

## A Review Study to Analyze the Impact of Social and Cultural Factors on Dropout Rates in Indian Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

This review paper examines the impact of social and cultural factors on dropout rates in Indian higher education, a critical issue affecting the country's efforts to enhance access, equity, and quality in the education sector. Despite significant strides in expanding higher education opportunities, dropout rates remain a persistent challenge, undermining the socio-economic mobility of individuals and the nation's broader developmental goals. This study synthesizes findings from current literature, policy papers, and empirical investigations to identify significant social and cultural factors of student attrition in higher education institutions in India. Gender, caste, socioeconomic position, geographical inequalities, family expectations, and cultural conventions influence students' education. The analysis also examines how cultural norms and institutional practices marginalize poor populations, increasing dropout rates.

Findings show that cultural biases including gendered expectations limiting female education and caste or community shame drive students out of school. Financial restrictions, lack of familial support, early marriages, and cultural expectations to adhere to conventional roles are major obstacles. The study also emphasizes how institutional factors like inaccessible campuses, lack of inclusive teaching, and inadequate support networks perpetuate these difficulties. The study proposes specific legislative and institutional changes to overcome these social and cultural hurdles. Implement inclusive policies, give financial assistance and scholarships, create a friendly academic atmosphere, and promote cultural bias awareness initiatives. The study emphasises community participation and mentoring and calls for a multi-stakeholder approach to dropout rates and educational justice.

This paper discusses educational inclusion and the necessity for a comprehensive approach to Indian higher education dropout rates. By removing social and cultural obstacles, stakeholders can make education more equal and help all students achieve their academic and professional goals.

*Keywords:* dropout; education; higher; social; cultural

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## Introduction

According to former Indian president Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the power of education has the potential to transform India from a developing nation into a powerful and economically developed nation. According to him, India would be able to endure this transformation because our country is home to a billion intelligent people who, if they all receive an education, would enable this transformation. The survey identifies the difficulty of "every child receiving a basic education" as the most important priority among the many issues and concerns facing our country. In terms of education, this is the only means for our nation to progress from "developing country" to "developed country." And because the "Right to Education" is now a fundamental right, we cannot bring about this transformation until we ensure that the fifty million education children who are not currently enrolled in schools are enrolled in schools that are suitable for them, and until we ensure that all education children who are enrolled in school are learning. There are a number of challenges, however, in providing education to every dropout or pupil who is not enrolled in school. It is inconceivable, but the Indian government has managed to reduce out-of-school dropout to zero.

When it comes to the educational system in India, the issue of dropouts is widespread. To a large extent, students who start elementary school are unable to complete their secondary education because of a number of factors. Prior to entering in school, students are already exposed to a variety of potentially harmful environment factors. These factors include the education level of the parents, the makeup of the family, the educational trends of the siblings, and the absence of preschool experience. The environment that a person is raised in, which is shaped by their family history and the difficulties they face at home, has a detrimental impact on the importance that they put on continuing their education. Students may stop going to school for a number of reasons, including but not limited to: an unwelcoming atmosphere, trouble comprehending the material being taught, absenteeism, the attitudes and actions of the instructors, recurrent failures in the same grade, etc. According to Chauhg (2011), students who have experienced failure in school are usually unsatisfied with their sense of success. This dissatisfaction may lead to emotions of alienation and rejection, and eventually dropout.

The socioeconomic growth of a nation is heavily influenced by higher education. According to the World Bank (2019), it provides people with the information, skills, and competences that are important for their own personal development and as well as contributes to the

general advancement of the country. The higher education sector in India has seen tremendous growth and diversity over the course of the last few decades. In spite of this, the problem of student dropout rates continues to be a persistent obstacle that hinders the efficiency of higher education. When we talk about dropout rates, we are referring to the percentage of students who withdraw from their educational programs before they are finished. There are larger cultural and economic ramifications that come along with high dropout rates, in addition to the fact that they interrupt individual educational paths.

