

MAJOR DROPOUTS REASONS OF STUDENTS IN E- LEARNING INSTITUTIONS OF PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The E learning institutions are providing most effective way of education with many Socio-Economic benefits. In developing countries of Asia, people have limited financial resources whereas major portion of population is living in backward rural areas. Due to limited resources, the only solution is E learning (EL). Pakistan is also facing many problems for promotion of education in backward rural areas; therefore, Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has provided funds to different universities for starting EL (e.g. UMT, Gomal University etc.). The EL study system has its own challenges. One of the biggest challenges is how to retain students and to minimize the dropouts. There are many factors that are playing a vital role in dropout of students in EL institutions. The purpose of this paper is to highlight major factors/reasons behind the student dropouts in Pakistan, their trend in upcoming years and how to minimize/control these factors. The study also includes the analysis of dropout students in a leading EL university of Pakistan.

Keyword: Higher Education Commission, Trend, Factors.

INTRODUCTION

E learning (EL) and distance learning is quickly gaining ground around the world (Glickman, 2002; Shop.org, 2001). In many developing countries, E learning is considered as a method to train qualified workers in their own socio cultural contexts but still EL programs have a number of drawbacks such as high dropout rates and lack of individualized supervision (Bernard & Amundsen, 1989 ; Blay, 1994 ; Bourdages & Delmotte, 2001 ; Brindley, 1987 ; Fredda, 2000 ; Garrison, 1985, 1987 ; Morgan & Tam, 1999 ; Powell, Conway & Ross, 1990 ; Scalese, 2001 ; Visser, 1998). There are many challenges that developing countries face, starting with access to adequate technologies so that students can enroll in the programs (Oladele, 2001; Intsiful, Okyere & Osae, 2003; Selinger, 2001; Tunca, 2002; Bakhoun, 2002). In such circumstances, the question arises as to whether EL is really an effective way of education for developing countries. The purpose of our study is to highlight the major factors/ reasons behind the dropouts of the students in the EL institutions and their trends in the future. We have based our findings based on the case study of a leading EL institute of Pakistan.

METHOD

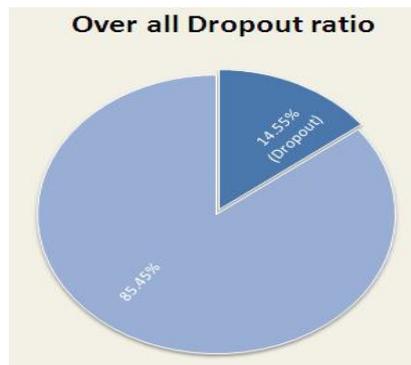
We apply a mixed-method approach, including:

- (1) An online questionnaire targeting students who had left EL program
- (2) Online data base information of dropout students.

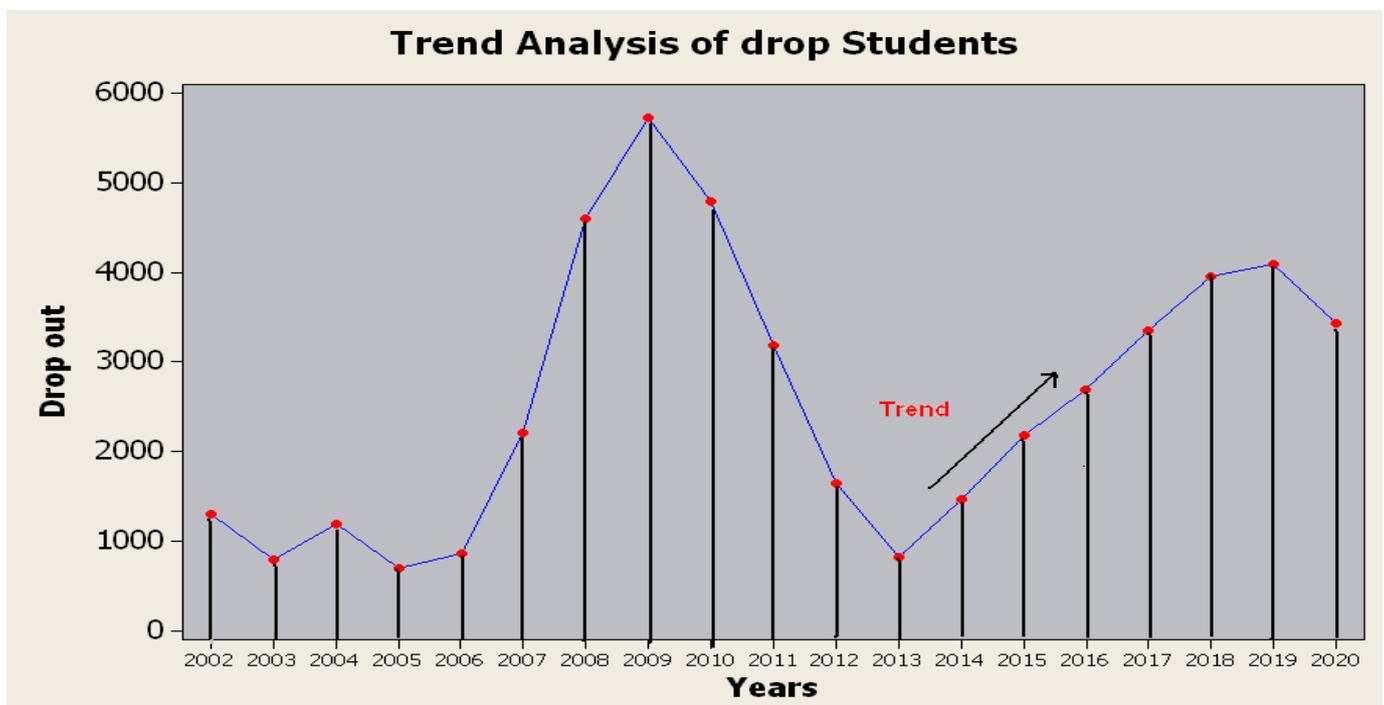
We performed analyses using SPSS 19 and MS Excel 2010 of the data. The results obtained are discussed in the next section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data obtained from different sources is given below:



