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ATTRITION CAUSES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: THE CASE OF GONDAR UNIVERSITY, GONDAR, NORTH WEST ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The main purpose of this study was to examine major contributing factors for student's attrition in Gondar University.

Methods: Questionnaire was used a means to obtain students response, simple random sampling used and four hundred fifty participants were involved. The data analyses were done based on the percentage, rank ordered and percentage comparison.

Results: Lack of time management, carelessness, tension, fear of failure and lack of adequate effort were the top five personal factors for student's attrition. Among the major challenging factors in the university environment; lack of facilities, adjustment problem with the campus life, and lack of special support services were identified reason for dropout. High work load, use of difficult assessment techniques, low grade, style of learning and poor quality of teaching were the top five reasons for attrition in academic aspect, and variations had been observed in sex, male students had reported low grade as the first most reason for attrition whereas females reported high work load. Lack of money for learning (coping, buying books, for assignment typing), shortage of money to support oneself (pocket money) were reasons for students dropout, however there is gender difference and male students more attributed these economic factors for students attrition than females. Further, friends, parents, partner, academic adviser and instructors were nearest people students would like to seek advice from or share their secret when they were thinking of dropout. And, there had been gender differences in people to whom students discussed with, that is, male students prefer to consult with academic adviser whereas females prefers to discussed with their parents. Good preparation/orientation program in the beginning of a semester, participating short term training (study skill, time management, life skills), increased support from academic advisor, improvement in financial situations and domestic (family duties) were the top five possible solution that improve students attrition problems. There is gender difference in the possible solution that changes students less likely to dropout; male students ranked participating short term training, making friends on campus, improvement in financial situations, whereas female students had agreed good preparation orientation a head of a semester, increased support from academic advisor and teaching staff were identified as a solution for the problem.

Keywords: Attrition Causes, Students' Attrition, Gondar University

INTRODUCTION

Attrition refers to the proportion of students in a particular year that neither graduate nor continued studying the following year [1]. Attrition rates provide a measure of the proportion of students who drop out of an institution each year. [2], this is one of a range of indicators of outcomes of higher learning institution that should be viewed in conjunction with other measures to make judgment of the quality of the institutions. Some higher institutions include data on completion rates as indicators of performance, although there is a concern that the practice may implicitly force academic departments to lower standards of performance to attrition.

In all countries of the world, students' interruption/dropout is a common experience, and students' attrition is an important issue for many tertiary level educations [3]. Student learning and development of academic proficiencies in higher education are influenced by a multitude of factors, which can be categorized in to personal characteristics (both cognitive and non cognitive), physical and mental maturation, home environment and school experiences [4]. Some of these factors are experienced when the students enter the higher learning institutions while the others are related to their socioeconomic and school academic backgrounds.

Students attrition rates differ from country to country even within institution to institution, although averages are computed to show the overall figure for a country. For instance, the attrition rate for higher education students in Europe and the United States is indicated to around 30% [5]. Another assessment conducted in higher education institutions in the US indicated that out of 2.4 million freshman students in 1993 1.1 million left without completing their degrees [6]. Dropout rate is even relatively higher during the freshmen program since the first year experience is indicated to be the most difficult time for students. Over half of all students leave college does so before their second year, even at highly selective colleges and universities [7].

Although there is no comprehensive study conducted in relation to the percentage of dropouts from Ethiopian universities, some [8] reveled the dropout rate to be between 10% and 15%, with the largest losses occurring in the first year of study largely because of difficulties in adjusting to campus life.

A number of research studies on attrition have confirmed that students drop out of higher learning institutions because they are being influenced by the academic as well as psychosocial factors they experienced during high school and even after join college [9]. For instance, a recent study conducted by [3] using data collected from six higher learning institutions in Ethiopia has revealed that fear of failure, influence of senior students, lack of self confidence, lack of effort, carelessness, and lack of ability contributed to higher rates of female attrition. The study revealed GPA (Grade Point Average) to be significantly correlated with support from teachers. Problems in the university environment (such as lack of adequate reading space and absence of support services), support from friends and entrance score female students college GPA.

