A CRITICAL STUDY ON FACTORS INFLUENCING THE STUDENT DROP-OUT FROM THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES OFFERED BY THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of selected variables on student drop-out from the Open University of Sri Lanka. It also attempts to identify the variables which predict drop-out, variables responsible for discriminating students who dropped-out and those who completed and recommend measures which could reduce the rate of drop-out.

On the basis of the existing research literature and the long experience of the researcher as a distant educator decision was taken about the variables to be measured. In this research; background characteristics of students, institutional factors and home and work environment factors were treated as independent variables. Drop-out and completion were considered as dependent variables. Two questionnaires were developed with the purpose of measuring the variables.

A total of 1523 students; 992 drop-outs and 531 completers constitute the main sample of this study. 583 drop-outs and 391 completers responded to the questionnaires.

Percentages, Chi-square analysis, factor analysis, regression analysis and discriminant function analysis were used to analyse the data. In this study seven sets of variables were identified using factor analysis. Of the seven sets of variables: the student economic background variables, demographic variables, variables related to study behaviour of the students, support system and variables related to distance from the home to the institution were found influential on drop-out. Sets of variables related to sponsorship and home and

work environment were found not contributing to drop-out. The set of variables student support system and the satisfaction over the support provided by the institution was found as most influential than the other variables. Of the tested variables: the satisfaction over the support provided by the institution, use of audio and visual material and students pre-entry qualifications were found as variables which could predict drop-out. The primary variables responsible for discriminating between students who dropped-out and those who completed the programme were marital status, size of the family, income level, pre-entry qualifications, audio and visual material and the satisfaction over the support provided by the institution.

Finally, on the basis of the major findings a model support system was developed which could improve the present support system provided by the Open University of Sri Lanka and result in a lowering of the rate of drop-out.