

Why they Contemplate Leaving: Exploring the Factors that Drive the High Dropout Intention Rate among University Teacher Trainees in Post-COVID Uganda and South Africa



Loyce Kiiza Kobusingye¹ , Newlin Marongwe²  & Rogers Mageyo¹

¹ Department of Educational, Social and Organisational Psychology, Makerere University, Uganda.

² Department of Continuing Professional Teacher Development, Walter Sisulu University, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

In the post-COVID-19 period, it is evident that various studies have been conducted on the effects of the pandemic on economies, politics, education, and teachers, to mention but a few, but there are very few studies on how the pandemic has influenced student turn over especially in as far as educational retention and drop out intention is concerned. It should be noted that a multiplicity of factors hinder disadvantaged students from completing their studies and becoming lifelong students for educational and academic sustainability. Therefore, in addition to exploring the factors for this hindrance, the purpose of this study was also to offer strategies or alternative pathways that should be implemented to retain students and help them overcome related challenges. A qualitative approach was chosen for the study and a snowball sampling technique was utilized to select a total of 16 teacher trainees drawn from one Ugandan university (8) and one South African university (8) to explore factors why student teachers contemplate dropping out of their university education. Microsoft Teams meetings and physical interviews were utilized to collect data. The data was analysed thematically. Findings showed that the intention to drop out of university is driven by COVID-19-related factors or effects such as grief and loss of employment; government policies, economic, academic, and personal factors. The researchers therefore recommend teacher motivation, counselling, and new funding models to support teacher trainees, partnering with different potential employer stakeholders, focusing on addressing COVID-19 instructional effects, and creating socially safe spaces to minimize the intention to and actual drop out which are detrimental to future teacher availability. This in turn has implications on the quality of education for sustainability, which in the long run has implications on students' academic achievement and job prospects.

Correspondence

Loyce Kiiza Kobusingye

Email:

koloyce@gmail.com

Publication History

Received: 23rd October, 2023

Accepted: 22nd January, 2024

Published online:

22nd March, 2024

Keywords: *Dropout Intention, Demographic, Teacher Trainees, Post-COVID-19*

INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, institutions of higher learning, especially in Africa, are faced with the challenge of student dropout, access, and success in the post-COVID-19 era. Shuja, Ali, Khan, Burki, and Buki posit that third-world countries have had the problematic issue of students dropping out and that the problem has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ Literature attests that before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the globe was already

¹ Anita Shuja et al., "Factors Affecting Students' Dropout Rate During COVID-19," 2021.

struggling with retaining students in higher education institutions. According to Crosling, Heagney and Thomas, higher education institutions across the globe are concerned not only about progress but also the need to retain and have students succeed in academics.² The position of this paper is that if retention of students was problematic before COVID-19, then it must be a more serious issue now, given the disruption caused by pandemics, natural disasters such as floods, volcanoes, global warming, poverty, widened and deepened inequalities in parts of the globe such as South Africa and Uganda. In a study conducted by Kakuchi, it is postulated that in Japan, for example, many students who were dropping out of university cited challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic.³

Current dropout intentions, especially among university students may be a product of an interplay between different factors.⁴ These factors may be personal, institutional, family, natural disasters, effects of COVID-19, career, academic and structural. Ndebele states that the number of students who are out of school in South Africa has tripled due to COVID-19 and that Sub-Saharan African countries are the most affected.⁵ Universities must identify and understand the different factors that prompt their students to develop intentions to drop out of the university, for these intentions could easily translate into actual dropouts. It is equally important to identify and critically analyze the intention to drop out process as a factor of time and examine at what point of the university career journey, students are more likely, vulnerable, susceptible and prone to drop out. Doing so would enable concerned stakeholders to identify both institutional and non-institutional factors to accordingly implement response strategies to address the multidimensional drivers of student dropout.

Maroco et al., in their study done in different countries about the predictors of dropout intentions, revealed that burnout among students is also a factor worth noting because the mechanisms of coping involved such as self-blame denial, self-distraction and disengagement highly predict students' intention to drop out and ultimately, actual drop out and poor academic achievement.⁶ Similarly, Kakuchi observes that university students were negatively impacted by coronavirus-related changes and needed a lot of counselling due to related mental issues.⁷ It is well documented that different policies have been formulated and implemented by different universities to address this challenge yet there are still students who contemplate dropping out of university.⁸ However, little or no research has been done in the Ugandan and South African contexts to identify challenges and intervention strategies that can be used in addressing university student teachers' challenges of contemplation to drop out post-COVID-19. Hence, this study aims to explore the factors that drive dropout intention among university teacher trainees at selected universities in Uganda and South Africa. It further aims to suggest strategies that could be employed to mitigate the factors pushing student teachers to drop out.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is the backbone of economies for any country and for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved.⁹ As the former South African President, Nelson Mandela used to say, "Education is a life transformation tool." Education is a right and not a privilege, therefore, it should be accessed by all and completed successfully without students dropping out. This article is of the view that a failed education breeds and is a symptom of a failed nation that impacts negatively on SDGs. Therefore, dropping out of university by students should be guarded against, especially post-COVID-19. The latest literature attests that though higher education has grown through

² Liz Thomas, Glenda Crosling, and Margaret Heagney, "Improving Student Retention in Higher Education," *Australian Universities Review* 51, no. 2 (2009): 9–18.

³ S. Kakuchi, "Student Dropout Rate Due to COVID-19 Is Still Rising. University World News: The Global Window on Higher Education, Japan.," <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=202111261339042>, 2021.

⁴ Nicolette Vanessa Roman et al., "School Dropout: Intentions, Motivations and Self-Efficacy of a Sample of South Africa Youth," *Youth* 2, no. 2 (April 11, 2022): 126–37, <https://doi.org/10.3390/youth2020010>; Kelzang Tentsho, Rhysa McNeil, and Phattrawan Tongkumchum, "Determinants of University Dropout: A Case of Thailand," *Asian Social Science* 15, no. 7 (June 30, 2019): 49, <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v15n7p49>; Lisa Bardach et al., "Context-Related Problems and University Students' Dropout Intentions—the Buffering Effect of Personal Best Goals," *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 35, no. 2 (June 13, 2020): 477–93, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-019-00433-9>; Camelia Truta, Luminita Parv, and Ioana Topala, "Academic Engagement and Intention to Drop out: Levers for Sustainability in Higher Education," *Sustainability* 10, no. 12 (2018): 4637; Russell W Rumberger and Sun Ah Lim, "Why Students Drop out of School: A Review of 25 Years of Research," 2008.

⁵ Hloniphani Ndebele, "Exploring the Challenges of Information and Communication Technology Localization in South African Higher Education: A Language Management Approach," *International Journal of Multilingualism* 19, no. 3 (2022): 368–82.

⁶ João Marôco et al., "Predictors of Academic Efficacy and Dropout Intention in University Students: Can Engagement Suppress Burnout?," *PLOS ONE* 15, no. 10 (October 29, 2020): e0239816, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239816>.

⁷ Kakuchi, "Student Dropout Rate Due to COVID-19 Is Still Rising. University World News: The Global Window on Higher Education, Japan."

⁸ Shuja et al., "Factors Affecting Students' Dropout Rate During COVID-19."

⁹ Shuja et al., "Factors Affecting Students' Dropout Rate During COVID-19."

online strategies, it is expanding at a cost implying that a substantial number of students fail to complete academic programs online.¹⁰ The same authors further argue that certain initiatives should be taken to minimise the non-completion of studies by the students.

In the report that was released by UNICEF in 2022 on the rate of school dropouts in South Africa due to Covid-19, the UNICEF Executive Director, Catherine Russell warned that the education of the marginalised, poor, and the vulnerable must be guarded since education can divide the society instead of equalising people in the society because of unequal access that affects the completion and success. Students' dropouts can have repercussions and be a burden to individuals, institutions, and the nation. In Uganda, there were over 45 % post-COVID-19 dropouts in 2019.¹¹ Bernardo et al., are of the view that dropping out of students affects the institution in the sense that is time and money wasted and is likely to negatively affect the institution's reputation and integrity and the funding system.¹² Hence it is in the interest of this study to suggest intervention strategies that can be put in place to reduce student dropout.

It is in the public domain that the COVID-19 pandemic brutally impacted negatively on the entire education sector and other sectors worldwide. According to Dube and Landa, Zhou and Marongwe, institutions of higher learning and schools were compelled to transition from the traditional modes of teaching to online modes because of numerous lockdowns that were put in place to manage the COVID-19 virus.¹³ This was tough for some institutions and students to sustain the push to teach and learn.¹⁴ It is well documented that the closures of all educational institutions paved the way for distance learning. This pushed further concerns about the unequal involvement of all students in the teaching and learning activities.¹⁵ It is argued that the decision to offer online classes benefited to a greater extent the already privileged classes at the expense of many poor, and other marginalized groups.¹⁶ Further factors that can drive students to drop out are discussed in the following section below.