There is mixed research when it comes to the differences among female and male students in relation to the proportion of attrition. For instance, a research conducted at Addis Ababa University indicated that there is no significant difference in the survival rates of males and females [10]. Similarly a study conducted at a medical school in Pakistan reveled that drop outs rates among males and female did not significantly differ [11]. However, other studies [3], indicated that there is a very high rate of attrition for female students in most of the universities in Ethiopia. [12] Study on attrition based on data collected from various medical colleges that graduated in 17 different batches confirmed among male and female medical students, with the higher loss being experienced by females.

There is wealth information available regarding attrition in higher education institution in the western universities but African attrition issues have been almost neglected in dropout research. Moreover, studies regarding attrition issues are scarce or none existing in African countries in general and in Ethiopia particular. To the researcher knowledge, only two survey studies were conducted for female students excluding male students, no other detailed studies have been done in Gondar University that investigate students attrition and related problems and causes, except reports from the Ministry of Education for each year university allocated accommodation and graduate number of students. Hence, there is a need to conduct a study which involved both sexes since the problem from both sides about contributing specific factors, and solutions for the problem.

Besides, in view of the fact that attrition is a universal issue/phenomena but the rates, pattern, causes, its impact on students and the country is vary from country to country and institution to institution, and considering the shortage (non existence) of related information in University of Gondar, there is a need to carry out studies and compile data on contributing factors for attrition and implication for prevention and intervention. Having all these the above mentioned facts, this research tries to raise the following research questions.

- What are the factors that contribute students' attrition at Gondar University?

- Whom students discussed when they are thinking about facing academic problems?

- What changes in students circumstances would make students less likely to leave?

- Is their gender difference in contributing factors, which students discussed and solutions to reduce the problem?

- What are the implication of students' attrition problem for prevention and intervention?

METHODS

Study Design

The research adopted a cross-sectional survey study design. This research basically employed questioner once to measure perceived attrition factors for more than 400 regular students.

Study Area

This study was conducted in the Gondar University. The rationale behind to conduct this study in Gondar university is that, one thing the researcher do have work experiences in the university and observing students attrition at different times. Secondly, Gondar University is most accessible which undoubtedly minimizes costs for the study.

Participation and Sampling Techniques

Out of the total more than 13,000 regular students, as sample of 450 students will be randomly selected through simple random sampling techniques. That is students were categorized across four campuses and sex. For each campus 100 samples has taken and half male students and half female students were involved. The questionnaire was distributed to 450 students in the classroom randomly where there are adequate numbers of females and males arbitrarily in the classroom. Of 450 questionnaires 423 were returned and of these only 406 questionnaires were found properly filled. The analysis is therefore, made based on the response of 406 third year students and the detailed profile of study participants were presented below.

Table1: Samples Profile (n=406)

Faculty/College	Medical & Health Sciences		Social Sciences & Humanities		Business and Economics		Technology	
Department	Internal Medicine		Sociology		Management		Civil Engineers	
Male	53	13.05%	51	12.56%	44	10.83	48	11.82%
Female	49	12.06%	48	11.82%	50	12.31	54	13.30%
Total	101		99		104		102	

Over all 406 third year students participated in this study. As can be seen from Table1, the medical college share 101 participants, of them 53 (13.05%) were male while 49(12.06) female and they were internal medicine students. the respondents from FSSH were 99 (male 51(12.56) and female 48(11.82)). Tewodros campus participants were 104 which was the largest of all and constitute 44(10.83) male and 50(12.31) female students. Finally, technology students are represented by civil engineer student of 102 of them male were 48(11.82) and females 54(13.30).

Instrument

Data was collected be using questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared by the researcher based on literature that states about students attrition nature and factors facilitate attrition. It contains, background information, factors affecting academic performance and contributing to attrition (university, academic and, economic factors for dropout), when thinking about dropping out whom they are discussed. What changes in circumstances would make students less likely to leave. In addition to questionnaire, document analysis also used to identify previous year attrition rate.

Administration

First of all, the researchers had given brief orientation about the objectives of the study, the instructions of the tool and assured confidentiality to the respondents. And then, the questionnaire was distributed to be filled by participants in a free classroom.

Data Analysis

In this study, a quantitative data analysis technique was employed. Data was presented and summarized using tables. Descriptive statistics like percentage was computed. In addition, rank order and percentage comparisons also were used.

