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Factors Influencing Students Academic Withdrawal during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract
Purpose: The purpose of this study is to determine the factors influencing student withdrawal during COVID-19 pandemic.
Design/methodology/approach: Descriptive analysis were used in this study. 141 samples were taken from the data gathered by the university system consisting of private higher education students that intended to withdraw their subjects.
Findings: This study found that the reasons for student withdrawal is low academic performance, e-learning difficulties, family/personal issues, financial constraints and mental/health issue. This study also found there is significant difference between year of study and factors influencing student withdrawal.
Research limitations/implications: there is limitation in the sample size. Larger sample size is more preferable. Additionally, this study is limited to a one higher private institution in Malaysia. This study will provide more factors if the study were conducted across the universities and region
Practical implications: The results of this research may aid colleges and universities in Malaysia in developing a theoretical foundation for identifying variables affecting student withdrawal and selecting the best way to help students during future pandemic.
Originality/value: this study is among the early research that are related to the student academic and COVID-19.
Paper type: Research paper

Keywords: Student withdrawal, COVID-19, E-learning

Introduction

Since 2020, Malaysia's higher education institutions have been compelled to postpone courses and shut campuses throughout the country in response to the increasing coronavirus epidemic. Malaysian institutions of higher learning have shifted courses to online learning, cancelled face-to-face sessions, and encouraged students studying on-campus to return home to finish their studies. The Malaysian populace was limited to a prolonged period of social isolation as a result of the mobility control order (MCO) (Sundarasen et al., 2020). The unusual regulations had a major impact on people's lives and finances, which may have an effect on a student's academic continuance and performance. While the measures taken primarily focused on containing the COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia, the closed down of a universities might have a significant impact on students' performance and may result in their withdrawal from e-learning. Numerous studies have shown that the number of students withdrawing from school

is rising during the COVID-19 epidemic. Howell et al. (2021) discovered that withdrawal rates varied by college sector and student subpopulation in the United States. COVID-19 has a greater retention effect on junior rather senior undergraduates. The objective of this study is to identify the factors influencing student withdrawal in a Malaysia higher learning institution. This study also used to determine whether there is significance difference between gender, year of study and program with the factors influencing student withdrawal. The results of this research may aid higher learning institution in developing a basis for identifying variables affecting student withdrawal and selecting the best way to help students during future pandemics. Additionally, it should offer policymakers with recommendations on potential methods for mitigating the effects of student disengagement during this pandemic crisis.

Literature Review

COVID-19 had affected 98.6 percent of students worldwide, totaling 1.725 billion children and adult worldwide ranging from pre-school to higher learning (UNESCO, 2020).Close to a billion people were quarantined as the coronavirus epidemic brought life to a virtual halt across the globe. The pandemic is anticipated to have a massive economic impact and is already having a catastrophic effect on worldwide schooling. Until September 2021, the majority of nations will have opened their academic institutions, but Malaysia will remain closed owing to the high prevalence of COVID-19 infections.

Malaysia

Status: Closed due to COVID-19

Affected learners: 7,962,033

Total females 3,997,262
Total males 3,964,771

School type	Females	Males	Total
PrePrimary	490,792	508,765	999,557
Primary	1,508,405	1,576,225	3,084,630
Secondary	1,308,945	1,284,025	2,592,970
Tertiary	689,120	595,756	1,284,876

Figure 1: Statistics of Students Affected by COVID-19 in Malaysia (UNESCO, 2021)

According to UNESCO (2021) data, COVID-19 impacted 1.285 million students enrolled in tertiary or higher education. Due to this epidemic, all academic institutions in Malaysia are discontinuing face-to-face instruction in favor of online instruction. E-learning technologies were critical throughout this pandemic because it can help the educator to deliver education to the student (Subedi et al., 2020). However, there are drawbacks to e-learning that may result in student withdrawal, including education policy, infrastructure, connectivity and e-learning teaching method (Murgatrotd, 2020), as well as other factors that contribute to student withdrawal, such as financial constraints, a lack of family support, mental breakdown, and poor academic performance.

