Journal of Policy Research, 10(2), 559-567
https://jprpk.com
https://doi.org/10.61506/02.00269

Investigating the Causes of Dropout in BS Programs: Insights From Public Sector Universities

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Abstract
The present study investigates the causes of dropout in 4-year Degree Programs in public sector Universities of Punjab, focusing on the factors contributing to phenomenon. The research adopts a Mixed Methods Research approach, utilizing the Concurrent Triangulation Design to balance the strengths and weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data were gathered through questionnaires distributed to 1,290 participants, including students, teachers, and dropouts, while qualitative data were collected via interviews with 24 dropouts. The findings indicate that content-related challenges, economic constraints, and unsupportive institutional environments significantly contribute to dropout rate. The study reveals that the complexity and volume of course content, unaffordable fee structures, inadequate physical resources, and unfavorable social circumstances are major deterrents to student retention. Notably, the qualitative insights underscore the critical impact of financial difficulties, negative teacher-student interactions, and insufficient university facilities on students' decisions to discontinue their education. The study recommends revising academic curriculums, providing financial support, improving institutional infrastructure, and enhancing teacher support services to address these issues.
Keywords: Dropout, 4 Years Bachelor Programs, Public Sector Universities

1. Background

Education is crucial for preserving civic order, fostering citizenship, and promoting economic growth while reducing poverty. Throughout history, it has been a primary means of disseminating human accomplishments and knowledge. Its role in producing and transferring skills in society is well established (Govinda, 1997). Research indicates that education, especially basic education has a major role in shaping social values and political ideologies in emerging nations. It plays its part in promoting economic growth, decreasing poverty, and raising awareness (Jane, 2002).

The most recent studies highlight academic difficulties as a primary cause of dropout among university students. Tinto's (2017) model emphasizes the importance of academic integration and performance in student persistence. In Punjab, challenges such as inadequate preparation, lack of academic support, and high failure rates contribute to dropout. Teaching strategies and curriculum content also influence student interest and persistence (Kuh et al., 2019). It is important to comprehend these barriers in an effort to design programs that would help at-risk learners. Socio economic factors also play a major role in determining the dropout rates. The literature shows that students from low SES are more likely to drop out due to financial reasons (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2020). There are many economically disadvantaged students in public sector universities. The cost of education and indirect expenses are often high and may act as a hindrance. Scholarships, financial aid, and flexible payment methods are crucial so that financial difficulties do not lead to students' dropout. Facilities like availability of support services, and the environment in the institutions play a central role in retention of the students. Astin (2018) also addresses such key factors as the campus environment and student services. The factors influencing students' continuation or dropping out include infrastructure, availability of counseling services and extra-curricular activities in Universities. These are some of the factors that if evaluated can assist in the development of a favorable learning environment that can enhance retention. The psychosocial factors are also very important in determining the retention of the employees some of which include mental health and social integration. Research indicates that students with stress, anxiety, and low social support tend to drop out (Bean & Eaton, 2021). In Punjab, culture and social factors such as parental pressure and friends influence the academic experiences. These challenges can be overcome through raising awareness of mental health, offering counseling services, and creating a supportive environment for students at the campus.

The dropout rates in Pakistan are quite high and even more so at the secondary level of education. According to a report by Dawn (2008), only 10 percent of the population achieves 12 years of schooling, which is one of the lowest in South Asia. The literature survey shows that there is some contradiction in the data concerning enrollment and dropout rates of students at secondary level (Mohsin, Aslam & Bashir, 2004). Hunt (2008) identified several social, personal and institutional causes of students dropping out of school. Solving these problems entails the cooperation of both the students and the teachers to foster a proper learning atmosphere. It has been identified that higher education has a significant role in enhancing students' employability skills and entrepreneurial characteristics (HEC Pakistan, 2006). Universities, as centers of research and innovation, are significant in promoting higher education and enhancing productivity. Despite various programs launched by the government and the Higher Education Commission (HEC) to promote higher education, the retention rates in

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four-year BS programs in universities remain low. Media reports and general perceptions suggest that these programs face significant challenges, including complex nomenclature (Daily Times, 2011).
Investigating the reasons of dropout in four-year BS programs in Universities is essential to address this pressing issue. While extensive research has been conducted on dropout causes at primary and secondary education levels, little attention has been given to higher education programs. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the various factors contributing to dropout in BS programs. By collecting data from targeted universities and analyzing the findings, this research seeks to provide insights and recommendations for improving student retention and success in higher education.