RESULTS

As point out in the above Table 2, out of the 20 personal factors listed to the respondents, lack of time management skill (67.2%) was found to be the first problem that challenges students where as disability was the last factor selected as a reason in Gondar University. The second problem was found to be carelessness (63.8%) of students, followed by two psychological problems, tension (60.3%) and fear of failure (58.6%) which are third and fourth rank respectively. Lack of adequate effort (58.6%) and self confidence (53.4%) were other factors students attributed for their academic failure. The remaining mentioned problems are problems students reported or encounter in Gondar University ranked from 7th to 20th in order.

Table 2: Personal Factors Responsible for Dropout (Attrition)

No	Personal factors for dropout (attrition)	Yes%	No %
1	Lack of time management skill	67.2	32.8
2	Carelessness	63.8	36.2
3	Tension	60.3	39.7
4	Fear of failure	58.6	41.4
5	Lack of adequate effort	58.5	41.4
6	Lack of self confidence	53.4	46.6
7	Lack of study skill	53.4	46.6
8	Falling in love easily	51.7	48.3
9	Poor communication with senior students and friends on academic matters	51.7	48.3
10	Homesickness (problems in family)	50	50
11	Separation from family/friends	50	50
12	Being addicted to drinking, smoking, disco houses etc	46.6	53.4
13	Health problem	46.6	53.4
14	Loneliness	44.8	55.2
15	Inability to become well planned and organized	44.8	55.8
16	Work commitment	43.1	56.9
17	A critical event in life (parent, relative, significant person death, pregnancy etc)	43.1	56.9
18	Feeling of anxiety during exam or test	41.4	58.6
19	Lack of ability to be competent	39.7	60.3
20.	Disability	31.0	69.0

Table 3: Personal Factors for Dropout (Attrition) Cross Analyzed by Gender

No	Personal factors for dropout (attrition)	Male		Female	
		Yes %	No%	Yes %	No%
1.	Lack of self confidence	27.5	24.1	25.8	22.4
2.	Lack of adequate effort	27.5	24.1	31	17.2
3.	Carelessness	18.5	24.1	36.2	12.0
4.	Lack of ability to be competent	18.9	32.7	20.6	27.5
5.	Fear of failure	25.8	25.8	32.7	15.5
6.	Tension	29.3	22.4	31	17.2
7.	Homesickness (problems in family)	29.3	22.4	20.6	27.5
8.	Loneliness	22.4	29.3	22.4	25.8
9.	Separation from family/friends	20.4	31.0	18.9	29.3
10.	Falling in love easily	29.3	22.4	22.4	25.8
11.	Inability to become well planned and organized	20.4	31.0	24.1	24.1
12.	Being addicted to drinking, smoking, disco houses etc	18.9	32.7	20.6	27.5
13.	Lack of study skill	27.5	24.1	18.9	29.3
14.	Poor communication with senior students and friends on academic matters	29.3	22.4	22.4	25.8
15.	Lack of time management skill	36.2	15.5	31.0	17.2
16.	Feeling of anxiety during exam or test	22.4	29.3	18.9	29.3

Major Factors Contributing for Students' Attrition

17.	Work commitment	22.4	29.3	20.6	27.5
18.	A critical event in life (parent, relative, significant person death, pregnancy etc)	24.1	27.5	18.9	29.5
19.	Health problem	25.8	25.8	20.6	27.5
20.	Disability	17.2	34.4	13.5	34.4

As Table 3 portrays, among the different factors listed for the respondents, male students reported that lack of time management skill (36.2%) problem was the first problem that challenges students, followed by tension, homesickness (problems in family), falling in love easily, and poor communication with senior students and friends on academic matters which jointly account 29.3% as the top five problems.

While, for the female counter parts, carelessness (36.2%) was found to be the first problem that students reason for attrition problem followed by a psychological factor, that is, fear of failure (32.7%). Lack of time management skill, tension, and lack of adequate effort were found to be other contributing factors account the same figure (31.0%) for student problems ranking 3rd- 5th respectively.

