



PRINT ISSN: 2519-9781

ONLINE ISSN: 2710-1320

Factors Influencing University Enrolment Decline and Dropout in Mogadishu, Somalia

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Abstract

This study explores the factors leading to enrolment decline and dropout rates at universities in Mogadishu, employing a descriptive quantitative approach. Using a descriptive quantitative approach, it surveyed 412 students and 82 academic staff members. The findings reveal that financial constraints are the main barrier to enrolment, with tuition fees and related costs being significant obstacles. Family issues are also crucial, highlighting the need for emotional and financial support. Socioeconomic challenges, such as poverty and family responsibilities, greatly impact dropout rates, alongside the critical barrier of financial constraints. Additionally, many students enter university academically underprepared, and the lack of support services,

including career guidance and mental health resources, further worsens dropout rates. These insights underscore the need for targeted interventions to improve student retention and enrolment rates in Mogadishu's universities.

Keywords: University, Enrolment Decline, Dropout, Mogadishu

1. Introduction

Student enrolment decline and dropout in higher education are pressing challenges affecting the educational landscape globally. In Somalia, particularly in Mogadishu, this issue is exacerbated by a complex interplay of financial, socioeconomic, academic, institutional, and contextual factors. Higher education in Somalia has undergone a significant transformation from the pre-war era, where few public institutions existed, to a post-war landscape characterized by a proliferation of privately owned universities. These community-initiated academic establishments have made substantial contributions to the higher education sector, particularly in the absence of a strong national government. However, critical challenges remain concerning evaluation and quality assurance, which are essential for institutional accreditation and the acceptance of credentials by other educational establishments (Eno, Eno, & Mweseli, 2015).

Following the collapse of the state in 1991, the governance of the Tertiary Education System (TES) shifted dramatically, with market and oligarchic forces gaining prominence as over one hundred universities were established with minimal regulation. This shift resulted in a fragmented system where these forces operate autonomously, lacking shared goals. Additionally, there is a notable disconnect between the education provided by higher education institutions (HEIs) and the labor market's demands, posing significant challenges for graduates entering the workforce. Collaborative initiatives between the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) and the private sector are crucial for aligning higher education with job market requirements (Farah, 2020).

Factors influencing students' choice of universities include academic quality, learning environment, facilities, courses offered, fees, student

attitude, location, the influence of friends and parents, and the university's image or reputation (Nor, 2018).

Moreover, student retention in higher education is a significant challenge requiring effective strategies. Institutional administrators play a crucial role in enhancing retention by providing funding, academic support, and managing diversity, while faculty contribute by creating positive learning environments through innovative teaching methods. Ultimately, successful retention depends on student motivation and active participation, emphasizing the need for collaboration among administrators, faculty, and students (Lau, L. K., 2003).

A significant positive correlation exists between various dimensions of service quality—specifically tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy—and student satisfaction. Among these, empathy stands out as a particularly impactful element, demonstrating a strong link to student satisfaction and playing a vital role in influencing how students perceive the services provided by their universities. Regularly evaluating student satisfaction and continually enhancing the quality of services at universities in Mogadishu are fundamental actions for achieving organizational success (Ali, A. Y. S., 2014).

1.1. Problem Statement

Universities in Mogadishu would thrive with high enrolment rates and low dropout rates, ensuring students receive essential support and resources for academic success. With robust financial aid programs, strong family support, and effective academic resources, students would enjoy a conducive learning environment for personal growth. However, the current trend of declining enrolment and rising dropout rates poses significant challenges to the higher education sector. Various factors contribute to these trends, and understanding them is crucial for developing effective strategies to enhance student retention and improve

the educational environment. Without addressing these barriers, universities risk perpetuating a cycle of disengagement and underachievement, undermining the potential of both students and the broader community. Therefore, the study seeks to answer this central question: What are the factors contributing to enrolment decline and dropout rates at universities in Mogadishu?

1.2. Research Objectives

The study seeks to:

1. Identify the primary financial barriers affecting student enrolment and retention at universities in Mogadishu.
2. Examine the impact of family issues and support systems on student enrolment and dropout rates.
3. Analyze the influence of socioeconomic challenges, including poverty and family responsibilities, on student retention.
4. Assess the preparedness of students entering university and the adequacy of academic support services provided.
5. Investigate the role of institutional factors, such as learning resources, infrastructure, and communication, in affecting student engagement and retention.
6. Evaluate the impact of job opportunities and career prospects on student decisions regarding enrolment and continuation of their education.
7. Examine the role of external factors such as transportation difficulties and political instability on enrolment and dropout rates.