2. Problem Statement

The 4-year degree programs are helpful to avoid the wastage of time between terminal degrees. Student's skill and competency can also be enhanced through providing extensive and excellent content from grass-root level to the development of higher-level order. It is considered that in BS program is helpful for students to get specialization due to the long term investment of time. However, the problem of dropout demonstrates the wastage of time and sources which has no alternative. Hence, the focus of the research is to highlight the causes of dropout at BS level. The students are leaving BS programs at a consistent pace, in spite of all the strategies developed and put into practice to lower the dropout rate and improve student retention. The current study set out to identify the contributing factors to BS program dropout rates in universities.

2.1. Significance of the Study

This research was looking into the factors leading to dropout in the context of the BS program in Universities of Punjab. The reasons of dropout would be examined from the teachers, students and dropouts. The dropouts of BS programs in the universities would also be interrogated concerning their decision to drop out. Thus, the study may provide recommendations to the stakeholders. Hopefully, this study may assist policy makers how they can improve their learning environment in order to eliminate drop out phenomena in four years' degree programs. The findings of this research can be used in formulating objectives and strategies for the university administrators regarding the action that needs to be taken in future.

2.2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:
To find out the enrolment of 4-year bachelor programs in Public Sector Universities of Punjab.
To examine the dropout situation of 4-year bachelor degree programs in Public Sector Universities.
To observe the perspectives of university teachers who faced the dropout phenomenon in BS programs.
To identify the factors of dropout in universities through documenting the perspectives of students and dropouts.

2.3. Research Questions

What is the enrolment rate of 4-year degree programs in Public Sector Universities of Punjab?
What is the dropout ratio in Public Sector Universities of Punjab?
What is the opinion of teachers regarding dropout phenomena in 4-year bachelor programs?
What are the reasons of dropout in BS programs through documenting the perceptions of students and dropouts?
How dropout ratio can be reduced at BS level in Public Sector Universities of Punjab?

3. Methods and Procedures

The present study investigated the causes of dropout in 4-year Degree Programs in public sector Universities of Punjab. A mixed method research was adopted to answer the research questions. In MMR, Concurrent Triangulation Design was chosen for this study because it enables the researcher to capitalize on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods while offsetting their respective weaknesses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This design is particularly suitable for complex issues like dropout, where multiple factors are involved. The justification of using a concurrent triangulation design is rooted in its ability to balance the strengths and weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data provide generalizable findings and allow for the identification of patterns and correlations, while qualitative data offer in-depth insights and contextual understanding (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The quantitative data gathered through questionnaires, while interviews were administered with 24 dropouts to gather qualitative data. The study involved twelve hundred and ninety participants including students, teachers, and dropouts.

3.1. Participants

The population of the present study was all the teacher, students and dropouts related to public Universities in Punjab. The researcher used a multi-phase sampling to study the dropouts in academic year 2021. The sample for this study included two categories: the first category comprised teachers and students, while the second category consisted of dropouts. The sample included 660 students (from two sessions, 2019-2022 and 2020-2023), 130 teachers, and 500 dropouts.
Out of total public universities of Punjab, 5 universities were selected for this study as a sample. These universities included:
The Government College University, Faisalabad
University of Education, Lahore

The Lahore College for Women University, Lahore
The Baha-ud-Din Zakariya University
The University of Sargodha
From each of these universities, two departments were chosen: one from the social sciences and one from the natural sciences. This sampling strategy ensured a diverse and representative sample from the population under study.
For qualitative data collection, purposive sampling of 24 students, who had dropped out from 4-year BS programs, was done. This selection process was done purposefully with the aim of obtaining in-depth information and identifying the reasons for their decision to quit. The justification for the purposive sampling is that the information generated can be in-depth and specific as to hold the potential of giving a deeper insight into the causes of dropping out. Unlike random which is used to capture a representative population, purposive sampling aims at capturing individuals that can provide useful information in relation to the research question. The data collection method used in this research was case study interviews that encompassed semi-structured interviews to ensure that participants provided their unique narratives based on their experiences while at the same time addressing specific aspects that were areas of interest to the researchers.