The figure 1 shows the overall dropout ratio is 14.55% .



Reasons Why Students Left EL

- Majority of Students Leave EL due to Domestic and Personal Problems
- Lots of Students Leave EL due to Financial Problems
- Some Students Leave EL due to Job Restriction
- Many Students Leave EL due to Time Problems
- Some Students Leave EL due to not Satisfied with EL System
- Thousands of Students are inactive due to different reason
- Lots of students are freeze their semesters
- Lots of Faculty members not take interest in Students queries
- Study material and video lectures are not updated
- Very Poor performance of EL Own Campuses
- Some Students Leave EL due to Different Reasons.
- Some Students did not mention any reason
- Due to Illness
- Leave Pakistan etc.

Major Dropout Reasons

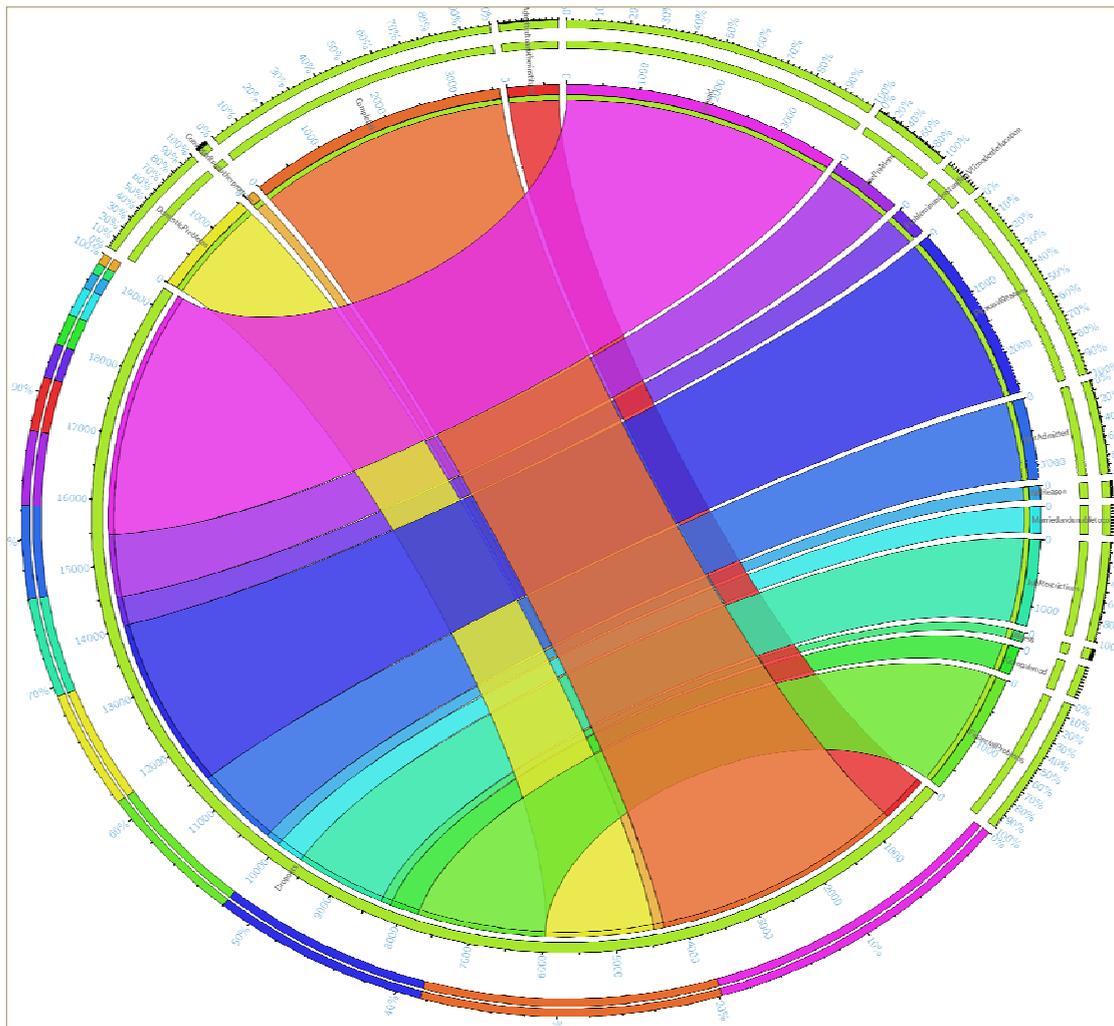


Figure 3

The figure 3 shows the Circos chart in which the width of the ribbon shows the number of dropout reasons where as the most common reason is unpaid dues.

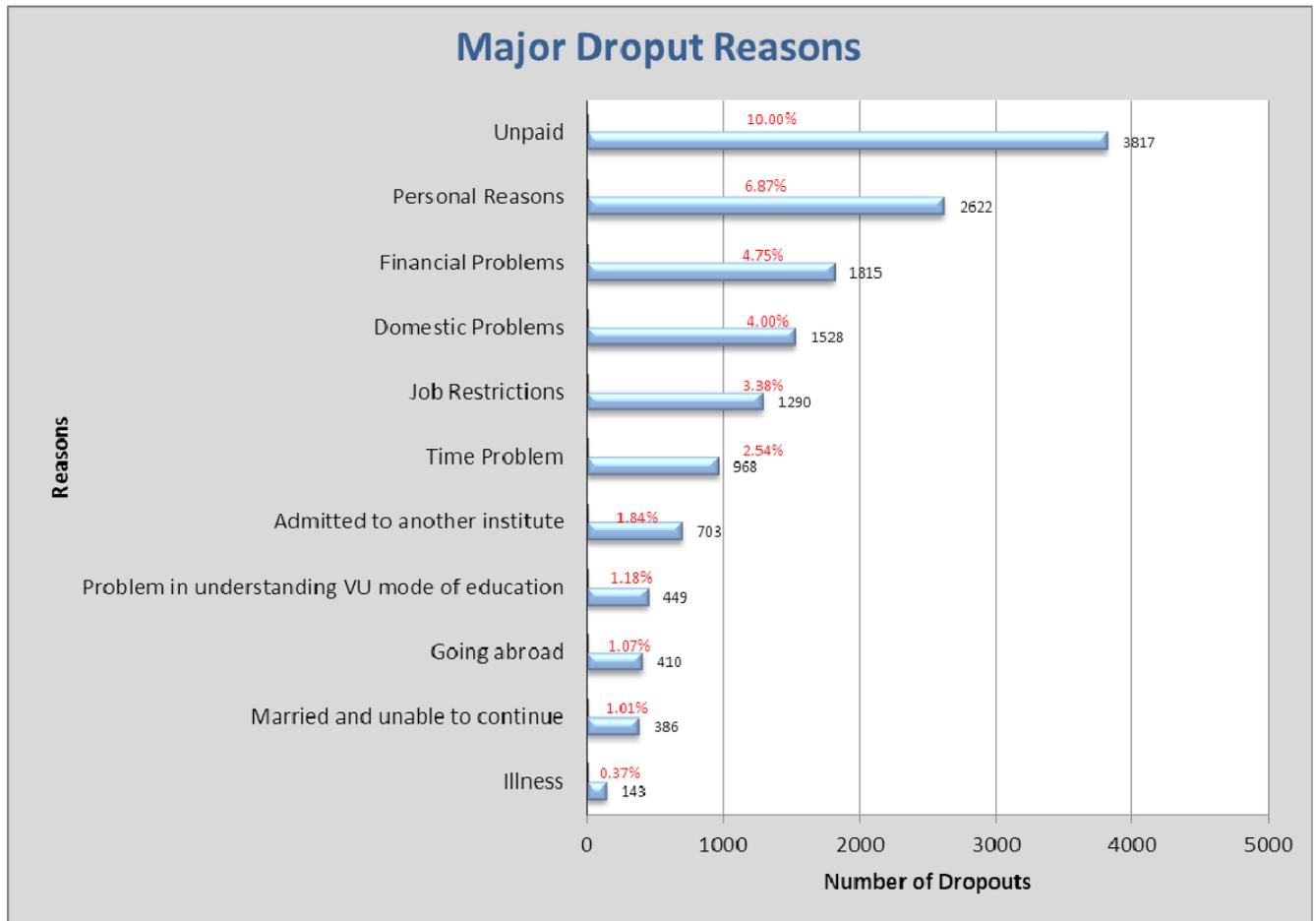


Figure 4

Figure 3 and 4 shows top major reasons for dropouts at EL.

