



## A CASE STUDY ON LOSS OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: DROPPING OUT OF UNIVERSITY

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### Abstract:

The focus of studies on university dropout should be to determine why individuals drop out of university. In this study, the opinions of individuals on the reasons for dropping out of university were determined. The method of the study is qualitative research method and it is a case design study. Data were collected through focus group interviews. The study group consisted of twelve university dropouts. During the focus group interview process, the answers given by the individuals were recorded with a voice recorder. The audio recordings were transferred to the MAXQDA program and thematic analysis was conducted on these audio recordings. Ten of the participants stated that they were glad that they left the university, while two of them expressed regret. Cultural reasons for dropping out of university include the responsibilities imposed on the individual by early marriage and gaining social status. Out-of-school reasons for dropping out of university include the preference for distance education over classroom-based learning. Economic reasons include promotion at work and working due to economic inadequacies. The reasons stemming from the school include incompatibility with the school and negativities stemming from academics.

**Keywords:** loss of human resources, case study, dropping out of university, focus group interview, thematic analysis

### 1. Introduction

Public capital (financial, technological and manpower capital) can be categorized in 3 different forms. The coexistence of these three capital elements can enhance both institutional synergy and economic development. The most strategic capital is human

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resources capital. Human resource capital is a phenomenon that can be developed through training. In this context, human resource capital is strategic value for national education systems. In terms of human resources, the demand for higher education is increasing rapidly all over the world. In parallel with the developments in the world, the number of institutions in higher education has been increasing rapidly in recent years (Şahin and Uysal, 2007).

One of the most unforeseen situations in higher education planning is dropping out or dropping out of university. Dropping out of university is the termination of a person's formal education due to the negativities within the school or because environmental factors are more attractive. Dropout is a measure of students leaving higher education institutions. There are three main types of this measurement defined in the literature: *Dropping out of school, leaving the institution and leaving the system* (Chen, 2008). Students who take a break from university usually return after a short period of time, university dropouts may transfer to another school, while those who leave the system drop out altogether. According to the OECD (2018) education report, dropout rate in Turkey ranks first among member countries with 33%. According to EUROSTAT (2024), there are over 2 million people in the 6-24 age group in Turkey who are not included in both education and labor force. This situation shows that developing countries like Turkey are far from the targets in terms of their potential to have human resources.



**Figure 1:** Dropout rates in higher education

According to EUROSTAT (2024), the country with the highest dropout rate in higher education is Turkey with 33%. Spain, Romania, Northern European countries and Italy follow in that order. The high dropout rate in countries with high national income makes it important to evaluate this process beyond economic reasons.

## 2. Literature Review

In the literature, the most debated issue related to university dropout is why university dropout occurs. Researchers characterize school dropout as a process that results in withdrawal from the school environment. Students may leave university for compulsory or voluntary reasons. Compulsory school dropout; Dropping out of university due to reasons such as failing many courses, a serious illness, a different job opportunity, family problems, financial difficulties, adjustment problems. Many of these students leave the system and find it very difficult to return to school. Voluntary school dropout; Dropping out of school for reasons such as boredom with the program, feeling inadequate, disliking friends or classes. Comparing the two reasons, voluntary dropout is less common. The reasons for compulsory school dropout are often environmental and, most importantly, financial problems (Bennett, 2003). There are 4 important models in the literature on school dropout.

*Spady Model*; According to Spady (1970), academic factors and social factors together influence individuals' decision to drop out of school. Academically unsuccessful individuals drop out of school because they do not meet the school's success criteria. While social relationships positively affect school engagement, positive social interaction can also have a positive impact on academic achievement. *Tinto Model*; In his model, Tinto primarily distinguishes between voluntary dropout and dropout due to academic failure. According to him, academic failure leads to dropping out of the system, while voluntary dropout leads more to changing schools. According to Tinto (1975), school dropout behavior is similar to Durkheim's suicide theory. In Durkheim's theory, an individual tends towards suicidal behavior in two situations. The first of these is having values different from the values of the social environment and the second is having insufficient interaction with the social environment. Tinto stated that the individual who cannot integrate with the social system of the university prefers to leave the university or other alternative paths. *Bean Model*; According to Bean (1985), individuals who are expelled from university due to social or academic failure reflect the socialization or achievement inadequacy of the university. This model assumes that academic, socio-psychological and environmental factors influence socialization processes. *Kerby Model*; According to Kerby (2015), socially isolated students have negative experiences academically. This situation negatively affects their decision to attend university.

Studies on the reasons for dropping out of university confirm the above theoretical models. Among the economic reasons for dropping out of university are high rent and transportation costs and low income levels of students. Environmental reasons include family conflicts, insufficient family support and limited social opportunities in the city. Individual reasons include dislike of the department, desire to change departments, desire to start work early and failure in exams. Institutional reasons include dormitory and food problems, insufficient academic staff, and insufficient lifelong learning activities of the university (Şimşek, 2013; Bülbül, 2013).