3.2. Research Instruments

The researcher developed same questionnaires for students, teachers and dropouts for quantitative data. A semi structured interview was also developed for dropouts to collect facts. The questionnaire contained 29 items to identify the causes of dropouts in BS Program (4 years). It is composed of six sections as: factors related to content, Teaching and Administration related factors, Economic aspects related factors, Examination related factors, factors related to Physical facilities and the factors related to Social Aspects.

3.3. Validation and Reliability of Instruments

A three-point scoring system consisting of most relevant, relevant, and less relevant was used. The surveys had 45 items, and the mean value of each was calculated. Seventeen items were eliminated from the final draft because their mean values were less than 2.99. The experts also improved the phrasing and arrangement of the items to arrange them in a more meaningful way. The panel of expert consisted of 8 university teachers including 4 head of departments. They were all male and belonged to urban areas. Academic qualification of all experts was PhD, aged ranged 35-45, have 1-10 years teaching experience at university level.

Table 1: Reliability of Questionnaire Used for Students and Dropouts

Indicators	*R*
Content Related Factors	.765
Teaching and Administration Related Factors	.633
Economic Aspects Related Factors	.733
Examination Related Factors	.711
Factors Related to Physical Facilities	.623
Factors Related to Social Aspects	.744
Overall	.889

The researchers applied Cronbach alpha to examine the reliability of questionnaires. The factors wise and overall reliability is presented in table 1. The reliability of questionnaire was .889 Cronbach alpha.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Part

Table 2: The Association Between Factors that Influence 4-yearsBS Program and Dropouts

Factors	Gender	Responses		Fisher's exact test		
		Yes	No	X^2	*v*	*p*
Content Related Factors	Students	366	294	94.158	0.23	.001
	Teachers	71	59			
	Dropouts	284	216			
	Overall	721	569			
Factors Related to Teaching and administration	Students	396	264	86.526	0.25	.000
	Teachers	81	49			
	Dropouts	295	205			
	Overall	772	518			
Factors Related to Economic Aspects	Students	421	239	78.368	0.54	.010
	Teachers	89	41			
	Dropouts	352	148			
	Overall	862	428			
Factors Related to Examination	Students	339	321	69.368	0.23	.003
	Teachers	92	38			

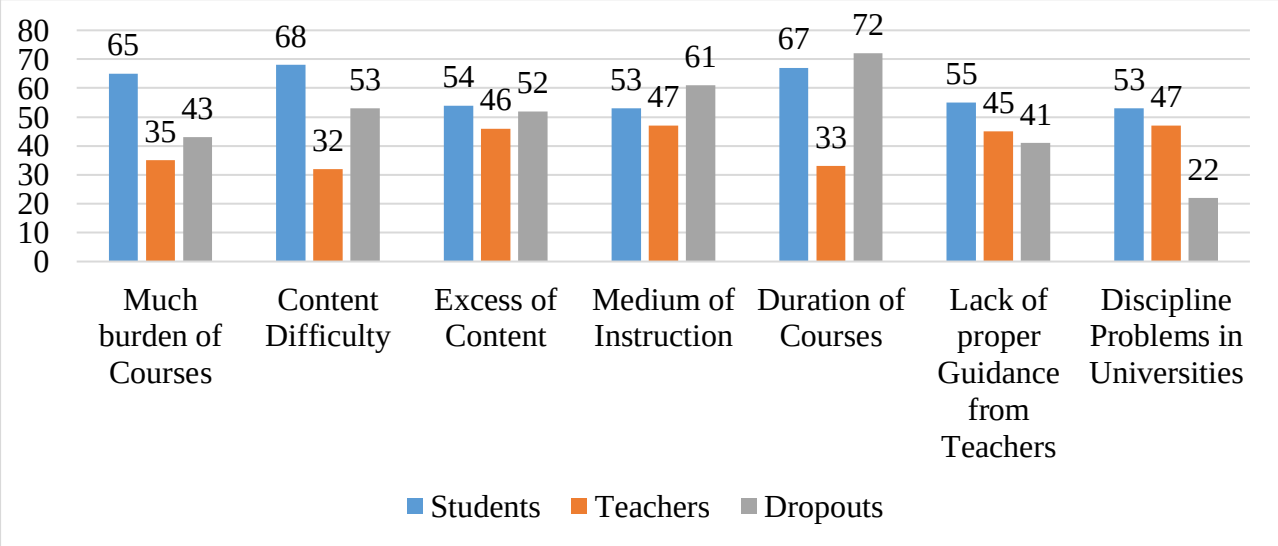
	Dropouts	324	176			
	Overall	755	535			
Factors Related to Physical Facilities	Students	289	371	68.895	0.27	.001
	Teachers	71	59			
	Dropouts	247	253			
	Overall	607	683			
Factors Related to Social Aspects	Students	305	355	49.737	0.29	.000
	Teachers	95	35			
	Dropouts	352	148			
	Overall	752	538			