Factors Influencing Student Withdrawal in Higher Learning Education

E-learning Difficulties

Despite its popularity and benefits, online education has been plagued by high withdrawal rates. According to reports, online learning settings have a greater dropout rate than conventional learning environments. Moore and Fetzner (2009) said that only 56% undergraduate student able to complete during e-learning. The result is similar accorss the program with a distinctive completion rates (Terry, 2001). From an institutional standpoint, online programmes at universities with significant withdrawal in subject seems to be unproductive and therefore unsustainable (Willging & Johnson, 2009). Inability to persevere through e-learning may serve as a deterrent to future enrollment in an online course (Poellhuber et al., 2008). Moore and Greenland (2017) raised an additional issue with their results with e-learning student at Australia's biggest online education company. E-learning students have a variety of duties, including professional obligations. However, these two researchers discovered that five Australian institutions had rules and processes that made it unjustifiable to give assignment extensions due to employment-related reasons. This occurrence demonstrates a significant issue: e-elarning environments are insufficiently constructed to suit the requirements of e-learning students. Higher learning institution must find a method to increase e-learning satisfaction and reducing withdrawal (Moore & Greenland, 2017; Murphy & Stewart, 2017).

Financial Constraint

According to Callender (2007), since students had to work part-time to finance their education, their academic performance was impacted by their necessity to work many part-time hours. Martinez (2001) argued that external variables such as student financial difficulty had a larger impact on withdrawal rates. As Bennett (2003) noted, financial hardship was the primary driver of attrition choices was the fact that student retention rates often varied significantly across courses with students from the same socioeconomic background. That is, students who had comparable financial problems may have varying dropout rates depending on the kind of courses they attended, suggesting that courses (and perhaps course difficulties) have a greater impact on the probability of attrition than financial stress does. Additionally, a large percentage of perseverance is seen among middle-class students who got financial aid. Choi (2018) found that student who working more than 20 hours per week has a detrimental influence to maintain in the programme, Guimarães et al. (2010) discover that financial constraint has a significant impact on academic performance and choice to withdraw from the program. According to Hoyt and Winn (2004), financial assistance in the form of scholarships and financing program is more closely associated with the decline withdrawal. Stratton et al. (2008) conduct an analysis of people who dropped out within the first year and others who withdrew briefly throughout time. In terms of financial assistance, undergraduate who obtain a loan and scholarship were less likely to withdraw.

Mental Breakdown

Healthy Minds Study (2020) investigate the strength of the correlation between student withdrawal and mental breakdown throughout the pandemic. Students with mental breakdown unable to complete their study regardless any program even when previous academic achievement is good and other student characteristics are taken into account. More than one quarter of the students who dropped out mentioned that mental breakdown is the main cause Healthy Minds Study (2020). Additionally, mental breakdown may indicate whether or not students would withdraw. According to the study, undergraduates who show depression symptom were more likely to drop out. Sundarasen et al. (2020), in a research performed in Malaysia, discovered that students' anxiety levels rise under Movement Control Orders (MCO).

Norton et al. (2018) highlighted that when students feel their study “too much” or “too hard” that may cause mental/health issue, they will tend to withdraw the subject.

Family/personal Issue

Clark et al. (2005) discovered that if a student does not have a family problem, the likelihood of the student remaining in college increases. Similar to the study conducted by Tarrah (2011), student who had family problems may impact their behaviour and performance. According to Hart (2002), the existence of family support may improve a student's perseverance to complete their studies, while the high family support can reduce the number of student withdrawal. Park and Choi (2009) highlighted that student who maintain their study received strong support from the the family and does not have any family or personal issue.

