutional Causes:		
Overloaded/ Not flexible Programme	6	31.6
Centralized exam	5	26.3
Total	19	100

Further analysis of the causes of dropout and associated factors were conducted and are presented in Table 4.

Different Characteristics and Causes of Dropout

The causes of dropout were categorized into institutional and non-institutional factors and analyzed in relation to various respondent's characteristics, such as socio-demographic factors, teaching-learning aspects, and institutional dropout prevention measures, to determine their impact. Forty-two percent of respondents cited non-institutional dropout causes, while 58 percent reported institutional causes.

Respondents citing institutional causes for dropout were primarily linked to the following socio-demographic characteristics: being in the lower age group (<35 years: 64%), male (62%), urban residents (67%), primary profession in teaching (62%), enrolled in the master's level (59%), possessing computer knowledge and technical know-how (58%), having access to good quality internet (60%), considering an additional degree important for their career (61%), and having family care responsibilities (64%), compared to those who reported non-institutional causes.

Similarly, respondents who reported non-institutional causes of dropout were mostly associated with the following socio-demographic characteristics: being female (68%), rural residents (57%), non-teaching profession (68%), experiencing poor quality internet access (68%), and facing difficulties in managing job and study simultaneously (57%), compared to those who reported institutional causes of dropout.

Table 4. *Different Characteristics of the Respondents by Causes of Dropout*

Different Characteristics		Causes of Dropout					
		Non institutional Causes		Institutional Causes		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Socio-demographic Characteristics:							
Age group	Less than 35 years	4	36.4	7	63.6	11	100.0
	35 years and above	4	50.0	4	50.0	8	100.0
Sex	Male	6	37.5	10	62.5	16	100.0
	Female	2	66.7	1	33.3	3	100.0
Place of residence	Rural	4	57.1	3	42.9	7	100.0

	Urban	4	33.3	8	66.7	12100.0
Religion	Buddhist	1	100.0			1 100.0
	Hindu	7	38.9	11	61.1	18100.0
Family support in enrollment	No	1	33.3	2	66.7	3 100.0
	Yes	7	43.8	9	56.3	16100.0
Primary profession	Teaching	6	37.5	10	62.5	16100.0
	Non-teaching	2	66.7	1	33.3	3 100.0
	M.Ed. Science	7	41.2	10	58.8	17100.0
Enrolled subject	PGD in Social studies	1	50.0	1	50.0	2 100.0
Status of digital literacy	Good	7	41.2	10	58.8	17100.0
	Fair	1	50.0	1	50.0	2 100.0
Knowledge of using computers	Yes	8	42.1	11	57.9	19100.0
Technical knowhow to be connected in an online class	Yes	8	42.1	11	57.9	19100.0
Favorable home environment for learning	No	2	50.0	2	50.0	4 100.0
	Yes	6	40.0	9	60.0	15100.0
	Good	4	40.0	6	60.0	10100.0
Quality of the internet	Fair	0	0.0	3	100.0	3 100.0
	Poor	4	66.7	2	33.3	6 100.0
Importance of degree for career	Important	7	38.9	11	61.1	18100.0
	Fair	1	100.0	0	0.0	1 100.0
Have to care for a family member	No	4	50.0	4	50.0	8 100.0
	Yes	4	36.4	7	63.6	11100.0
	Very difficult	0	0.0	3	100.0	3 100.0
Management of job and study	Somehow difficult	8	57.1	6	42.9	14100.0

	Not difficult	0	0.0	2	100.0	2	100.0
Teaching Learning Activities:							
Effectiveness of the orientation class	Insufficient	2	66.7	1	33.3	3	100.0
	Sufficient	3	42.0	4	58.0	7	100.0
Have to move around while studying	No	1	50.0	1	50.0	2	100.0
	Yes	7	41.2	10	58.8	17	100.0
Overload in job	No	2	40.0	3	60.0	5	100.0
	Yes	6	42.9	8	57.1	14	100.0
Comfortable of class time	No	1	33.3	2	66.7	3	100.0
	Yes	7	43.8	9	56.3	16	100.0
Load of the class work/assignments	Not loaded	1	50.0	1	50.0	2	100.0
	Overloaded	3	30.0	7	70.0	10	100.0
	Somehow overloaded	4	57.1	3	42.9	7	100.0
Class works/ assignment's difficulty	Difficult	1	16.7	5	83.3	6	100.0
	Not difficult	3	75.0	1	25.0	4	100.0
	Somehow difficult	4	44.4	5	55.6	9	100.0
Have to care for a family member	No	4	50.0	4	50.0	8	100.0
	Yes	4	36.4	7	63.6	11	100.0
Classes not going to help in real life	No	8	44.4	10	55.6	18	100.0
	Yes	0	0.0	1	100.0	1	100.0
Expectation fulfilled from teacher in learning	No	1	25.0	3	75.0	4	100.0
	Yes	7	46.7	8	53.3	15	100.0
Flexibility in deadline of the assignment	No	1	25.0	3	75.0	4	100.0

