Determinants of Student Dropout from Two External Degree Programmes of Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda

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Abstract

This paper reports on the results of an analytical, cross-sectional, comparative study adopting tracer methodologies to establish the determinants of student dropout from two external degree programmes of Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. Distance education (DE) has the capacity to increase access to education as an alternative to face-to-face instruction. Using stratified sampling, continuing students and students who dropped out of the Bachelor of Education (External) degree and the Commonwealth diploma in Youth in Development Work were selected as samples while purposive sampling was used to select lecturers and administrators. Findings showed that socio-cultural and financial factors mainly contributed to the student dropout. Other factors included environmental factors like the teaching and learning environment, transfers from one working place to another, loss of jobs, demanding jobs, sickness and feelings of isolation. It is recommended that there should be advocacy for the decentralisation of support activities so that services are moved nearer to students, hence reducing their expenses; materials should be printed and made available while funds should also be solicited by the Department of DE to construct a building that can accommodate the unique activities required by DE students. Employers of students should also be sensitised about the advantages of studying by distance so that they support the students and give them soft loans to enable them to meet the requirements for university study.

Abstrak

Kertas kerja ini melaporkan keputusan analitikal dan kajian perbandingan yang menggunakan kaedah jejakan untuk mewujudkan penentu kepada keciciran pelajar daripada dua program ijazah luaran yang ditawarkan oleh Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. Pendidikan Jarak Jauh mempunyai kemampuan untuk meningkatkan akses kepada pendidikan sebagai satu

alternatif pada pengajaran bersemuka. Dengan menggunakan sampel 'stratified' pelajar berterusan dan pelajar yang tercicir keluar daripada ijazah pendidikan (luaran) dan Diploma Komanwel dalam belia, dalam pembangunan kerja dipilih sebagai sampel manakala pensyarah dan pentadbir digunakan sebagai sampel bertujuan. Dapatan menunjukkan faktor sosio budaya dan kewangan adalah penyumbang utama kepada keciciran pelajar. Faktor lain termasuk faktor persekitaran seperti persekitaran pengajaran dan pembelajaran, pemindahan daripada satu tempat kerja ke tempat lain, kehilangan pekerjaan, permintaan pekerjaan, kesihatan dan perasaan kesunyian. Adalah disarankan bahawa aktiviti sokongan seperti penasihatan dinyahpusatkan supaya perkhidmatan ini dibawa dekat dengan pelajar. Ini akan mengurangkan perbelanjaan mereka dan bahan pembelajaran dicetak dan disediakan manakala dana perlu diperoleh oleh jabatan pendidikan jarak jauh untuk membina bangunan yang boleh memenuhi keperluan aktiviti unik pelajar pendidikan jarak jauh. Majikan kepada pelajar-pelajar ini juga perlu peka terhadap kebaikan belajar secara jarak jauh supaya mereka boleh menyokong pelajar ini dan memberikan mereka pinjaman mudah untuk membolehkan mereka memenuhi keperluan pengajian universiti.

Introduction

Distance education (DE) has the capacity to increase access to education and as an alternative to face-to-face instruction, it has witnessed steady growth since its beginning in the mid-1800s (Parker, 2003). However, due to either social, economic or retention factors, completion of the programmes they offer has been limited. Constraints include age, motivation and other circumstances, which in the long-run, influence the chances of most students completing their studies. According to Ganstad (1991), the definition of dropout varies widely with different situations, nations and states.

Socio-cultural approaches to the process of learning are increasingly being applied by educationalists. Socio-cultural theorists argue that individuals cannot be considered in isolation from their social and historical context and therefore, it is necessary to look at the society and the development occurring at a given time (Reigeluth, 1995). He further noted that two principal agencies, the family and the school, powerfully shape children's learning experiences. The influence of these two agencies is constrained

by the wider social and cultural systems into which they are embedded. There is great diversity in cultural backgrounds (beliefs, norms and values), social conditions, family arrangements (nuclear versus extended) and school organisations.

Other socio-cultural perspectives also suggest that differences in attitudes and behaviour of students, peers and families help to explain racial and ethnic differences in achievements. For example, Steinberg, Dornbusch and Brown (1992), demonstrated that Asians are more successful in school than other ethnic groups because of two cultural beliefs: a belief that a good education will hurt their chances for future success (rather than a belief that a good education will help their chances) and a belief that academic success comes from effort rather than ability or the difficulty of the learning material. They also asserted that the contexts of families, schools and peers influence the achievement of racial and ethnic groups differently.