Table 4: University Factors Responsible for Dropout (Attrition)

No	University Factors for Dropout (Attrition)	Yes%	No %
1	Lack of facilities (separate reading places, medical, recreation, water)	77.6	22.6
2	Adjustment problem with the campus life/environment	70.5	29.3
3	Lack of special support services (e.g. guidance and counseling)	65.5	34.5
4	Lack of proper guidance	65.5	34.5
5	The influence from teachers and other staff members	62.1	37.9
6	Being placed in the department I was not interested	51.7	48.3
7	Lack of security in dormitories	48.3	51.7
8	Academic advising problems	41.4	57.9
9	Influence from bad senior friends	41.4	58.6

Of the different nine factors within the university, students reported that lack of facilities (separate reading places, medical, recreation, water etc) (77.6%) were found to be the first university factor contributing for their attrition. Adjustment problem with the campus life/environment account for 70.5% which was the second factor, where as lack of special support services (e.g. guidance and counseling) and lack of proper guidance equally reason (65.5%) ranked third for students' problem. Further, the influence from teachers and other staff members (62.1%) reported to the fifth cause for students' dropout, the remaining factors include being placed in the department I was not interested, lack of security in dormitories, academic advising problems, and Influence from bad senior friends.

Table 5: University Factors for Dropout (Attrition) Cross Analyzed by Gender

No	University Factors for Dropout (Attrition)	Male		Female	
		Yes %	No%	Yes %	No%
1	Academic advising problems	22.4	29.3	18.9	27.5
2	Being placed in the department I was not interested	27.5	24.1	24.1	24.1
3	Influence from bad senior friends	20.6	31.0	20.6	31.0
4	Lack of special support services (e.g. guidance and counseling)	32.7	18.9	32.7	15.5
5	Adjustment problem with the campus life/environment	36.2	15.5	34.4	13.5
6	Lack of facilities (separate	36.2	15.5	41.3	4

	reading places, medical, recreation, water)				
7	The influence from teachers and other staff members	34.4	17.2	27.5	20.6
8	Lack of proper guidance	34.4	17.2	31.0	17.2
9	Lack of security in dormitories	24.1	27.5	24.1	24.1

In relation with factors with the university, as Table 5 depict above, male participants of the study testimony that adjustment problem with the campus life/environment and lack of facilities (separate reading places, medical, recreation, water etc) were found to be the first ranked problems that students encountered which both account 36.2%. Almost similar result also reported for the factors of influence from teachers and other staff members (34.4%), lack of proper guidance (34.4%) and lack of special support services (e.g. guidance and counseling) (32.7%), which ranked from 3rd-5th respectively.

On the female side similar results were reported and lack of facilities (separate reading places, medical, recreation, water etc) (41.3%) and adjustment problem with the campus life/environment (34.4%) found to be the first and second problems that female students faced in Gondar university. What's more, lack of special support services (e.g. guidance and counseling)(32.7%), lack of proper guidance (31.0%) and the influence from teachers and other staff members (27.5 %) were the other factors that female students attributed for their academic failure.

Table 6: Academic Factors Causes for Dropout (Attrition)

No	Academic Factors for Dropout (Attrition)	Yes%	No%
1	High workload (much assignments, much credit hours)	69.0	31.0
2	Use of difficult assessment techniques (exams, tests, assignments and practices)	69.0	31.0
3	Low grades	63.8	36.2
4	Style of learning	60.3	39.7
5	Poor quality of teaching	56.9	43.1
6	Negative feedback on work/learning from teachers	55.2	44.8
7	Un-transparent grading	53.4	46.6
8	Timetable difficulties/problems	50	50
9	Difficulty of tasks	50	50
10	Difficulty of education	46.6	53.4
11	Poor high school performance/background	37.9	62.1

The results in Table 6 show that out of 11 factors that presumed to be factors affecting students' performance, high workload (much assignments, much credit hours) and use of difficult assessment techniques (exams, tests, assignments and practices) were found to be the first rank academic reasons for drop out, which jointly account 69%. Out of the top five problems reported, low grades (63.8%), style of learning (60.3%) and poor quality of teaching (56.9%) found to be the third, fourth and fifth causes for students attrition respectively. The remaining factor based on their rank includes un-transparent grading, timetable difficulties/problems, difficulty of tasks, difficulty of education, and poor high school performance/background.