1.3. Value of the Study

This study is vital for the higher education landscape in Mogadishu, as it seeks to identify the underlying factors contributing to the troubling trends of declining enrolment and increasing dropout rates. By pinpointing critical barriers, the research will offer valuable insights that can shape policy decisions and institutional practices. Understanding these factors is essential for developing targeted interventions to enhance student retention and create a more supportive academic environment. Additionally, the findings can help universities strengthen their programs, improve academic support services, and foster better communication between administration and students.

2. Related Work

2.1. Factors Influencing Enrolment Decline at Universities

Various factors contribute to the decline in enrolment or influence students' choices at the faculty or university level. Marangos et al. (2013) assert that several key elements impact enrolments in economics and business at Australian universities. Notably, historical enrolment patterns exert a significant influence on contemporary choices, while economic recessions often lead to an increase in enrolments in economics. Furthermore, female students typically demonstrate a preference for business studies over economics. Additionally, a rise in total enrolments appears to exert a slight negative effect on economics enrolments. These factors underscore the intricate interplay among economic conditions, demographic trends, and institutional influences that shape student decisions (Marangos et al., 2013).

One significant factor influencing enrollment decisions is the perceived employability of graduates. Factors such as academic programs, tuition fees, and employment opportunities significantly

impact students' decisions to enroll in private higher education institutions (Ali, 2023).

Furthermore, the study by Drydakis highlights that the reputation of the university attended can significantly affect graduates' labor market prospects, suggesting that students are likely to choose institutions that are perceived to enhance their employability (Drydakis, 2016).

The perception of safety on campus is a critical factor influencing students' enrollment decisions. A study by Calitz et al. indicates that safety concerns, particularly in light of increasing incidents of violence and crime on campuses, are paramount for prospective students and their families (Calitz et al., 2019). This sentiment is echoed by Mensah et al., who argue that security challenges on campuses can deter students from enrolling, as parents are increasingly worried about their children's safety in educational environments (Mensah et al., 2019). Furthermore, Owusu et al. found that students expressed dissatisfaction with campus safety, particularly during evening hours, which could deter potential students from choosing that institution (Owusu et al., 2016).

2.2. Factors Influencing Student Dropout at Universities

Student dropout from universities is a critical issue that has garnered significant attention from educators, policymakers, and researchers. Understanding the factors contributing to student attrition is essential for developing strategies to improve retention rates and support student success. This literature review explores the multifaceted nature of student dropout, focusing on academic, financial, social, familial, mental health, and institutional factors.

Academic performance is one of the most significant predictors of student dropout. Tinto's (1993) Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure posits that students' academic integration within an institution,

including their academic performance and intellectual development, plays a crucial role in their decision to persist or drop out. Students who struggle academically may face increased stress, reduced self-efficacy, and a sense of failure, all of which contribute to their decision to leave the university (Tinto, 1993). This theory is supported by empirical research, which shows a strong correlation between poor academic performance and higher dropout rates (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Moreover, Bean and Metzner's (1985) Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition highlights that nontraditional students, who often balance education with work and family responsibilities, are particularly vulnerable to academic challenges. These students may lack the time and resources to succeed academically, leading to higher attrition rates (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Economic factors are a dominant theme in the literature on student dropout. Financial stress, including the inability to afford tuition, textbooks, and living expenses, is a major barrier to student retention. Dynarski and Scott-Clayton (2013) argue that financial aid policies determine students' ability to persist in higher education. Their research suggests that inadequate financial support and rising education costs exacerbate dropout rates, particularly among low-income students.

Furthermore, the relationship between financial aid and student retention has been widely studied. Bettinger (2004) found that increases in grant aid are associated with significant reductions in dropout rates, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, the complexity of financial aid systems and the uncertainty surrounding future financial aid eligibility can also lead to attrition, as students may fear accruing debt or failing to maintain the required academic standards for aid (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 2002).

Social integration, or the extent to which students feel connected to their peers and the broader campus community, is another critical factor influencing dropout. Tinto's (1993) theory emphasizes that students' social experiences, including their relationships with faculty and peers, significantly affect their decision to stay or leave. Students who feel isolated or disconnected are more likely to withdraw, particularly if they do not establish meaningful social ties early in their academic careers (Tinto, 1993).

Empirical studies support this view. For instance, a study by Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007) found that a strong sense of belonging within the university community was a significant predictor of student persistence. The study revealed that students who participated in campus activities and formed close relationships with peers were less likely to drop out. Conversely, students who felt alienated or marginalized were more likely to leave the institution.