The college-fit theory suggests that the greater the congruence between the values, goals and attitudes of the students and those of the college, the more likely the students are to remain at school (Taylor & Whetstone, 1983; Kalsbeek, 1989). Taylor and Whetstone (1983) found that the personal characteristics (values and attitudes) of academically successful students are significantly different from those of the unsuccessful ones. This can be used to assist students in selecting the college setting where they best "fit". Cognitive consistency and dissonance theories help us understand the cause of this observed correlation. These theories explain that, in general, when two cognitions that are inconsistent with one another occur, they will produce discomfort that motivates the person to remove the inconsistency (drop out) to bring the cognition into harmony.

Makerere University (MAK), a dual mode institution, began DE programmes in 1991. Over the years, some students have been dropping out of the programmes and hence failing to complete their studies. Two separate studies were carried out to compare reasons for dropout. These focused on the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) external degree and the Commonwealth Youth Program (CYP) diploma in Youth in Development Work. The B.Ed. external degree, the first of its kind in Uganda, was launched in 1991. The Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (IACE), through the Department of Distance Education (DDE), is

responsible for the day-to-day administration of the programme while the School of Education oversees the academic activities.

Over the years, student numbers have been growing. As DE extends its reach and uses different delivery tools, concerns about its effectiveness have increased. At MAK, it has been found that the rate of student dropout ranges between 34.97% and 83.87% for the B.Ed. programme and between 40.74% and 59.76% for the CYP diploma in Youth in Development Work. Dropping out here means students leaving university before completing courses they applied and registered for. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) (1999) identifies a student as a dropout if the individual is absent without an approved excuse or documented transfer and does not return to school by fall of the following year or if he/she completes the school year but fails to re-enrol the following year.

According to Clarke, Zimmer and Main (1997), the reasons for withdrawal such as personal, employment, financial issues, academic preparation and choice, are common to students generally. However, these reasons vary in importance for different groups. In a study carried out by Woodfield, Bruce and Ritchie (2000), the majority of those who dropped out were first year students because of personal, unknown, academic, employment related, financial and medical reasons. They noted that personal problems may sometimes be overcome with the help of guidance and counselling of students while effective pre-entry advice, information and admission procedures could reduce the incidence of dissatisfaction with chosen courses or careers.

Although DE students learn as much as conventional students, they are much more likely to drop out before completing their programmes. At MAK, the DE student dropout rate is high. Although the students may have enrolled for programmes with great enthusiasm, they often fail to register or complete the programmes. If this dropout rate is not addressed, it might discourage many potential applicants for courses, thus posing a problem to the success of the various programmes. This study was therefore carried out to examine the determinants of student dropout on the two programmes, specifically focusing on socio-cultural, financial constraints and environmental factors as contributors to the dropout.

The Two Programmes Surveyed

The Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) external degree

MAK's Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) external degree programme, the first of its kind in Uganda, was launched in 1991. The Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, through the Department of Distance Education (DDE), is responsible for the day-to-day running of the programme. The DDE prepares the necessary logistics such as acquiring study materials, contracting writers of local study materials, organising tutoring for ongoing students, providing support services and communicating important information to students. The School of Education at the university, on the other hand, is responsible for the academic part of the programme.

The dropout trends for this B.Ed. programme can be seen in the table below:

Table 1   The Dropout Trends in the B.Ed. Programme

Year	Admitted	Registered	Dropout rate
1991/92	198	148	25.25%
1992/93	0	0	0.00%
1993/94	178	132	25.84%
1994/95	120	89	25.83%
1995/96	233	132	43.35%
1996/97	600	450	25.00%
1997/98	360	300	16.67%
1998/99	980	693	29.29%
1999/00	2,500	1,640	34.40%
2000/01	1,646	1,046	36.45%
2001/02	1,185	328	72.32%
2002/03	1,022	388	62.04%
2003/04	547	387	29.25%
2004/05	902	707	21.62%
2005/06	998	514	48.50%
2006/07	501	381	23.95%

Source: DE Registration Records

It can be observed that over the years, student numbers have been growing. As DE extends its reach and uses different delivery tools, concerns about its effectiveness have increased. In MAK, it has been found that the rate of student dropout ranges between 34.97% and 83.87% for the B.Ed. programme. Dropping out here means students leaving university before completing the courses they applied and registered for.

The B.Ed. students report for one face-to-face session during which they are introduced to courses and given materials and assignments; they also receive a year planner that indicates when they are to return to the university. During this face-to-face session, students are expected to register with the university upon payment of tuition fees, the registration fee, the examination fee and research fees. However, many of them fail to register during this time mainly due to financial problems. During this session, they also do some timed tests. They then return to their respective homes where they are expected to study on their own and do assignments. During this time, tutorials are arranged to explain certain areas where the syllabi may not have been completed. Students also submit the assignments given. Those who had failed to register are given a chance to do so. The face-to-face session usually lasts three weeks and is usually held during the primary and secondary school holidays since the majority of the students (98%) are teachers. After a given period indicated in the year planner, students are expected to return to the university for the final semester examinations which begin in mid-November of every calendar year for semester one and June for semester two.

