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A Case Study on University Dropout: Perspectives from Education Faculty Students and Academicians[1]

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Abstract

This case study investigated the reasons for students dropping out of a university and the experiences associated with the dropout process of individuals who dropped out of the faculty of education in Turkey. We collected data from 10 individuals who dropped out and 8 academic staff members who worked in the same faculty of state university in the Aegean region in Turkey between 2008 and 2018 using the criterion sampling technique. We collected data using semi-structured interview forms and conducted content analysis. The results revealed that pre-admission factors (I), which are the factors of guidance, personality, system, family, career, and city play decisive roles in the admission process of individuals.

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These factors can shape their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation before the faculty admission process. After admission, the university processes factors (II) such as psychological condition, academic condition, social condition, organizational situation, appointment factors, military service, family situation, and financial situation are determinant factors on individuals' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in their university experience. After the dropout decision, individuals either drop out of the system or change department/university. Findings point out that the reasons for and process of the dropout are interdependent and divergent. Recommendations for future investigations and practices are presented based on our findings.

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Introduction

School dropout has been taken seriously considered in every stage of formal education in the last decades. The demand for university education has risen in recent years due to reasons such as changing nature of knowledge, national and international economic developments, changes in job market conditions, globalization and its effects on economic, social life and education, etc. Therefore, dropout from the university has become an urgent research topic in many countries as well. Universities and policymakers in education have

increasingly sought to evaluate the effects of dropouts in terms of both individual and educational outputs.

University student dropout has effects on various economic and social issues at macro and micro levels. It may cause failure to provide educated manpower and foster economic development (Shcheglova et al., 2020) and increase social costs (Bäulke et al., 2021). As Park (2014) suggests, university student dropout results in higher costs for countries in terms of tax losses. Because of dropouts, expected economic and social development is interrupted and returns to public spending on higher education decrease at macroeconomic level. Moreover, expected social externalities may also be interrupted, too (Saccaro & França, 2020). Higher dropout rates may cause increased demand for social support, reduced political participation, and reduced intergenerational mobility at macro level (Hayes et al., 2002; Park, 2014). University student dropout rates are also taken as a criterion for university rankings and higher dropout rates have a negative effect for a university and lower levels of dropout are taken as a criterion for university effectiveness (Sneyers & De Witte, 2017). When micro level effects are considered, university dropout has individual consequences, too. Individual investment in higher education cannot be translated into positive outcomes in the job market (Aparicio-Chueca et al., 2021; Archer, 2008; Szabó & Matar, 2021). It is still true that the earnings of university graduates are higher than those of non-graduates, especially in developing countries. (Ergen, 2017; Somani, 2021).

Considering dropouts in Turkey, it can be said that there is almost no definite data on dropout rates. There is only one official document taken from TBMM archives (TBMM, 2018b). To this official

answer to a parliamentary question (TBMM, 2018a) 1,115,530 students dropped out or suspended their studies between 2013-2014 and 2017-2018 in Turkey. When the document is analyzed, the number of dropped out or suspended students were 135,137 in 2013-2014; 161,193 in 2014-2015; 197,482 in 2015-2016; 212,770 in 2016-2017 and 408,948 in 2017-2018. It is seen that the number of dropped out or suspended students has risen in recent years. This implies that the dropout problem has an increasing importance for the future effectiveness of the Turkish higher education system, market conditions, and individual and societal outcomes.

While there are many studies (Gökşen & Cemalcılar, 2010; Köse, 2014; Yorğun, 2014; Zorbaz, 2018) at lower levels of education on dropout, university dropout studies are limited in Turkey. They are focused on many different faculties and there is a need to focus on a specific type of faculty to put forward the faculty specific reasons of dropout. Therefore, we investigated individuals' evaluations and views before the university admission process, their experiences at the university, the dropout process, the reasons underlying their dropout decisions, and their experiences in the dropout stage. Moreover, we also evaluated the opinions of the academic staff working at the same faculty in the period of student dropout. Thus, we aimed to understand the complex relationships between reasons for dropping out. Choosing a specific faculty also lets us infer whether the faculty and profession-specific dynamics affect the dropout decision and process. Also, considering the available studies, using a specific group (education faculty dropout) provided us a deep insight into the problem.

The main purpose of this study is to examine the reasons for dropping out of a university in Turkey based on the views of the students who dropped out of a faculty of education and the academic staff in that faculty in Turkey.

Reasons for university student drop out

University student dropout is among the important topics studied in higher education papers after the 70s. After the seminal papers of Spady (1970) and Tinto (1975), research on dropout has varied and intensified. Early studies focused on dropout reasons (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975), while later studies focused on relationships between the dropout reasons, the effect of them on the dropout (Bean, 1985), and interrelations among these reasons (Heublein, 2014; Kerby, 2015).

Dropping out of a university is a process that contains mutual interactions of several factors (De Witte et al., 2013; Troelsen & Laursen, 2014). These factors may be specific to each individual and need to be considered as multidimensional. These individual factors are of a broad and ambivalent nature. The factors behind university dropout can be summarized as pre-admission and individual factors, academic and social factors, internal and organizational factors, and external factors.