$p < .05$, v = Cramer's V.

Table 2 highlights the proportions of students, teachers, and dropouts and association among factors of dropout rate in higher education. It is evident that there is positive strong relationship among the factors that caused dropout in higher education (table 2). The most commonly reported factors are content, and teaching and administration. The least claimed factor is social aspect. The association between categories of respondent are found significant on all the factors (p<.05). The highest and stronger association is examined at content related factor with Fisher's exact test value of 94.158 (v = .23, p = .001).

Figure 1

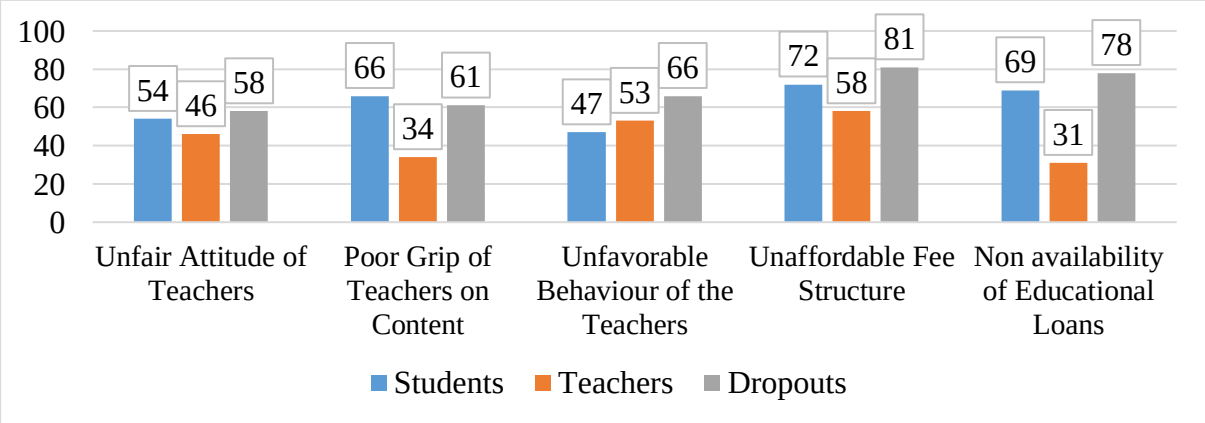
Content Related Factors



It can be observed in figure 1 that there are differences among the perceptions of participants. The student and dropouts are agreed that content related factors caused dropout in comparison to others, While, teachers are less agreed on these statements. Most of (72%) dropouts claimed that duration of program is of the major causes of dropout rate, while majority of students (68%) expressed content difficulty. The least (22% dropouts) agreed that there are discipline problems in universities.