The landscape of higher education in India is complicated due to the country's enormous and widely varied population. There has been a significant increase in the number of institutions and enrollments, which indicates that the nation has achieved tremendous success in expanding access to higher education. The dropout rates at Indian higher education institutions continue to be a cause for worry, despite the fact that the situation has improved. This high dropout rate in the Indian setting may be attributed to a number of different factors. Students' educational goals are significantly hampered by socioeconomic factors such as poverty, income disparity, and inadequate financial means. A significant number of students originate from economically challenged families, which makes it challenging for them to pay the fees that are connected with participating in higher education. Due to financial restrictions, students are sometimes compelled to withdraw from their studies and look for jobs in order to provide for their families (Bourdieu, 1986; Kundra, 2018).

When students are not adequately prepared academically, it might make it more difficult for them to deal with the challenges that come with higher education. The majority of students who enroll in higher education institutions have academic foundations that are not up to standard, which causes them to struggle with comprehending concepts and keeping up with the curriculum. Based on research conducted by Ream and Palacios (2017) and Shettar and Naik (2020), it has been shown that a lack of fundamental abilities in disciplines such as mathematics, language competence, and critical thinking may result in feelings of dissatisfaction and disengagement, eventually leading to higher rates of dropouts.

To a considerable extent, the retention of students is influenced by the quality of education that is provided by institutions. The learning experience and the motivation of students may be negatively impacted by a variety of factors, including but not limited to obsolete curriculum, outdated teaching techniques, and inadequate infrastructure. (National Education Policy, 2020; Mhrd.gov.in, 2019).

## **Overview of Dropout Rates in Higher Education**

The percentage of students who withdraw from higher education institutions has been a source of worry on a worldwide scale. Students who withdraw from their educational programs before they have the opportunity to complete them not only experience personal failures, but they also have wider-reaching ramifications for people, institutions, and society as a whole. For the purpose of designing successful measures to promote student retention and achievement, it is essential to demonstrate an understanding of the factors that contribute to dropout rates. The purpose of this section is to offer an overview of the dropout rates in higher education and to highlight noteworthy findings from prior research.

Dropout rates vary across countries and educational systems. In the context of higher education, dropout rates are typically reported as the percentage of students who leave their programs before completion. The magnitude of dropout rates can be influenced by factors such as socio-economic conditions, educational policies, institutional characteristics, and student demographics.

In Europe, the European Union's Education and Training Monitor (2020) reported an average dropout rate of 18% for higher education institutions within the European Union. However, this rate can vary across countries within the EU and between different academic disciplines (European Commission, 2020; Kyndt et al., 2019).

In India, dropout rates in higher education have been a concern due to factors such as socio-economic disparities, lack of academic preparedness, and limited institutional support (Kundra, 2018; Mhrd.gov.in, 2019). While comprehensive nationwide data on dropout rates in higher education in India is limited, various studies have indicated substantial dropout rates across different levels of education (Shettar&Naik, 2020; Ream & Palacios, 2017).

### **Research objectives**

- To explore the impact of social and cultural factors on dropout rates in Indian higher education.

### **Factors Influencing Dropout Rates**

Several factors contribute to dropout rates in higher education institutions. These factors can be categorized into individual-level factors, institutional factors, and external factors.

Individual-level factors include socio-economic background, academic preparedness, motivation, personal circumstances, and psychological factors. Socio-economic factors, such as low family income, financial constraints, and the need to work to support oneself or family, have been consistently found to influence student dropout rates (Bourdieu, 1986; Kundra, 2018; Pascarella et al., 2014). Academic preparedness, including prior academic achievement, cognitive abilities, and study skills, also plays a crucial role in student persistence (Ream & Palacios, 2017; Shettar&Naik, 2020).

Institutional factors encompass characteristics of the educational institution, such as teaching quality, support services, institutional climate, and campus culture. The quality of education and teaching has been identified as a significant factor influencing student retention (Mhrd.gov.in, 2019; Pascarella et al., 2014). Inadequate support services, limited access to academic and career guidance, and a lack of institutional support systems have also been associated with higher dropout rates (Mishra, 2020; Chakrabarti&Saha, 2018).