Table 7: Academic Factors for Dropout (Attrition) Cross Analyzed By Gender

No	Academic Factors for Dropout (Attrition)	Male		female	
		Yes %	No%	Yes %	No%
1	Negative feedback on work/learning from teachers	24.1	27.5	31.0	17.2
2	Low grades	34.4	17.2	29.3	18.9
3	High workload (many assignments, credit hours)	32.7	18.9	36.2	12.0
4	Poor quality of teaching	29.3	22.4	27.5	20.6
5	Use of difficult assessment techniques	34.4	17.2	34.4	13.5
	(exams, tests, assignments and practices)				
6	Un-transparent grading	20.6	31.0	32.7	15.5
7	Timetable difficulties/problems	27.5	24.1	22.4	25.8
8	Difficulty of tasks	22.4	29.3	20.6	27.5
9	Poor high school performance/background	15.5	36.2	22.4	25.8
10	Style of learning	25.8	25.8	34.4	13.5
11	Difficulty of education	18.9	32.7	27.5	20.6

As indicated in Table 7, among the different academic factors presented to male student, low grades and use of difficult assessment techniques (exams, tests, assignments and practices) were found to be the first problems that student reason out for attrition, which jointly account 34.4%. Further, High workload (many assignment and credit hour) (32.7%), poor quality of teaching (29.3%) and timetable difficulties/problems (27.5%) were the other factors responsible for students dropout, which are ranked 3rd – 5th respectively.

In contrast to male respondents, female students most frequently selected high workload (many assignments, credit hours) (36.2%) as a first problem that the perceived as a factor for attrition. Subsequently, use of difficult assessment techniques (exams, tests, assignments and practices) and style of learning were found to be the 2nd and 3rd problems responsible for attrition, which both account 34.4%. The remaining top five factors includes un-transparent grading (32.7%) and negative feedback on work/learning from teachers (31.0%), which are differing to male students response.

Table 8: Economic Factors Reason for Dropout (Attrition)

No	Economic Factors for Dropout (Attrition)	Yes%	No%
1	Lack of money for learning materials (coping, buying books, for assignment typing)	69.0	31
2	Shortage of money to support oneself (e.g. pocket money)	69.0	31

A significant majority (69.0%) of the respondents reported they faced lack of money for learning materials (coping, buying books, for assignment typing etc) and shortage of money to support oneself (e.g. pocket money) were cause for students drop out in the campus.

Table 9: Economic Factors for Dropout (Attrition) Cross Analyzed By Gender

No	Economic Factors for Dropout (Attrition)	Male		Female	
		Yes %	No%	Yes %	No%
1.	Lack of money for learning materials (coping, buying books, for assignment typing etc)	44.8	6.8	24.1	24.1
2.	Shortage of money to support oneself (e.g. pocket money)	44.8	6.8	24.1	24.1

Table 9 shows above economic factors for dropout, lack of money for learning materials (coping, buying books, for assignment typing) and shortage of money to support oneself (e.g. pocket money) were equally found to be the reason for attrition of male students. Contrary, less number of female students selected these factors (24.1%) as a cause of students' attrition.

Responses of students to whom they discussed when they were thinking about dropping out (withdrawing from a subject/ reducing load).

Students were asked to whom they discussed when they were thinking about facing academic problems. Eight responsible options/bodies they would consult were listed and they have selected them, the summary result presented here below based on the frequency of selection in rank order.

Table10: People to Whom Students Discussed When They Were Thinking about Dropping Out (Withdrawing from a Subject/ Reducing Load)

No	What people you discuss with	Yes%	No %
1	Friend/s	72.4	27.6
2	Parent/s	69.0	31.0
3	Partner	67.2	32.8
4	Academic adviser	67.2	32.7
5	Instructor/Lecturer	48.8	51.7
6	Study skill adviser	46.5	53.4
7	Other family members	44.8	55.2
8	Student counselor	37.9	62.1

The result from table 10 put on view that friend/s (72.4%) found to be the first nearest people students would like to seek advice from or share their secret, followed by parent/s (69.0%). Subsequently, partner and academic adviser which both account 67.2% were found to be the third dependable bodies students discussed with. The remaining people students talk to includes instructor/lecturer, study skill adviser, other family members and student counselor.