For many students, particularly those who are nontraditional, balancing family responsibilities with academic demands is a significant challenge. Miller and Stovall (2014) discuss how students with dependents, such as children or elderly relatives, often struggle to manage their time and resources effectively. The need to prioritize family obligations can lead to missed classes, incomplete assignments, and ultimately, withdrawal from the university.

Research indicates that universities often lack adequate support systems for students with family responsibilities. Policies that provide flexible scheduling, child care services, and family support resources are critical in helping these students persist. However, the absence of such support can lead to higher dropout rates, as students may be forced to choose between their education and their family obligations (Miller & Stovall, 2014).

Mental health has become an increasingly important area of focus in understanding student dropout. Eisenberg, Golberstein, and Hunt (2009) highlight the prevalence of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress among college students. These mental health challenges can impair academic performance, reduce motivation, and contribute to social isolation, all of which increase the risk of dropout.

The relationship between mental health and student retention is complex. While some students may leave university to seek treatment or recover from mental health issues, others may remain enrolled but struggle to meet academic demands. Universities that provide robust mental health services, including counseling and crisis intervention, are better equipped to support students facing these challenges and reduce dropout rates (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010).

The role of institutional support in preventing student dropout cannot be overstated. Bean and Eaton's (2001) Psychological Model of College Student Retention emphasizes the importance of psychological processes in student retention, including the development of positive attitudes and beliefs about the institution. Universities that offer comprehensive support services, such as academic advising, tutoring, and mentoring, help students navigate challenges and build resilience, thereby reducing dropout rates.

In addition to academic support, the availability of extracurricular activities and opportunities for student engagement are crucial in promoting retention. Astin's (1984) Theory of Involvement suggests that students who are actively involved in campus life are more likely to persist, as involvement fosters a sense of belonging and commitment to the institution. However, institutions that fail to provide adequate support or engagement opportunities may see higher dropout rates, particularly among students who are at risk (Astin, 1984).

3. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive quantitative approach to explore the factors contributing to enrolment decline and dropout rates at universities in Mogadishu. The target population for this research includes students and academic staff from various universities in the Mogadishu. A sample of 412 students was randomly selected to provide insights into their perceptions regarding enrolment and dropout issues. Additionally, a sample of 82 academic staff members was included to capture their perspectives on the academic and institutional factors influencing student dropout. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to both groups, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the critical factors affecting enrolment and dropout rates. The quantitative data were then analyzed using statistical methods, including means and standard deviations, to identify patterns

4. Results

4.1. Participant Profiles

The target population consists of students and academic staff at universities in Mogadishu. The student profile reveals that 60.9% are male and 39.1% are female, indicating a predominance of male students. The majority of students (78.9%) are within the 18-20 age range, suggesting a predominantly young adult population, with 20.4% aged 21-25 and only 0.7% over 25. Among the 82 academic staff members, approximately 55% are male and 45% female, indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution. Around 60% of the staff are between 30 and 45 years old, reflecting a mature workforce typically engaged in higher education. About 70% of the staff hold advanced degrees (Master's or Ph.D.), underscoring their academic competency, and around 40% have over ten years of teaching experience, contributing to a wealth

of knowledge and expertise. This diverse profile provides a comprehensive understanding of the educational environment and the factors influencing enrollment decline and dropout rates at universities in Mogadishu.

4.2. Results of Research Factors

4.3. Factors Contributing to the Enrolment Decline at Universities

**Table1.Results of Participants' Views on Factors Influencing
University Enrolment Decline , N=412**

	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	Cost of Education: University expenses, such as tuition fees and other costs, can be a financial burden that prevents students from enrolling.	3.42	.889
Q2	Job Opportunities: Some students are concerned about job opportunities after university and feel that there are not enough jobs available that match their skills	3.20	.989
Q3	Lack of Experience: Some students feel they lack the experience needed to succeed in university, which can lead to fear of enrollment.	2.77	1.173
Q4	Family Issues: Some students come from families without financial or emotional support, making it difficult for them to attend university.	3.54	.774
Q5	Course Selection: Students may not find suitable majors that align with their interests or the skills they want to learn, leading to hesitation about enrolling.	2.80	1.112
Q6	Influence of Peers: Friends or acquaintances can	2.93	1.126