External factors refer to broader socio-cultural, economic, and policy-related influences on dropout rates. Socio-cultural factors such as gender norms, societal expectations, and cultural practices can affect student persistence, particularly among marginalized groups (Kumar &Tiwari, 2021; Sharma, 2020). Economic factors, such as the availability of employment opportunities or economic crises, can also impact dropout rates (Pascarella et al., 2014). Additionally, educational policies and regulations related to financial aid, admission criteria, and institutional autonomy can influence student retention (Mhrd.gov.in, 2019; European Commission, 2020).

## **Implications of Dropout Rates**

High dropout rates in higher education institutions have significant implications at individual, institutional, and societal levels. For individuals, dropout can result in lost educational and career opportunities, reduced earning potential, and lower socio-economic mobility (Baum & Ma, 2007; Pascarella et al., 2014). It can also lead to psychological distress, self-esteem issues, and feelings of failure (Gaur & Sharma, 2021; Ibnian & Hasan, 2019).

Institutions face challenges related to the efficient use of resources, as dropout rates contribute to wasted investments in student recruitment, infrastructure, and faculty (Baum & Ma, 2007). High dropout rates also affect institutional reputation and rankings, as completion rates are often used as indicators of educational quality (Chakrabarti&Saha, 2018). Dropout

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rates contribute to a less-educated workforce, which can impact national productivity and competitiveness (Baum & Ma, 2007).

### **a) Socioeconomic Factors**

Socioeconomic factors play a significant role in student dropout rates. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with low family income, and limited financial resources are more likely to face challenges in pursuing higher education (Baum & Ma, 2007; Kundra, 2018). Financial constraints often force students to seek employment or take on additional responsibilities, leading to higher attrition rates (Ibnian&Hasan, 2019). Additionally, the lack of access to financial aid or scholarships can hinder students' ability to continue their education (Pascarella et al., 2014).

**Institutional Support and Resources** The availability of institutional support and resources can greatly influence student retention. Institutions that provide comprehensive support services, such as academic advising, mentoring programs, counseling services, and financial aid, have been shown to have lower dropout rates (Mishra, 2020; Chakrabarti&Saha, 2018). Adequate access to resources, including libraries, research facilities, and technology, can also contribute to student success and persistence (European Commission, 2020)

**Social and Cultural Factors** Social and cultural factors can significantly impact student dropout rates in higher education. Gender disparities and societal expectations often pose challenges for female students, as cultural norms may prioritize early marriage or family responsibilities over education (Kumar &Tiwari, 2021; Sharma, 2020). Discrimination and biases based on caste, ethnicity, or religion can also contribute to higher attrition rates among marginalized groups (Gaur & Sharma, 2021; Chakrabarti&Saha, 2018). The lack of inclusive policies and a supportive campus climate can further exacerbate dropout rates for students from diverse backgrounds (Mishra, 2020).

### **b) Psychological and Personal Factors**

According to Ibnian and Hasan (2019) and Gaur and Sharma (2021), psychological and personal factors, such as stress, anxiety, and a lack of self-confidence, may have a major influence on a student's motivation to continue their education at a higher level. According to Ream and Palacios (2017), factors that might contribute to the high percentage of dropouts include difficulties in adjusting to the academic and social environment of a college or university, feelings of isolation, and mental health concerns. In addition, a student's choice to

stop their education may be influenced by their personal circumstances, which may include health issues, the obligations of their family, or personal crises (Kumar & Tiwari, 2021).

Understanding the magnitude, factors, and implications of dropout rates in higher education institutions is crucial for developing effective strategies and interventions. By addressing the identified factors contributing to dropout, institutions and policymakers can work towards improving student retention, enhancing educational quality, and promoting inclusive higher education systems.