The Commonwealth Youth Program (CYP) diploma in Youth in Development Work

The CYP diploma is currently delivered through institutions of higher learning in collaboration with the Commonwealth Youth Secretariat, member governments, the youth sector and the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector. MAK, through its department of Distance Education in the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, started offering the diploma as a pilot project in 2001 in its role as a Partner Support Institution (PSI) falling under the ambit of the Open University of Tanzania (OUT). While OUT accredits the programme, MAK is in charge of the delivery and support with Huddersfield University taking charge of quality assurance. The Commonwealth Secretariat sponsors 50% of the

three phases while the government of Uganda pays the remaining 50%. In the academic year 2004/2005, the Commonwealth Secretariat gave MAK the status of a Partner Institution (PI) mandated to accredit the diploma. MAK's University Council accords the diploma programme special status and a total of 54 students were admitted into the first year in 2001/2002.

The dropout trends in this programme can be seen in the Table 2.

Table 2 The Dropout Trends in the CYP Diploma in Youth in Development Work

Year	Admitted	Registered	Dropout rate
2001/02	54	32	40.74%
2002/03	0	0	0.00%
2003/04	61	32	47.54%
2004/05	82	33	59.76%
2005/06	0	0	0.00%
2006/07	0	0	0.00%

Source: DE Registration Records

The above table indicates that the dropout rate is between 40.74% and 59.76% for the CYP diploma in Youth in Development Work.

The students report for two face-to-face sessions. During the first session, they are introduced to the courses, given materials and assignments and also receive a year planner that indicates when they should return to the university. The materials given to them are produced by the Commonwealth Secretariat while some have been adapted to the local conditions. During this orientation face-to-face session, students are expected to register with the university upon payment of tuition fees, the registration fee, the examination fee and research fees. However, many of them fail to register during this time mainly due to financial problems. They then return to their respective residential regions where they are expected to study on their own and do the assignments. On returning for the second face-to-face session, the respective syllabi are completed and timed tests conducted. Those who had failed to register are given a chance to do so. The face-to-face sessions usually last two weeks each. After the second face-to-face session, students are expected to return to the university for the final semester examinations which begin in mid-

November of every calendar year for semester one and June for semester two.

Methodology

An analytical cross-sectional survey design was adopted together with a comparative design and tracer methodologies to compare the two programmes. The survey population included continuing students, students who dropped out, lecturers and administrators of the B.Ed. external degree and the CYP diploma in Youth in Development Work. Staff and students were selected using stratified sampling while purposive sampling was used to select administrators. Primary data were collected using the questionnaire method and focused group discussions for B.Ed. students because of their big numbers while students in the CYP diploma programme were surveyed using focused group discussions only because there were few students. Secondary data were collected through document reviews. Questionnaires were tested for content validity and reliability and were found to be reliable with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.97.
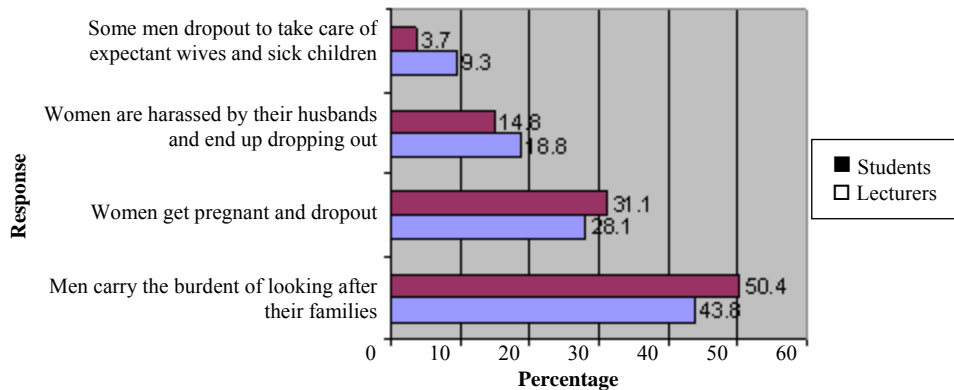
Findings

The following are the findings from the study. The graphs are for findings from the B.Ed. students with data collected using questionnaires being quantified; the findings from the CYP diploma students were qualitative and their views were incorporated into the explanations in each section.

