Factors Influencing on Dropouts at Undergraduate Level in Private Universities of Bangladesh: A Case Study

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Abstract

Private universities are playing a significant role in expanding education in Bangladesh. Every year many students get admitted into these universities. However, many of the students cannot complete their graduation level. The main purpose of this paper was to conduct an investigative study on factors influencing on dropouts at undergraduate level in the private universities of Bangladesh. For achieving the purpose of the study, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used. A dropout survey was developed to determine the factors which influence students’ attrition from the university programs. 100 students who had dropped out were asked to explain the causes behind their decisions. They have been contacted over phone or personally. The findings of the study show that the most important factors affecting students’ dropouts are the pressure of study, financial problems, and going abroad took the second and the third places. Some recommendations based on research findings have also been included in this paper to control this leakage.

Keywords: Dropouts, Private University, Leakage Control, Graduation Level

1. Introduction

Students’ dropout means discontinuing schooling for some reasons. In general, dropping out means the situation when students depart school before completing their graduation degree and does not join any university. Student dropout means leaving school without completing their basic early education and secondary education.

Students’ dropout is a serious issue for all developed and the developing countries of the world. In developing countries, dropout rate is remarkably high, even for the basic school going children (Graeff-Martins et al., 2006). Large numbers of students complete their high school education in many developed countries, but in the United States, more than 1 million students drop out each year. 7 thousand students in the United States of America (USA) left their school in a day. Bangladesh is a developing country. Every year many students leave school for various reasons. “The Daily Sun,” a popular English newspaper in Bangladesh, investigates the cause of dropping out of students. It reports (June 28, 2016) that despite taking many steps and applying efforts, the dropout rate in primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels is not decreasing at the expected level. It is still high. Poverty, child marriage, high-priced note-guide books, compulsory coaching, and weak teaching system are responsible for the high dropout rates. If 100 students get enrolled in class one, out of them, only 32 students retain till intermediate level, the rest 68 students drop out of the educational institution. Although incentives in the form of stipend, free textbooks distribution at a cost of millions of dollars, school-feeding programs are going on, dropout rate is not decreasing. Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) disclosed this fact recently. The Education Minister told the newsmen that some causes of dropouts are – marriage of the students belonging to ultra-poor families, students entering
job market due to poverty, failing in the test examination, and final examination. Girl students drop out mainly due to marriage and the location of colleges in distance. In 2014, World Bank mission released a report on education of Bangladesh which also showed almost the same reasons of dropout along with poverty, weak teaching method, and weaker base of students. Students leave schools in phases from class 1 to 12. It has been recorded that from 1 to class 5, students drop out at every class. There lies a difference between the students registered for PEC examination and the numbers of students really sit for this examination. After getting the results published, the students who fail also drop out but a few of them restart their studies. The same thing happens in the SSC and HSC examinations. It has been received from the records of the statistics of Education Ministry and public examinations that 22 lakh 72 thousand and 289 students took part in the JSC and JDC examinations in 2015. Out of them, 20 lakh 82 thousand passed and 1 lakh 74 thousand and 207 students failed. Moreover, more than 1 lakh students registered, but they did not fill up the examination forms. Thus, about 2 lakh and 75 thousand dropped out in 1 year. For appearing in the SSC examination in 2016, 16 lakh 95 thousand and 467 students registered in class 9. Out of them, 16 lakh 51 thousand and 523 appeared in the SSC examination and passed 14 lakh 52 thousand and 605. They are invited to take admission in the higher secondary level, but 13 lakh 1 thousand and 99 applied. It shows that 3 lakh 94 thousand and 368 students dropped out in 2 years between their registration in class 9 and till intermediate. Dropout rate here is more than 26%. 13 lakh 3 thousand and 331 students passed the SSC and 12 lakh 2 thousand and 617 students got enrolled in class 11 in 2014. Out of them, 9 lakh 61 thousand and 702 took part in examinations. According to this account, 2 lakh 40 thousand and 915 students left educational institution. 1 lakh 11 thousand and 672 boys and 1 lakh 29 thousand and 243 girl students that mean girl students drop out more than boys. From SSC to HSC, more than 26% students drop out in 2 years. BANBEIS has developed another report reflecting on the education scenario. It shows that dropout rate in secondary level is 40.29%. In higher secondary level, it is 22.70%. Directorate of Primary Education released a report in December 2015 showing the dropout rate in primary 20.4%. It also says that students drop out in every class from 1 to 5 but another 6% gets reenrolled. BANBEIS report says student’s enrolment has decreased about 4 lakh from 2014 to 2015 in primary level. In secondary level, this rate has slightly decreased in 2015 than in 2014 but increased in higher secondary level. In 2014, secondary level dropout was 41.59%. In 2015, it became 40.29%. In higher secondary level, dropout rate was 21.37% in 2014, it was 22.70 in 2015. From primary to university, total 3 crore 66 lakh 46 thousand and 519 students study. Girl students among them is 1 crore 84 lakh and 637 which is half of the total student population. Hence, average student equality is maintained which is undoubtedly good news. However, this alarming rate of drop out induces the researchers to think of the dropout scenario at different levels of education. As a matter of interest, this study tries to scrutinize the dropout scenario at tertiary level of education with a particular attention to the dropout cases of Port City International University (PCIU), Chittagong, Bangladesh. The researchers tried to investigate whether the reasons behind dropouts at the primary and the secondary levels are same as that of undergraduate level. While working with this issue, it has been found that most of the researchers on dropout issues have done either for primary or for secondary education level. For this reason, it has created a scope for the researchers to deal with the dropout scenario on graduation level. The honorable Founder, President, and Chairman of the Board of Trustee of PCIU, Chittagong, Bangladesh, also emphasizes on finding out the factors for dropout and to detect the measures to control dropout at the graduation level in Bangladesh.