## **Literature Review**

Hadjar, Haas, and Gewinner (2022) proposed an improved model to explain dropout intentions in higher education. The model placed an emphasis on individual background factors as well as satisfaction with the assistance provided by the institution. For the purpose of this study, the data from the Eurostudent survey in Luxembourg were used to evaluate this model. The findings supported the most of the relationships proposed by the Spady-Tinto methodology, with the exception of the fact that initial study commitment was not associated with social integration. As a critical element in understanding dropout intentions, satisfaction with the assistance provided by the institution appeared as a significant component. The findings of this study indicate that socioeconomic factors have a direct impact on dropout intentions, and this influence is not totally mediated by commitment and integration.

In Australia, Saudi Arabia, and Ethiopia, Singh and Alhamad (2022) investigated the influence of country culture on student dropout factors. According to the findings of the study, which were based on the Hofstede national culture model, the factors of social, psychological, economic, and organizational influence on dropout rates in various nations varied in terms of their amount of influence. A variety of factors were discovered in each nation, including social factors that exerted a significant amount of influence in Ethiopia and economic factors that played a more significant part in both Ethiopia and Australia. The importance of taking cultural context into account when analyzing student dropout was stressed in the study.

To better understand the primary causes of dropout from physics teacher training programs, Kussuda and Nardi (2019) conducted a study. They collected data from past students via the use of an online questionnaire, and the research found that the reasons for dropout were more

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closely associated with issues with the pedagogical performance of higher education professors than they were with the difficulty of the physics program itself.

Aiming to replicate public policy scenarios with the purpose of resolving dropout rates in rural higher education in Colombia, Guzman et al. (2023) investigated the issue. Through the use of data obtained from Colombian governmental institutions, they developed a parameterized simulation model. The simulations demonstrated that policies that emphasize the expansion of educational credits, the provision of financial assistance, and the provision of a family income subsidy have the potential to curb the rate of student dropouts. In order to avoid and reduce dropout in rural regions, the study underscored the importance of a dynamic, data-driven strategy.

In 2013, Patiño and Pérez conducted a comprehensive assessment of papers that focused on the phenomenon of university student dropout in Colombia and Latin America. A number of factors, including entrance examinations, vocational advice, economic hardships, and personal and family histories, were identified as factors that influence dropout rates. The evaluation also brought to light the need of using efficient strategies and providing assistance for the integration of regional education in order to combat the issue of university dropout.

In a study that was conducted by Doe, Shindano, and Kimolo (2022), the views of school heads and instructors were investigated with respect to the dropout rate of secondary school students in peri-urban communities that are situated in Zanzibar, Tanzania. These settlements are located in the country of Tanzania. According to the findings of the study, there are a number of factors that contribute to dropout. These factors include the distance to school, failure and repetition, inability to handle school responsibilities, poverty, engagement in economic activities, language of instruction, and challenges in the community. Counseling, which included the creation of English groups as well as voluntary work in the community, was one of the strategies that was put into place to avoid dropout. According to the findings of the study, it is of the highest importance to grasp and address the factors that lead to dropouts at a range of different kinds of educational institutions (all of which are different).

When Marina and Senthilrajan (2023) wanted to anticipate the rate of dropout from public schools among children who are physically challenged, they proposed a framework that is known as HFIPO-DPNN. This framework was developed with the goal of predicting the rate of dropout. Both enhanced particle swarm and hybrid firefly were the two approaches that were used by the framework in order to successfully complete the job of feature selection.

The system used a DPNN model in order to successfully complete the job of dropout prediction before it was considered complete. When everything is taken into account, it is estimated that the model successfully attained an accuracy of roughly 99.02%. The results of the study indicate that the framework has the potential to be improved in order to gain the capacity of properly anticipating dropout rates among children who are facing a range of obstacles. This is the conclusion that can be drawn from the findings of the study.