Factors Driving University Students to Drop Out

Family Influences

The family setup, status and involvement in a student's academic journey greatly influence the level of their academic achievement and minimize tendencies and intentions of dropping out.¹⁷ These factors determine the affective and logistical investment that influences the students' drive towards academic achievement, thereby playing a significant role in influencing dropout intentions as supported by Gobena among other studies.¹⁸ However, Catalan and Santelices argue that socioeconomic levels do not really contribute to a dropout intention as such.¹⁹ Contrary to the views by Catalan and Santelices, Moscoviz and Evans in their reports on learning, loss and

¹⁰ Ana B. Bernardo, Adrian Castro-Lopez, and Alejandro Diaz Mujica, "Editorial: Higher Education Dropout After COVID-19: New Strategies to Optimize Success," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (April 8, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.880295>.

¹¹ C.A. Okudi, "Support to School Drop Outs as a Result of COVID-19 Pandemic in Uganda," *International Journal for Cross-Disciplinary Subjects in Education* 3, no. 1 (2022): 4586–91.

¹² Bernardo, Castro-Lopez, and Diaz Mujica, "Editorial: Higher Education Dropout After COVID-19: New Strategies to Optimize Success."

¹³ Hartness M Samushonga, "On Bivocational Ministry-Focused Training in British Theological Schools: Dialoguing with British Theological Educationalists," *Practical Theology* 13, no. 4 (2020): 385–99; Landa L Trentham, "Anxiety and Instruction Effects on Sixth-grade Students in a Testing Situation," *Psychology in the Schools* 16, no. 3 (1979): 439–43..

¹⁴ Samushonga, "On Bivocational Ministry-Focused Training in British Theological Schools: Dialoguing with British Theological Educationalists"; Bekithemba Dube and Xolisile P. Ndaba, "Educating Progressed Learners in Times of COVID-19: How Can Bricolage Help?," *Research in Social Sciences and Technology* 6, no. 2 (September 9, 2021): 22–36, <https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2021.9>; A. Fataar, "Why the Fees Must Fall," *The Socialist Worker*, 2015, <https://socialistworker.org/2015/10/27/why-the-fees-must-fall>.

¹⁵ Olympia Tsolou, Thomas Babalis, and Konstantina Tsoli, "The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Education: Social Exclusion and Dropping out of School," *Creative Education* 12, no. 03 (2021): 529–44, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2021.123036>.

¹⁶ Tsolou, Babalis, and Tsoli, "The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Education: Social Exclusion and Dropping out of School"; A Fataar, "Why the Fees Must Fall," *The Socialist Worker*. Accessed April 9 (2015): 2020, <https://socialistworker.org/2015/10/27/why-the-fees-must-fall>.

¹⁷ R. Mageyo, "Motivation, Academic Achievement and Drop out Intention among Secondary School Students in Butaleja District" (Makerere University. Kampala, 2022).

¹⁸ Gemechu Abera Gobena, "Family Socio-Economic Status Effect on Students' Academic Achievement at College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Haramaya University, Eastern Ethiopia," *Journal of Teacher Education and Educators* 7, no. 3 (2018): 207–22.

¹⁹ Ximena Catalán and María Verónica Santelices, "Academic Performance of Students from Different Socio-Economic Levels in Universities: The Case of the Catholic University of Chile," *Calidad En La Educación*, no. 40 (2014).

student dropouts during the COVID-19 pandemic note that poverty pushed some students to drop out, that is, socioeconomic levels of parents or guardians play a significant role in students' decision to contemplate dropping out.²⁰ In addition, Bergeron et al., affirm that most of the predictors of dropout intention have the same influence on students regardless of socioeconomic status.²¹ A recent study done by Cocorada et al., on undergraduate students at a Romania University, indicated that low family income is a big indicator of dropout because students may experience financial difficulties due to living costs or tuition fees.²² In the same study, they also found that a higher dropout intention was among students from disadvantaged families compared to those from well-off families.

Families that have a good education in terms of accomplishment and attitude are considerably able to motivate their offspring's academic attainment through effective guidance and supervision. In contrast, families that are low on these attributes are not in a good position to be able to promote their children's academic achievements.²³ This could mean that students who belong to such families may have high intentions of dropping out. The social and economic background are significant predictors of education dropout.²⁴ Poverty is related to negative educational outcomes with mediators such as family conflicts and struggles.²⁵ Stressors related to poverty interact with various factors to influence student's decision to leave school.²⁶ Aguti et al., study revealed that socio-cultural and financial factors mainly contribute to student dropout.²⁷ From Omollo's Doctoral study done in Kenya in 2013, it was established that students who have educated and enlightened mothers tend to concentrate more on their academic success and would be less likely to drop out of school.

Gender

In terms of gender, it is generally perceived that female students persist more in completing their degree programs because they believe it will give them a stronger position in society. Male students show a higher dropout intention than female students, and they perceive more barriers to the completion of the degree program.²⁸ Male students appear to be less motivated to complete their studies.²⁹ On the other hand, and away from the gender angle, a study by Bargmann et al., indicates that it is career decidedness that determines consideration of dropping out of school and the lower the career decidedness the earlier it can be for a student to consider dropping out.³⁰ Bardach et al., assert that to establish a better understanding of university students' intentions to withdraw from their degree programs, both structural and personal attributes must be looked into as it was discovered that non-conducive study conditions, such as a lack of information on the study program or insufficient support from lecturers, increased students' thoughts about dropping out of their degree program play a role.³¹ Arhin, in an earlier study, also supports

²⁰ Catalán and Verónica Santelices, "Academic Performance of Students from Different Socio-Economic Levels in Universities: The Case of the Catholic University of Chile"; Laura Moscoviz and David K Evans, "Learning Loss and Student Dropouts during the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Review of the Evidence Two Years after Schools Shut Down," 2022, <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/learning-loss-and-student-dropouts-during-covid-19-pandemic-review-evidence-two-years>.

²¹ Julie Bergeron, Roch Chouinard, and Michel Janosz, "The Impact of Teacher-Student Relationships and Achievement Motivation on Students' Intentions to Dropout According to Socio-Economic Status.," *Online Submission*, 2011.

²² Elena Cocoradă et al., "Dropout Intention, Motivation, and Socio-Demographics of Forestry Students in Romania," *Forests* 12, no. 5 (2021): 618.

²³ Gobena, "Family Socio-Economic Status Effect on Students' Academic Achievement at College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Haramaya University, Eastern Ethiopia."

²⁴ Enrico Ripamonti, "Risk Factors for Dropping out of High School: A Review of Contemporary, International Empirical Research," *Adolescent Research Review* 3 (2018): 321–38; Rumberger and Lim, "Why Students Drop out of School: A Review of 25 Years of Research."

²⁵ Martha E. Wadsworth et al., "An Indirect Effects Model of the Association Between Poverty and Child Functioning: The Role of Children's Poverty-Related Stress," *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 13, no. 2–3 (February 18, 2008): 156–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325020701742185>.

²⁶ Isabelle Archambault, Jade Vandebosche-Makombo, and Sarah L. Fraser, "Students' Oppositional Behaviors and Engagement in School: The Differential Role of the Student-Teacher Relationship," *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 26, no. 6 (June 17, 2017): 1702–12, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0691-y>.

²⁷ Jessica Norah Aguti, Dorothy Nakibuuka, and Richard Kajumbula, "Determinants of Student Dropout from Two External Degree Programmes of Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda," 2009.

²⁸ Cocorada et al., "Dropout Intention, Motivation, and Socio-Demographics of Forestry Students in Romania."

²⁹ Mageyo, "Motivation, Academic Achievement and Drop out Intention among Secondary School Students in Butaleja District."

³⁰ Carina Bargmann, Lisa Thiele, and Simone Kauffeld, "Motivation Matters: Predicting Students' Career Decidedness and Intention to Drop out after the First Year in Higher Education," *Higher Education*, 2022, 1–17.

³¹ Bardach et al., "Context-Related Problems and University Students' Dropout Intentions—the Buffering Effect of Personal Best Goals."

this with an investigation into career aspirations and student behaviour.³² He notes that an important consideration for understanding dropout intentions should include issues such as promoting opportunities for academic persistence, supporting students in setting objective goals, and self-improvement rather than comparing themselves to others to try and suppress the emergence of intention to drop out. Houtte and Demanet's findings show that instructors' beliefs play a rather ignored vital contribution in influencing drop-out intention.³³ Though this study was done on vocational students, it seems to have some relevance. It highlights that the instructors' role connects to the motivation and inspiration of the students where they can be encouraged to work for success when they share their beliefs, attitudes, and guidance about the course, thereby having an impact on dropout intentions.