1.1. Significance of the study

Although many studies have been done on the primary and the secondary school dropout in Bangladesh, at the undergraduate level, it remains opened for research. It is seen from the secondary sources that several programs and policies had been taken to curb dropout, but the result is not fruitful. Besides, multidimensional factors are interwoven with dropping out of the students and to control the dropout reasons at primary to graduate levels is definitely a complex one. Hence, it is a new insight into focus on dropout scenario at the university level in Bangladesh. As the number of public and private universities is increasing day-by-day, and the number of students is also increasing, it is high time to concentrate on
the dropout issue at the graduation level and identify the measures to control it. To do so, a case study has been conducted by the researchers on the dropout students of PCIU, Bangladesh, as a sample to find out the factors and their solutions. To evaluate this, the causes of dropout at primary and secondary levels are also taken into consideration. Hence, the purpose of this study is not only to investigate the factors of dropout at graduation level but also to integrate the overall reasons of dropout at different levels of education and to make a conceptual framework by which the level of dropout can be controlled at undergraduate and other levels of education in Bangladesh. This paper will help the policymakers to take the best strategies for building an early warning system that can signal which institutions are most in need of controlling dropout problem. On the other hand, the study will also be beneficial for the guardians of the learners to understand the internal and the external reasons of dropout and to provide them an idea about their contribution to minimize dropout at different levels of education.

1.2. Research questions

• What are the reasons of student dropouts?
• What are the ways to combat with student dropouts?

1.3. Objective of the Study

The study was conducted to find out the overall reasons for dropout of students from the undergraduate level. The following are the specific objectives of the study:

1. To identify the major academic, social, family, financial, job related, and personal causes of students drop out at graduation level.
2. To identify the impact of dropout in the society.
3. To make recommendations to reduce the chances of high dropout.

Findings of this research would be helpful for the policymakers to curb dropouts in educational institutes. Besides, this research would be helpful for making policies to enhance quality education in our country and increase economic progress. Quality education is most desirable objective of a country (Saadi and Saeed, 2010). It is believed that the country will be developed where a large proportion of its budget is allocated on education.

2. Research Methodology

The case study was limited to graduate students of PCIU, Bangladesh. There are 11 programs at three faculties at PCIU. Up to the date of the study, there are 3272 students enrolled in the programs where 326 students are found dropouts. A sample of 31% of total dropouts was taken by simple random sampling technique. In the round Figure, the sample dropouts were 100 students. The samples were taken purposively so that the objectives of the study could be fulfilled. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data; the data were collected from classrooms, administrative officers concerned for the semester wise course registration. Primarily, the names, roll numbers, and the contact details of the dropout students were collected, and accordingly, they have been interrogated over mobile phones. The university students’ information server has played a significant role in contacting with the dropout students. The data were tabulated and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel.