	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
	influence their decision; if their peers are not planning to attend university, they may also lose motivation.		
Q7	Mental Health Challenges: Anxiety and stress about higher education can also impact students' decisions to enrol in university.	2.86	1.166
Grand Mean		3.07	1.032

The table presents seven key factors that contribute to a decrease in university enrolment, along with their mean scores and standard deviations. The cost of education emerged as the most significant factor, with a mean of 3.42, indicating that many students perceive financial burdens, such as tuition and related costs, as a major obstacle to enrollment. Following closely is family issues, which received the highest mean score of 3.54, suggesting that students feel strongly about the importance of financial and emotional support from their families. Job opportunities also ranked high, with a mean of 3.20, reflecting concerns about the availability of jobs that match their skills post-graduation. In contrast, factors like lack of experience (mean of 2.77), course selection (mean of 2.80), influence of peers (mean of 2.93), and mental health challenges (mean of 2.86) received lower scores, indicating that while they are considered relevant, they are not viewed as significant barriers by most students. The standard deviations for these factors show varying degrees of agreement among respondents, highlighting that perceptions of these issues differ widely. Overall, the findings suggest that addressing financial concerns and enhancing family support could be crucial in efforts to improve university enrolment rates.

4.4. Factors Contributing to Students Dropout at Universities

Table 2. Results of Participants' Views on Socioeconomic and Political Instability Factors

Items	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	Socioeconomic factors, like poverty and family responsibilities, impact students' ability to stay enrolled in the university.	4.06	.743
Q2	The distance from students' homes to the university campus and the challenges with transportation make it difficult for them to attend classes regularly.	3.66	.997
Q3	Financial constraints, such as high tuition fees and lack of financial aid, make it difficult for students to continue their studies.	4.21	.885
Q4	Political instability and conflicts in the region have disrupted the normal functioning of the university, making it difficult for students to continue their studies.	3.63	1.048
Grand Mean		3.89	0.918

The table presents an analysis of Academic staff's perceptions regarding socioeconomic and political instability factors that impact their ability to remain enrolled in university. The statement concerning socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and family responsibilities, received a mean score of 4.06 and a standard deviation of 0.743, indicating strong consensus among Academic staff that these issues significantly affect their educational pursuits. This low standard deviation suggests that most Academic staff share similar views about the importance of socioeconomic challenges. In contrast, the statement about transportation difficulties—related to the distance from home to

campus—yielded a mean score of 3.66 and a standard deviation of 0.997. This reflects moderate agreement, with a higher standard deviation indicating greater variability in responses; some Academic staff see transportation as a significant barrier, while others do not. Financial constraints were highlighted as a major concern, with the statement regarding high tuition fees and lack of financial aid achieving the highest mean score of 4.21 and a standard deviation of 0.885. This suggests that financial challenges are perceived as critical obstacles to continuing education. Lastly, the statement on political instability received a mean score of 3.63 and a standard deviation of 1.048, indicating that while Academic staff recognize the impact of political conflicts on their studies, it is viewed as less significant compared to socioeconomic factors.

Table 3. Results of Participants' Views on Academic Factors

Items	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	Many students enter the university academically underprepared for the demands of the coursework.	4.12	.760
Q2	The quality of education at the university, including outdated curricula and teaching methods, does not meet students' expectations	3.55	1.056
Q3	The rigid and inflexible academic policies, such as strict attendance requirements and limited course options, create barriers for students.	3.48	1.080
Grand Mean		3.71	0.965

The table outlines Academic staff' perceptions of various academic factors that influence their university experience. The statement regarding academic preparedness, which notes that many students enter

the university underprepared for the demands of the coursework, received a mean score of 4.12 and a standard deviation of 0.760. This high mean indicates a strong consensus among Academic staf that academic readiness is a significant issue. In contrast, the statement about the quality of education, including outdated curricula and teaching methods, has a mean score of 3.55 and a standard deviation of 1.056. This suggests a moderate level of agreement, indicating that while some Academic staff feel the education quality meets students expectations, others do not. Lastly, the statement concerning rigid academic policies, such as strict attendance requirements and limited course options, scored a mean of 3.48 with a standard deviation of 1.080.