Academic Progress and Achievement

Academic progress and achievement are some of the most important and stable predictors of dropout intentions.³⁴ This can be measured by students' self-reported grades other than completed exams and the official teacher's evolutionary student performance.³⁵ Academic success can also be defined as grades-based accomplishment, that is, Grade Point Average (GPA).³⁶ Academic achievement at university has predicted educational accomplishment. Meta-analytical studies indicate that an increase in success is related to an increase in career accomplishment, in addition to factors such as intelligence and home socio and economic status.³⁷ Course achievement at the very beginning of the first academic year predicted final course grades for the rest of the first year.³⁸ Achievement motivation has been considered as an extended person-intrinsic motivation showing a pattern of actions, planning and feelings connected with striving to achieve some internalized standards of excellence. It arises from an interaction within the person.³⁹ According to Rumberger et al., poor academic achievement is significantly related to high school dropout, that is, higher scores reduce its risk while the reverse is true for lower scores.⁴⁰ Again, grades appear as a more consistent predictor than test scores. In the same vein, prior research has shown that retention and academic accomplishment are associated.⁴¹

An average relationship between dropout and academic accomplishment among high-grade undergraduate students was found and those who had low intention to drop out (Pascarella & Terenzini, (2005); Allen et al., (2008). The decreasing effect of achievement on the intention to drop out was observed among high school students.⁴² Some scholars argued that low achievement is significantly associated with dropout intention and decisions in the initial academic year than in the subsequent years.⁴³ The longer the period of study, the lower the chances of dropping out.⁴⁴ Intention to drop out at the commencement of a semester among undergraduate students is associated with poor academic achievement at the semester's end irrespective of their prior academic control or emotions. Rumberger found that, after controlling many demographics, family, and school variables in a logistic regression

³² Vera Arhin, "Relationship between Career Aspirations and Study Behaviours among Second Year Distance Learners of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana.," *African Educational Research Journal* 6, no. 3 (2018): 173–80.

³³ Mieke Van Houtte and Jannick Demanet, "Vocational Students' Intention to Drop out in Flanders: The Role of Teacher Beliefs," *Profesorado, Revista de Currículum y Formación Del Profesorado* 19, no. 3 (2015): 178–94.

³⁴ Alex J Bowers, Ryan Sprott, and Sherry A Taff, "Do We Know Who Will Drop out? A Review of the Predictors of Dropping out of High School: Precision, Sensitivity, and Specificity," *The High School Journal*, 2012, 77–100.

³⁵ Fabio Alivernini and Fabio Lucidi, "Relationship between Social Context, Self-Efficacy, Motivation, Academic Achievement, and Intention to Drop out of High School: A Longitudinal Study," *The Journal of Educational Research* 104, no. 4 (2011): 241–52.

³⁶ Michelle Richardson, Charles Abraham, and Rod Bond, "Psychological Correlates of University Students' Academic Performance: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.," *Psychological Bulletin* 138, no. 2 (2012): 353.

³⁷ Tarmo Strenze, "Intelligence and Socioeconomic Success: A Meta-Analytic Review of Longitudinal Research," *Intelligence* 35, no. 5 (2007): 401–26.

³⁸ Raymond P Perry et al., "Academic Control and Action Control in the Achievement of College Students: A Longitudinal Field Study.," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 93, no. 4 (2001): 776.

³⁹ S Deepika and S Sushma, "Relationship between Motivation and Academic Achievement," *International Journal of Advances in Scientific Research* 4, no. 1 (2018): 1–5.

⁴⁰ Rumberger and Lim, "Why Students Drop out of School: A Review of 25 Years of Research."

⁴¹ Steven B Robbins et al., "Intervention Effects on College Performance and Retention as Mediated by Motivational, Emotional, and Social Control Factors: Integrated Meta-Analytic Path Analyses.," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 94, no. 5 (2009): 1163.

⁴² Stephen R Porter and Randy L Swing, "Understanding How First-Year Seminars Affect Persistence," *Research in Higher Education* 47 (2006): 89–109.

⁴³ Jeff Allen et al., "Third-Year College Retention and Transfer: Effects of Academic Performance, Motivation, and Social Connectedness," *Research in Higher Education* 49, no. 7 (November 12, 2008): 647–64, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-008-9098-3>.

⁴⁴ E. T. Pascarella and P. T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

model, students' academic performance, measured by their course grades and standardized test scores, was still a significant predictor of dropping out.⁴⁵ Another study by Truta et al., indicated that the academic engagement of students which of course determines academic achievement is a significant predictor of early dropout intentions.⁴⁶ This could mean that students who feel confident about their learning abilities and view school activities as interesting are likely to have higher expectations of their performance on upcoming tasks and make more positive achievement-related choices. This also comes up from Powdthavee and Vignoles study which reveals that the difference in first-year dropout rates between richer and poorer students can actually be attributed to differences in their academic preparation as measured by earlier measures of educational achievement.⁴⁷

Maroco et al., study that was done in several countries including Portugal, Finland, Serbia, Mozambique, the United States of America, Taiwan and Macao reveals more about understanding of the dropout intentions of students.⁴⁸ What is mentioned is students' personal traits and how they cope with the different situations around them, including their home background, previous performance in secondary school, and the entire university programme. This would give a good background to study what actually happens in Uganda and South Africa. Most of the studies in Africa, specifically in Uganda and South Africa have been on dropout rates and causes but especially for primary and secondary/high school students, thereby leaving a big gap to study and establish the same for university and with a focus on dropout intentions, because this would help to devise appropriate measures to counter the intentions of the students before their intentions to drop out of school materialize.

Mitigation Strategies to Counter Factors Driving University Students to Drop Out

Motivation is a critical factor in academic results, school dropout inclusive. Hardre and Reeve, in their study on the relationship between motivation and dropout intention, observed that student dropout intention is positively related to an increase in demotivation.⁴⁹ In Alivernini and Lucidi's longitudinal study, it was discovered that of all predictors of dropout intention, intrinsic motivation was the strongest of them all, with demotivation playing a crucial role in both intentions and actual dropout school dropout.⁵⁰ However, even though these findings are representative of the fact that demotivation is a key player in the intention to or actually drop out of school, it is unclear what the source of student demotivation is. Achievement Motivation is the attitude to achieve rather than the achievements themselves. It can be considered as extended person-intrinsic motivation because its reinforcement is delayed. It arises from an interaction within the person.⁵¹ The nature of college experiences, which is viewed as an outcome of the interaction among student goals, self-efficacy, sense of belonging and perception towards the curriculum, can either enhance or diminish student motivation.⁵²

Research attests that universities are trying to support students emotionally by providing them with free counselling services offered by academic advisors and psychologists. It is well documented that the COVID-19 pandemic instilled fear in students and caused them to be stressed, anxious and psychological traumas that affected most students and the general populace's mental health.⁵³ So, motivation is key in making students revive their eagerness to study, bounce back, form resilience and drop the thoughts of dropping out.

According to Mageyo's recent study conducted on Ugandan students, enhancing learners' academic achievement is yet another important issue that would help to retain students in schools because academic achievement affects their attitudes and impacts when a student starts and leaves school.⁵⁴ The district education offices could also explore opportunities from different organizations to help fund the appropriate initiatives. In addition, educated alumni in educational institutions could play a key role in contributing resources and attracting the appropriate organizations to support developmental initiatives of this nature in their communities.

⁴⁵ Rumberger and Lim, "Why Students Drop out of School: A Review of 25 Years of Research."

⁴⁶ Truta, Parv, and Topala, "Academic Engagement and Intention to Drop out: Levers for Sustainability in Higher Education."

⁴⁷ Anna F Vignoles and Nattavudh Powdthavee, "The Socioeconomic Gap in University Dropouts," *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy* 9, no. 1 (April 23, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.2202/1935-1682.2051>.

⁴⁸ Marôco et al., "Predictors of Academic Efficacy and Dropout Intention in University Students: Can Engagement Suppress Burnout?"

⁴⁹ Patricia L Hardre and Johnmarshall Reeve, "A Motivational Model of Rural Students' Intentions to Persist in, versus Drop out of, High School.," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 95, no. 2 (2003): 347.

⁵⁰ Alivernini and Lucidi, "Relationship between Social Context, Self-Efficacy, Motivation, Academic Achievement, and Intention to Drop out of High School: A Longitudinal Study."

⁵¹ Deepika and Sushma, "Relationship between Motivation and Academic Achievement."

⁵² Tentsho, McNeil, and Tongkumchum, "Determinants of University Dropout: A Case of Thailand."

⁵³ Shuja et al., "Factors Affecting Students' Dropout Rate During COVID-19."

⁵⁴ Mageyo, "Motivation, Academic Achievement and Drop out Intention among Secondary School Students in Butaleja District."