Contribution of Socio-cultural Factors to Student Dropout

Socio-cultural factors contributing to student dropout basically included gender, age, family background and traditional norms.

All the lecturers strongly agreed that gender contributed to dropout. 80% of the administrators, 45.5% of the continuing students as well as 50% of the students who dropped out agreed that the dropout was due to gender factors. The different aspects of gender and how they affected dropout were established as shown in Figure 1.

Some men dropout to take care of expectant wives and sick children — 3.7 (Students), 9.3 (Lecturers)
Women are harassed by their husbands and end up dropping out — 14.8 (Students), 18.8 (Lecturers)
Women get pregnant and dropout — 31.1 (Students), 28.1 (Lecturers)
Men carry the burdent of looking after their families — 50.4 (Students), 43.8 (Lecturers)

Response / Percentage

Source: Primary data

Figure 1 The Different Aspects of Gender Affecting Dropout

As shown in Figure 1, most male respondents said that they had to bear the burden of looking after their families, hence leading to their dropout from the programmes. These students were asked to explain how gender contributed to their dropout. While men indicated that the burden of being family heads was responsible for their dropout, the female students who dropped out indicated that their husbands were not supportive and even threatened to marry other wives if they continued studying. Other female students reported that their husbands suspected that when they left for their studies, other men would befriend them. The views on gender supported the findings by Feldman (1993) who observed that female students tend to have more responsibilities at home, thus being more likely than their male counterparts to drop out. The discussions with the CYP diploma students indicated that these were major considerations especially since most of them were adults and teachers.

Another social-cultural aspect studied was age. The findings indicated that 50% each of the administrators and lecturers agreed that age contributed to student dropout from the university.

A total of 91.9% of the continuing students agreed with this view. However, 80% of the students who dropped out disagreed that it was age that led to their dropout.

When asked how age contributed to dropout, the following findings as shown in Figure 2 were elicited.
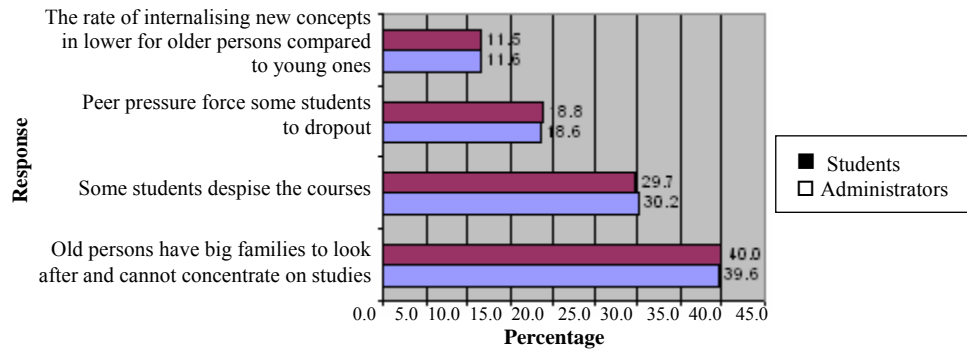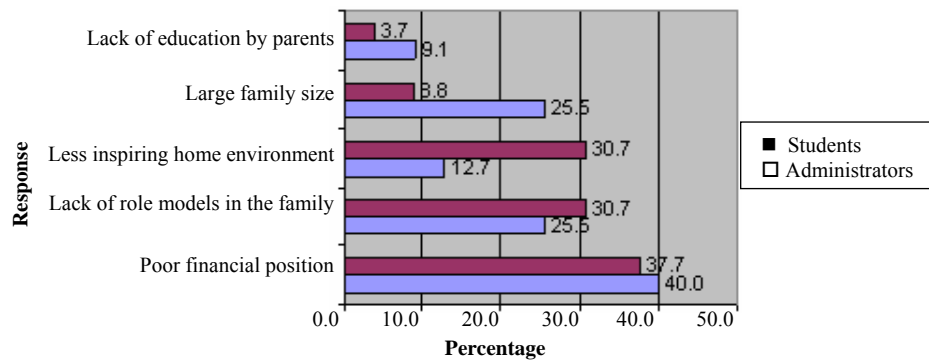

Source: Primary data

Figure 2   Contribution of Age to Dropout

Figure 2 shows that most students and administrators reported that older adults had big families to look after and could not concentrate on studies. They also mentioned that some relatively young students disliked certain programmes and dropped out. Peer pressure and the rate of internalising new concepts being lower for older adults than younger ones were also identified as causes of dropout especially for the older adults. During the interview, one student dropped out because he felt retirement was close and therefore saw no need to continue with the course; he said:

> *I was advised by friends that I will get appointment as a graduate teacher because I was due for retirement. So I opted to withdraw because my interest was to exit service with a better pension.*

The issue of age is therefore very important in keeping one at school. Feldman (1993) observed that students aged 35–75 and over are 1.77 times more likely to drop out than students aged 21–34 because of several factors. However, Parker (1999) noted that while society calls for lifelong learning, employment and family responsibilities call for adults to seek forms of education other than traditional, face-to-face instruction. DE enables adults to acquire required formal education with flexible scheduling.