Figure 2

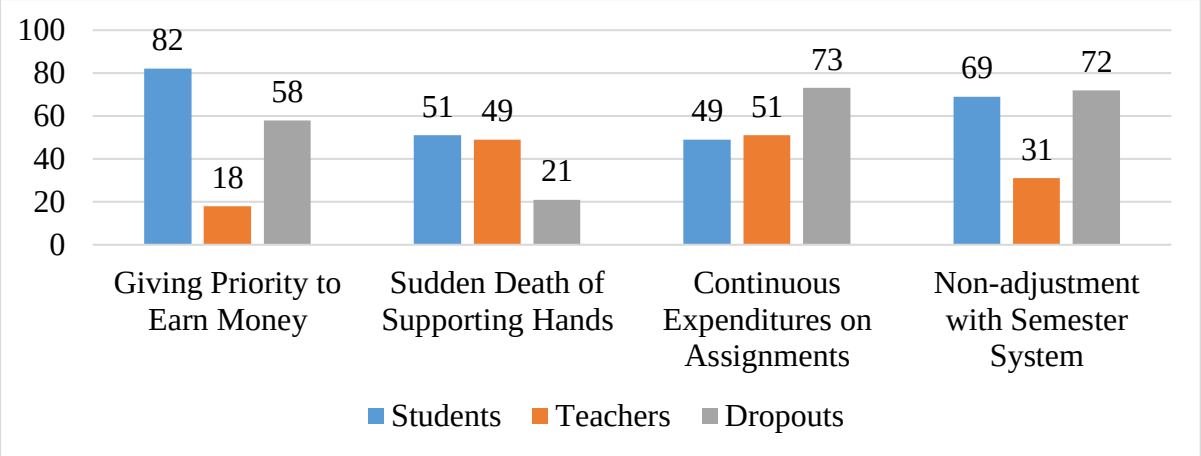
Factors Related to Teaching and administration



Most of dropouts (81%), students (72%), and teachers (58%) demonstrated that they face unaffordable fee structure. It is found that students and dropouts do not have any easy educational loans to continuous their education. While, teaching unfair attitude, unfavorable behavior, and weak content grip added reasons of dropout.

Figure 3

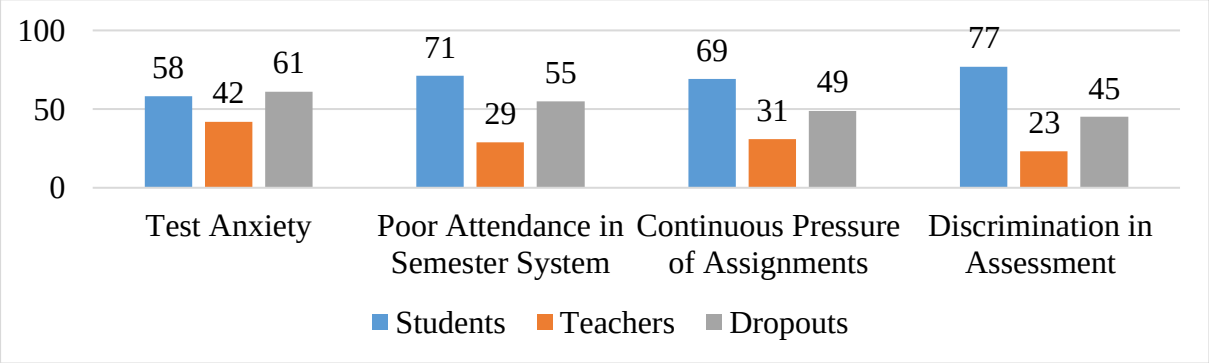
Factors Related to Economic Aspects



A greater number of students (82%) expressed that they prefer to earn money more than higher education due to economic issues. While dropouts exhibited that they could not continue their education due to expenses (73%) and unadjusted system (72%) with their socioeconomic status. While, least number of teachers (18%) believe that students and dropouts prefer earning money.