While the available reviewed literature ably addresses dropout intention among learners, there is a scarcity of studies that focus on university students, moreover, teacher trainees who are unique. It has also been noted that those studies reviewed in the literature do not specifically refer to the post-COVID era and its implied contribution to drop-out intention among university teacher trainees.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was based on the self-determination theory (SDT) which has its foundation and hinges on the motivation model of drop-out intention. According to this theory, learners require relatedness, competence and autonomy to make progress in their studies.⁵⁵ These much-needed attributes produce self-initiation, self-efficacy and social bonding among learners. SDT postulates that causes of drop-out intention may be both from the within and the without of the learners as characterized by attribution and extrinsic demands respectively.⁵⁶

METHODOLOGY

The study took a qualitative exploratory phenomenological approach to explore the factors that drive dropout intention among university teacher trainees post-COVID-19 in Uganda and South Africa. The study further aimed to suggest strategies that could be used to mitigate such driving factors to minimize university students' dropout. It took on a phenomenological design, specifically descriptive phenomenology (Moran, 2000; Giorgi, 2009) with dropout intention and their causes as the phenomenon under consideration and whose in-depth causes were not clear before the research.⁵⁷ The explorative phenomenological design helped to generate rich data from the students' lived experiences of those who had contemplated dropping out of university post-COVID-19. The students' lived experiences also assisted in coming up with mitigation strategies to counter the factors that drive students to drop out. The target population was year three (for Ugandan participants) and year four (for South African participants who were doing their final year respectively), that is, Bachelor of Arts/Science with Education university students, a category that developed doubts about the value placed on teachers and the teaching profession as influenced by the realization of the fate of teachers in the government policy on payment of teachers, the COVID-19 pandemic and the related closure of schools that rendered many teachers in Uganda and South Africa unemployed.⁵⁸ In the Ugandan university, the population of teacher trainees in year three academic year was about 800 (Academic Registrar Records, 2020) and the selected respondents were 8 in number while in the South African University, the population of teacher trainees was 450 as per the Faculty Board Minutes of the meeting of 2020 and the selected participants for the in-depth interviews were also 8 from each country, hence 16 in number in total.

Convenience sampling was used to select the universities, that is, the researchers are teacher trainers at these two universities. Purposive sampling was used to select the year of study, that is, year three students that have had two years experience in university education, a time frame adequate to measure attributes like drop-out intention. The snowball sampling technique was used to select the participants. The researchers work as lecturers in the respective faculties as teacher trainers and hence were well versed with what transpires in terms of dropout and dropout intention, and the two universities have large numbers of students, from diverse social and economic backgrounds that could influence intention to drop out of university. The selection of the 8 participants per university was done using the snowball sampling technique whereby a chain of referrals was formed of students who had contemplated or at one time harboured feelings, thoughts, and intentions of dropping out of university.

Data, through only in-depth interviews, was collected using digital recorders, transcribed and thereafter, themes were generated to guide the data presentation and analysis. The researchers used a hybrid mode of face-to-face and Microsoft Teams to interview the study participants. For example, when it was time to interview students in Uganda, the researcher based in Uganda would interview the participants face-to-face while the researcher based in South Africa was connected online using Teams to be part of the interview. Appointments were scheduled with

⁵⁵ Richard M Ryan and Edward L Deci, "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions," *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 25, no. 1 (2000): 54–67.

⁵⁶ E.L. Deci and R.M. Ryan, "A Motivational Approach to Self-Integration in Personality," in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation: Perspectives on Motivation*, ed. R. Deinstbier, vol.38(Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 237–88.

⁵⁷ D. Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2008); Amedeo Giorgi, "Concerning a Serious Misunderstanding of the Essence of the Phenomenological Method in Psychology," *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 39, no. 1 (2008): 33–58; L. Cohen, L. Manion, and K. Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 6th ed. (London and New York, NY: Routledge Falmer, 2007); R. Pring, *Philosophy of Educational Research* (London: Continuum, 2000).

⁵⁸ Loyce Kiiza Kobusingye and Tom Luswata, "The COVID-19-Related Schools' Closure and the Ugandan Teacher: Exploring the Psychological and Non-Psychological Threats and Opportunities.," *Journal of Education* 4, no. 8 (November 26, 2021): 32–45, <https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t5035>; Marongwe Newlin and Kobusingye Kiiza Loyce, "A Comparative Analysis of the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Rural University Students in South Africa and Uganda," *E-BANGI* 19, no. 3 (2022): 1–17.

participants and the interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes each. Audio recorders and Microsoft Teams recordings were used to record interviews (after getting consent from the participants) for data trustworthiness.

Data was analysed using thematic analysis and narratives. Data analysis and discussion were done asynchronously.⁵⁹ Respondents were required to consent to participate in this research after they were made aware of the purpose and relevance of the research. Their privacy was protected by keeping their identity anonymous. Research clearance was done before data collection.

FINDINGS

COVID-19 related causes

It emerged, from the interviews, that the desire to drop out of university is driven by several factors that range from personal to institutional drives. One of the factors that was presented was the COVID-19 after-effects which can be categorized as economic, social and career-related. University students intimated that due to the pandemic and its subsequent closure of educational institutions for at least a year, several challenges emerged and negatively affected the projection of their future in terms of academic completion, as one female respondent from Uganda asserted,

“When COVID-19 broke out in the country, it took two years of a break at home. When the university eventually re-opened, there was limited semester time. Before the COVID-19 lockdown, the semester was four months long but thereafter, it was cut to two months as a way of catching up with the lost time. This did not give me enough time to read adequately and understand what I was supposed to cover in a semester. Instead, I have to cram so that I pass exams. This makes me feel half baked, affects my performance to the extent of even thinking of leaving university for good before I can complete the course.”

Findings from one of the rural universities in South Africa confirmed the above assertion from Uganda. A male interviewee from South Africa had this to say,

“I am contemplating dropping out of the university since I lost my mom who was the sole breadwinner. She was raising us single-handedly, but now she passed on because of COVID-19 and I am the eldest child who must take care of my four siblings. So, I would like to look for employment to fend for my siblings.”

From this excerpt, it can be depicted that the student had a personal drive that was beyond his control. COVID-19 has disorganized the lives of some people. Related to the above factor is the effect of COVID-19 on instructional dynamics. The physical face-to-face lectures were replaced by online pedagogical strategies and whereas this was intended for the good, it indirectly produced unintended counterproductive outcomes for the students and influenced their dropout intention as one male student from Uganda argued,

“COVID-19 lockdown subjected me to online examinations. As a student from a very remote area of origin, I couldn't access internet connectivity. I did not even bother to try to do the exams because I was sure it was impossible. This meant an automatic retake of all the courses for semester one, 2020. This was not only an academic challenge but a financial one too since every paper I was going to re-sit required me to pay at the end of the day. It was like paying tuition fees twice for just one semester. I had hoped that the university, in introducing online lectures and exams, would put us from rural districts into consideration, but no, this policy only favoured the urban-based students. To be sincere with you, at that point, I was very sure I was going to leave these studies. It was that bad.”

This experience was not unique to only students in Uganda who participated in the study but to South African students as well. A male student from South Africa explained,

“I am in my final year, and I almost dropped out. I went to the administration to deregister, but the Senior Assistant Registrar told me to think twice about it. I wanted to drop out because classes were online and there were several assignments and tests that I had missed because of network and connectivity issues. Our province was affected by floods, and we were traumatized since we lost loved ones, properties, power (electricity) and network connections. So, I lost hope. I know that five of my classmates dropped out because of such challenges and now they are doing menial jobs and I wanted to do the same.”

The influence of COVID-19 was also presented to have had personal and social dimensions in their role in influencing the intention to drop out of university studies in both Uganda and South Africa. Another male Ugandan student emotionally expressed,

“COVID-19 forced me to stay at home and the villagers would mock me saying that even the so-called educated are home and we are now all the same. This caused a lot of frustration and made me question my self-worth if I was now being weighed on the same scale as the village illiterates. It made me doubt the

⁵⁹ John W Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research* (SAGE publications, 2014).

value of university education. This was very stigmatising indeed. On the social front, I lost touch with my university friends because of different districts of origin, and I realized that social groups are helpful, especially in academics. It was very shocking to accept that I was reading alone, attending online lectures alone and attempting examinations alone. This loneliness made me feel very left out and I no longer saw any use in continuing with education without the encouragement from my university peers with whom I was previously tackling general and academic problems.”

It is worth noting that students from South Africa who participated in the study did not experience being mocked by the villagers. It could be that nearly every South African community experienced the gruesomeness of COVID-19. However, the students also experienced loneliness in their silos since classes were online. One female student from South Africa boldly highlighted how she was affected by COVID-19 to the extent of thinking about quitting her university education. She thus expressed,

“Classes were online, but I felt disconnected, and I had burnout, emotionally I was not stable, and COVID-19 disorganized how we used to work as students. As social beings, we were used to being in groups, having warm bodies in class, sharing ideas, pains, challenges, etc., but now I was left on my own. To be honest, I could not contain it hence I decided to leave.”

According to the students, COVID-19 and its resultant organization of teaching and learning also had instructional consequences that seemed to work in the disfavour of students as it caused laxity among lecturers and consequent loss of interest among learners, as one female student from Uganda asserted,

“For some lecturers, it has turned out that they have refused to revert back to the original pre-COVID-19 teaching methods and styles. This has been characterized by absenteeism from teaching. Ever since online teaching and learning was introduced during lockdown, some lecturers have used that opportunity to avoid physically meeting us both for teaching and non-teaching needs. For this reason, we end up not being taught adequately and thus, we are not guided on what to do which affects our performance and morale to push on with our university studies.”