2.1. A case study of PCIU, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Dropout is a common affair in the education sector not only in Bangladesh but also the whole world. PCIU, Bangladesh, is one of the youngest private universities. It launched functioning on the May 17, 2013. In the first batch, 69 students were admitted. The present number of registered students up to Spring 2016 midterm in the three faculties is 3272. Out of this, 326 students are found as dropouts, which is 9.97% of the total number of students. In other private universities in Bangladesh which have
higher tuition fee, the rate of dropouts ranges from 24% to 35%. The dropout information of the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) of Dhaka University that was founded in 1966 in collaboration with Indiana University, Bloomington, USA, under a Ford Foundation Financial Assistance Program with the aim of providing professional training to create future business leaders in Bangladesh, will add value in this perspective. IBA, as the pioneer of Master of Business Administration (MBA), started its journey by launching its flagship MBA program. According to a recent study, it has been found that in its MBA program, 200 students get admitted. Out of these 200 students, about 125 students pass out. Hence, the rate of dropout is 37.5%. In its newly commenced BBA program, the rate of dropout is about 30%. The main reason of this dropout is the pressure of study. Another reason that has been mentioned by some of the students is that most of the students are involved in services.

2.2. Analysis of dropouts in total

Our sample size was 100 out of the 326 dropout students. On the basis of sample survey, the following analysis in total is shown in the bar chart. It is seen in the chart that the reason of the highest dropouts is connected with academic problem and the lowest dropout is insecurity. It can be guessed from the chart that the amount of learning that PCIU takes from the students is very low. It is found from the analysis that the level of security at PCIU is very good as only 0.5% student said that dropout was due to insecurity as shown in Figure 1.

The above scenario can also be displayed through a pie diagram. From the pie diagram, it is seen that financial crisis is the chief cause of dropout. The second highest reason mentioned by the dropout students is the reason for higher pressure of study. Besides, various reasons are related to dropout who includes job-related problem, family problem, going abroad, changed university, and security problem as shown in Figure 2.

2.2.1. Analysis by university study-related causes

Duerksen (1972) summarizes several studies on instrumental music dropouts. One study reported that 34% students mentioned that they dropped out due to the difficulties of the instrumental program. From the Duerksen study, it is seen that the difficulty level of study materials is related to dropouts. At PCIU, Bangladesh, all the faculty members always try their utmost to impart quality education to the learners. In our analysis, it has been found that the guardians are very much conscious of their son’s or daughter’s career. When a guardian notices that his/her son/daughter is not doing well in the courses, the guardian gets worried. The guardian finally takes the son/daughter out of the university. It is seen from the total study-related problem that 50% has been dropped due to pressure of study, 35% has been dropped due to...
out due to weakness in English, 4% could not adjust with the environment, 8% failed in the courses, and 3% students are dropped out as their credits from another universities were not accepted. Due to weakness in English, the students are dropped out as all the texts followed in teaching are in Standard American English. The course curriculum of the most renowned universities of the USA is followed in this university. The students cannot cope with English and feel bored, which leads them to drop out. Pressure of study is large at this university. As a result, the admitted students have left the university with much pain as shown in Figure 3.

Reasons of university study-related dropouts can also be apparently shown through a pie chart. From the following pie diagram, it is seen that a large portion of the circle has been covered with the study pressure. Dropout for study pressure is the strength of the university, and this credit should be awarded to the faculty members. The faculty members are dedicated and serious enough to ensure the quality education for the students as shown in Figure 4.

2.2.2. Analysis by the financial causes
PCIU, Bangladesh, is one of the cheapest among the private universities in Bangladesh. The amenities offered by this university in comparison to its fee structure have been appreciated by the guardians and education experts. In the meantime, it has achieved popularity for it’s less expensive but quality education. The researchers have extracted data about the fee structures of different universities, which are providing the same level of education but vary in cost of education. From the comparison to those universities, it is seen that the fee structure of PCIU, Bangladesh, is lowest although it is providing the same quality education. It can be clearly seen from the following bar diagram. Why is it doing so? ASA as the leading Non-Government Organization (NGO) in Bangladesh has an aim to bring quality education to the doors of the poor as shown in Figure 5.
The causes of dropout are many. Onset of puberty resulting into engagement and marriage, household chores mainly looking after children, financial crisis at home is very common causes for high dropout rate among girls. For boys, the main causes of drop out are financial crisis, inability to give good results in the school examinations and the need to be productive and contribute to the family income (Sharmila, 2008). The researchers have identified that among all the causes stated relating to financial crisis dropouts, 70% students fallen into financial crisis after getting admission at the university, 10% students have been dropped out due to the cancel of waiver, and 20% dropped out as a result of large amount of accumulated dues. The Founder, President, and Chairman of PCIU, Bangladesh, have already announced more 44,42,560 taka as scholarship in different criteria (e.g.,