Family background was another social factor that led to student dropout. 83.7% of the students agreed that their family background contributed to dropout while 17.3% disagreed. 70% of the students who dropped out likewise agreed while the remaining 30% did so strongly. 85% of the lecturers agreed while 15% disagreed. All administrators agreed that the family background contributed to student dropout. Figure 3 shows the various views of the administrators and students regarding how the family background contributed to student dropout.

Source: Primary data

Figure 3 Views of Administrators and Students Regarding Contribution of Family Background to Student Dropout

Figure 3 shows that the various factors in the family background that influence dropout include the financial position, the lack of role models in the family, a less inspiring home environment and large family size, all these being in line with the findings by Mbabazi (1995). Some students who dropped out indicated that their parents and family members did not understand why a married person with responsibility would opt to leave the family and go for further studies. One female student reported:

> *My father-in-law offered some cows to my husband to marry a*
> *second wife because I was going to get spoilt in Kampala (MAK).*
> *So I decided to consolidate my family and opted to drop out.*

From the above, it is clear that family issues play a crucial role in a student's continued stay at the university and as pointed out by Musaazi (1985), large families result in heavy responsibilities and the economic resources available have to be utilised according to the gravity of the responsibilities. As was observed by Keller (1996) and, Barton and Gimono (1994), when poverty strikes, children's education becomes an and as Towles (1993) noted, adults show greater concern for their families.

Another social factor that was studied to determine whether it led to student dropout was traditional norms and taboos. All lecturers and administrators disagreed with this factor as a contributor to student dropout. 71% of the continuing students and all those who dropped out also disagreed. However, 29% of the continuing students agreed that in some cultures, women must not be so educated because it is against traditional norms.

Contribution of Financial Constraints to Student Dropout

Financial constraints included expenses incurred while undertaking a programme, need for financial support and high tuition fees.

74.5% of the continuing students agreed that expenses students incurred while following their programmes were relatively high while 25.5% disagreed. 90% of the students who dropped out agreed that expenses for the programmes they were pursuing were relatively high while 10% disagreed. 60% each of the lecturers and the administrators agreed that expenses were relatively high. Respondents had various views on the nature of expenses incurred while pursuing the programmes as shown in Figure 4 below.

Most of the students in both programmes are primary and secondary teachers who are low-income earners, have a poor financial base and at times, their salaries are not paid on time; however, they have to pay tuition fees as well as have money to sustain themselves. Financial issues are frequently the reasons for student withdrawal from programmes as pointed out by Clarke et al. (1997).

It was observed that the majority of the respondents incurred high expenses in education. The expenses they incurred fell as shown in Figure 4.
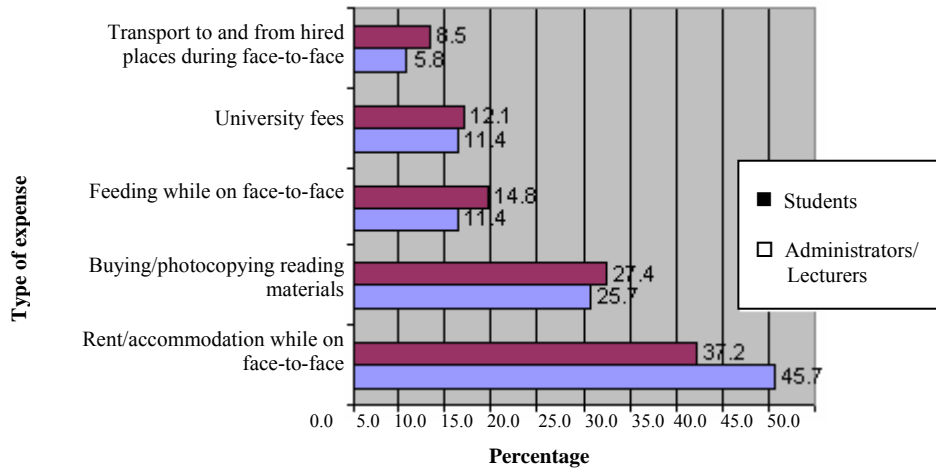
Source: Primary data

Figure 4   Categories of Expenses Incurred by Students

As shown in Figure 4, it is clear that students spent more on accommodation and reproducing reading materials and least on transport to and from their rented accommodation during face-to-face sessions. Pschoropolus and Wood (1985) pointed out that poverty results in dropout for the students whose level of income is generally very low. They would, however, have initially enrolled for the programmes assuming as noted by Henke and Russum (2000), that DE would be affordable.