Wayman (2001) conducted a study that investigated the factors that influence the result of high school dropouts in terms of those who go on to get degrees. Participants who were Mexican American and white who were not of Latino descent were the primary focus of the study. The use of logistic regression analysis was the means by which this objective was achieved. This study resulted in the identification of a number of indicators that are capable of predicting degree progression. The capacity to attend school, the social position of the parent, the presence of children, and the grade level at the time of the dropout were some of the factors that determined the decision to drop out of school. It is of the highest importance to take into account a broad range of correlates and to make certain that the requirements of returning dropouts are addressed. This is because the findings of the study indicate that it is of the utmost importance to address the needs of returning dropouts.

To ascertain the degree to which students who had previously withdrawn from higher education in Brazil returned, Marques (2020) conducted an investigation. A significant number of higher education dropouts subsequently went back to school, but not necessarily to the same institution, according to the study, which made use of micro data obtained from the Higher Education Census. From the findings of the investigation, this conclusion was derived. After that, a large number of people went back to the same field of study that they had previously studied. The study, which was conducted all along the process of formulating education policy, shed light on the need of having a solid understanding of the dynamics of dropout and return.

Qvortrup and Lykkegaard (2022) proposed an updated model with the purpose of explaining dropout processes in higher education, with a particular focus on factors associated to the study environment. The model was developed with the objective of explaining dropout processes. The purpose of developing this model was to provide an explanation of the mechanisms involved in dropouts. To provide a more particular example, they differentiated between characteristics that are associated with the social system, the academic system, and

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instruction, and then they studied how components of these systems may be applied to grasp and avoid dropouts. The findings of the study indicate that in order to improve retention, it is necessary to take into consideration and address a number of factors that are linked with the setting in which the study is being conducted.

In order to better predict academic success and dropout intentions among biology students enrolled in higher education, Jenö, Danielsen, and Raaheim (2018) conducted their research. For the purpose of directing their investigation, the researchers relied on the Self-Determination Theory. Throughout the course of the inquiry, it was discovered that the components of autonomous motivation and perceived competence were demonstrated to be good predictors of academic accomplishment. On the other hand, the same factors were shown to be negative predictors of dropout intentions. Despite the fact that there was no correlation between controlled motivation and academic success, it was found that controlled motivation was a strong predictor of dropout attempts. This was the case despite the fact that there was no significant link between the two. According to the findings of the study, it is of the utmost importance to provide financial assistance to students in order to fulfill their requirements for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It is essential to do this in order to accelerate students' academic advancement and reduce dropout.

Ige and Adenuga (2021) conducted an analysis that focused on the factors that administrators at public secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria, perceive to be the most important contributors to student dropout. The findings of this inquiry were presented within the context of the investigation. The factors of poverty, bad peer influence, unfavorable teacher attitudes, and prejudice about gender were shown to have a significant effect, in addition to discrimination based on gender. These traits were found to have a significantly negative impact. A significant difference in perceptions was not found between male and female principals, nor between principals with more experience and those with less experience, according to the findings of this study. This was also the case for principals with more experience and those with less experience. It is advised that although it is recommended that steps be made to eliminate poverty, it is also recommended that standards surrounding parental responsibility be enforced more severely in order to aid in the retention of students.

With the goal of undertaking an analysis of the key factors leading to school dropout, Al-Mansoob, Masood, and Al-Abid (2020) conducted a study in Yemen. The study, which was conducted using binary logistic regression, came to the conclusion that the factors that were

discovered to be important were as follows: poverty, school conditions, education willingness, orphanhood, gender, and domicile locations. A prototype is a possible solution to the issue of dropouts and the factors that lead to the occurrence of these dropouts, according to the findings of the study that was conducted.

Greenland and Moore (2022) conducted in-depth interviews with students who had attempted to participate in open online education but had subsequently dropped out of the program. In order to re-define the factors that lead to dropout, the purpose of these interviews was to gather relevant information. By using the method of theme analysis, it was possible to get a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena of dropouts. The identification of 41 subthemes that were then grouped under 10 overarching causes for dropout scenarios was the means by which this objective was achieved. The poll also revealed that students had some ideas for avoiding dropouts, which was another conclusion of the experiment. When viewed in the context of open online education, the findings provide some insights into possible techniques that may be taken to increase the retention of students.