Some South African students who participated in the study pointed out that there was some sort of chaos post-COVID-19 because of teaching and learning policies that were not clear to both lecturers and students. The participants indicated that it was communicated that a certain percentage of the semester schedule was for online classes and a certain percentage for contact classes, but this was not clearly indicated on the timetable. It was left to individual lecturers to decide whether their classes would be online or face-to-face contact, and this opened a window for sort of a Laissez-faire environment. One of the students from South Africa indicated,

“I wanted to drop out because of frustration. There was no order, and no one was serious after we had received communication through our Student Representative Council that we were supposed to resume classes using blended learning of a certain percentage for face-to-face and online”. Another student stated, “My friends and I had agreed to discontinue our studies since we felt like we had not gained much from the studies so, it was better to look for jobs and then pursue studies in the following year. We wanted to take a year gap. Anyway, it did not happen for me because my brother who is my guardian pushed me but two of my colleagues dropped out because of this reason.”

Government policy on teachers’ pay

It also emerged, from the findings, that the thought of, desire and intention to drop out of university is influenced by the current Ugandan government and specifically the Ministry of Education policy on Science versus Arts teachers in terms of payment scale. One Ugandan female teacher trainee vividly expressed,

“When the government started segregating the pay for teachers and since I am a future Arts teacher, I realized that I am in the wrong profession going to teach subjects that my government does not appreciate. This has threatened me to the extent of wanting to leave university education.”

About the above same factor, another Ugandan student argued,

“Being an Arts teacher, I almost dropped out of the university after a segregative salary enhancement decision was declared in the year 2021 which has put the science teachers over and above their Arts counterparts. The pay gap between the Arts and Science teachers has shown that the government does not value me and many other teachers with my type of subjects. A section of teachers has been favoured while we have been sidelined. This has made me realise that I have been wasting my time at the university and I feel I am better off leaving and doing other jobs that are not related to what I have been studying.”

This was reechoed by another male Ugandan student who associated this government policy with value reduction for the teaching profession which has hitherto been held in high regard as a noble profession. He argued,

“The course and profession of education is losing value especially the Arts teachers’ fraternity to which I belong. This dynamic in the remuneration of Arts teachers has demoralized me yet I hoped it would change my future since the economy of our country is so straining and now I have to live with the fact that the profession I have chosen is good-for-nothing. This makes me wonder what I am still doing at the university.”

This is indicative of the learned helplessness that developed towards a policy that has been interpreted as grossly unfair to Arts teachers and favourable to science teachers yet both categories study and work under similar conditions and both disciplines are important and cannot operate without each other. Surprisingly, this is the opposite of the responses gathered from South African university teacher-trainees. In South Africa, other people who did other non-teaching degree programmes flock to do a teaching degree or to a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) mainly because teachers in South Africa are favourably remunerated compared to other professions, irrespective of whether they are Arts or Sciences inclined. However, the South African participants pointed out that the only major reason why some could decide to quit teaching or drop out of the programme was because of the violence that is being experienced in some South African communities. Some teachers' and learners' lives are at risk or stake because of violence in schools. A male South African university student teacher said,

“I love teaching. Teachers in South Africa are still among the most respected professions. Teachers earn decently and can afford a good lifestyle and take care of some of the clan members. That’s what made me not discontinue my studies. But I hear others complaining about the violence that is rampant in some schools and has cost the lives of some teachers and learners.”

Economic Drivers of drop out intention

Another factor that was cited as being responsible for the intention to drop out of university was the economic/financial issue. From the issues raised under financial constraints, it was observed that these factors are a result of several other pre-existing drives. One male Ugandan student asserted,

“As a privately sponsored student, I pay my own tuition and functional fees and based on the way the Ugandan economy is, I thought it was a wise decision and right time to get out of university studies. I can no longer afford what is economically required of me to complete my studies. Everything has gone up in price including the hostel fees, purchase of scholastic materials, transport, food and other requirements.

However, the financial challenges are not experienced by only privately sponsored students. Students on government scholarships have had economic challenges that have made them contemplate dropping out of university, as one female Ugandan student argued,

“Personally, although I am a government-sponsored student, I have faced situations that have made me doubt if really, I need to continue with university education. The allowances given to me as a government student cannot adequately cater to my needs and thus I end up doing part-time jobs to make ends meet. It has become increasingly difficult since as much as the prices of all I need to survive at the university have gone up, the allowances have not increased in the last two years. To be sincere, I feel like giving up. By the way, my parents do not offer any financial assistance due to the argument that the government sponsors me so I am ignored and I have to wait for the often delayed and insufficient government allowances, hence economic stress in accessing food, rent and reading materials. This has sometimes prompted me to contemplate dropping out.”

The economic hardships that are related to the high cost of living amidst financial scarcity, for both private and government-sponsored Ugandan students have been a driving factor for the intention to drop out of university among students. From the South African side, the students who were interviewed acknowledged and appreciated the government funding they were getting through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). The teacher trainees also indicated the bursaries that they were getting as an incentive to lure them to train as teachers. Matthew Goniwe and Funza Lushaka were some of the prestigious bursaries that student teachers were getting. However, they did point out that they faced financial challenges when it came to other social and home-related issues such as fending for the siblings.

Academic and Instructional Factors

It also became evident during the interviews that the intention to drop out of university is tagged to academic factors, whose manifestations and reasons came in different dimensions. Issues of academic progress or lack of it have made university student teachers contemplate dropping out and this factor was a cause for concern in both Uganda and South Africa where the study was conducted. One of the male participants from Uganda argued,

“I have sometimes thought of dropping out of university because of persistent issues to do with academic performance. Although I was admitted into the university with average grades, I always knew I could make

it but ever since I started sitting for university examinations, failure and average scores have been the order of the day. I find this very discouraging and this makes me feel like dropping out of university. Secondly, I feel that the university practices unfair marking systems by the lecturers where missing marks become very common and upon following up, lecturers decide to give you a fifty percent (50%) pass mark which is a lower harvest compared to the efforts invested. Right now, I have a paper that I will not disclose but I was awarded fifteen percent (15) which is not even my coursework mark. This leaves me wondering whether lecturers wish us to graduate and change our lives in the future or if they want us to get frustrated and leave the university to them.”

Another student from the same university also asserted,

“You can write an exam and you even register but at the end when the marks are displayed, the marks are nowhere to be seen and you are advised to re-sit the subject. This according to me has a lot to do with the careless attitude of lecturers while handling our marks. It is a lack of academic empathy on their part, without considering how this affects us academically, emotionally and mentally. This is usually one of the reasons why I sometimes think of giving up on my studies.”

The study participants from South Africa shared similar experiences though with a unique twist on the cause of the academic frustrations. One of the students said,

“It is so frustrating to always fight for marks with lecturers and you are told the work was plagiarized, your similarity index is very high when the software highlights even your names or citations that have been quoted using opening and closing inverted commas. This issue of rewrite upsets me and sometimes I consider quitting.”

Another student from South Africa reiterated what her fellow student had said and added,

“Students sometimes get confused and disappointed when it comes to the issue of marks. It is like the lecturers and faculty secretaries blame each other when the marks go missing. You are told to go pillar to post looking for marks. That is not good for us students. Such issues can affect some students emotionally and can push some students out of university.”

One other academic factor that was presented was the failure of students to achieve their academic goals which has culminated in academic frustration and intention to drop out of the university as one female Ugandan participant said,

“Like any other student, I set my goals at the beginning of my course yet a few semesters into it, my efforts were not being reflected in the results, that is, performance that I was getting. At times, I am dismayed by the poor grades that I get as compared to what my classmates get yet these are the same classmates with whom I revise.”

A South African student had this to say,

“No student wants to fail. We often find ourselves seeing on the student portal system showing fail, supplementary, and repeat. This is a drawback, and it hits us hard. I know of some of my mates who dropped out because they were told to repeat two modules each for the whole year. Who on earth would like that so the best is to drop out and look for employment?”

Coupled with the perceived potential and actual performance discrepancy as an academic cause for intention to drop out of the university, students presented course burden as one important drive behind the intention to leave university as one female respondent argued,

“Because of the course I am doing and the course units it has, the Bachelor of Arts with Education course is so hectic most especially because I was forced to do the course. Everything associated with it is hard to deal with.”