Top 10 Reasons of Dropouts are:

1) Unpaid dues

The highest dropout reason is the unpaid fee. Unpaid fee means student was unable to pay their required dues on the due dates. This continuous unpaid status ultimately put them in the drop out list. The actual reason behind this is not disclosed properly.

2) Personal Problem

Almost seven percent of drop outs quoted that it was their some personal reason due to which they cannot pursue their studies. These personal reasons are undisclosed. Generally, we observe that when students do not want to show their *actual* reason or confused about things or have poor communication then they tend to choose mixed options. The “personal reason” is the safer one.

3) Financial problems

Affordability is an important reason to pursue or drop the higher studies. Students initiate the admission for 2 or 4 year program on some assumption. But due the inflation, poor budgeting, or other pressing finical obligation, they find it difficult to bear the burden of their studies.

4) Domestic Problems

Domestic problem is another good reason for leaving the studies. It includes the hurdle of distance between home and institute, unavailability or poor connectivity of internet at home, no family support, family illness or crisis or parents’ migration to another city.

5) Job restriction

One of the flexibility of online and distance education is that students can continue their studies during job. But it is also observed that many institutes do not encourage their employees for further studies. Even many students

cannot open their online video lectures, handouts and EL emails in the offices. Such restriction leads to frustration and quitting the study.

6) Time problem

Students who take admission face problems to manage time for studies. Every activity in life need some time and focus. Poor time management, no clear prioritization of activities and many other compelling routines and life challenging leave any time for their education. So, they postponed (dropout) studies with the hope that when circumstances will be better, they will do it again.

7) Admitted to another institute

Students may get admissions in multiple institutes and due to the burden of multiple tasks cannot their studies properly. Resultantly, they have to leave their studies.

8) Problem in adopting the online mode of education

There is always an ongoing debate on the comparison of online and traditional mode education. The main point to be noted is that online education should not be treated as the *replacement* of traditional education, rather it is an *alternative* way of education and both systems of education have their own strengths and limitations. The voices from the traditional arena is raised that students face problem in distance learning education but the facts tell us that the students who leave EL just due to its mode of education are less in number. This shows that very large majority have no issues in the adoption of this mode of education.

9) Going abroad

Few students and/or their families move to abroad for personal or professional reasons and these students find it difficult to carry on studies. Although the online education is free from borders and we have a number of students who moved abroad and still continued education from the foreign country.

10) Got married and unable to continue

Marriage is an important life event which brings many happiness in life but it may cause a study break for few students, especially females tend to discontinue their studies due to in-laws' restrictions, moving to new city or other family obligations.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This paper highlights the major dropout reasons in an E-Learning institution of Pakistan. The same types of problems are being faced by other EL institutes. By conduction same type of studies we can elaborate the major reasons of student dropouts and overcome these reasons.

Some suggestion for the major dropout reasons are given below:

An "early alert" program: If a distance learning student hasn't been responding the first few weeks of the course the instructor can pass on the student's name to the computerized system. The student then get e-mail in which we can try to find out the reasons for inactivity and offer him helping solutions. Just like in the recent elections, recorded voice VOIP messages can also be send to students to engage and help them.

Not enough money: The financial burden on students to seek higher education is only growing. Many will drop out because they can't simultaneously manage payments, working, and trying to perform in EL.

- Scholarship to those who gained excellent marks in
- Give semester wise fee concession to those who top the previous semester
- Kinship base fee reduction

Peer tutoring: In conventional education system, the students always get valuable help from senior students. Students who did well in a course in the previous semester can be engage by an instructor to be a peer tutor in the course. The peer tutors help juniors with specific assignments, answering frequently asked questions, and take care of basic student needs in order to free up the instructor's time.

A student success course: A success course can be introduced by focusing on various aspects of online education, "teaching learning skills", "time management skills", and "life skills".

Students need to feel integrated into the program and the institution. A sense of belonging as a student, whether traditional or distance learner, has been shown to be an important aspect in retention, and responsiveness to student's needs is a large determinant in a student feeling like they are part of a course. Intuitively we can assume that if students are not engaged and do not perceive themselves as an integral part of their environment they will likely choose to leave that environment and seek one where their needs are met.

Online Support 24/7: In traditional education it would not sufficient to have a computer technical support desk that is only open during normal university hours. Most online students are working during non-traditional times and may need support in the evenings or on weekends. With that said, there sources (in this case staffing) must be made available to meet the unique needs of distance learners.

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