**Figure 3:** Dropouts for academic problems in graph chart

![Academic Problems Graph](image)

**Figure 4:** Dropouts for academic problems in pie chart

![Academic Problems Pie Chart](image)
result based, merit based, need based, and different quotas) to 112 students in Spring 2016 Trimester. It has been found that the students who have been dropped out for financial crisis after admission only their family in financial crisis.

There are many reasons behind financial crisis: Sudden loss of job of the main earning member and dropping in farmers’ crop price. As an example, it can be referred that a good number of students who dropped out due to financial crisis mention that their brothers or fathers have been sent to Bangladesh from abroad. It is a generous practice at PCIU, Bangladesh, that the students have been allowed to appear at the final examination even after having the whole semester’s fee due. Hence, the university was going through the changes. The dues have become large as shown in Figure 6.

2.2.3. Analysis by job-related causes
This factor is very much alike to the financial problem of the students. Low financial position reported as major cause of students’ dropouts (Khan et al., 2011). Students drop out their school to fulfill their

**Figure 5:** Comparison of tuition fees in other universities of Bangladesh

![Comparison of Tuition Fees](image)

**Figure 6:** Dropouts for financial problems in pie chart

![Financial Problems](image)
financial needs (Rani, 2011). At the end of first semester, Shamim decided that he would not come back
at PCIU, Bangladesh. With family problems and ever-growing financial problems, Shamim left his
mess bag and baggage and said goodbye to his friends in mess. Shamim is a part of growing population
of students who are, for various reasons, leaving their education. Students’ opinion regarding dropout
of university is different. Some, like Shamim, drops out due to financial strain or family problems.
Shamim said that his family issues were resolved very quickly, but the financial problems did not go
away so easily. He has left varsity to assist his family. Now, he is an MD of a factory. Some said that
they got jobs and left the university. In the findings of the survey, it is seen that 4.5% students have left
the university due to getting job and involving in business. Most of them are involved in business as
shown in Figure 7.

2.2.4. Analysis by family-related problem
In Bangladesh, women are always deprived of education for early marriage. It has been found in many
researches that after marriage, many girls were not allowed to go to schools, colleges, and universities.
Early marriages, security problems and inability of bearing education expenses are major causes of
students’ dropouts (Abdullah-Al-Mamun et al., 2012). Parents force their daughters to drop their school
(Tan, 2007). In this paper, it has also been found that the married girls have left the university as their
husbands and guardians prohibited them from going to university. Out of 18 females, family-related
dropouts 14 (i.e. 77%) have been dropped out due to marriage. Family problem includes separation of
parents, death of the main member of the family, and accident by other family members as shown in
Figure 8.

2.2.5. Analysis by types of university change
From the 100 dropout students of PCIU, Bangladesh, 20 students say that the causes of their dropping
out are to change their university. Three main causes have been found for changing their university.
Among them, to study their chosen subjects and to switch to the other private universities were equal in
percentage. To enroll in a public university is another cause of dropping out from their institution which
belongs to 25% under this category of dropping out as shown in Figure 9.

After investigating all the above-stated causes for changing their university, it has been found
that about 30% students were not satisfied with their existing programs and so, they would like to
switch to their preferred programs from this university. On the contrary, around 28% dropout students
within this category who believe that the educational program and the images of public universities are
comparatively better than that of private universities, they would also like to leave PCIU, Bangladesh.
The causes of switching to other private universities are totally frictional. That means they have
voluntarily taken their decision to enroll into other private universities either due to their preintention
to get admitted into that university or for any other comparative advantage related to internal or external

Figure 7: Dropouts for job related problems

![Figure 7: Dropouts for job related problems](image)
issue. The severe pressure of study may also influence some students to switch over to other private universities. Students who get poor grades at PCIU, Bangladesh, or failing to cope with the standard education system are more likely to switch to the other private universities also.