Considering pre-admission and individual factors, starting age (Araque et al., 2009) is one of the important causes of dropout. The higher the age to start university, the higher the probability of dropping out of school. Besides, Wolter et al. (2014) argues that the higher the class level, the less likely to drop out of school, especially for women. Gender is another factor for university dropout, as Şimşek

(2013) suggests. Male students may have a higher tendency to drop out compared to females. This may be because of higher education expectations of females, which is to overcome cultural and economic hindrances. Former educational achievement or background are also important personal factors (Bernardo et al., 2016; Paura & Arphiova, 2014; Wolter et al., 2014). Higher academic performance in high school may decrease the dropout risk and raises the possibility of completing the program. Parents' educational background is among the important determinants of university dropout because students coming from more educated families have lower risk of dropout (Aina, 2013). Besides family's educational background, socio-economic factors are also determinants of university dropout. Having low socio-economic background may cause financial problems and adaptation problems at university. It may also cause low level of preparedness for the university (Chies et al., 2014; Oragwu, 2020; Uslu Gülşen, 2017). Moreover, family support and encouragement are other pre-admission factors that play role in the dropout decision (Boyacı et al., 2015; Bülbül, 2012; Duque et al., 2013; Parr & Bonitz, 2015). Lack of family support can lead to adaptation or social problems at university and thus dropout, while higher support may encourage an individual to complete university. Apart from those factors, city is another important factor for university dropout. As Troelsen and Laursen (2014) state socialization facilities in and out of the university determines individuals' dropout decision. Individuals consider city life in pre-admission process and low levels of satisfaction of city facilities can lead them thinking of dropout (Calitz et al., 2019; Ceylan et al., 2017).

After university admission, academic and social factors get involved in the equation. Satisfaction from the courses and academic

achievement play a crucial role as feeling dissatisfied with the courses, academic failure, and consequently absenteeism raises the possibility of dropout (Parr & Bonitz, 2015; Uslu Gülşen, 2017; Wolter et al., 2014). Besides academic factors, social factors such as adaptation to university, friend support, and relations with academic staff may also affect dropout behavior (Aypay et al., 2012; Bernardo et al., 2016; Bülbül, 2012; Şimşek, 2013; Troelsen & Laursen, 2014). Negative friendship experiences, social integration problems, and lower levels of communication with academic staff may cause thinking of dropout option for students.

Organizational factors are on the other side of the coin in terms of internal factors. Quality of educational resources, faculty and university facilities, orientation and adaptation programs, and teaching program are among the organizational factors playing role in university dropout (Boyacı et al., 2018; Duque et al., 2013; Paura & Arphiova, 2014; Uslu Gülşen, 2017). Perceived low quality of teaching or resources may make students feel unsatisfied. Moreover, lack of support for adaptation and orientation programs –especially in the first semester- negatively affects students' integration to the university. Higher student per staff ratios, and low academic support from teachers or administrators may make students feel stressed or unhappy and this may cause both academic failure and commitment problems and dropout.

The organization of the educational system and market conditions after graduation are among the external factors of university dropout (Bülbül, 2012; Kerby, 2015; Lavrijsen & Nicaise, 2015). Students think of the possibility to participate in the job market as soon as possible after graduation. If there is a disequilibrium in the

job market (overeducation problem, excess supply, etc.), then students may feel demotivated to complete a program. Also, the excess supply of graduates to the job market raises the feeling of hopelessness among students and that may cause dropout risk.

Apart from those factors, motivation is an important determinant factor to university dropout. To Tinto (1975), expectations and variables of motivation sources of students are effective in their dropout decisions. Similarly, Krstić et al. (2019) and Jungert et al. (2014) express that dropout decision is related to motivation processes of students. Low levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation may determine a student's dropout decision. Paura and Arphiova (2014) state that low level of motivation toward the profession may lead individuals dropout in the long run. Moreover, as Parr and Bonitz (2015) state low levels of motivation in university process determines an individual's dropout decision. Although, we can take motivation as a basis factor to dropout, it may result from other factors, as well. For example, as Jungert et al. (2014) suggest, while payment conditions of a job determine extrinsic motivation, being ambitious of doing a job determines intrinsic motivation. Considering those studies, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation must be taken as important factors in analyzing dropout processes.

When the causes of university dropout are considered based on the literature, it can be said that the factors of dropout are complicated and interdependent. Not only individual and organizational factors but also national level factors play an important role in analyzing dropout phenomenon. Analyzing these factors and relations among them is crucial in terms of micro and macro level effects. As the dropout factors and processes are different for each individual and

faculties, analysis of a specific unit may provide deeper insight into the problem, possible solutions, and policy options. Based on the literature and the aim of the study, we tried to answer the following research question based on the views of individuals who dropped out from the university and their teachers:

What are the reasons of university student dropout according to the views of dropped out students and academicians?