Low Academic Performance

According to Woods et al. (2019), 22.4 percent of participants explicitly cited grades as the reason for course withdrawal, while 17 percent cited class performance/performance grade as the reason for departure. While the two descriptors were separated to reflect a distinct understanding of grade as a direct reason for course withdrawal and poor class performance-related grades as reasons for withdrawal, unsatisfactory grade outcomes as reflected in the two descriptors add up to 39.4 percent and are the primary reason for students' course withdrawal. This research found that students opted to withdraw due to their concern of receiving poor grades, failing the course, or receiving unsatisfactory marks. Clark et al. (2005) examine variables that affect students' choice to continue attending school after completing their post-compulsory education in the United Kingdom. Individual ability is one of them. Students who get higher marks have a reduced chance of dropping out. Johnson (2006) found that getting poor grades has a favorable effect on subject drop-out.

Research Method

Type of Research, Sample Selection and Data Collection

Type of research for this study is descriptive analysis. 141 samples were taken from the data gathered by the university system consisting of private higher education students that intended to withdraw their subjects. The semester selected is the semester that was held during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling where is focus only the particular students who intended to withdraw from their subjects. Purposive sampling is utilised to guarantee that this research accurately represents a certain geographic region and closely resembles the study goal (Sundarasen et al., 2020). The data collection for this study were divided into four categories, which is gender, year of study, program and factors that lead to the intention to subject withdrawal from the students.

Measurement of Variables

There are 4 variables that are been tested in this study, 3 variables indicating test variables is gender, year of study and program. Grouping variable for this study is factors influencing student withdrawal. All the variable were categorised using nominal scale as shown by Table 1 below:

Table 1: Variables and Nominal Scale

Variables	Nominal Scale
Gender	0=Male 1=Female
Year of study	1=1st year

	2=2nd year 3=3rd year 4=4th year
Program	1=Engineering 2=IT 3=Business
Student Withdrawal	1=Financial Constraint 2=E-learning 3=Family/Personal Issue 4=Academic Performance 5=Mental/Health Issue 6=Others

Findings

Frequency Analysis for Gender, Year of Study and Program

Table 2: Frequency Table for Gender, Year of Study and Programme

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	115	81.6	81.6	81.6
	Female	26	18.4	18.4	100.0
	Total	141	100.0	100.0	
Year of Study	Year 1	24	17.0	17.0	17.0
	Year 2	50	35.5	35.5	52.5
	Year 3	29	20.6	20.6	73.0
	Year 4	38	27.0	27.0	100.0
	Total	141	100.0	100.0	
Program	IT	28	19.9	19.9	19.9
	Business	21	14.9	14.9	34.8
	Engineering	92	65.2	65.2	100.0
	Total	141	100.0	100.0	

Based on the Table 1 and Figure 2, the majority of respondent is male with 81.6% compared to the female with 18.4%. This shows that female undergraduates demonstrate more resilience during study, recover more quickly, and maintain a better mental state compared to the male undergraduates. Eisler (1988) highlighted that men are more impacted than women when it comes to conforming to social gender standards, which may result in anger and bad decision making. Prior studies performed among students studying at various levels discovered a substantial gender gap in academic performance. The researchers indicate that female students outperform their male students (Dayioglu & Turut, 2007; Khwaileh & Zaza, 2010). For the year of study, 35.5% of the students were from 2nd year, 27% from 4th year undergraduates, 20.6% from 3rd year and 17% from 1st year undergraduate. This shows that the frequency of student withdrawal based on the year of study is vary. The highest withdrawal is from 2nd year students, following by 4th year, 3rd year and 1st year. For the program. The highest withdrawal came from engineering students (65.2%) followed by information technology-related program (19.9%) and business-related program (14.8%). This result is similar with the study found by Geisinger and Raman (2013) who indicate that is high withdrawal rates in engineering

program. Most of withdrawal reason highlighted by the engineering student is they unable to cope e-learning for engineering subjects and more prefer face to face learning.