Figure 4

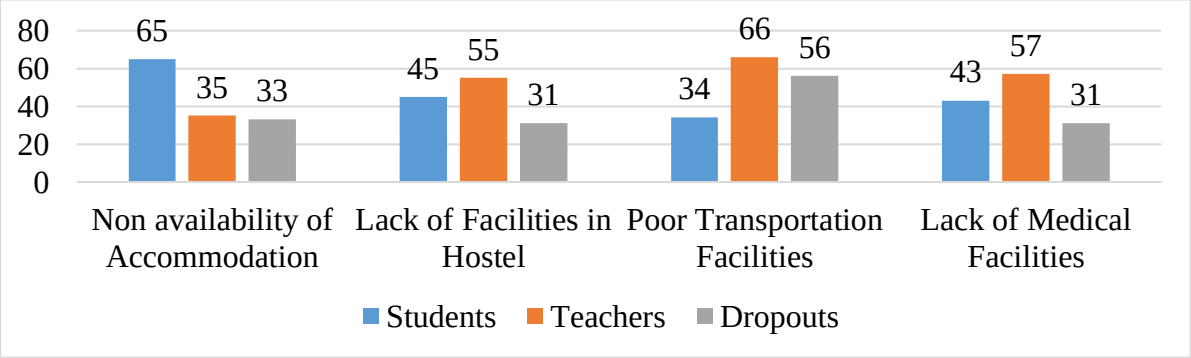
Factors Related to Examination



It is examined that text anxiety (58% students & 61% dropouts), attendance system (71% students & 55% dropouts), and overburdened assignments (69% students & 49% dropouts) increases the cause of dropout in examination related factors. Maximum number of students (77%) and lowest number of teachers (23%) admitted that there is discrimination in our examination system.

Figure 5

Factors Related to Physical Facilities



It is displayed in figures 5 that most of the students and dropouts admitted that there are limited physical resources in institutions. 66% of teachers and 56% dropouts agreed that there are improper transportation facilities especially for girls. While, 65% complained about non availability of accommodations in institutions. Meanwhile, 57% expressed that there is lack of medical facilities for students.

Figure 6
Factors Related to Social Aspects

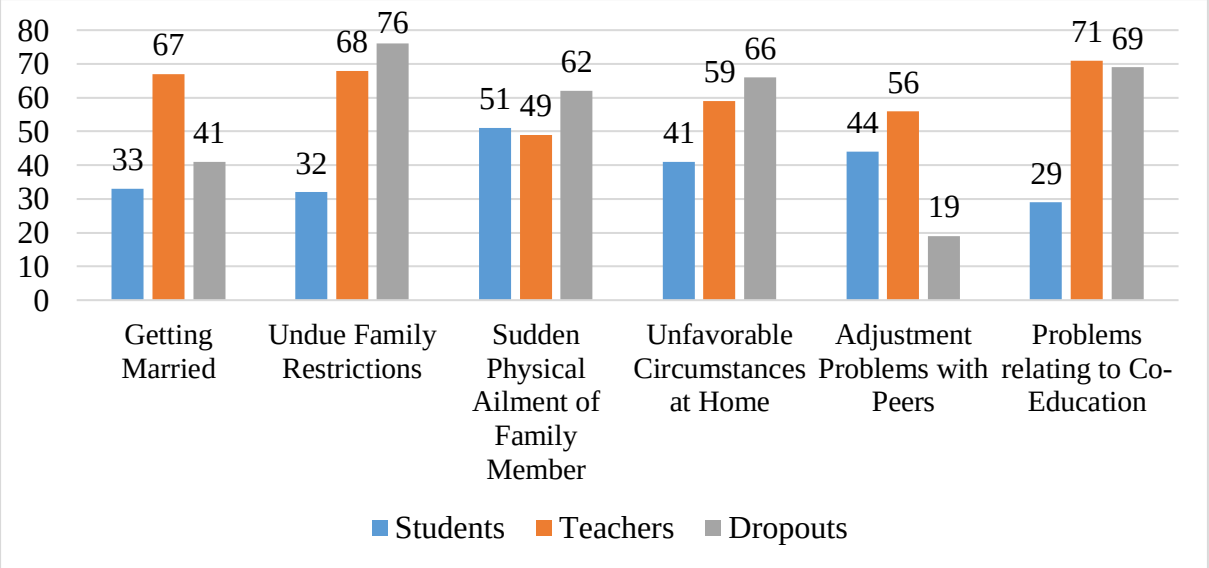


Figure 6 showed social elements that affect dropout rate in higher education. The problem related to co-education scored (71% teachers & 69% dropouts), family restriction for higher education (68% teachers & 76% dropouts), and unfavorable domestic circumstances (59% students & 66% dropouts). It can be noticed that majority of teachers believe that marriage during education (67%), family boundaries (68%), and coeducation (71%) are the major disruption in higher education. While, maximum number of students support that ailment of family member can be caused of dropouts. In last majority of dropouts stated that family restrictions (76%), ailment of family member (62%), domestic environment (66%), and coeducation (69%) greatly affect dropout rate in higher education

Table 3: Association between dropouts' regret about educational disruption and their gender

		Male	Female	Fisher's exact test	*p*	df
Any regret to make you feel upset about educational disruption?	No	58%	31%	Chi-square = 41.32	.010	1
	Yes	42%	69%			

Table 3 demonstrated the demographical relationship of dropouts' gender and their disappointment towards incomplete education. 58% of male dropouts are found without any regret on educational discontinuity while on the other side, 69% of female felt regret on their education disruption. The association based on gender and dropout regret is sound significant the Fisher's exact test value of 41.32 (df = 1) with p = .010. It is understood that the female dropouts' disappointment is significantly associated with educational discontinuity more than male dropouts.