Methodology

Study Design

Case study design was used in this study to deeply analyze the dropout reasons of the students who dropped out from a faculty of education in Turkey based on the views of the students and teachers working in the same faculty. A case study is a qualitative design in which researchers collect detailed and in-depth information from multiple sources (observations, interviews, visual materials, documents, and reports) and provide a description or themes of a situation (Creswell, 2015). In this study, dropout reasons of the individuals were deeply investigated through interviews with individuals who had dropped out and teaching staff working in the same faculty. The critical point in case studies is the objective of answering questions of *how* and *why* (Saban & Ersoy, 2016). Therefore, in this study, we aimed to answer these questions by focusing on the reasons (why) and experiences (how) of dropouts based on the views of dropouts and academic staff to understand the nature of the phenomenon. A real case study design is used in this study to better understand an experienced case (Glesne, 2012). Yin (2018) states that single case studies allow us to contribute to knowledge and theory

building by confirming, challenging, or extending the theory. Therefore, the phenomenon of dropout from faculty of education, which was not particularly focused on in previous studies in Turkey context, was narrowed down to education faculty in order to contribute to expanding the findings on dropout behavior and its causes. Thus, a more specific unit is determined and the reasons and experiences of individuals specifically for this unit are investigated (Merriam, 2015).

Study Group

We used the criterion sampling method to select the study groups, which consisted of ten individuals who dropped out (Study Group 1) and eight staff members (Study Group 2) of the faculty of education between 2008 and 2018. As the oldest records of the faculty on dropout starts from 2008, it was chosen as a starting point. Having at least one year of enrollment in the faculty was the basic criterion for individuals who dropped out (D1, D2, …) as first year experiences (Chies et al., 2014; Mannan, 2007; Montmarquette et al., 1996) are important to explain the dropout process. Having experienced a student dropping out from the faculty they work, and having academic mentoring duties were the basic criteria for the academic staff working in the same faculty through their academic profession (A1, A2, …) since experiences with the academic staff (Lavrijsen & Nicaise, 2015; Parr & Bonitz, 2015; Ramsdal et al., 2013; Şimşek, 2013) are highly determinant factors for a dropout. Therefore, we used these criteria on study group selection as well. We got participants' data from the faculty under official and ethical permission for use of the data on academic purposes and keeping them confidential, which allowed us to assess the data in terms of the criteria given above, which

are year of admission and dropout, gender, department, contact info, etc.

Demographics of the study groups are given in Tables 1 and 2:

Table 1. *Demographics of Study Group 1 (Dropouts)*

Participant	Gender	Major	University starting age	Year of dropout	Current occupation
D1	Female	Preschool Education	18	2nd Year (2013)	Trainee Lawyer
D2	Male	Social Sciences Education	19	2nd Year (2013)	Self-employed
D3	Female	Classroom Teacher Education	19	3rd Year (2013)	Classroom Teacher
D4	Female	Art Teacher Education	19	2nd Year (2013)	Art Teacher
D5	Male	Social Sciences Education	18	5th Year (2013)	Prison Guard Officer
D6	Male	Science Teacher Education	18	2nd Year (2011)	Aircraft Maintenance Technician
D7	Male	Classroom Teacher Education	19	2nd Year (2010)	Police
D8	Male	Music Teacher Education	18	3rd Year (2016)	Student
D9	Male	English Language Teaching	18	2nd Year (2018)	Student
D10	Female	English Language Teaching	24	2nd Year (2018)	ELT Teacher

As seen in Table 1, there are 4 females and 6 males in study group 1. At least one participant from each major was included in the study, whose university starting ages ranged between 18 and 24. All the participants meet the criterion of having at least one year of enrollment in the faculty and some of them have 2 or more years of enrollment. Faculty's dropout records start from 2008 but we could go back to 2010 since we could not contact the earlier dropouts or the ones we had reached did not want to be included in the study. Only three of the participants work as a teacher, while the others have different jobs.

Table 2. *Demographics of Study Group 2 (Academic Staff).*

Teaching staff	Gender	Title	Years of experience in the faculty
A1	Female	Assoc. Prof. Dr.	10
A2	Female	Assoc. Prof. Dr.	19
A3	Male	Res. Assist.	15
A4	Female	Assist. Prof. Dr.	19
A5	Female	Res. Assist.	10
A6	Male	Lecturer	14
A7	Female	Lecturer.	12
A8	Male	Prof. Dr.	22

As seen in Table 2, 5 of the academic staff are female and 3 of them are male. They all have mentoring duties and have at least one dropped out student in the faculty. At least one staff from all different titles was included in the study group, as each of them had different levels of communication with students (e.g. mentoring, teaching, both, etc.). Considering the experiences, it is seen that all staff have 10 years or more of experience in the same faculty.