Álvarez (2021) conducted a complete bibliometric study, which included the detailed research of 182 scientific works that were relevant to the phenomena of university dropout in Spain throughout the period of time ranging from 2002 to 2021. This extensive investigation was carried out in order to evaluate the extent of the phenomenon. important publications and writers who have made important contributions to the field were acknowledged as a result of the inquiry that was conducted. The study, which was conducted using a factorial method, found a wide range of different issues and subjects that are associated with the occurrence of student dropout. Some of the problems and themes that fall under this area include educational policy, academic failure, and the social, personal, psychological, and economic factors that lead to academic failure. This category also includes a number of other topics and concerns.

## **Conclusion**

Dropout rates in higher education institutions pose significant challenges to India's educational landscape, affecting both individuals and society at large. Understanding the factors influencing dropout rates is crucial for devising effective interventions and policies to mitigate this issue. While conventional wisdom often attributes dropout rates to socio-economic factors and academic preparedness, recent research has unveiled a more intricate

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web of influences encompassing socio-economic, academic, institutional, social, cultural, and personal dynamics. This essay delves into the complexities surrounding dropout rates in Indian higher education, challenging preconceived notions and offering insights for future research and policy initiatives.

Traditionally, socio-economic status has been presumed to correlate inversely with dropout rates, with students from disadvantaged backgrounds facing higher risks of dropping out due to financial constraints and lack of support systems. However, recent studies have revealed unexpected trends, indicating a nuanced relationship between socio-economic status and dropout likelihood. Surprisingly, some data suggest a slight increase in dropout rates as socio-economic status rises, defying conventional assumptions.

This paradoxical finding underscores the need for a deeper examination of socio-economic dynamics influencing dropout behavior. While students from affluent backgrounds may have greater access to resources and support, they might also face unique pressures and expectations that contribute to their dropout vulnerability. Moreover, the interplay of socio-economic factors with cultural and familial dynamics can significantly impact students' decisions regarding higher education continuation or withdrawal. Thus, a holistic understanding of socio-economic influences demands consideration of cultural norms, familial expectations, and individual aspirations.

Academic preparedness has long been regarded as a primary determinant of dropout rates, with students lacking requisite academic skills and knowledge deemed more susceptible to attrition. However, recent research has challenged this notion, revealing that factors beyond academic readiness exert substantial influence on dropout behavior. While academic preparedness remains crucial, other variables such as motivational factors, self-efficacy beliefs, and psychological well-being play significant roles in shaping students' persistence in higher education.

For instance, students' perceived sense of belongingness within the academic community and their ability to navigate the institutional environment effectively can impact their likelihood of dropping out. Similarly, socio-emotional factors such as peer relationships, faculty support, and campus climate contribute to students' overall academic experiences and retention outcomes. Therefore, interventions aimed at reducing dropout rates must adopt a

multifaceted approach that addresses not only academic deficiencies but also socio-emotional and institutional barriers to retention.

Higher education institutions themselves exert considerable influence on dropout rates through various policies, practices, and support mechanisms. Institutional factors such as course structure, teaching quality, availability of student support services, and campus culture profoundly shape students' experiences and outcomes. Institutions that foster a supportive and inclusive environment are likely to witness lower dropout rates compared to those plagued by structural barriers and systemic inequities.

Moreover, social dynamics within the campus community, including peer interactions, social integration, and extracurricular engagement, contribute to students' sense of belonging and academic engagement. Institutions that prioritize building strong social networks and promoting student involvement in campus life are better positioned to enhance retention rates and foster academic success. Recognizing the pivotal role of institutions and social environments in shaping students' educational trajectories underscores the importance of systemic interventions targeting organizational culture and social cohesion.

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