## 1.2. Problem Status

Dropping out of university is a common problem in higher education systems in many countries. This problem has economic implications for all stakeholders in higher education. Voluntary leaving university is related to the individual's school climate and interaction with schoolmates. Compulsory school dropout is associated with the failure of the university to meet the intellectual and social demands of individuals. Therefore, individual, organizational and environmental factors directly or indirectly influence student dropout decisions.

There are different studies on school dropout in the literature. Lee and Staff (2007) found that socio-economic status and low academic achievement were effective in young people's decision to drop out of school. Gury (2011) found that grade repetition, not being placed in the field of their choice, not receiving financial support from the family and working part-time increased the risk of dropping out of school. Aina (2013) found that students whose families were financially well-off had lower levels of dropout ideation. Arendt (2013) found that increased public support for higher education reduces dropout rates. Lavrijsen and Nicaise (2015) found that the risk of dropout decreases as the income and education level of the family increases, students' inability to integrate with the university increases the risk of dropout, and socialization problems outside of class time at the university affect dropout. In his study, Hovdhaugen (2015) found that the number of students working part- or full-time increases as the grade progresses and the risk of dropping out of university increases. Venuelo *et al.* (2016) found that students' feeling of belonging to the university reduces the risk of university dropout. Aparicio-Chueca *et al.* (2021) found that the tendency to drop out is high among young people who do not feel compatible with university. The findings of the current quantitative research provide a basis for an evaluation of the dropout process. However, in terms of social sciences, it should be kept in mind that quantitative research findings may not reflect all factors in the university dropout process in detail. For this reason, in this study, a detailed focus group interview was conducted with individuals who dropped out of university and the possibility of different factors in the dropout process was emphasized.

## 3. Material and Methods

This research is a qualitative research. Qualitative research is a research method that focuses more on words and expressions rather than numbers in collecting and analyzing data. According to another definition, qualitative research is research conducted to understand the why and how of human and group behavior. (Bryman, 2012). The study design is a case study design. A case study is a method in which a situation or event is examined in depth, that is, longitudinally, data is collected systematically and what happens in the real environment is examined (Creswell, 2022).

### 3.1. Study Group

The study group consists of 12 individuals who dropped out of university in Turkey for different reasons and then continued their education in open education. Among the individuals in the study group, 2 were female and 10 were male.

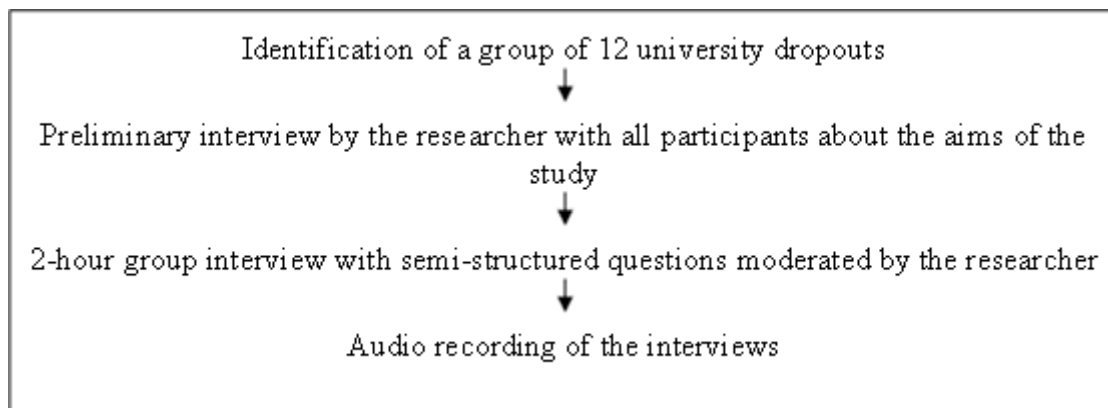
### 3.2. Data Collection Tool

In the focus group interview, two semi-structured open-ended questions prepared by the researcher were asked:

- *Are you satisfied with dropping out of university?*
- *Why are you leaving university? Can you explain your reasons for leaving university?*

### 3.3. Data Collection

The data were obtained through focus group interviews. A focus group is a technique that aims to collect data in a polyphonic environment where participants do not hide their true thoughts, usually consisting of 4-12 people with some common characteristics and accompanied by a moderator (Suter,2000). The following steps were followed while collecting data in this study:



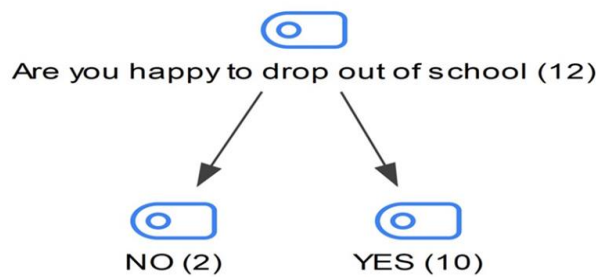
**Figure 2:** Data collection stages

### 3.4. Data Analysis

During the focus group interview process, the answers given by the individuals were recorded with a voice recorder. The audio recording was transferred to the MAXQDA program. Thematic analysis was conducted on the interviews recorded on a voice recorder. Through thematic analysis, themes were created based on the opinions of individuals.