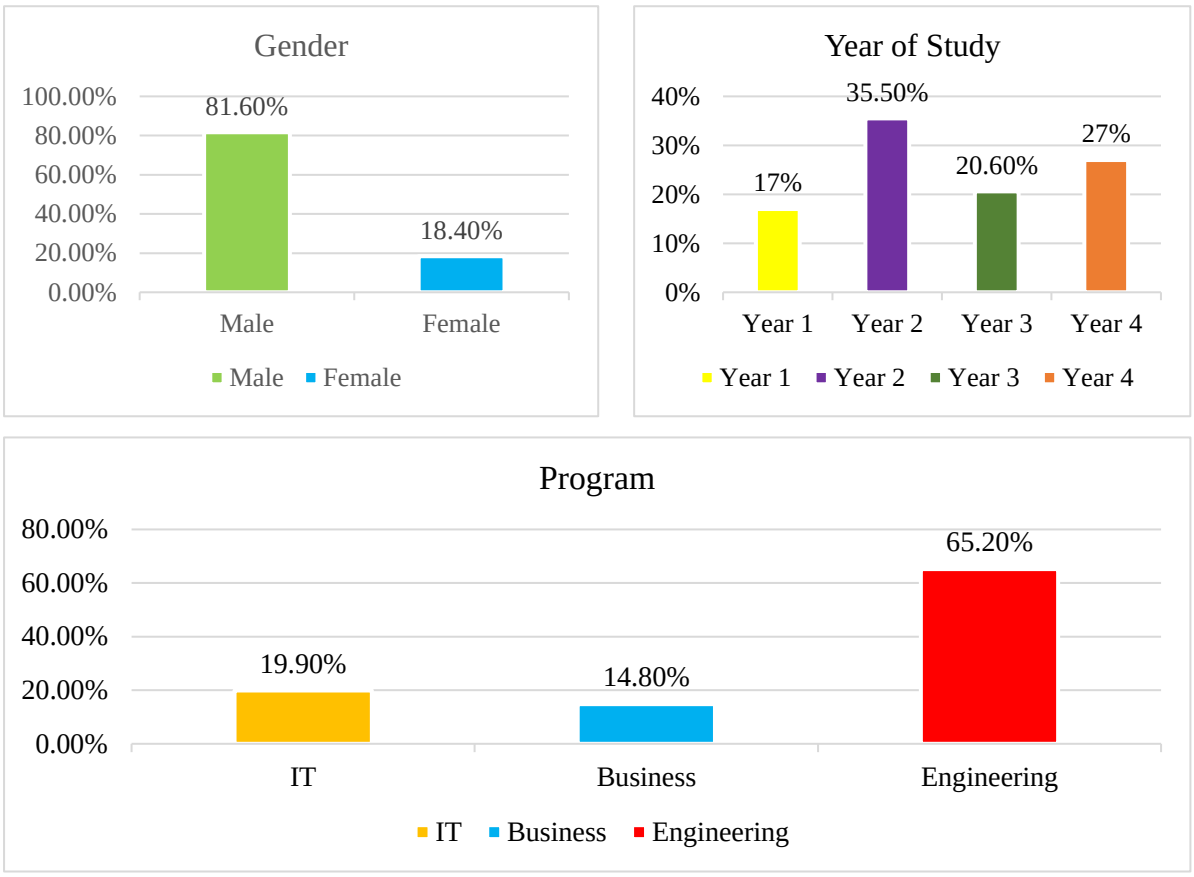

Figure 2: Frequency Bar Charts for Gender, Year of Study and Programme

Frequency Analysis for Factors Influencing Withdrawal

Table 3: Frequency Table for Factors Influencing Student Withdrawal

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Factors Influencing Withdrawal	Financial Constraint	7	5.0	5.0	5.0
	E-learning	45	31.9	31.9	36.9
	Family/Personal Issue	24	17.0	17.0	53.9
	Academic Performance	48	34.0	34.0	87.9
	Mental/Health Issue	6	4.3	4.3	92.2
	Others	11	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	141	100.0	100.0	