Some CYP diploma students said that they even feared losing their jobs while on the programme and since they were sponsoring themselves using the income from their jobs, they opted to drop out. Despite the support offered by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the government of Uganda lacks funds to support their part of the required expenditure. Thus students are required to pay the balance of the remaining fee. Some of the students had in fact lost their jobs as they embarked on their studies; they then failed to pay fees and dropped out.
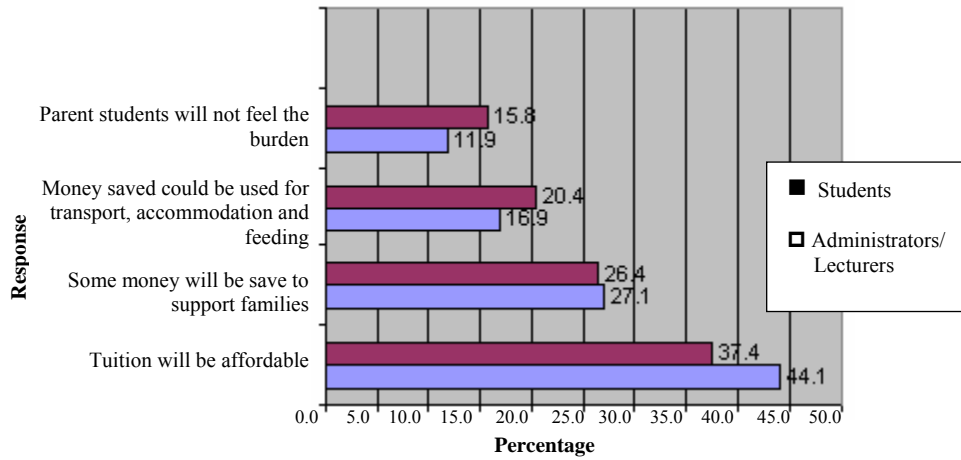
When the files of students who had dropped out were reviewed, it was found that most students who had applied for withdrawal from studies had indicated financial problems as the reason for their inability to continue.

In an interview with students who dropped out, some said that they were putting their families in financial danger while others said they had failed to pay school fees for their secondary school-going children. One student indicated that:

> *I was in my second year when my second child was admitted in a secondary school. I asked my wife who is a primary school teacher to pay for her and she refused. For almost three weeks, she was at home. I had saved some money to pay my university fees. I almost became a laughing stock in my village. For a daughter of a teacher to drop out of school was unheard of. So I decided to pay for her and terminated my own studies.*

Students and administrators were then asked if students in the DE programmes needed financial support and whether a reduction in tuition fees would reduce the dropout rate. All respondents agreed that students needed financial support. However, administrators and tutors objected to the reduction in tuition fees saying that in programmes which were completely self-sustaining, reducing tuition fees would reduce the income collected hence reducing the quality of services offered to students. All students agreed that the tuition fees should be reduced to enable them to afford university education. This is in line with the findings of Carr, Fullerton, Severino and McHugh (1996) that finances can lead to students abandoning academic studies.

All lecturers and administrators said that a reduction in tuition fees would not reduce the dropout rate because there are other factors that lead to dropout. 50% of the student who dropped out concurred with them. When respondents were asked to indicate how they thought a reduction in tuition fees would reduce the dropout rate, the following were their responses (Figure 5).

Horizontal bar chart showing benefits of reduction in tuition fees, with axis labels "Response" (vertical) and "Percentage" (horizontal, 0.0 to 50.0). Legend: Students, Administrators/Lecturers.

- Parent students will not feel the burden: 15.8, 11.9
- Money saved could be used for transport, accommodation and feeding: 20.4, 16.9
- Some money will be save to support families: 26.4, 27.1
- Tuition will be affordable: 37.4, 44.1

Source: Primary data

Figure 5   Benefits of Reduction in Tuition Fees

Most respondents said that a fee reduction would mean that tuition would be affordable and they would be able to save money to support their families. From the interview with students who dropped out, it was reported that a reduction in tuition fees would help them save money to enable them to support their education and the basic needs of their families. One male student who dropped out reported:

> *I was at the cross-roads by the time I dropped out. I had to choose between education and my children's welfare. Well, I know better education would help in the long-run but in the short-run, I could not subject my siblings to torture. They (siblings) would rather enjoy the little I could in the short-run. So, I opted out.*

The above also introduces the aspect of opportunity cost of DE. Students consider the benefits they are foregoing if they continue with their studies and based on that, decide whether they should continue or not. This supports the observation by Türkoglu (2004).

