STUDY ON STUDENT DROPOUTS IN ADVANCED CERTIFICATE IN PRE SCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

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INTRODUCTION

Distance education focuses on pedagogy, technology and an instructional system design that aim to deliver education to students who are not physically "on site" as in a traditional class room or campus.

A large number of students learn through the distance mode in the world today, but some students who have enrolled in programmes do not complete their studies due to a variety of reasons. Dropout rates for distance education courses are usually higher than those for comparable on-campus courses. Dropouts in distance education has been subjected to considerable investigation (Garrison 1987), (Zajkowski 1992, Kamau 2006, Ngoma 2006, Rekkadal 1983) internationally. (Wanasinghe 1961, Ismail 1997, Lekamge & Karunanayaka 2003) locally have highlighted that both institutional and non-institutional factors affect student persistence or withdrawal from distance education programmes.

The Department of Early Childhood & Primary Education (ECPE) of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) has been conducting the programme on Advanced Certificate in Pre-school Education (ACPE) since 2000. The total student number who got registered for this programme since 2000 is 1598.

Within eight academic years high levels of non completion and dropout rates have occurred. The statistics show that only 48% have completed the programme successfully. Totally a 20% dropout rate is indicated. The Department of ECPE considered that the issue of drop out is a problem worth investigating to find out the reasons

THE OBJECTIVES

- Identify the background characteristics of the dropout students who followed the ACPE programme

- Examine the factors affecting student dropout of ACPE Programme

- Identify the type of factors affecting student drop out – whether they are institution-based or person-based factors

- Make recommendations to minimize student dropout in the programme

METHODOLOGY

The survey method was used as the research method. The total number of students, (318) who have dropped out since 2000/2001 academic year up to 2008/2009 academic year was considered as the sample of the study. A mail questionnaire was used as the instrument of obtaining responses from students. Only 94 students responded to the questionnaire.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

ACPE programme is a female dominated (91%) programme. Majority (75%) are adults. Seventy five percent falls into the age category of 26 – 45 years. Majority are from the Sinhala ethnic group, married (63%) and employed (71%).They are employed mostly in the field of early childhood education.

The time factor is the most prominent difficulty faced by the drop out students. Forty one students (44%) were unable to manage their time sensibly. According to the background information provided the sample mostly consisted of married and employed adults. These factors have influenced them negatively when finding time to involve in their studies. Nearly one third of the sample has faced difficulties due to their occupational commitments.

Seventy five percent agreed that the quality of the content is high. Seventy three percent indicated that the content is presented methodically and 73% have mentioned that the language is user friendly.

The data received on Day Schools indicate that most of the respondents were satisfied about the manner the Day Schools were conducted. Fifty five (58%) respondents have mentioned that the number of Day schools conducted is sufficient. Sixty nine (73%) respondents mentioned that Day Schools were useful. Fifty five (59%) mentioned that their problems were discussed at Day Schools and 56 (60%) mentioned that peer group interactions were promoted and the tutors who conducted the Day Schools motivated them.

Seventy eight (83%) have mentioned that the assignments motivated them to self study the print material. Sixty eight students (72%) have agreed that assignments were well designed. Seventy three (78%) were satisfied about the number of assignments assigned to them. Sixty one (70%) students agreed that they have received good feedback. Above data shows those majority of students are satisfied with the assignment component and have not faced problems regarding the assignment component of the ACPE Programme.

More over, out of the 48 (51%) who have submitted the Project 36 (38%) have not received the pass mark (40%). It is evident that some students have faced problems at the submission stage.

Twenty one to thirty four students (22% - 36%) have faced difficulties in engaging in the Project. A majority 34 students (36%) have faced difficulties at the planning stage. Twenty eight (30%) have faced difficulties when collecting data and 21 (22%) at the report writing stage. Twenty five (27%) have mentioned that the guidance provided was not sufficient. It is evident that students have faced difficulties continuously from the commencing stage up to the completion stage.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

A majority had positive attitudes towards the components of print material, contact sessions and assignments. Suggestions have been made to develop the above components further.

The only component which the students were not satisfied with was the project component. The students have faced multiple problems at different stages regarding the project component. Not submitting the project in time and not obtaining pass marks were the major problems. Suggestions were forwarded to facilitate the project component

Thirty to fifty students were not satisfied about administrative procedures such as coordination and communication procedures. More efficient coordination and communication systems should be developed to reduce isolation of students.

The students have faced difficulties in different components continuously. Anyhow, it is noted that the drop out rates are more visible towards the latter part of the programme when the final examination and the project are scheduled.

The project component should be facilitated from the beginning of the programme.

The factors which contributed to dropout were interrelated. Lack of preparation for examinations and inability to submit project in due date were two major reasons for drop out. Personal and family related problems faced by the students have contributed to these failures. Multiple responsibilities of mother, wife, and an income earner has affected the studies and personal reasons, health problems, migration, dissatisfaction, have also contributed.

Due to these personal problems students have faced difficulties in time management.

As a whole the following suggestions are made. Make the programme more flexible, transforming lesson material into more user friendly material and making the assignment component a less burdensome component and introduce flexible submission dates for the project.

Introduce counseling sessions including academic, family and psychological counseling to match the needs of the students. It is also suggested to provides skills in time management.

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