	Yes	7	46.7	8	53.3	15100.0
Losing extra income opportunities	No	6	60.0	4	40.0	10100.0
	Yes	2	22.2	7	77.8	9 100.0
Institutional Dropout Prevention Measures:						
Fee structure	Fair	6	54.5	5	45.5	11100.0
	High	2	25.0	6	75.0	8 100.0
Offered scholarship from institution	No	8	42.1	11	57.9	19100.0
Continuous support and instruction	No	5	41.7	7	58.3	12100.0
	Yes	3	42.9	4	57.1	7 100.0
Offered altered class schedule	No	8	44.4	10	55.6	18100.0
	Yes			1	100.0	1 100.0
Offer extended time for an assignment	No	2	33.3	4	66.7	6 100.0
	Yes	6	46.2	7	53.8	13100.0
Offered to tutor for classes	No	6	42.9	8	57.1	14100.0
	Yes	2	40.0	3	60.0	5 100.0
Offer recorded classes	No	5	71.4	2	28.6	7 100.0
	Yes	3	25.0	9	75.0	12100.0
Proper information about the Programme	No	1	12.5	7	87.5	8 100.0
	Yes	7	63.6	4	36.4	11100.0
Proper guidance and counseling	No	5	41.7	7	58.3	12100.0
	Yes	3	42.9	4	57.1	7 100.0
Supportive teacher in learning	Fair	5	100.0			5 100.0
	Not supportive	1	33.3	2	66.7	3 100.0
	Supportive	2	18.2	9	81.8	11100.0

Level of difficulty in getting study leave	Difficult	3	25.0	9	75.0	12	100.0
	Not Diff			1	100.0	1	100.0
	Somehow difficult	5	83.3	1	16.7	6	100.0
Total		8	42.1	11	57.9	19	100.0

The teaching-learning activities and dropout causes were analyzed to assess the impact of these activities on dropout intensity. Regarding academic activities, 16 percent of respondents found orientation classes insufficient, 90 percent had to relocate while studying, 95 percent had family support obligations, 74 percent felt overloaded with job responsibilities, 16 percent were uncomfortable with class times, and 79 percent found class work and assignments difficult or somewhat difficult.

Respondents who reported institutional causes of dropout were mainly associated with the following characteristics: perceiving orientation classes as moderately effective (68%), having to relocate while studying (59%), feeling overloaded with class work/assignments (70%), finding class work/assignments difficult (83%), having family care responsibilities (64%), unmet expectations from teachers (75%), lack of flexible assignment deadlines (75%), missed extra income opportunities (78%), and complaints about high fee structures (73%).

Similarly, respondents who reported non-institutional causes of dropout were predominantly related with characteristics such as not having recorded classes available (71%), inadequate information about the Programme (64%), fair teacher support in learning (100%), and facing difficulties obtaining leave for final exams from their workplaces (83%), compared to those who reported institutional causes of dropout.

Adopting dropout prevention measures is crucial for student retention. Effective strategies include offering scholarships, continuous support, flexible class schedules, extended assignment deadlines, tutoring, recorded classes, clear program information, guidance and counseling services, supportive teachers, and easy access to study leave.

The status of dropout prevention measures was analyzed to assess their impact on dropout causes. All (19) dropped out respondents reported that they were not offering scholarships, 63 percentage were not getting continuous support and instruction from the institution, 95 percent

were not offered altered class schedule, 32 percent were not offered extended time line for assignments, 74 percent were not offered to tutor for classes, 37 percent were not offered recorded classes, 42 percent were not provided with proper information about the Programme, 63 percent were not provided with proper guidance and counseling services, 63 percent were not easily getting study leave even for final exam from working institution, 95 percent were not getting any financial support from any institutions for study, and 16 percent were reported teachers were not supportive.

The respondents who were reported about the institutional causes of dropout, majority were related with the not offered scholarship from institution (58%), not offered extended time for an assignment (67%), not provided with proper information about the Programme (87%), not provided with proper guidance and counseling (58%), and facing very difficulties/difficulties to get study leave for final exam from working institution (75%). Similarly, the respondents who reported non-institutional causes of dropout majority were related with not offered to tutor for classes (71%), teacher's support in learning was fair (100%), and facing somehow difficulties in getting study leave for final exam from working institution (83%).

Netanda et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of support in Open Distance Learning (ODL), demonstrating that it offers a competitive advantage, reduces attrition, and boosts retention and success rates. The present study also found that most dropout students lacked adequate institutional support, emphasizing the need for better student support to retain students in ODL programs.

Conclusion & Implications

This study investigates the causes of student dropout and proposes prevention strategies, focusing on 45 respondents enrolled in a one-year Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Programme in 2019. Specifically, the Programme studied was the M.Ed. in Science and the Post-Graduate Diploma Programme in Social Studies Education at Tribhuvan University hosted in Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal.

Among the respondents, 42 percent dropped out from the Programme, with 67 percent dropping out from the PGD in Social Studies Education and 40 percent from the M.Ed. Science Programme. The average age of the respondents was 35 years. The majority of dropout respondents were associated with younger age groups, rural residency, lack of family support,

non-teaching professions, unfavorable home learning environments, poor internet access, and difficulties balancing job and studies.

The main cause of dropout was identified as overloaded and inflexible Programme structures, constituting 32 percent, followed by centralized exam systems (26%), difficulty managing work and study simultaneously (21%), and family problems and poor internet access (each at 10%). Institutional causes accounted for 58 percent of dropout reasons, while 42 percent were related to non-institutional factors.

Respondents mentioning institutional causes of dropout were predominantly associated with younger age groups, males, urban residency, teaching as their primary profession, enrollment in the master's level, inclination towards additional degrees, overloaded and difficult class work/assignments, inflexible assignment deadlines, loss of extra income opportunities, and complaints about high fee structures. Similarly, institutional causes were reported by respondents not receiving scholarships, extended assignment times, proper Programme information, guidance and counseling, and facing difficulties obtaining leave for exams from their workplaces.

It is imperative to urgently reform institutional dropout prevention measures, specifically addressing the load of assignments and Programme flexibility, along with implementing a decentralized exam system. This is crucial to retain students in the enrolled Programme, given that 58 percent of dropout causes were associated with institutional factors. Similarly, there is a need to revisit the Programme to address issues faced by working students, as one-fifth of dropouts occurred due to the inability to manage work and study simultaneously. By addressing these concerns, academic institutions can better support students and enhance their likelihood of academic success and Programme completion.

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