Contribution of Environmental Factors to Student Dropout

Environmental factors included quality of teaching and learning facilities and the student-facilitator ratio. A total of 91% of continuing students agreed that environmental factors affected dropout while 9% disagreed.

50% of those who dropped out agreed while 80% of the administrators and 65% of the lecturers disagreed with the view that the quality of the learning and teaching facilities contributed to dropout while 35% of the lecturers and 20% of the administrators disagreed. When respondents were asked about their views on which aspects of the teaching and learning environment led to students' dropout, they responded were as shown in Figure 6.
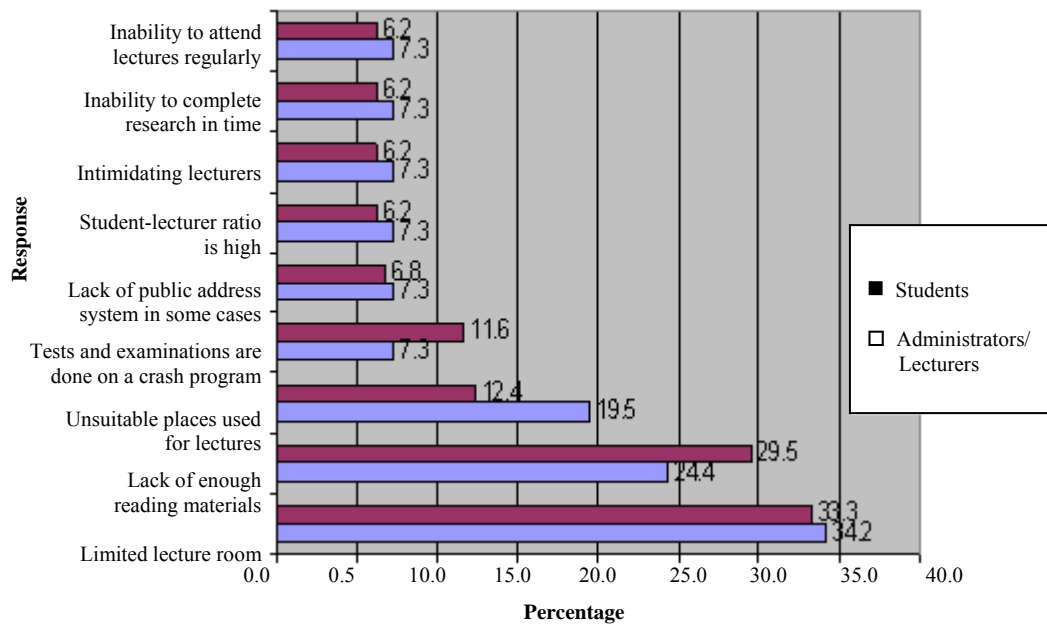
Source: Primary data

**Figure 6** Aspects of the Teaching and Learning Environment Leading to Student Dropout

Most respondents indicated limited and unsuitable lecture rooms, the lack of reading materials and undergoing tests and examinations after a crash course as the four most important teaching and learning environmental factors that can lead to dropout. Some said that tutors tended to intimidate them. This may lead to students losing interest and as Ibrahim, Rwegasira and Taher (2007) noted, the instructor's role is considered the key component to successful courses.

The current facilitator-student ratio stands at 1:19 for the B.Ed. external degree and 1:4 for the CYP diploma. When asked to respond to this ratio, 60% of the administrators and all the lecturers agreed that for the B.Ed., it was high and led to student dropout. 99% of the continuing students and all the students who had dropped out of the B.Ed. programme also agreed.

When the facilitator to student ratio is high, students are not likely to get personal attention; this affects their retention level and hence their stay in a programme. The concentration of students when studying and their regular attendance are affected by their learning environment. Allan (1998) reported that student withdrawal is caused by unsatisfactory experiences in programmes, unhappiness with the quality of the institution, inability to cope with programme demands and dissatisfaction with institutional provisions or facilities. This coincides with the findings from the students who dropped out of MAK's DE prgrammes.