Table 4. Results of Participants' Views on Student Support Factors

Items	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	The lack of career guidance and job placement support makes it difficult for students to see the relevance and value of their education	4.02	.769
Q2	The ineffective or inadequate mental health support services available to students contribute to increased stress and dropout rates	3.74	.886
Grand Mean		3.88	0.827

The table presents data on student support factors that impact students' educational experiences and retention. The statement regarding the lack of career guidance and job placement support received a mean score of 4.02 with a standard deviation of 0.769, indicating strong agreement among Academic staff that insufficient career services hinder their ability to recognize the relevance and value of their education. This high mean reflects a widespread concern that effective support in this area is crucial for student success. Additionally, the statement about the

effectiveness of mental health support services scored a mean of 3.74 and a standard deviation of 0.886. This suggests a moderate level of agreement that inadequate mental health contribute to increased stress and dropout rates among students, highlighting the need for improvements in mental health support.

Table 5. Results of Participants' Views on Institutional Factors:

Items	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	Limited access to learning resources, such as libraries and modern technology, hinders students' academic progress	3.55	1.090
Q2	Poor infrastructure on campus, including overcrowded classrooms and inadequate housing, discourages students from continuing their studies	3.55	1.113
Q3	The lack of student support services, like counseling and tutoring, makes it challenging for students to cope with the demands of university life.	4.02	.942
Q4	Poor communication and engagement between the university administration and the student leads to a disconnect and lack of trust.	3.62	.964
Q5	The limited opportunities for students to provide feedback and participate in decision-making processes can lead to a sense of marginalization	3.67	.917
Q6	The lack of extracurricular activities and opportunities for social engagement on campus can make students feel isolated and disengaged.	3.83	.966
Grand Mean		3.7	0.99

The table highlights various institutional factors that influence students' dropout. Limited access to learning resources, such as libraries

and modern technology, received a mean score of 3.55 with a standard deviation of 1.090, indicating that Academic staff perceive this as a significant barrier, though opinions on its severity vary. Similarly, poor infrastructure, including overcrowded classrooms and inadequate housing, also scored a mean of 3.55 and a slightly higher standard deviation of 1.113, suggesting that many students are discouraged by these conditions, but experiences may differ among individuals. In contrast, the lack of student support services, such as counseling and tutoring, garnered a higher mean score of 4.02 and a standard deviation of 0.942, reflecting strong agreement that these deficiencies critically hinder students' ability to manage university demands. The statement regarding poor communication and engagement between university administration and students received a mean score of 3.62 with a standard deviation of 0.964, indicating a moderate consensus on the need for improved communication to foster trust within the university community. Additionally, limited opportunities for student feedback and participation in decision-making processes scored a mean of 3.67 and a standard deviation of 0.917. Lastly, the lack of extracurricular activities and opportunities for social engagement received a mean score of 3.83 and a standard deviation of 0.966, indicating that many students feel isolated and disengaged due to insufficient social opportunities.

5. Conclusion

The study revealed several critical factors contributing to both enrolment decline and dropout rates at universities in Mogadishu. Financial constraints emerged as the most significant barrier to enrolment, with students perceiving tuition and related costs as major obstacles. Family issues highlighted the importance of emotional and financial support, while concerns about job opportunities post-graduation were also prevalent. Socioeconomic challenges, particularly poverty and

family responsibilities, were identified as strong influences on dropout rates, alongside financial constraints, which were viewed as critical barriers to continuing education. Transportation difficulties and political instability were acknowledged but deemed less significant. Academic factors indicated that many students enter university underprepared, and although the quality of education was considered moderately satisfactory, the lack of support services—especially career guidance and mental health resources—were significant barriers. Institutional factors such as limited access to learning resources and poor infrastructure contributed to these challenges, along with ineffective communication between administration and students, which fostered feelings of isolation and disengagement.

6. Recommendations

To address the challenges of enrolment decline and dropout rates at universities in Mogadishu, several recommendations are proposed

1. **Financial Support Programs:** Universities should develop financial aid programs, including scholarships and flexible payment plans, to alleviate the financial burden on students and encourage enrolment.
2. **Family Engagement Initiatives:** Institutions should create programs to engage families in the educational process, providing resources and guidance to strengthen familial support for students.
3. **Career Services Enhancement:** Improving career guidance and job placement services is essential. Universities should collaborate with local industries, and companies to create job opportunities aligned with students' skills.

5. Academic Preparedness Programs: Implementing preparatory courses and support for incoming students can help bridge the gap in academic readiness.
6. Improved Student Support Services: Enhancing mental health services and counseling can address the emotional challenges students face, contributing to retention.
7. Infrastructure Development: Universities should invest in infrastructure improvements, providing adequate learning resources and creating a conducive environment for academic success.
8. Enhanced Communication Channels: Establishing feedback mechanisms and opportunities for student participation in decision-making can foster a sense of community and trust between students and administration

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