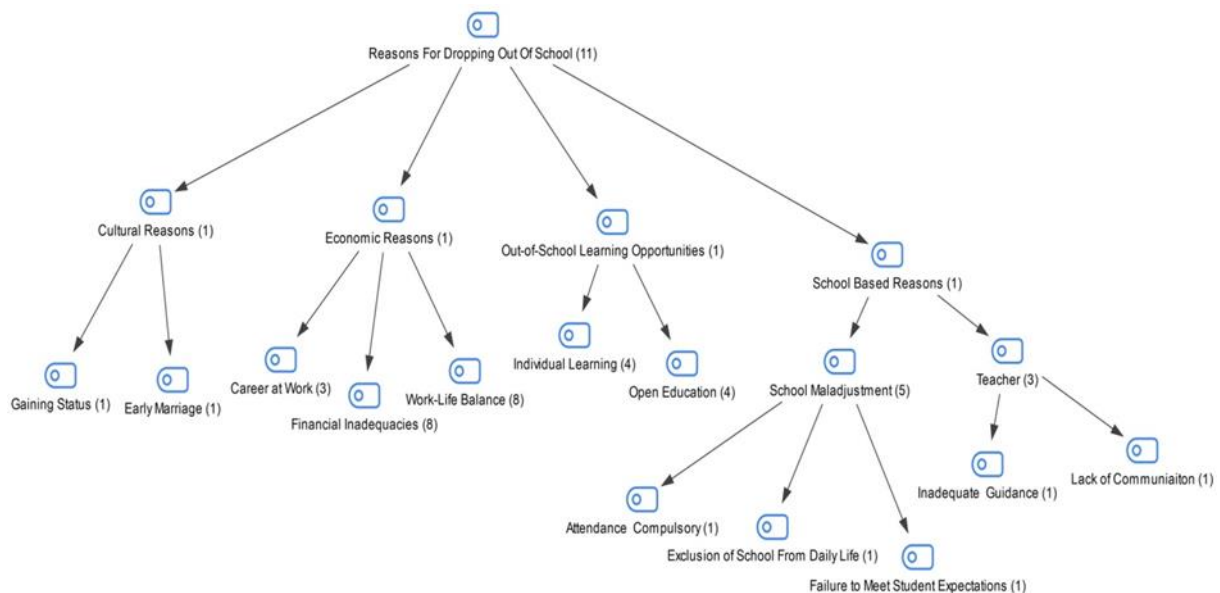
## 4. Results and Discussion

The outputs determined as a result of the thematic analysis conducted in the MAXQDA program on the focus group interviews are shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4.



**Figure 3:** Satisfaction with dropping out of school

Ten of the participants stated that they were glad that they left the university, while 2 of them regretted it. It is seen that the participants took the decision to drop out of school voluntarily due to the high number of push factors at the university.



**Figure 4:** Reasons for dropping out of university

The opinions of individuals regarding the reason for dropping of university were classified into 4 categories: In the category of cultural reasons, 1 person (woman) stated that he dropped out of university to gain status and 1 person (woman) stated that she dropped out of university because he/she got married early. In the category of economic reasons, 3 people (men) stated that they dropped out of university to pursue a career, 8 people (men) stated that they dropped out due to economic insufficiency and 8 people (men) stated that they dropped out to maintain their work-life balance. In the category of out-of-school reasons, 4 people stated that they dropped out of university because they preferred to learn individually instead of learning in the classroom, and 4 people stated that they dropped out of university because they preferred open education.

In the category of incompatibility with school, 1 person (man) stated that he dropped out of university because attendance was compulsory, 1 person (man) stated that he dropped out because school was disconnected from daily life, and 1 person (man)

stated that he dropped out because student expectations were not met. In the academician category, 1 person (man) stated that he dropped out of the university due to the inadequacy of the guidance of the lecturers, and 1 person (man) stated that he dropped out of the university due to the inadequacy of the communication of the lecturers with the students.

**Table 1:** Number of Opinions on Reasons for Dropping Out of University

<b>Categorical Reasons</b>	<b>f</b>
Cultural Reasons	3
Economic Reasons	20
Out-of-School Learning Opportunities	9
School Based Reasons	9

Individuals who dropped out of university expressed opinions mostly on economic reasons. Then, opinions on school-related reasons and out-of-school learning opportunities were included. The least number of opinions were related to cultural reasons. It is observed that reasons stemming from economic conditions are more effective than cultural reasons.