When administrators, lectures and students were asked to suggest measures to reduce dropout, their responses were as shown in Figure 7.
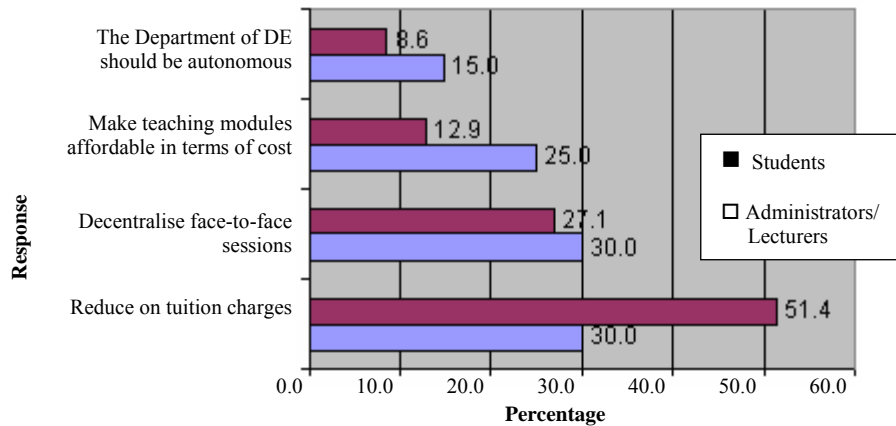
Source: Primary data

Figure 7   Suggested Measures by Students to Reduce Dropout

Most respondents suggested that tuition charges should be reduced, followed by the decentralisation of the face-to-face sessions, making teaching modules affordable in terms of costs and making the Department of Distance Education autonomous.

Other factors of concern raised especially by the CYP diploma students were transfers from one working place to another, loss of jobs hence failing to pay tuition fees, beginning new jobs that were demanding, sickness and feeling isolated because they were scattered. The students therefore need more support from the university because lack of support is a factor that leads to students dropout as emphasised by Fozdar, Kumar, and Kannan (2006). Pre-enrolment support has been found to be useful. Nash (2005) noted that the use of pre-course orientations and supplemental tutoring services encourages distance learners to prolong their studies; many of them would be willing to use these services.

Summary of Findings

The above findings were elicited from the administrators, lecturers, continuing students and students who had dropped out from the B.Ed. (External) degree and the Commonwealth Diploma in Youth in Development Work offered by MAK. Gender was a socio-cultural constraint that had a significant impact on the dropout from the external degree programme.

Most students and administrators reported that older adults may have large families to look after and be unable to concentrate on studies. Administrators and students mentioned that some relatively younger students dislike certain programmes and drop out. Peer pressure and the rate of internalising new concepts being lower for older students than younger ones have also been identified as causes of dropout especially for the former.

Most students in the programmes are primary and secondary teachers who are low-income earners, have a poor financial base and at times, do not receive their salaries on time while having to pay tuition fees as well as have insufficient money for subsistence. Students spend more on accommodation and reproducing reading materials and less on transport to and from their rented accommodation to attend face-to-face sessions.

All respondents agreed that students need financial support. However, administrators and tutors object to a reduction in tuition fees saying that where programmes are completely self-sustaining, this would reduce the income collected, hence reducing the quality of services offered to

students. All students, however, agreed that reduced tuition fees would enable them to afford university education.

Most respondents indicated limited or unsuitable lecture rooms, the lack of enough reading materials and undergoing tests and examinations following crash courses as the four most important teaching and leaning environment factors that can lead to dropout.

They also suggested that tuition charges should be reduced, followed by a decentralization of face-to-face sessions, making teaching modules affordable in terms of costs and making the DDE autonomous as a way of reducing dropout rates.

As regards the facilitator to student ratio, the current facilitator-student ratio stands at 1:19 for the B.Ed. external degree and 1:4 for the CYP diploma.

Conclusions

- Socio-cultural factors contribute to student dropout from distance learning programmes in MAK. These basically include gender, age, family background and traditional norms.
- Financial factors also affect dropout since most students are low income earners. They have to pay school fees for their dependants, pay tuition fees as well as raise money for their subsistence during face-to-face sessions. In most cases, when they fail to meet the university and other requirements, they drop out.
- Environmental factors have a role to play in dropout. The study showed that the teaching and learning facilities offered have not been adequate. There is also insufficient space for lectures and presentations.
- Other factors contributing to dropout include transfers from one working place to another, loss of jobs hence failing to pay tuition fees, beginning new jobs that are demanding, sickness and a feeling of isolation when students are scattered.

Recommendations

- There should be advocacy for more decentralisation of face-to-face sessions and other support activities like registration so that services are provided nearer to the students, hence reducing their expenses.
- Study materials should be printed and made available to students in time and should be written in the DE mode.
- Funds should be solicited by the DDE to construct a building that can accommodate the facilities required by the students.
- Employers of students should be sensitised about the advantages of DE so that they are flexible towards the needs of these students and also assist them with soft loans to meet tuition fees and other requirements.

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