Instruments

We used semi-structured interview forms to collect data. Related studies were reviewed, then draft questions were prepared focused on inquiring reasons of dropouts. A total of 10 experts reviewed the content, context and the language of the pre-application forms, which contains draft questions of the interview forms. After their suggestions we revised the questions proceeded to pre-application. The interview form for the dropouts had 13 questions and for the teaching staff consisted of 7 questions before the pre-application. After piloting, which was applied to 2 dropouts and 1 teaching staff member, and lasted approximately 30 minutes each, the

interview data were analyzed by 2 other researchers in terms of content, length, and practicability. Finally, interview forms were revised and contained 12 questions for the dropouts, including questions about their admission process, their individual, academic, economic, and social experiences as a student, idea of dropout and its reasons, the process of decision making for dropout, experiences after dropout and 7 questions for the teaching staff, including questions on their dropped out students, and students' dropout reasons.

Since this study reveals a part of a more comprehensive study conducted to determine the reasons behind dropout and the experiences of university students regarding the dropout process, the findings related to the reasons for dropout obtained from the analysis of the data are included here. In this context, the parts of the interviews with the individuals who left the education faculty and the lecturers working in the same faculty regarding the reasons for leaving the university were discussed and evaluated together.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews were conducted in 2018 and 2019, and lasted from 35 to 97 minutes. The lengths of the interviews differed. This is because some participants were wishful to give extra information about their memories, some were talkative, and in some interviews features of the place of the interview (café, home, etc.) affected the length of the interview. Before the interviews with Study Group 1, each participant was contacted by phone, e-mail, or social media and asked to set an appointment. Appointments were arranged at a time suitable for the participants, and interviews were conducted at a location of their

choice for them to feel comfortable and safe (Griffiths, 1998). The first author of the study interviewed one participant in her home, one in his workplace, and the others in different places (cafe, shopping center, etc.). The researcher recorded the interviews upon the permission of the participant by two recorders to avoid technical problems. After each interview, the researcher checked his notes and took extra notes on the interview, in general, to be included in the analysis process. After nine interviews with dropped out students and seven interviews with teachers, we observed the collected data, discussed its content, and agreed that no new information on the reasons of dropout would be provided by any other interview. We decided to conduct two more interviews one with dropped out students and one with teachers to be sure that our data has saturated enough for a deep understanding of the dropout phenomenon.

We used content analysis technique to analyze the data and extract the concepts and relations among them (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The content analysis process is shown in Figure 1:

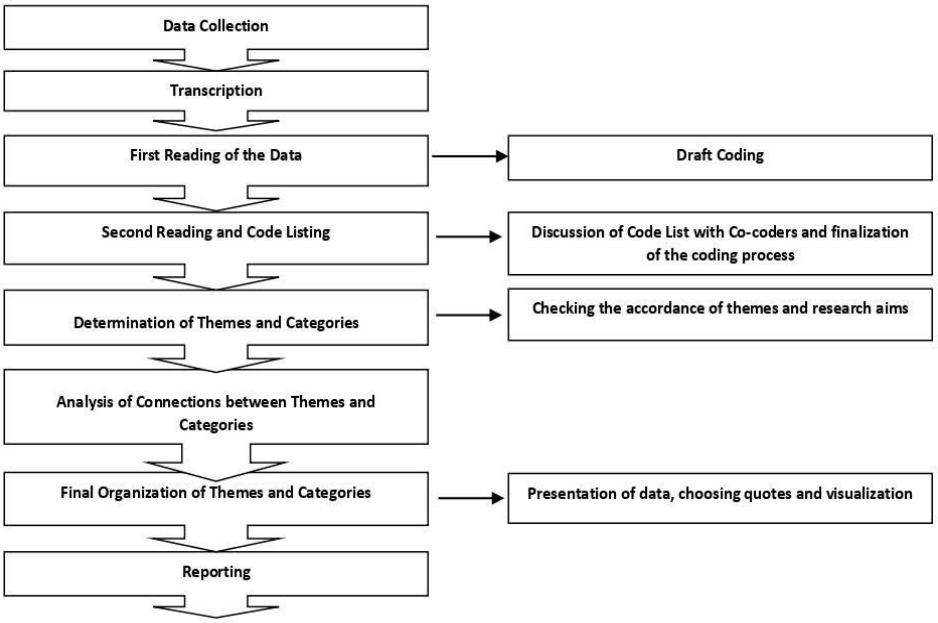


Figure 1. Content Analysis Process

Two researchers experienced in qualitative research and determined as co-coders were asked to check the coding process and codes to assess the reliability of the analysis process (Bilgin, 2014). For this, we made available the whole text of two interviews, and aim of the study and problem sentence, asked those researchers to code the whole data. Then, the codes of the researchers and co-coders were compared until we all agreed on the codes.

In the analysis of the data we considered the data from the dropped out students and the academic staff together as they both include dropout reasons. This common point allowed us to evaluate the case of dropout in depth. Although there are no questions of pre-admission process of the dropouts in academic staff interview form,

academic staff expressed their views concerning pre-admission stage. So, we included those ideas in the analysis process with students' views. Based on the analysis process we reached two themes regarding the reasons of dropout process which are "Pre-Admission Factors" and "Factors Associated with the University Process".