Table 11: People to Whom Students Discussed with Cross Analyzed by Gender

No	What people you discuss with	Male Yes%	No %	Female Yes%	No %
1	Partner	32.7	18.9	34.4	13.5
2	Friend/s	39.6	12.0	34.4	15.5
3	Parent/s	32.7	18.9	36.2	12
4	Other family members	20.6	31.0	25.8	24.1
5	Instructor/Lecturer	15	25.8	22.4	25.8
6	Academic adviser	43.5	10.3	25.8	22.4
7	Student counselor	17.2	34.4	20.6	27.5
8	Study skill adviser	22.4	29.3	24.1	24.1

As indicated in Table 11, male students more like to discuss with first their academic adviser (43.5%), next friend/s (39.6%), followed by partner and parent/s which jointly account 32.7%. On the female side, parent/s (36.2%) were the first dependable bodies students talk about. Similar to male students, friend/s and partner were the second person students would like to seek advice from which equally accounts 34.4%.

What Changes in Students Circumstances would make Students Less Likely to Leave

Students were asked to what changes in students circumstances would make students less likely to leave. Twelve options were listed and they have selected them, the summary result presented here below based on the frequency of selection in rank order.

Table 12: What Changes in Students Circumstances would make Students Less Likely to Leave

No	Items	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
1	A good preparation/ orientation program in the beginning of a semester	67.3	20.7	12.1
2	Participating short term training (study skill, time management, life skills)	63.8	17.2	18.9
3	Increased support from academic advisor	63.8	17.2	18.9
4	Improvement in financial situations	58.6	24.1	17.3
5	Increased support from teaching staff	55.2	24.1	20.7
6	Increased support with domestic/family duties	55.2	25.9	19
7	Getting guidance and counseling service	53.5	22.4	24.1
8	Getting better grades	53.4	24.1	22.4
9	Making friends on campus	50	24.1	28.9
10	Doing your course over a long time frame	50	34.5	15.5
11	Changes to the timetable	48.3	25.9	25.8
12	Increased support from senior students	44.8	29.3	25.8

Table 12 above revealed the possible solution that changes/make students less likely to leave. In this regard, the top five way outs students agreed were a good preparation/ orientation program in the beginning of a semester (67.3%), participating short term training (study skill, time management, life skills) and increased support from academic advisor (63.8%), improvement in financial situations (58.6%) and Increased support from teaching staff and Increased support with domestic/family duties (55.2%). The last agreed solution for students' problem was found to be increased support from senior students (44.8%).

Table 13: What Changes in Students Circumstances would make Students Less Likely to Leave Cross Analyzed by Gender

No	Items	Male Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Female Agree	Undecided	Disagree
1	A good preparation/ orientation program in the beginning of a semester	32.7	12.0	6.8	34.4	8.6	5.1
2	Increased support from academic advisor	32.7	8.6	10.3	31.0	8.6	8.6
3	Increased support from teaching staff	24.1	12	15.5	31.0	12	5.1
4	Participating short term training(study skill, time management, life skills	34.4	6.8	10.3	29.3	10.3	8.6
5	Increased support with domestic/family duties	25.8	13.5	12.0	29.3	12.0	6.8
6	Improvement in financial situations	32.7	8.6	10.3	25.8	15.5	8.6
7	Getting better grades	27.5	12.0	12.0	25.8	12.0	10.3
8	Doing your course over a long time frame	24.1	17.2	10.3	25.8	17.2	10.3
9	Getting guidance and counseling service	31.0	10.3	10.3	22.4	12.0	13.5
10	Changes to the timetable	25.8	10.3	15.5	22.4	15.5	10.3
11	Increased support from senior students	24.1	12.0	15.5	20.6	17.2	10.3
12	Making friends on campus	32.7	8.6	10.3	17.2	15.5	15.5

Table13 above show the possible solution that changes/make students less likely to leave across sex. In this issue, male respondents had agreed the following top five circumstances that would make students less likely to leave, first participating short term training (study skill, time management, life skills)(34.4%), second four other circumstances which account the same figure (32.7%) reported, making friends on campus, improvement in financial situations, a good preparation/ orientation program in the beginning of a semester and increased support from academic advisor.