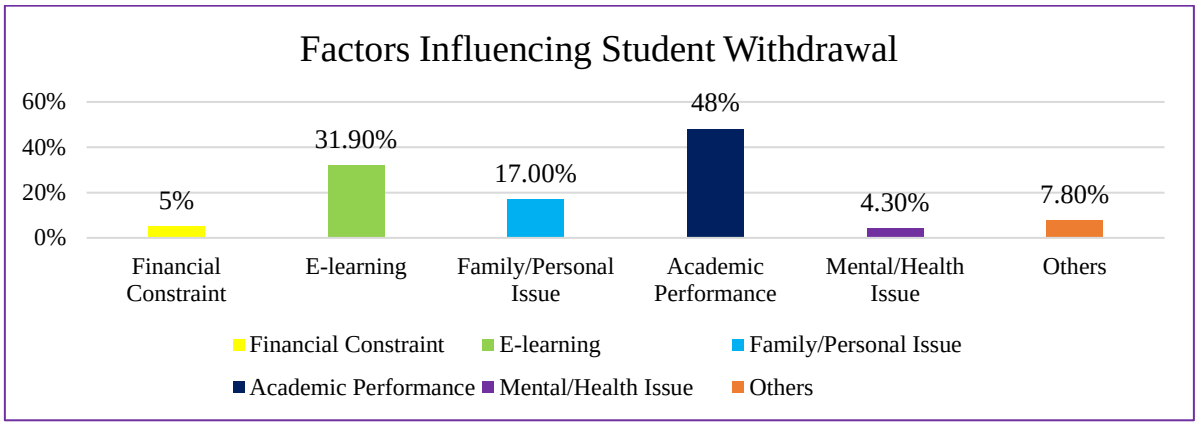

Figure 2: Frequency Bar Chart for Factors Influencing Student Withdrawal

Based on the frequency table and bar charts for factors influencing student withdrawal, the highest factor in academic performance (48%). Majority of the students highlighted that they unable to proceed the because of low carry marks and low CGPA point. Robin (2004) the conducted meta-analysis of 109 studies also found that high school GPA is a better predictor of persistence compared to the students that scores low GPA. The other factors for student withdrawal is e-learning (31.9%). Students who gave this reason mentioned that they unable to proceed with e-learning due to poor internet connection, device not ready/compatible and more prefer face to face than e-learning. Students mentioned that they are not satisfied with the current e-learning environment and this agreed by the researcher that there is a need to increase online learner satisfaction and retention (Moore & Greenland, 2017; Murphy & Stewart, 2017). Third factor is family or personal issue (17%). It shows that family and personal issue play important part in the intention of student to withdraw the subject. Tarrah (2011) highlighted that student academic performance are associated with family problems. Clarke et al. (2005) also mentioned that if student does not have any family issues, they will tend to perform better in academic. Following factors are financial constraints (5%), mental/health issue (4.3%) and others (7.8%). Majority of the student were supported financially by a parents and Guimarães et al. (2010) discover that family income has a significant impact on students' performance and choice to withdraw from the program. Meanwhile study conducted by Sundarasen et al. (2020) discovered that students' anxiety levels rise under Movement Control Orders (MCO) thus may influence mental condition. Other reasons indicate by the student is geographical issue due to COVID-19, too many subjects, issues with lecturer and program not suitable.

Kruskall-Wallis Test

Table 4: Kruskall-Wallis Test

	Gender	Year of Study	Program
Kruskal-Wallis H	6.323	10.335	1.483
df	5	5	5
Asymp. Sig.	.276	.066	.915

a. Kruskal Wallis Test
b. Grouping Variable: Factors influencing student withdrawal

Based on the Kruskall-Wallis test result, this study found no significant difference between gender and program with student withdrawal. However, there is significant difference between year of study and student withdrawal at 0.066. This indicate that different year of study will

lead to the different factors that might influence student withdrawal during COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

The study's objective is to determine the factors influencing student withdrawal during COVID-19 pandemic. This study found that the reasons for student withdrawal is low academic performance, e-learning difficulties, family/personal issues, financial constraints and mental/health issue. This study found there is significant difference between year of study and factors influencing student withdrawal. The outcome may be different sample size is much larger. Additionally, this study is limited to a one higher private institution in Malaysia. This study will provide more factors if the study were conducted across the universities and region. Further statistical analysis will provide better outcome and findings.

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