We provide detailed quotes of the participants for the credibility of the study along with detailed information on the entire process. The interview notes were also considered in the data analysis process for a detailed investigation of the dropout reasons and experiences. Collecting data from both dropouts and teaching staff as varying the data (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008) in addition to the external control of data analysis by co-coders (Long & Johnson, 2000) allowed us to ensure the credibility of the study and trustworthiness of data analysis process. Finally, the pre-application of the interview form enabled us to obtain quality data in terms of both content, length, and practicality (Perakyla, 2004).

Results

The study aims to present the dropout reasons of the students from a faculty of education in Turkey based on the views of the dropped out students and academic staff from the same faculty. The results are given under the titles of Pre-Admission Factors of University Student Dropout and Factors Associated with the University Process on University Student Dropout.

Pre-Admission Factors of University School Dropout

Pre-admission factors of dropout are guidance, personality, system, family, career options, and city where the university is located.

First, guidance factors are important for individuals to choose which university to attend. This factor covers getting career guidance in high schools, and which school counselors guide university candidates in terms of skills, ability, and future expectations. Below quote of a participant is given about how guidance affected the decision of admission to a university:

> *"After I got my score from the university entrance exam, nobody helped me on my university choices. I knew that my score was fine, but it was not clear to me where to choose… The school counselor did not help me." (D5)*

Personality is another preliminary factor in the pre-admission process as it reflects individuals' academic status, expectations from the university, their characteristics, etc. It may also reflect how individuals perceive themselves, if they are self-aware about their potential, motivations for attending a university, goals of attending university, etc. Below follows a quote from a participant on the issue:

> *"I did not have any expectations before being admitted to a university. All I wanted was to start university. I wanted to be away from my family and to be able to take care of myself… Being a teacher is not in my plans. I wished for an engineering training, but my scores were not high, so I had to come faculty of education." (D6)*

University entrance system is also an important factor in the pre-admission process. In Turkey, university entrance relies on the score taken from the university entrance exam. In some majors such as Art Teacher Education, there is an extra aptitude exam made apart from the entrance exam by faculties themselves. This means that some art teacher education departments may make the aptitude exam in July and some of them may in August or September. The entrance system,

time of the exam, and changes made in the entrance system (score coefficient, etc.) can affect the pre-admission process and later dropout. Some participants expressed this as below:

> *"My admission process was somehow compulsory. I was obliged to apply to that university as all the others had completed their application processes." (D4)*

> *"After the entrance exam, I made my university choices and expected to be accepted in my first choice. But that year, a transition option was given to the ones having higher scores in mathematics and science… so the threshold points rose. I couldn't get my first choice." (D3)*

Family is another pre-admission factor, once many reasons related to family issues may affect university choice. Being away from home or staying with the family, considering the expectations of family members and of other relatives, and an expectation of becoming independent may motivate individuals when choosing a university. When interviews were considered, they surfaced as determinant factors, for instance:

> *"I was not conscious in university admission process. I chose university X only to be with my mother. My second choice was university Y because of easy transportation. I could easily go there by bus and be with my mother as well." (D10)*

On the one hand, having a career goal is mainly a direct motivation for individuals in the pre-admission process. On the other hand, having no career goals can be a motivation for dropping out. Some participants expressed their career goals based on career options of being a teacher. Such as:

> *"I preferred this major as it is relaxing, has better working options. I would be a classroom teacher, civil servant after the university." (D3)*

> *"I did not know that major is entirely on teacher training. I had different goals of studying music. As I did not want to be a teacher, I didn't want to study lessons because my motive is to be a musician" (D8)*

The final pre-admission process factor is the city, i.e., the city where the university is located. Social life, socio-cultural structure of the city, having a seashore or not, being close to hometown or not, presence of contact, or presence of outstanding features of a city in the pre-admission process for individuals. Here is a participant's expression on the issue:

> *"I was expecting a coastal city when I first came here. When I saw that it was not, I was disappointed. The city is undeveloped. I came from a metropole. That was a shock. I still could not believe that there was not a seashore. I was thinking, what if it is at the end of that road? Then looked it up we are 50 kms away from the sea." (D2)*

The academic staff also expressed that city is an important factor that effects students' motivation in pre-admission process. Here is an example of the issue:

> *"One of them had come from a big city. She tried much but couldn't adapt here. She expressed that the city does not meet her socio-cultural expectations and this demotivates her…" (A8)*

Factors Associated with the University Process on University Student Dropout

Factors associated with the university process include the views of the individuals and teachers on the reasons of dropout

process after university admission. It has a broad range of interconnected factors as well. These factors are psychological condition, academic condition, social condition, organizational situation, appointment factors, military service, family situation, and financial situation.