Whereas female students had agreed that a good preparation/ orientation program in the beginning of a semester (34.4%) was the first circumstance that would make students less likely to leave their learning. Increased support from academic advisor and increased support from teaching staff were found to be the second circumstance that would make students less likely to leave their education which jointly accounts 31.0%.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the descriptive analysis of personal factors indicated that, lack of time management, carelessness, tension, fear of failure and lack of adequate effort were the top five factors that threatened or encountered students' academic performance in Gondar University. Variation was observed in the first factor for females, which reported carelessness, but the remaining top five factors almost reported same order. When we look these factors critically, the first problem is more of managemental, carelessness and lack of adequate effort are motivational, whereas tension and fear of failure are typically psychological problems. From this it easy to conclude that most of the top ranked problems are psychological in nature and needs psychological measures like timely counseling and orientation for students either personal or in group base.

This finding somehow in line with the study of [13, 3] who found out personal matters like lack of self confidence, lack of adequate effort, carelessness, lack of ability to be competent, inability to proper notes, distraction because of personal reason, fear, shyness, were the significant factors that deter students academic performance especially female ones. Such similarities in study results might be attributed to, one thing the study size was similar and the time of the research is too close.

Contrary to the current study findings, [14] suggested lack of time and absence of interaction with fellow students as the most significant factor influencing students' decision to withdraw. This difference might be because of study area difference, program difference, socio-economical and cultural factors.

As it has been indicated in university factors, lack of facilities, adjustment problem with the campus life lack of special support services were found to be the major challenging factors in the university environment. These mentioned problems almost similarly reported in both sexes. Hence it is visible to observe facilities like separate reading places, medical, recreational centers, water, guidance and counseling are the most profound factors the university setting.

In the present study, it appears that the findings are in agreement with local study in four universities by [13], lack of study space, medical, recreational, water and shortage of dormitories were the top problems in these higher institutions. Such kind of similar study result was found across time difference due to the fact that there is no significant change has been made in improving students' facilities in these universities. To the contrary, [15] indicated that the major reasons leading to students' decision to withdraw are insufficient academic support from staff members, insufficient physical facilities, and insufficient counseling session. Additionally, [16] identified a number of school factors that promote female students' success in higher education. The most critical is sound counseling and providing staff training to help teachers serve students more effectively.

The outcome of the present study also show high work load, use of difficult assessment techniques, low grade, style of learning and poor quality of teaching were the top five reasons for attrition in academic aspect. In academic factors variations had been observed in sex, male students had reported low grade as the first most reason for attrition whereas females reported high work load, in the remaining top five factors relatively similar ranks are reported. This implies that, female students were more work loaded than males ones.

This finding is the direct contrast with [1] in Mekelle University, they found out prior academic background is a predicator of persistence and academic achievement in college. However, preparatory school average has no contribution to college success. The current researcher share the reasons for this gave by the same authors, this could be because the preparatory score was obtained from various schools, and hence the differences in the teaching as well as item writing skills of teachers might have affected the outcomes.

Similar to the current study research finding, i.e. use of difficult assessment techniques, [1] found out that quality of assessment employed contributed to predicting college persistence. That means students are not satisfied with the nature and quality of teaching and assessment.

Results of this study also reveled low grades as one of the main reasons for academic difficulty in Gondar University, which goes in line with the findings of [3] students left the higher learning institution due to lower academic performance followed by health problem. Female students' high workload could be attributed that, they need relatively more time to care their beauty and neatness which share their academic time and make a burden on their learning.

As it has been indicated in the economic factors, majority of the respondents reported that lack of money for learning (coping, buying books, for assignment typing) shortage of money to support oneself (e.g. pocket money)were reasons for students dropout, however there is gender difference and male students more attributed these economic factors for students attrition than females.

Consistent with to this study finding, [15] found out 40% of the total respondents face financial problems. Though financial problems could be something that females' students commonly share with male students, the effect could be worse for female students because of the many different needs they have to fulfill including sanitary materials.

In this study, it was found out friends, parents, partner, academic adviser and instructors were nearest people students would like to seek advice from or share their secret when they were thinking of dropout. And, there had been gender differences in people to whom students discussed with, that is, male students prefer to consult with academic adviser whereas females prefers to discussed with their parents.