4.2. Qualitative Part

4.2.1. Summary of Interviews with Dropouts

Twenty-four respondents were reported to have dropped out of the study but researcher was able to reach them telephonically and asked each five questions.

Q1: What was the primary reason behind the BS Program dropout decision?

Fourteen of them mentioned that due to financial constraints, they dropped out of the program as they could not afford to continue and three said that course difficulty and medium of instruction was a reason that made them drop out while four said that death within the family made them drop out.

Q2: How satisfied are you with fee structure of universities?

Among the dropout, twenty of them focused on the dissatisfaction they have over overwhelming fee structure of universities while four of them did not have anything to say about this question.

Q3: What was your teachers' behavior in classroom/ University?

According to the sixteen dropouts, when they tried to talk to professors about their personal and academic issues, they were not given the right advice but instead were discouraged. The reason for their dropout was never of interest to the teachers. However, four of the respondents were quite satisfied with the teachers' behavior.

Q4: Were you able to discover that treatment of teachers in university was discriminative?

Eighteen of dropouts shared with the researcher that personal liking and disliking of teachers in assessment and evaluation expedited their way to dropout while six opined that psychological harassment of teachers increased their dropout.

Q5: Did you satisfy with the facilities availed by the university management?

Dropouts of Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan and Lahore College for Women University, Lahore were comparatively more satisfied with the facilities provided by their university while the dropouts of University of Sargodha and Government College University, Faisalabad were dissatisfied with the facilities of accommodations and transportations while dropouts from other university of the Punjab were reluctant to answer the question.

Summary of Thematic Analysis

Theme	Codes	Frequency
Financial Constraints	Lack of Financial Resources	14 out of 24
	Dissatisfaction with Fee Structure	20 out of 24
	No comment on Fee Structure	4 out of 24
Academic Challenges	Content Difficulty and Medium of Instruction	6 out of 24
Personal Circumstances	Sudden Family Death	4 out of 24
Teacher-Student Interaction	Lack of Proper Guidance and Discouragement	16 out of 24
	Satisfactory Teacher Behavior	8 out of 24
Teachers' behavior	Personal Liking and Disliking in Assessment	18 out of 24
	Psychological Harassment	6 out of 24
University Facilities	Satisfaction with University Facilities	8 out of 24
	Dissatisfaction with University Facilities	16 out of 24

5. Findings

The study identified several factors contributing to the dropout rate in 4-year Bachelor programs in Universities, which were categorized into Content-related Factors, Teaching and Administrative factors, Economic Aspects, Examination-related Factors, Physical Facilities, and Social Aspects. The Majority of the respondents (students 68% and dropouts 53%) cited that the course content was too difficult; they mentioned excessive content as a reason for dropping out. Issues with the medium of instruction affected 53% of students and 61% of dropouts, and 72% of dropouts found the course duration problematic. A significant number of dropouts 81% and students 72% were complaining about heavy fee structure in Universities, while 66% dropouts reported unfavorable behavior of the teachers; they were also dissatisfied regarding the grip of teachers on their Content. The study also revealed that due to heavy academic cost, the students preferred to earn money than that of education due to economic constraints. The findings of study mentioned that dropouts as well as students (58% and 61%) were dissatisfied with the assessment system. They experienced test anxiety, inappropriate attendance system and discriminatory grading of teachers. Furthermore, the dropouts and students highlighted about poor physical facilities, transportation and lack of accommodations in universities as a reason of dropouts. Moreover, a great number of respondents indicated that they were of certain family restrictions and unfavorable domestic circumstances which add the miseries of the students and dropouts as well.

6. Discussion & Conclusion

The dropout phenomenon in 4-year degree programs in Universities is a multifaceted issue influenced by a variety of factors, each contributing significantly to the overall dropout rate. The comprehensive analysis of this study has provided a clear insight to the factors.