The dropout process follows the feeling of unhappiness during university education. Below is an example from a participant's expressions on his/her psychological condition:

> *"… I was unhappy. Being there made me feel uneasy… I was more enthusiastic when I started, I would learn new things, have better friends… I started hoping for good things but it didn't occur. Both school and friends made me feel unhappy, I felt alienated." (D4)*

Similar to the dropout students, the academic staff also expressed that students' psychological condition is an important factor of dropout. An example is given below:

> *"They want to dropout time to time… which stems from feeling of anxiety and stress which is because of being away from their families or other reasons…" (A5)*

Negative feelings regarding academic integration, academic support, absenteeism, not having regular study habits, program's failure to satisfy participants' expectations, and anxiety over exams after the university are critical factors related to the academic status of the participants. Examples of them are below:

> *"I expected that university education should not give me basic definitions, it should be more practical. But I wanted to learn the reasons of something ... They did not give me such kind of training…" (D5)*

> *"I wasn't a good student. I did not use to go classes regularly. I'd never studied for the exams and projects." (D2)*

> *"I hoped that the university… independent… extraordinary teachers… But I saw that it is like a high school. Just normal classes. Campus was not a good one, too. This did not give me any motivation." (D7)*

The academic staff also expressed academic status as a crucial factor in the dropout decision. They emphasized mainly unmet expectations, such as an expectation of better education, absenteeism, and weak intrinsic motivation. Here is an example:

> *"There were some students dropped out for academic reasons… They did not consider dropping out at first, but after … campus life and academic dissatisfaction may have caused them to think about dropping out…" (A1)*

Dropped out individuals expressed that social experiences are important in staying or dropping out. Social factors include relationships with others and lecturers, cultural factors, having different memories, social activities in the university, city life and university facilities. Here is an example of the effect of social factors:

> *"Not generally speaking but, I had my worst friendship experiences there. That's part of the reason for my trauma… I didn't want to only chat with my friends. I also wanted to learn new things. I couldn't achieve it there, which was dissatisfying." (D1)*

The academic staff also expressed that social experiences are important factors for dropout. For example:

> *"Students coming from bigger or more developed cities may suffer from cultural difficulties. This city may not have met their*

expectations. There may not be many options of socio-cultural activities." (A2)

In addition to social factors, organizational resources are among the factors leading students to drop out. They are mainly related to social clubs and physical features, and directly affect an individual's academic and social integration with the university. Below is an example of organizational factors related to dropout:

"I do not have distinctive memory… Nothing positive or negative comes to my mind. The campus was not attractive. There was a real mess, landscape was not attractive either. Also, transportation was an issue, as the campus was located far away from the city center." (D6)

Academic staff also expressed that organizational factors are important factors leading students to dropout. Below is an example from the quotes of and academic staff:

"They transfer to other universities that have better training. They don't like the academic environment, campus life, physical conditions here… They think of other universities as having better opportunities." (A7)

One outstanding finding is that post-university work or assignment conditions have a pervasive effect on the participants' decision to drop out or change their major. Here is an example of the effect of being hired after university on dropout decision:

"The future was dark for me. Getting a job was so difficult. We can see that there are many non-working graduates…and their hard lives … They studied for 4 to 5 years, and took exams but couldn't achieve even if they got higher scores... I thought that I would not be

hired even if I got high scores or would have to wait many years." (D2)

Academic staff also mentioned appointment factors after university education is an important factor that determined the dropout behavior of the students. Here is an example about post-university appointment factor:

> *"They are unhappy with appointment conditions. They say that 'We won't be appointed no matter how successful we are'. Payment conditions of being teacher is another problem, too. They say that: 'I will earn 3.000 liras when started to job. I can earn more in another profession'" (A6)*

One participant expressed that compulsory military service was important for his decision to drop out. In Turkey, all the males have a compulsory military service duty. In the last years, some other options for this service became available, such as paid military service. However, when that participant dropped out, he had to serve at least five months. Completing military service is also necessary for many areas of social and professional life in Turkey.

A striking finding of the study is that although many studies suggest that financial and family variables cause dropout, no participant in this study dropped out due to financial or family reasons. In turn, academic staff reported that students who dropped out expressed financial or family problems as a reason for dropping out. That's why we used a dashed line between financial and family situation, and extrinsic motivation. Here are some quotes from the academic staff:

"…I had a student who dropped out because of financial problems... She loved this university, but financial reasons obliged her. She said that she couldn't afford it…" (A8)

"One of my students had to drop out because of health problems within her family. Her father had died, and her mother had health problems. She had to be with her mother. She dropped out involuntarily..." (A1)

Based on the obtained results from the study, university dropout factors and processes are given in Figure 2 below. University dropout is a process based on the pre-admission process and a combination of university process factors ending with dropping out of the system or major/department/university transfer (Figure 2).