This finding is a sharp contrast to [17], students support services have a very important and vital role to play in helping students successfully complete their program of study, one of this and core is counseling service in the institutions who shoulder the responsibility of providing timely and quality feedback to students' academic and personal matters. Additionally, [16] identified a number of school factors that promote female students' success in higher education. The most critical is sound counseling and providing staff training to help teachers serve students more effectively.

This observed difference with other setting researches probably attributed late establishment of students' guidance and counseling service in our university and less awareness of students about the service. The gender difference might be caused by females' behavior of high attachment with their parents and afraid to communicate their instructors'.

With regard to circumstances that would make students less likely

to leave, this study found out that a good preparation/orientation program in the beginning of a semester, participating short term training (study skill, time management, life skills), increased support from academic advisor, improvement in financial situations and domestic (family duties) were the top five possible solution that improve students attrition problems.

As indicated in the last table, there is gender difference in the possible solution that changes students less likely to dropout; male students ranked participating short term training, making friends on campus, improvement in financial situations, whereas female students had agreed good preparation orientation a head of a semester, increased support from academic advisor and teaching staff were identified as a solution for the problem.

From the above point it is easy to understand early preparation or orientation are very crucial for students survival especially for female students, short term training also important in study skill, time management and life skill issues.

CONCLUSION

- Lack of time management, carelessness, tension, fear of failure and lack of adequate effort were the top five factors that threatened or encountered students' academic performance in Gondar University. Variation was observed in the first factor for females, which reported carelessness, but the remaining top five factors almost reported same order.
- As it has been indicated in university factors, lack of facilities, adjustment problem with the campus life, and lack of special support services were found to be the major challenging factors in the university environment. These mentioned problems almost similarly reported in both sexes.
- The outcome of the present study also show high work load, use of difficult assessment techniques, low grade, style of learning and poor quality of teaching were the top five reasons for attrition in academic aspect. In academic factors variations had been observed in sex, male students had reported low grade as the first most reason for attrition whereas females reported high work load, in the remaining top five factors relatively similar ranks are reported. This implies that, female students were more work loaded than males ones.
- As it has been indicated in the economic factors, majority of the respondents reported that lack of money for learning (coping, buying books, for assignment typing etc), shortage of money to support oneself (e.g. pocket money)were reasons for students dropout, however there is gender difference and male students more attributed these economic factors for students attrition than females.
- In this study, it was found out friends, parents, partner, academic adviser and instructors were nearest people students would like to seek advice from or share their secret when they were thinking of dropout. And, there had been gender differences in people to whom students discussed with, that is, male students prefer to consult with academic adviser whereas females prefers to discussed with their parents.
- With regard to circumstances that would make students less likely to leave, this study found out that a good preparation/orientation program in the beginning of a semester, participating short term training (study skill, time management, life skills), increased support from academic advisor, improvement in financial situations and domestic (family duties) were the top five possible solution that improve students attrition problems.
- As indicated in the last table, there is gender difference in the possible solution that changes students less likely to dropout; male students ranked participating short term training, making friends on campus, improvement in financial situations, whereas female students had agreed good preparation orientation a head of a semester, increased support from academic advisor and teaching staff were identified as a solution for the problem.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the finding of this study, the following recommendations are made.

- Most of the top ranked problems are psychological in nature and needs psychological measures like timely counseling and orientation for students either personal or in group base.
- Still university facilities are major problems of on campus challenges; hence the administrations of the university should immediately improve conditions for students learning. Timely arranged workshops/trainings on how to adapt with new campus life should be delivered either by the gender office of the University or the guidance and counseling offices.
- Teachers necessarily considered students workload when give assignments and design alternative options reduce learners over burdens especially for girls, and improve the assessment and teaching methods to help students more.
- To support student's financially, at least the university should arrange things to help in kind like photo coping and borrow books for long time for students.
- Female students still afraid of consulting their teachers, hence, teachers should motivate female students to consult regularly when in need of advice.
- Orientation program in the beginning of a semester must be arranged to reduce the students leave out.
- Increased support from academic advisor and teaching staff should be expected as a solution for the problems.

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