Academic challenges have been identified as an important factor of student dropout. Students faced significant challenges due to the medium of instruction, the amount and complexity of the course material. This curriculum was too much for many learners and prevented them from learning and adapting. This is in line with Tinto's (2017) model that posits integration into academics helps in retaining the students. Thus, to decrease dropout rates, it is necessary to ensure that the curriculum is understandable and students are provided with sufficient academic support. The findings are in concordance with Haider (2008) and Mbilinyi (2003) who noted that when courses and curricula are very demanding and when courses offered do not suit the students, they are discouraged from pursuing them.

Economic limitations were cited as one of the major challenges that affected the process of student retention. A lot of students were left their study due to the high fee structures and recurrent cost of education. This finding supports Pascarella and Terenzini (2020) who note that financial difficulties lead to high student dropouts. Financial aid can ease the burden of paying tuition fees, and make it possible for students to pay their fees through installments, or even offer scholarships which would encourage students to go back to school. Sweeten (2004) and other authors' findings also revealed the relationship between poverty and dropping out.

The dropout rates were also affected by institutional factors including inadequate physical facilities and managerial practices. Students and dropouts indicated that issues related to transportation, housing, and medical facilities affected their education in a negative way. Astin (2018)'s study shows the significance of a supportive environment of campus is to keep students. To address these issues, the institutional infrastructure must be developed, and a positive learning environment must be cultivated.

Dropout rates were significantly influenced by examination-related variables, including test anxiety, strict attendance policies, and the perception of bias in evaluation. These elements produced a demanding learning environment that caused many pupils to lose interest. Reducing stress and increasing student retention can be achieved by making revisions to the examination system to make it more accommodating and encouraging.

It was also observed that social and psychosocial factors contributed significantly to the student dropout. unfavorable domestic condition, restriction of family and issues of co-education were some of the major challenges that affected many students particularly the female students. Bean and Eaton (2021) wrote about the effects of social integration and mental health on retention. By engaging the community and supporting social issues, students can help overcome these problems and retention in their educational programs. The study also showed how discouraging behaviour, biased attitude of teachers, and poor guidance services affected the dropout rates of students. This supports the conclusions made by Stake & Norman (1985) and UNESCO (2006) that prejudice and discrimination result in the failure of education.

The study also revealed that lack of transport and accommodation facilities, getting married and unfavorable conditions at home were also the cause of dropout. The findings are align with Colclough et al. (2000) who pointed out that early marriages reduce education achievements especially for the female students. Also, the students considered the four-year degree program as not meeting the international standards hence the dropouts. Raza & Naqvi (2011) pointed out that universities need to redesign their curriculum for the purpose of enhancing the quality as per international-standards.

Quantitative data reveals some of the major difficulties like course difficulty, lack of funds, and unfavorable teaching and administrative practices while qualitative data derived from the dropout interviews reveal the criticality of financial problems, bad interaction with teachers, and lack of adequate facilities in the universities. It is crucial to address these issues through curriculum revision, financial aid programs, institutional improvements, examination reforms, and improvements in social support services in order to minimize the dropout rate and create a more supportive educational environment.

7. Recommendations

Following recommendations were made in the light of findings and conclusions of the study:

The study material of 4 years BS programs should be revised to match the actual needs of the students.

The duration of 4-year degree programs should be rationalized.

It is important to prevent biased teaching practices and unnecessary favouritism. It should be observed by heads to make it sure that some students may not be favoured without merit.

Teachers should improve their differentiated instructional strategies to tackle with individual needs. Therefore, workshops should be organized by the HEC for this purpose.

Thus, university administration should employ strict measures in observing the general conduct within the university compound; proper utilization of Information Technology.

The government should provide educational loans to university students.

The educational institution should establish connections with foreign institutions in order to improve the efficacy of the current BS (Hon) programs.

Universities should ensure counselling and guidance facilities for their students during the time of admissions to choose the disciplines of their preference.

7.1. Future Research Directions

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of implemented interventions on dropout rates.

Comparative studies between public and private sector universities could provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of different retention strategies.

Additionally, exploring the impact of specific interventions, such as academic support programs and financial aid, on student retention can provide valuable information for policy and practice.

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