Some of the South African students who participated in the study also complained about too many assignments to handle for too many modules. Students were complaining about the uncoordinated way of being given assignments with deadlines falling on the same dates by different lecturers which seemed a burden to the students. They further complained about School Based Experience (SBE) also known in some parts of the globe as Teaching Practice or School Practice (TP/SP). Some students feared going on SBE because they hated being supervised by lecturers whom they thought were after fault finding and therefore failed them. Other students feared reports of ever-increasing violence in schools and feared for their lives. One of the students from South Africa said,

"I wish our lecturers could communicate coordinated dates to avoid giving us assignments that have got same deadlines. It gives us a lot of pressure and it ends up stressing us and some students might see this as a burden and would consider dropping out." Yet another student raised that, *"I hate SBE, to me it is the worst part of the course. Lecturers would just come out with a notice of failed students, they don't explain anything, and it is so scary."*

Personal factors

The university students also presented personal factors that are largely related to background issues as some of the reasons behind the dropout intention. One Ugandan female student asserted,

"I will be the first-degree holder in my family. During my first university year, it was hard to convince my parents about the reality of university life because they had no clue about the actual challenges I faced as a student. They didn't believe that we studied for long hours the whole week. They thought I was being deceptive when I told them I would be studying on weekends too. This put a lot of pressure on me to the extent that I at one time considered leaving these studies because I was tired of explaining. If I went home late, there was sarcasm when I was accused that it seems university students move at night and no longer adhere to family rules and authority. To them, I was being disobedient and developing a big ego. My stepmother kept telling me that I should not feel big since she had seen degree holders in the past who became failures in life. I have regained strength now to continue with my studies but at the end of year one, I seriously wanted to leave studies due to this family pressure."

Other personal factors were perceptual and attitude-related. Generally, teacher trainees have a negative attitude towards their future profession, that is, teaching and this has in a way contributed to their intention to drop out of the university. One Ugandan male participant asserted,

"I almost dropped out because I felt I needed more time to recollect myself and my thoughts about whether this was the course I wanted to determine my future. I don't see myself being a teacher beyond school practice. Even school practice I do because it is a requirement for graduation but I hate the classroom and everything concerning teaching. I one time left but my parents forced me to come back and study. Secondly, I have not been inspired by the past students who became teachers later. I came to the university hoping for a bright future but the teachers who already graduated have made me lose the morale to continue up to completion. Teachers in Uganda look miserable and those who seem okay are doing other income-generating activities outside of teaching. By the way, most students who have graduated have not been able to get jobs."

It was surprising to discover, through the interviews solely among the female university students both in Uganda and South Africa that one other factor why some of them have contemplated leaving their university studies was a social one. Female students face the vice of sexual harassment from their male lecturers in exchange for academic progress. One Ugandan student emotionally expressed,

"Madam, marks here are sexually transmitted. Being sexually harassed by male lecturers makes me think of dropping out because sometimes marks will not be posted on the portal if the sexual demands have not yet been met. We have nowhere to run to for help because most administrators are male and may not be empathetic enough to help a female student against a fellow male worker. It is so bad that if you are lucky you will only get poor marks but most times, when a lecturer is sexually targeting you, he will intentionally hide your marks so that in the process of following them up at his office, he lets you know of his sexual intentions towards you. I sometimes wonder if these lecturers have daughters but for sure, some of us are tired of this habit."

Similarly, a South African female student explained,

"Some of us are sexually harassed by some lecturers who demand sex for marks and marks for sex. We sometimes fall for it not because we would like to have sex with them but because of circumstances beyond our control such as poor backgrounds, peer influence, being threatened by some lecturers because they have money and power and sometimes you report but without action being taken."

Furthermore, one male South African student said,

"We men should stand up boldly to defend our sisters and protect them. Some male lecturers and male students see female students as 'sex objects' and should dance according to their tune. What we are doing as men is embarrassing and disgusting and it forces our female counterparts to drop out of university."

This social factor is a gender-related matter, and it was not presented by any male respondent in Uganda while in South Africa some male students were vocal about it. They saw it as a form of gender-based violence that

needed both males and females to fight against. Hence, from the findings, it can be argued that the factors that influence the intention to drop out of university studies are COVID-19 effects, government policy on teachers' pay, and economic, academic, personal and social factors.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to explore the factors that influence dropout intention among university students. Through one-on-one in-depth interviews, it was revealed that these factors are diverse, ranging from personal to institutional factors. The family-related factors which were categorized as personal or non-academic in nature ogre well with those established in studies conducted by Mageyo and Gobena who argue that family involvement and material input invested in students' academic progress have an impact on whether or not they will develop and harbour intentions to drop out of education.⁶⁰ This encompasses the socio-economic status of the families where these students originate from, although Bergeron et al., seem to disagree on this role.⁶¹ Nevertheless, it can be argued that economic and social status are vital personal factors whose effect stretches into financial and socio-cultural challenges.⁶² Other personal background factors rhyme with those that are related to parental traits.

Gender factors too were evident in studies done by Cocorado et al., and Bargmann et al., who present male students as more prone to dropout intention and actual dropout.⁶³ This is contradicted by the sexual harassment issue that was generated by female university students in both Uganda and South Africa as a gender-related reality as a lived experience that sometimes drives them to contemplate dropping out. Either way, gender as a personal factor was apparent as a factor for dropout intention. Instructional factors too were presented as drivers of dropout intention. Such sentiments are in line with what Houtte and Demante presented in their study.⁶⁴ It was also noted that these instructional factors presented themselves as perquisites for academic challenges that drive dropout intention as either part and parcel of, or separate from them. These academic factors are parallel with those presented in studies done by various scholars who collectively concur that dropout intention emanates from academic or grade-related factors and lack of or low academic engagement.⁶⁵

Personal factors such as demands and unmet expectations from semi-literate family members were also factors that came out of the interviews and this was supplemented by issues to do with self-efficacy deficiencies among students who felt that university studies seemed complicated for an average learner due to the stress related to this factor, as Aoki argues and which stress can cause, not only drop out intention but drop out behaviour too.⁶⁶ Soul searching and negative attitudes towards teaching and teachers are strong factors that came out strongly as dropout intention drivers as Bargmann et al., assert.⁶⁷ These factors can also be tagged as motivation factors which could be both intrinsic and extrinsic.

Government policy on the payment gap between Arts and Science teachers was presented as a serious case for dropout intention with the latter as the lucky category and the former as the unfortunate one whose intention to drop out of university teacher training was higher as a result. It was noted however that this was an experience unique to the Ugandan context and non-existent in South Africa's education policy. This has lowered motivation to

⁶⁰ Mageyo, "Motivation, Academic Achievement and Drop out Intention among Secondary School Students in Butaleja District"; Gobena, "Family Socio-Economic Status Effect on Students' Academic Achievement at College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Haramaya University, Eastern Ethiopia."

⁶¹ Bergeron, Chouinard, and Janosz, "The Impact of Teacher-Student Relationships and Achievement Motivation on Students' Intentions to Dropout According to Socio-Economic Status."

⁶² Cocoradă et al., "Dropout Intention, Motivation, and Socio-Demographics of Forestry Students in Romania."

⁶³ Bargmann, Thiele, and Kauffeld, "Motivation Matters: Predicting Students' Career Decidedness and Intention to Drop out after the First Year in Higher Education"; Cocoradă et al., "Dropout Intention, Motivation, and Socio-Demographics of Forestry Students in Romania."

⁶⁴ Van Houtte and Demanet, "Vocational Students' Intention to Drop out in Flanders: The Role of Teacher Beliefs."

⁶⁵ G. Brown and J. Hattie, "The Benefits of Regular Standardized Assessment in Childhood Education: Guiding Improved Instruction and Learning.," www.researchgate.net/publication/233871126, 2012; Strenze, "Intelligence and Socioeconomic Success: A Meta-Analytic Review of Longitudinal Research"; Allen et al., "Third-Year College Retention and Transfer: Effects of Academic Performance, Motivation, and Social Connectedness"; Alivernini and Lucidi, "Relationship between Social Context, Self-Efficacy, Motivation, Academic Achievement, and Intention to Drop out of High School: A Longitudinal Study."

⁶⁶ S. Aoki, "The Role of Parental Expectations and Self-Beliefs on Academic Stress and Depression among Asian American Undergraduates" (University of Arizona, 2019); Russell W Rumberger et al., "Family Influences on Dropout Behavior in One California High School," *Sociology of Education*, 1990, 283-99.

⁶⁷ Bargmann, Thiele, and Kauffeld, "Motivation Matters: Predicting Students' Career Decidedness and Intention to Drop out after the First Year in Higher Education."

pursue and complete studies as influenced by the subsequent strikes.⁶⁸ The government found itself in a dilemma due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects which also featured among the key factors for dropout intention among university teacher trainees. This was concurrently presented with its economic effects due to the lockdown and closure of schools which meant university students lost time, and motivation and found alternative jobs that made them devalue their career journey and path. These sentiments agree well, though indirectly, with those presented in studies conducted by Bernardo et al., Marongwe & Kobusingye and Kobusingye et al.⁶⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and personal effects emerged as a strong determinant for dropout intention. In itself, as a health challenge affected university students in ways beyond health, as it was viewed and experienced in instructional and academic ways. Due to the pandemic, parents lost jobs and hence could not afford to pay fees for their university children.⁷⁰ The pandemic had academic and instructional effects as students had to switch to online learning and examinations, which was a challenge in terms of adjustment from physical to online pedagogies and assessment, a dynamic that had negative implications, especially for the rural university students who did not have access to readily available internet connectivity as Marongwe and Kobusingye found out in their study on the effect of the pandemic on rural university students in South Africa and Uganda.⁷¹ This involuntary adjustment led to anxiety and learned helplessness as students failed to attempt exams and attend online lectures, hence finding themselves in the category of failures and retakers, experiences that made them contemplate leaving the university.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mitigation Strategies to Counter University Students to Drop Out Intention

Based on the findings and discussions, the authors recommend that universities work hard to minimize dropout intention among students for in the short and long run can translate into actual dropout. Universities, parents, and stakeholders in government need to work in partnership to address the mentioned personal, social, economic, academic and instructional factors to reduce their impact on dropout intention. Universities also need to strengthen their guidance and counselling departments to help students access these services in instances of confusion and crises that may, if not attended to, lead to dropout, which has implications for teacher completion rates and ultimately, adequacy of teachers in a world whose educational needs greatly depend on the availability of trained quality teachers in the two countries. Universities also need to focus on addressing COVID-19 instructional effects and motivate students to love their future profession through improving instruction and creating socially safe spaces to minimize the intention to and actual drop out which are detrimental to future teacher availability, quality and motivation, which in the long run have implications on learner academic achievement.

