

Exploring Dropout Reasons of undergraduate Female Students of Virtual University Pakistan

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Abstract

The Virtual University was established in 2002 and it is the first Pakistani University based completely on modern information and communication technologies. The sub campuses are situated in one hundred cities of Pakistan and these campuses are facilitating students to provide infrastructure. The dropout rate is continuously increasing during the last three years. The main objective of the study was to find out the causes of female dropout at undergraduate level. The study was qualitative in nature. A semi structured interview was developed to collect the information. The data was collected from the drop out female students of April, 01, 2015 to March, 30 2016. There were 90 students in all. All the students were enrolled in undergraduate classes and unable to complete their degree. A telephonic interview was conducted and asked them to explain reasons regarding dropout. All the reasons were grouped and five major reasons were identified. The major reasons were: Financial problem, married and unable to continue, time management, unable to understand VU mode of instructions and admitted to another institute. The recommendations were made in the light of findings to minimize the dropout rate of the students.

Keywords: Problems of undergraduate female students, virtual university, causes of dropout

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Introduction

Pakistan, since its birth, realized the importance of education and tried its best to materialize the dream of educating the whole nation. The education Policy was announced immediately after its establishment wherein it was determined to educate all Pakistani people. Earlier the mode of education was the formal education.

Formal education has its own barriers and it is a proven fact that no country can impart education to the whole population by using the formal education mode alone. It has limited capacity in terms of student enrollment. It is much costly and time-consuming as well.

Virtual University of Pakistan is the pioneer university that adopted the ICT technologies to impart education with the slogan "Education at Your Door Step". Initially two satellite TV channels, namely VTV1 and VTV2, were established for the recordings of lectures. Now it has its four TV channels, namely VUTV1 to VUTV4, that can be accessed through Pak sat satellite.

To extend the quality of education with standard, VU selected top level scholars from the top ranking universities of the country and got the video lectures recorded from them against the courses to be offered. Allied material, i.e. lecture slides, lecture handouts, were also prepared by the same scholar. These lectures are broadcasted from VU TV channels that can be watched anywhere in the world. VU has developed its own open courseware (<http://ocw.vu.edu.pk/>). VU students may watch these video lectures at any time, however, VU gives a lecture schedule for better time management. CDs of these lectures are also available at VU online bookshop. VU developed its unique learning management system, named "Virtual Learning Management System (VULMS)". The whole academic activity and student support services and activities happen through VULMS.

As a student is enrolled at VU, he/she is given a unique student ID & password to login the VULMS to continue his/her study. Every student is given an e-mail ID as well to communicate with VU offices for any information and problem. No student needs to visit physically at VU for the solution to any problem. It is solved through emails.

Students interact with other students and teachers through VULMS, students receive and submit assignments through LMS and they also participate in the discussion on certain topics through MDBs (Moderated Discussion Boards).

VU has developed its own unique examination system. The students are asked to make their own date sheet in accordance with their own time availability and then examination is conducted accordingly. Examination is conducted online; local Pakistani students have to appear in designated examination centers however overseas students may appear in examination from the place where they can arrange computer and external web cam with stable internet connection.

In fact virtual university has adopted a unique mode of education that is why it has more than one hundred thousand students. It was observed during the last few years that the number of drop outs was increasing. It is very alarming because such large number of drop out of the students may create problems for the existence of virtual university. It has much concern and needs to be investigated.

Back ground of the Study

Research in higher education regarding countering the drop out of the students can be recorded back over 70 years (Braxton, 2000) with a profound research during decade 1970 (Astin, 1964; Bayer, 1968; Vaughan, 1968). Two books were got published in 1975: Astin's (1975) book, *Preventing Students from Dropping Out*, and Tinto's (1975) international theory is considered to be the foundation stone about the counter strategy to minimize the student dropout in higher education. Astin looked into the individual characteristics (such as type, location, and selectivity) and organizational characteristics (such as type, location, and selectivity) to point out how these variables play a vital role in student dropout. Tinto (1975) introduced a theory of incorporation of a student's commitment with institution, willingness to attain degree, and interlinking it into the academic and social life of the institute. As per Tinto's (1975, 1987) theory, a supreme integration with academic life caused a high level of commitment with institution. An ultimate commitment with study and integration are the major sources to increase the thirst to complete the degree and to minimize the dropout (Braxton, 2000; Braxton & Lien, 2000; Tinto, 1975, 1987). Braxton (2000) pointed out a detailed inquiry to indentify the dropout reasons in higher education in the mid-1990s with the wholesale acceptance of Tinto's (1987) model. He proposed to conduct new and in-depth research to "reinvigorate scholarly inquiry on the departure puzzle" (p. 3). The rapid change of student attitude, needs and demographics of students (Keller, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998), may work as torch bearer and suggest a need to re-think about the effects of multiple variables that give student retention plans.

Methodology

The present research is qualitative in nature. The data was collected from females under graduate students from April 01, 2015 to March 30, 2016. A semi-structured interview was conducted on telephone to collect the data from 90 female under graduate students. The data was recorded by the researchers themselves. According to information gathered, 12 major themes were developed to determine the drop out causes of under graduate female students of the university.

Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

The major findings of the research were as under:

Table 1

Undergraduate Dropout Causes of Female Students

Causes	Frequency	Percent
Financial Problems	19	21.11
Married and unable to continue	15	16.66
Time Management	12	13.33
Problem in understanding VU mode of Education	10	11.11
Admitted to another institute	06	06.66
Job restrictions	06.	06.66
Converted to another program	05	05.55
Going abroad	05	05.55
Illness	04	04.44
Not satisfied with VU PVC facilities	04	04.44
Personal reasons	03	03.33
Parent transfer	01	01.11
Total	90	100

Table 1 illustrates the female student dropout at undergraduate level. According to the data collected, there were 90 female students at undergraduate level out of 196. Out of these 90 female students, 19 students (21.11%) left their studies due to financial problems, 15 students due to their marriage (16.66%), 12 students due to time problem (13.33%), 10 students (11.11%) due to problem in understanding in VU mode of education, 6 students (6.66%) due to admission in another university, 6 students (06.66%) due to job restriction, 5 students (5.55%) converted their study program towards another study program, 5 students (5.55%) left the university due to moving abroad, 4 students (4.44%) left their studies due to health issue, 4 students (4.44%) were found dissatisfied with facelifts provided at private virtual campuses, 3 students (3.33%) got their admission cancelled due to personal reasons and 1 student (1.11%) left the study due to transfer of her parents.

It has been noted that financial problems, marriage issues, time management, problems in understating the VU mode of education and admission to another university are major reasons of female students dropout at undergraduate level.

For the solution to the financial problems, VU may award scholarships to the female students on priority level. It may engage “Bait ul Mall Pakistan” to contribute to it. It may make efforts to adjust such students in business organizations for small jobs so that they bear their educational expenses. Students should be engaged to keeping studying even after their marriage. University may talk to their parents and husbands as well to encourage them to allow the female students continue their studies. University should use an easy way to understand orientation video explaining VU mode of education so that an average student may grasp it.

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