As a result of the thematic analysis of the focus group interviews with university dropouts, the following themes were identified: The themes of "early marriage" and "gaining status in society" are among the opinions of individuals who dropped out of university regarding cultural reasons. It is seen that cultural behavior patterns have a significant impact on the decisions of individuals who drop out of university.

Among the opinions of university dropouts regarding economic reasons, the themes of "moving up in the workplace", "maintaining work-life balance" and "economic inadequacies" were included. It is seen that livelihood concerns, economic inadequacies and job priority are effective in individuals' decision to leave university. When compared with different studies in the literature, it is confirmed that job anxiety, obligation to work and economic inadequacies are effective in the decision to drop out of university (Lee and Staf, 2007; Gurry, 2011; Aina, 2013; Hovdhaugen, 2015).

The themes of "individual learning" and "open education" were among the opinions of individuals who dropped out of university regarding reasons other than school. Traditional classroom-centered learning situations do not create a suitable learning environment for everyone. It is seen that preferring flexible learning is considered as a reason for dropping out of school. This confirms the decision to drop out of university due to "insufficient lifelong learning activities" in different studies (Şimşek, 2013; Bülbül, 2013).

Among the opinions of those who dropped out of university, university-student incompatibility and reasons stemming from academics are also included. In this category, the themes of "school-student incompatibility", "compulsory school attendance", "not meeting student expectations", and "university being out of daily life" were identified. The themes of "insufficient guidance skills" and "lack of communication" were identified for academics. It was determined that inability to adapt to the university and student-

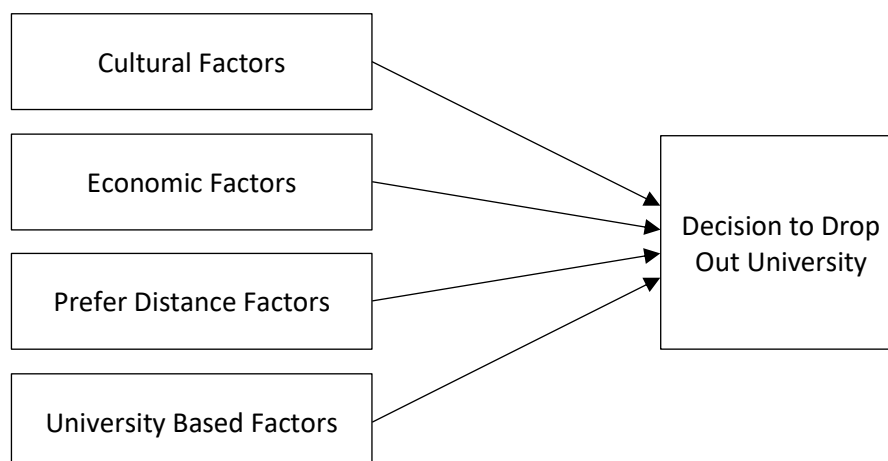
teacher communication conflicts, which were found in different studies in the literature, were effective in the decision to drop out of the university (Venuelo, Mossi and Salvatore, 2016; Aparicio-Chueca, Dominguez-Amaros, Maestro-Yarza, 2021).

In this study, unlike the results of other studies in the literature, it was determined that the cultural responsibility of early marriage and the thought of gaining status in the environment had an effect on the decision to drop out of university. In addition, it was determined that "individual learning instead of classroom learning" and "distance education" preferences were effective in the decision to drop out of university. The fact that economic, environmental and school-related negativities are effective in the decision to drop out of university is in line with the results of other studies.

## 6. Conclusion

As a result, the following scheme was developed in this study in the context of the factors of the decision to drop out of university. The decision to drop out of university is not only based on economic disadvantages. Cultural (environmental) factors seem to be effective in the decision to drop out of university, depending on the importance of individuals. With the development of educational technologies, it has been revealed that individuals prefer distance education alternatives to attending classes compulsorily. The fact that the facilities of the universities fall below the expectations of the students is effective in the decision to drop out of the university. It is seen that student satisfaction is effective in the decision of whether to continue to the university or not.

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**Figure 5:** Factors in the decision to drop out of university



## 6.1. Recommendations

In line with the findings of the study, the following recommendations were developed: Scholarship support for disadvantaged students can be increased by allocating funds to foundations under universities. Free meals should be provided for disadvantaged students. Protocols can be signed between universities and local governments to provide free transportation cards for disadvantaged students. Student deanships should be established within universities. Hybrid teaching for working students can be expanded to overcome the attendance requirement. Psychological support counseling units for students can be established under the auspices of faculties.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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