Managements of universities need to intensify how best they can motivate students in the post-COVID-19 era, more so, for students who grappled emotionally and psychologically due to the loss and grief of loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to this study, motivation was found significantly related to academic achievement. Therefore parents, teachers and university administrators should motivate the learners to achieve a meaningful academic achievement to reduce tendencies of dropout intentions. This means that there is a need to enhance students' motivation levels to have meaningful learning outcomes and lecturers should not perceive the process as being time-consuming, but rather, a necessity. The study also revealed that motivation helps determine whether one should continue or drop out of education. Therefore, students who are demotivated anticipate high university dropout intention, so lecturers should motivate their students intrinsically and extrinsically to keep them in school. This can be done by encouraging them to work hard and also treating them cordially.

Students' loans from the government and respective ministries that handle tertiary education could go a long way in lessening the financial burden that has increased the desire to drop out of university. These loans, with friendly rates, are an inevitable necessity, especially in Uganda where they are currently nonexistent. This, with the revision of policies governing the existent discrepancies in the payment of teachers, needs to be addressed to remove not only the gaps themselves but also the effects of these gaps since both science and Arts teachers invest equal effort and expenditure to acquire their teaching degrees. This would be a vital step in establishing equity among

⁶⁸ The East African (2022) Sunday, June 26th, 2022; The Observer (2022). Tuesday, June 14th, 2022.

⁶⁹ Newlin and Loyce, "A Comparative Analysis of the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Rural University Students in South Africa and Uganda"; Kobusingye and Luswata, "The COVID-19-Related Schools' Closure and the Ugandan Teacher: Exploring the Psychological and Non-Psychological Threats and Opportunities."

⁷⁰ ILO, "ILO Monitor on the World of Work," 2022; Dorrit Posel, Adeola Oyenubi, and Umakrishnan Kollamparambil, "Job Loss and Mental Health during the COVID-19 Lockdown: Evidence from South Africa," *PLOS ONE* 16, no. 3 (March 30, 2021): e0249352, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0249352>; Ana Bernardo et al., "Comparison of Personal, Social and Academic Variables Related to University Drop-out and Persistence," *Frontiers in Psychology* 7 (2016): 1610.

⁷¹ Newlin and Loyce, "A Comparative Analysis of the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Rural University Students in South Africa and Uganda."

teachers irrespective of the subjects they teach. Issues to do with the attitude towards teaching could also be addressed through guidance from university guidance and counselling departments with a major aim of mindset change towards teaching as a career path. Teaching is a noble profession globally and this reality must be instilled in teacher trainees right at the commencement of their university education through career talks, conferences, and industrial visits, to mention but a few.

It was revealed in the findings that COVID-19 pushed institutions of learning to adopt the use of technologies to teach skills and to deliver material that some students and lecturers were not accustomed to. This transition to online teaching and learning made some students contemplate dropping out of varsity as previously discussed above. Lack of skills and capacitation building frustrated some students. Based on that finding, universities should devise a model for capacitating and developing students and lecturers in meaningful online classes. The global trends are indicating that climate change and pandemics are slowly but surely becoming a norm and universities need to be proactive and strategise ways of maintaining digital education. It is in the interest of this study that student dropouts be arrested as it costs all stakeholders and therefore, universities should seriously reconsider using transformative pedagogies of online learning, newer approaches to supporting and assessing learning and provision of the ICT infrastructure. If learning is provided creatively and interestingly, students are likely to complete their studies.

CONCLUSION

The study has revealed that dropout intention among university students is an area of great concern. Specifically, teacher trainees in universities uniquely experience this phenomenon in both obvious and subtle ways as motivated by personal, social, economic, academic, instructional, gender and political/policy factors. In totality, it was revealed by this study that dropout intention is caused by socio-economic difficulties, sexual harassment, online pedagogies, COVID-19 effects, academic overload and government policy on teacher pay. It has also been noted that whereas some of these factors are general to both Ugandan and South African university teacher trainees, others are specific and unique to the individual countries. The mitigation strategies need to address the issue of dropout intention based on the causes, case by case where the personal, social, economic, policy and Covid-19-related factors and drivers are handled using their respective and corresponding interventions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aguti, Jessica Norah, Dorothy Nakibuuka, and Richard Kajumbula. "Determinants of Student Dropout from Two External Degree Programmes of Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda," 2009.
- Alivernini, Fabio, and Fabio Lucidi. "Relationship between Social Context, Self-Efficacy, Motivation, Academic Achievement, and Intention to Drop out of High School: A Longitudinal Study." *The Journal of Educational Research* 104, no. 4 (2011): 241–52.
- Allen, Jeff, Steven B. Robbins, Alex Casillas, and In-Sue Oh. "Third-Year College Retention and Transfer: Effects of Academic Performance, Motivation, and Social Connectedness." *Research in Higher Education* 49, no. 7 (November 12, 2008): 647–64. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-008-9098-3>.
- Aoki, S. "The Role of Parental Expectations and Self-Beliefs on Academic Stress and Depression among Asian American Undergraduates." University of Arizona, 2019.
- Archambault, Isabelle, Jade Vandenbossche-Makombo, and Sarah L. Fraser. "Students' Oppositional Behaviors and Engagement in School: The Differential Role of the Student-Teacher Relationship." *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 26, no. 6 (June 17, 2017): 1702–12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0691-y>.
- Arhin, Vera. "Relationship between Career Aspirations and Study Behaviours among Second Year Distance Learners of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana." *African Educational Research Journal* 6, no. 3 (2018): 173–80.
- Bardach, Lisa, Marko Lüftenegger, Sophie Oczlon, Christiane Spiel, and Barbara Schober. "Context-Related Problems and University Students' Dropout Intentions—the Buffering Effect of Personal Best Goals." *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 35, no. 2 (June 13, 2020): 477–93. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-019-00433-9>.
- Bargmann, Carina, Lisa Thiele, and Simone Kauffeld. "Motivation Matters: Predicting Students' Career Decidedness and Intention to Drop out after the First Year in Higher Education." *Higher Education*, 2022, 1–17.
- Bergeron, Julie, Roch Chouinard, and Michel Janosz. "The Impact of Teacher-Student Relationships and Achievement Motivation on Students' Intentions to Dropout According to Socio-Economic Status." *Online Submission*, 2011.
- Bernardo, Ana B., Adrian Castro-Lopez, and Alejandro Diaz Mujica. "Editorial: Higher Education Dropout After COVID-19: New Strategies to Optimize Success." *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (April 8, 2022). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.880295>.