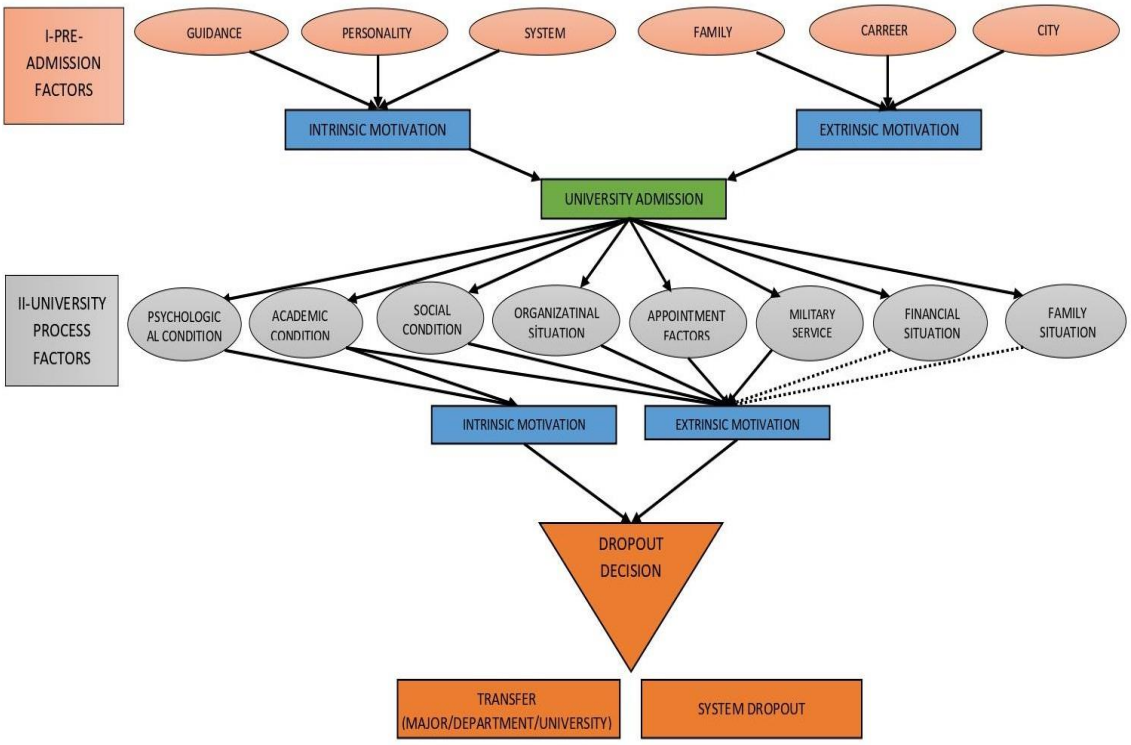


Figure 2. University Dropout Factors Expressed by Students and Academicians

Discussion

The aim of this study is to delineate the dropout reasons of the students from a faculty of education in Turkey based on the views of the dropout students and academic staff from the same faculty. To the results, the reasons of university dropout are pre-admission factors (guidance, personality, system, family, career and city) and university process factors (psychological condition, academic condition, social

condition, organizational situation, appointment factors, military service, financial situation and family situation).

This study suggests that pre-admission stage is crucial for student attrition or the dropout decision in subsequent years. Based on the results, negative experiences in pre-admission stage in terms of lack of effective guidance, personal preferences, university entrance system plays important role on dropout decision in later years. Similarly, studies in Turkey suggest that there are problems in services of guidance before university, and these problems can mislead choices of university education. Individuals without the necessary guidance services can be directed by their families and other people on their university choice (Atılgan, 2018; Gülcan & Cengizhan, 2009; Yanpar & Özen, 2004).

In this study, we have observed that family issues and guidance of relatives affected university and job preferences. In addition, personal factors are also important in the pre-admission process. Mainly, the expectations before admission are within the basic factors of the intrinsic motivation, and unfulfilled expectations cause a later dropout or transfer. Students who do not study in the majors they desire may have higher risks of dropping out (Gury, 2011; Lassibille & Gomez, 2008; Rodríguez-Gómez et al., 2015; Şimşek, 2013; Uslu Gülşen, 2017).

Our results showed that students consider social factors in the pre-admission process, such as social life in the city where the university is located. If the expectations are not fulfilled, a loss of extrinsic motivation is observed in subsequent years and is followed by the thought of dropping out. Similarly, Calitz et al. (2019), Herrero

et al. (2015), and İlgan et al. (2018) state that city is a variable that university candidates consider in the pre-admission process.

According to the results, when factors associated with the university process that affect the dropout decision are considered, the psychological status of the individuals plays an important role in academic satisfaction. Happiness is a significant predictor of academic achievement (Tabbodi et al., 2015). Ferreira et al. (2018) claim that academic quality affects the psychological well-being. They considered academic quality and psychological well-being (happiness) and detected a relationship where negative experiences on both issues may determine the dropout or transfer decision in the long run.

Based on our results, individuals' academic status is of primary importance to explain the dropout process. Academic dissatisfaction increases the intention to drop out (Truta et al., 2018). Similarly, the failure to meet educational expectations may direct individuals to transfer to another university/major (Boyacı et al., 2018). In turn, unmet academic expectations affect student motivation intrinsically, and unsatisfying academic support may reduce their extrinsic motivation. Weak teacher-student relations, unsatisfying academic support from academic staff, or unmet expected academic support may be reasons for low extrinsic motivation and can increase dropout risk (Bernardo et al., 2016; Parr & Bonitz, 2015; Şimşek, 2013; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991; Uslu Gülşen, 2017).