2.3. Analysis by other causes

It has also been found that eight other causes are related to dropout from PCIU, Bangladesh, among them, the reason of post admission at a university overseas for higher studies is the highest in percentage. Around 12% students who became disappointed in continuing their studies have also dropped out as they were not serious in study and showed poor academic performance at this university. As the university is very strict in its rules and regulations regarding class attendance and their performance, it also creates a mismatch between the university’s objectives and their attitudes. For this, they are also leaving this university. Almost all the other reasons of dropout are low in percentage but heterogeneous. Among them, the accidental reasons, migration abroad, and distance from home to the university are insignificant in percentage. Besides, about 9% students say that severe illness is their causes of dropout which is equal to the percentage of those dropout students whose reason of dropout is to go abroad.
with their family members. On the contrary, almost 14% students are reluctant to state their causes of dropping out as shown in Figure 10.

2.4. Credit Transfer (CT) Batch Analysis

To evaluate the overall dropout scenario at PCIU, Bangladesh, the researchers have also collected the data of dropout from different programs of the university. The data of CT batch have been shown in the following bar diagram.

It is seen that the students who came at this university from other university could not cope up with the environment. Out of 19 students admitted in the law department, only eight students have registered for the Spring 2016. From this data, it is seen that 11 students have either dropped the semester or have left the university. Dropout rate in case of CT students is about 58%. Among the causes stated by the CT students, study pressure is the first, new environment and new teachers would be the second and third causes for dropouts of CT batch students as shown in Figure 11.

The position of English department about CT batch is comparatively better than that of law department. In English department, out of 19 CT students, 4 have been left, which is 21% of the CT students admitted in English department as shown in Figure 12.

2.5. Recommendation

To control the worse situation of students’ dropouts from the private universities, the authority should take some remedial measures such as:
1. Counseling hours by the faculty members should be increased to motivate the students. In this case, some incentives can be offered for the faculty members.
2. Remedial English courses should be commenced. If a student cannot qualify in the remedial courses, he/she will not be allowed to the mainstream of programs.
3. Waiver policy can be revised for the betterment of the poor and the bright students.
4. Campus job can be offered to the brilliant and impoverished students.
5. Donation can be searched from the various donor agencies to assist the needy students.
6. Study loan can be managed both from banks and from the other NGOs.
7. Study loan can be offered to provide financial support.
8. The authority can offer large scholarships for brilliant and impoverished students.
9. Influences of external powers should be abolished from private universities which have adverse effect on educational system.

Figure 10: Dropouts for other problems
10. Regarding the family-related problems, the university has very little things to do. Community awareness seminar can be launched to raise the interest of parents and students toward study and avoid varsity dropout. Even the university can launch a campaign for the awareness of the people to allow the girls to go to the university.

11. CT batch should not be admitted because they do not stay at the university.

12. The offered courses should be reviewed and adopted according to the market demand and international standard (Latif et al., 2015).

13. The university has few measures to take regarding the change of university. Even they can enhance the physical facilities such as increasing the number of computer laboratories and science laboratories. Schools should be established with all basic facilities such as; furniture, electricity, water and computer and science lab (Zarif, 2012).
3. Conclusion

This study investigates the causes of students dropouts. It is clear that students’ dropout in private universities is not due to a single reason; there are various reasons behind this. The major reason conducted by the study is low financial and economic position of families and inability to afford educational expenses, academic problem, job-related problem, family problem, and so on. Pressure of study as most important reason, financial problems as the second most important factor and migration at third factor that cause student dropout at private universities in Bangladesh (Islam and Pavel, 2011). Parents’ and students’ interest, death of parent’ and low investment on girls’ education are responsible for dropout (Khan et al., 2011). If these factors are controlled, the dropout rate and the developing quality of education will be ensured. Otherwise, the government’s positive efforts will pale into insignificance.

4. The Way Forward

Further, research will be conducted on large scales to identify the reasons of dropouts. In future research, causes of students’ dropouts can be controlled in special educational institution, and at university level, comparative analysis of causes of students’ dropouts in public and private universities can also be conducted.

References