- Bernardo, Ana, María Esteban, Estrella Fernández, Antonio Cervero, Ellián Tuero, and Paula Solano. "Comparison of Personal, Social and Academic Variables Related to University Drop-out and Persistence." *Frontiers in Psychology* 7 (2016): 1610.
- Bowers, Alex J, Ryan Sprott, and Sherry A Taff. "Do We Know Who Will Drop out? A Review of the Predictors of Dropping out of High School: Precision, Sensitivity, and Specificity." *The High School Journal*, 2012, 77–100.
- Brown, G., and J. Hattie. "The Benefits of Regular Standardized Assessment in Childhood Education: Guiding Improved Instruction and Learning. ." www.researchgate.net/publication/233871126, 2012.
- Catalán, Ximena, and María Verónica Santelices. "Academic Performance of Students from Different Socio-Economic Levels in Universities: The Case of the Catholic University of Chile." *Calidad En La Educación*, no. 40 (2014).
- Cocoradă, Elena, Alexandru Lucian Curtu, Laura Elena Năstasă, and Iosif Vorovencii. "Dropout Intention, Motivation, and Socio-Demographics of Forestry Students in Romania." *Forests* 12, no. 5 (2021): 618.
- Cohen, L., L. Manion, and K. Morrison. *Research Methods in Education*. 6th ed. London and New York, NY: Routledge Falmer, 2007.
- Creswell, John W. *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*. SAGE publications, 2014.
- Deci, E.L., and R.M. Ryan. "A Motivational Approach to Self-Integration in Personality ." In *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation: Perspectives on Motivation*, edited by R. Deinstbier, 38:237–88. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991.
- Deepika, S, and S Sushma. "Relationship between Motivation and Academic Achievement." *International Journal of Advances in Scientific Research* 4, no. 1 (2018): 1–5.
- Dube, Bekithemba, and Xolisile P. Ndaba. "Educating Progressed Learners in Times of COVID-19: How Can Bricolage Help?" *Research in Social Sciences and Technology* 6, no. 2 (September 9, 2021): 22–36. <https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2021.9>.
- Fataar, A. "Why the Fees Must Fall." *The Socialist Worker*, 2015. <https://socialistworker.org/2015/10/27/why-the-fees-must-fall>.
- Fataar, A. "Why the Fees Must Fall." *The Socialist Worker*. Accessed April 9 (2015): 2020. <https://socialistworker.org/2015/10/27/why-the-fees-must-fall>.
- Giorgi, Amedeo. "Concerning a Serious Misunderstanding of the Essence of the Phenomenological Method in Psychology." *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 39, no. 1 (2008): 33–58.
- Gobena, Gemechu Abera. "Family Socio-Economic Status Effect on Students' Academic Achievement at College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Haramaya University, Eastern Ethiopia." *Journal of Teacher Education and Educators* 7, no. 3 (2018): 207–22.
- Hardre, Patricia L, and Johnmarshall Reeve. "A Motivational Model of Rural Students' Intentions to Persist in, versus Drop out of, High School." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 95, no. 2 (2003): 347.
- Houtte, Mieke Van, and Jannick Demanet. "Vocational Students' Intention to Drop out in Flanders: The Role of Teacher Beliefs." *Profesorado, Revista de Currículum y Formación Del Profesorado* 19, no.3(2015):178–94.
- ILO. "ILO Monitor on the World of Work ," 2022.
- Kakuchi, S. "Student Dropout Rate Due to COVID-19 Is Still Rising. University World News: The Global Window on Higher Education, Japan." <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=202111261339042>, 2021.
- Kobusingye, Loyce Kiiza, and Tom Luswata. "The COVID-19-Related Schools' Closure and the Ugandan Teacher: Exploring the Psychological and Non-Psychological Threats and Opportunities." *Journal of Education* 4, no. 8 (November 26, 2021): 32–45. <https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t5035>.
- Mageyo, R. "Motivation, Academic Achievement and Drop out Intention among Secondary School Students in Butaleja District." Makerere University. Kampala, 2022.
- Marôco, João, Hugo Assunção, Heidi Harju-Luukkainen, Su-Wei Lin, Pou-Seong Sit, Kwok-cheung Cheung, Benvindo Maloa, Ivana Stepanović Ilic, Thomas J. Smith, and Juliana A. D. B. Campos. "Predictors of Academic Efficacy and Dropout Intention in University Students: Can Engagement Suppress Burnout?" *PLOS ONE* 15, no. 10 (October 29, 2020): e0239816. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239816>.
- Moran, D. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London: Routledge, 2008.
- Moscoviz, Laura, and David K Evans. "Learning Loss and Student Dropouts during the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Review of the Evidence Two Years after Schools Shut Down," 2022. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/learning-loss-and-student-dropouts-during-covid-19-pandemic-review-evidence-two-years>.
- Ndebele, Hloniphani. "Exploring the Challenges of Information and Communication Technology Localization in South African Higher Education: A Language Management Approach." *International Journal of Multilingualism* 19, no. 3 (2022): 368–82.

- Newlin, Marongwe, and Kobusingye Kiiza Loyce. "A Comparative Analysis Of The Impact Of The Covid-19 Pandemic On Rural University Students In South Africa And Uganda." *E-BANGI* 19, no. 3 (2022): 1–17.
- Okudi, C.A. "Support to School Drop Outs as a Result of COVID-19 Pandemic in Uganda." *International Journal for Cross-Disciplinary Subjects in Education* 3, no. 1 (2022): 4586–91.
- Pascarella, E. T., and P. T. Terenzini. *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- Perry, Raymond P, Steven Hladkyj, Reinhard H Pekrun, and Sarah T Pelletier. "Academic Control and Action Control in the Achievement of College Students: A Longitudinal Field Study." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 93, no. 4 (2001): 776.
- Porter, Stephen R, and Randy L Swing. "Understanding How First-Year Seminars Affect Persistence." *Research in Higher Education* 47 (2006): 89–109.
- Posel, Dorrit, Adeola Oyenubi, and Umakrishnan Kollamparambil. "Job Loss and Mental Health during the COVID-19 Lockdown: Evidence from South Africa." *PLOS ONE* 16, no. 3 (March 30, 2021): e0249352. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0249352>.
- Pring, R. *Philosophy of Educational Research*. London: Continuum, 2000.
- Richardson, Michelle, Charles Abraham, and Rod Bond. "Psychological Correlates of University Students' Academic Performance: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *Psychological Bulletin* 138, no. 2 (2012): 353.
- Ripamonti, Enrico. "Risk Factors for Dropping out of High School: A Review of Contemporary, International Empirical Research." *Adolescent Research Review* 3 (2018): 321–38.
- Robbins, Steven B, In-Sue Oh, Huy Le, and Christopher Button. "Intervention Effects on College Performance and Retention as Mediated by Motivational, Emotional, and Social Control Factors: Integrated Meta-Analytic Path Analyses." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 94, no. 5 (2009): 1163.
- Roman, Nicolette Vanessa, Portia E. Davidse, Anja Human-Hendricks, Letitia Butler-Kruger, and Inge Karla Sonn. "School Dropout: Intentions, Motivations and Self-Efficacy of a Sample of South Africa Youth." *Youth* 2, no. 2 (April 11, 2022): 126–37. <https://doi.org/10.3390/youth2020010>.
- Rumberger, Russell W, Rita Ghatak, Gary Poulos, Philip L Ritter, and Sanford M Dornbusch. "Family Influences on Dropout Behavior in One California High School." *Sociology of Education*, 1990, 283–99.
- Rumberger, Russell W, and Sun Ah Lim. "Why Students Drop out of School: A Review of 25 Years of Research," 2008.
- Ryan, Richard M, and Edward L Deci. "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions." *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 25, no. 1 (2000): 54–67.
- Samushonga, Hartness M. "On Bivocational Ministry-Focused Training in British Theological Schools: Dialoguing with British Theological Educationalists." *Practical Theology* 13, no. 4 (2020): 385–99.
- Shuja, Anita, Prof Ali, Sana Shuja Ahmad Khan, Shafiq Bilal Burki, and Shaham Bilal Buki. "Factors Affecting Students' Dropout Rate During COVID-19," 2021.
- Strenze, Tarmo. "Intelligence and Socioeconomic Success: A Meta-Analytic Review of Longitudinal Research." *Intelligence* 35, no. 5 (2007): 401–26.
- Tentsho, Kelzang, Rhysa McNeil, and Phattrawan Tongkumchum. "Determinants of University Dropout: A Case of Thailand." *Asian Social Science* 15, no. 7 (June 30, 2019): 49. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v15n7p49>.
- Thomas, Liz, Glenda Crosling, and Margaret Heagney. "Improving Student Retention in Higher Education." *Australian Universities Review* 51, no. 2 (2009): 9–18.
- Trentham, Landa L. "Anxiety and Instruction Effects on Sixth-grade Students in a Testing Situation." *Psychology in the Schools* 16, no. 3 (1979): 439–43.
- Truta, Camelia, Luminita Parv, and Ioana Topala. "Academic Engagement and Intention to Drop out: Levers for Sustainability in Higher Education." *Sustainability* 10, no. 12 (2018): 4637.
- Tsolou, Olympia, Thomas Babalis, and Konstantina Tsoli. "The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Education: Social Exclusion and Dropping out of School." *Creative Education* 12, no. 03 (2021): 529–44. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2021.123036>.
- Vignoles, Anna F, and Nattavudh Powdthavee. "The Socioeconomic Gap in University Dropouts." *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy* 9, no. 1 (April 23, 2009). <https://doi.org/10.2202/1935-1682.2051>.
- Wadsworth, Martha E., Tali Raviv, Christine Reinhard, Brian Wolff, Catherine DeCarlo Santiago, and Lindsey Einhorn. "An Indirect Effects Model of the Association Between Poverty and Child Functioning: The Role of Children's Poverty-Related Stress." *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 13, no. 2–3 (February 18, 2008): 156–85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325020701742185>.

ABOUT AUTHORS

1. Loyce Kiiza Kobusingye is a Senior Lecturer of Educational Psychology, Department of Educational, Social and Organisational Psychology, Makerere University, Uganda.
2. Newlin Marongwe is an Associate Professor of Educational Psychology, Department of Continuing Professional Teacher Development, Walter Sisulu University, South Africa
3. Rogers Mageyo is a Graduate of Master of Education in Educational Psychology, Makerere University, Uganda.