Another critical factor of dropout is individuals' social status. Weak social relationships with friends and academic staff, adaptation problems, and unsupportive social environment cause dropout, as found in this study. Likewise, Troelsen and Laursen (2014) state that a reduced social integration may cause dropout. Social factors are

among the most important factors associated with being committed to the university (Kelly & Mulrooney, 2019; Russel & Jarvis, 2019), and students cannot integrate socially if they feel demotivated in their first years (Noyens et al., 2019). Social status influences extrinsic motivations and low-quality social interactions and support may reduce students' motivation and lead them to consider dropping out in the long run (Bülbül, 2012; Şimşek, 2013; Yüksel, 2004). Our results are in line with those studies.

One of the important findings in this study is that future work opportunities were among the primary factors on individuals' dropout decision. There is a huge gap between graduation and job market opportunities in Turkey, especially concerning education faculties. The gap between graduation rates and hiring rates is increasing yearly (Yılmaz & Sarpkaya, 2016), and this causes the education faculty students to feel hopeless, to say the least. Low future job expectations after graduation are one of the important determinant factors on dropout decision (Arendt, 2013; Belo & Oliviera, 2015; Roso-Bas et al., 2016; Uslu Gülşen, 2017). Parallel to the findings and according to previous studies, hopelessness concerning the possibility of being hired after graduation may be a primary factor of dropping out of the faculty of education.

Unlike many previous studies, financial status is not a primary factor for dropout in terms of dropped out participants in this study. But it was expressed as one of the main causes of dropping out, like family status by the academic staff. In a great deal of studies on dropout, financial problems (Aina et al., 2018; Bülbül, 2012; Duque et al., 2013; Gury, 2011; Lavrijsen & Nicaise, 2015; Uslu Gülşen, 2017; Yi et al., 2015) and family reasons (Aina et al., 2018; Bülbül, 2012; Esgice,

2015; Kehm et al., 2019) are listed as main causes. In the present study, while individuals, expressed the lack of family or financial problems in the dropout process, the academic staff expressed that they had students who dropped out due to financial or family reasons. This difference may be due to the unique nature of dropout for each individual which changes according to the economic situations of the dropouts while they were students.

Due to all the aforementioned factors, individuals in our study group 1, thought of two possible choices: transferring or dropping out of the system. Eight participants in study group 1 changed either their majors and universities or transferred to another university with the same major. Two participants dropped out of the system. A common point of all the participants is that they are all satisfied with their decisions, which indicates that dropping out or changing majors/universities may not be problematic at the individual scale. Dekkers and Claassen (2001) and Norton and Cherastidtham (2018) suggest that dropping out has not always negative consequences and may be a better choice for students. Because dropping out may be considered as a positive attempt in terms of both financial and time saving reasons. This supports our finding which is that nearly all the dropout students are satisfied with their decisions in various ways.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it would be safe to say that the dropout process begins with the pre-admission process. Guidance, personality, career aims, entrance system, family reasons, and city are primary factors that determine the primary motivation of individuals before university admission. Upon these factors, psychological

condition, academic satisfaction, social integration, job opportunities after graduation, and family and economic status in the university education process affect both initial motivation and later motivation of the individuals. It is worth mentioning that the dropout process is generally unique, based on individual characteristics and context. Moreover, the dropout is an output of a process that may have several reasons, and that output constitutes the combination of many factors given in this study.

Contributions and Implications

The study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, pre-admission factors may affect students' dropout decision in later phases. The process should be taken into consideration from the very beginning stage of the university, especially for faculties of education. Secondly, as university process factors determine students' dropout decision, any preventive actions or practices must focus on rising intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of the students. Thirdly, job market factors are important for faculty of education dropouts primarily. So, teacher supply policies must be reconsidered in the national level in order to provide a better future for faculty of education students. Fewer, internally motivated, and skilled students must be accepted into education faculties and the issue of excess supply of graduates should be handled with long-term plans, too.

As intrinsic motivation is effective for completing a program, we strongly suggest that an effective guidance service system before university must be ensured and the student selection system must be reorganized as assessing not only academic achievement but also personal interests, skills, and motives. Secondly, university process factors (especially academic and social status) are important to

students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the first year is critical for dropout. So, effective academic and social activities, which will raise students' motivation and consequently their academic and social integration, must be provided for students in the early years, such as freshmen seminars, faculty-student meetings, student-staff, family-student-staff organizations.

Limitations and Further Research

The study has some limitations. Firstly, it is limited with dropped out students whose contact information was reached from the faculty student affairs office. Secondly, we studied on one faculty of education in Turkey as a case and interviews with dropped out students and academic staff from the same faculty. So, further qualitative and quantitative studies in other education faculties are needed. Another limitation is that we completed our study in 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic. As a worldwide pandemic, COVID-19 has caused new circumstances and challenges in education, as in many other areas, studies investigating the effect of pandemic on university dropout are highly needed. As dropout has several dimensions and these dimensions have complicated relations with each other, further interdisciplinary studies are needed to explain those complex relations. Based on the study, it is clear that there are many factors based on the functioning of the university (university process). Further longitudinal studies may provide valuable knowledge of the dropout process. Last but not least, each factor given above can be studied separately for a deeper understanding of the choice of dropping out.

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