

Students Considering Dropping Out: Comparing New and Experienced Students

Georgios Stamelos and Anthi Adamopoulou

ABSTRACT

Student dropout is a global phenomenon. For many reasons (individual, social, political, economic), it is considered a serious problem. The specialized bibliography usually deals either with all students or it focuses specifically on new students. However, there is not much comparative research on how to structure the thought of dropping out of university between new and experienced students. This is the aim of this text. Based on 1,029 students' questionnaires, the quantitative study has shown that the way this thought is constructed is differentiated between new and experienced students. In other words, it is made up of a combination of different factors. For new students, the effect of the social representation 'university' and the motivation on the basis of this representation play a central role. On the contrary, when it comes to experienced students, the difficulties of university studies and especially the formulated perception of global student life seem to play the key role.

Keywords: Dropout, new students, experienced students, motivation, social representation.

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I. INTRODUCTION

After a long period of implementing policies to widen access to higher education, which has led to its massification, a global phenomenon emerges, student dropout, which raises a number of questions about the success of these policies. Indeed, 30% to 40% of students entering higher education will never finish their studies (Tinto, 2006, 2007; European Commission, 2014; Stamelos, 2016; Roso-Bas *et al.*, 2016; Hellenic Quality Assurance, 2018; Kehm *et al.*, 2019). The scope of the phenomenon has multiple consequences: individual, social, political, economic. Individual, because it is a personal failure that is sometimes badly experienced. Social, because it concerns the families but also the individual's relations with society at large. Political, because it questions the policies of democratization. Finally, economic, because it is meant as a waste of resources both individual/family and collective (public funding).

International literature appeared with the aim of analyzing and systematizing the factors, which appear to be primarily individual, social, academic (and institutional) and economic (Tinto, 1993 [1987]; Tinto, 1997; Cross & Slater, 2002; Stamelos, 2002; Bills, 2003; Kiprianos & Koniordos, 2003; Altbach, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2006; Díaz & De León, 2016; Stamelos & Evangelakou, 2018; Alban & Mauricio, 2019). At the same time, researchers' interest was focused on students dropping out in the first year of study, since in many cases it is the year with the biggest problem (OVE, 2007; Beaupère, Chamumeau, Gury, & Huguée, 2007; Aschieri, 2012; Perret & Berthaud, 2013; Ringard & Fléges, 2016; Paivandi, 2019).

Research is also interested in various variables that affect dropout: demographic, economic, performance, learning motivation, social inclusion, institutional characteristics, satisfaction, etc. (Pike & Saupe, 2002; Van der Hulst & Jansen, 2002; Van Bragt *et al.*, 2007, 2011; Kori *et al.*, 2015; Kim & Kim, 2018). Given that the problem of dropout affects a significant proportion of students entering university, in general, but first year students seem to be particularly affected, the query that arises is: are there differences in the construction of thought regarding dropout between freshmen and experienced (beyond the first year) students?

To investigate the question, the following research was carried out. As analytical tools, we have chosen two concepts: a) social representation, and b) motivation.

According to Moscovici, social representation (university) includes three dimensions (Moscovici, 1961, 1984): attitude, information and the field of representation. Jodelet argues that social representation is a form of Knowledge, social processed and commonly accepted, which has a practical view that is not necessarily coordinated with social reality (Jodelet, 1985, 1991). Abric says that social representation fulfils four basic functions: a) a function of knowledge, b) a function of identity, c) a function of orientation, and d) a function of justification (Abric, 1984). All four functions are essential for the realization of an individual's choices (go to university) but also for consolidation of his choices (remain in the university environment).

Motivation is defined as a personal interpretation and a personal attitude in relation to a social representation (university) that an individual (student) has about themselves

and their environment. The meaning of social representation helps individuals to insist on the realization of an educational activity (university studies) (Tardif, 1992; Barbeau, 1995). The dynamic of motivation depends on three perceptions: a) the value of the activity (Eccles, Wigfriend, & Schieffele, 1998; Viau, 2009), b) the perception of their capacity for the completion of the activity (Bandura, 2003; Viau, 2009), and c) the perception that it has control over the development of the activity (Viau, 1994; Tavis & Wade, 1999; Deci & Ryan, 2000). These perceptions lead to three behaviors: a) cognitive commitment (Parmentier & Romainville, 1998; Viau, 2009), b) persistence in activity (Purrer-Ouakil, Michel, & Perz-Diaz, 2004; Boudrenghien, Frenay, & Bourgeois, 2009; Roland & Emplit, 2015), and c) persistence in the outcome of knowledge and its success (degree) (Gurtner, Gulfi, Monnard, & Schumacher, 2006; Lacroix & Potvin, 2009). Motivation may be internal but is influenced by a number of external factors (Viau, 2019). Therefore, the formation of clear motivations weighs on the attitude of a student towards their studies and the difficulties that will arise during their student life. An unmotivated student is someone who is unsure of the commitment, perseverance and meaning of their university studies.

In the specialized literature, we have research that tries to create student profiles based on motivations and relationships with the studies. In addition, research is also aimed at specifying success prediction indicators to the extent that the problem is initially abandonment and then the measures to be taken to reduce it (Paivandi, 2015: 77-83, 85-86, 153-158).

II. THE RESEARCH

The research was conducted in the spring of 2020, through a questionnaire to students at a Greek university. The questionnaire started to be distributed in amphitheaters and classrooms but due to the pandemic it was turned into an electronic questionnaire. It is shared in five Schools: Humanities and Social Sciences (20.3%), Health Sciences (12%), Sciences (19%), Economics and Business Administration (25.7%) and Polytechnic School (23.1%). In terms of gender, 60.8% were women and 39% men. The total sample was 1,029 students. The analysis of data was processed using IBM SPSS25.

Two limitations should be mentioned: a) the students who participated are those who are still in the university and some of them are considering or have considered dropping out. Those who have actually dropped out are not in the university and are a different group, and b) most completed questionnaires come from answers in google forms. Therefore, the change in the distribution of the questionnaire may have affected the sample since some (albeit few) students are not very familiar with all the possibilities of the internet.

A. The Profile of the Students

The main characteristics of sample of the university students:

- Comes mainly from mainland Southern Greece: Peloponnese (31.2%), Attica (26.9%), Western Greece (12%) and Central Greece (12%).
- The educational level of students' parents is:

- Father: higher education (48.3%) – medium education (38.9%) – compulsory or less (14.8%).
- Mother: higher education (48.3%) – medium education (42.3%) – compulsory or less (9.3%).
- Comes from families with fixed income flow (84.9% father, 64.4% mothers)
 - Follows a program of studies that was in their first three choices, by 86.5% (1th – 3th choice: 86.5%, 4th – 6th choice: 9.6%, c) >7th: 3.9% (in Greece, there is a system of national examination for entry to higher education institutions. Admission (entry) to a study program is a combination of two factors: a) exam grades and b) the ranking of the student's choices by the student).
 - Follows a program of studies of its interest
 - at the entrance 73.3% (absolutely-very (73.3%), little – not at all (22.1%), I don't know (4.6%)
 - at the moment of the research 84.5% (absolutely-very (84.5%), little – not at all (13.7%), I don't know (1.7%).

So, one can argue that the institution is chosen by students mainly from families with higher (or secondary) education background, with fixed income flow, by majority, and the followed program of studies was/is of their interest. So, it is an almost ideal student population for an institution. However, in the continuation of our analysis, we will show that some students are facing problems

B. Presentation of Funding: Which Students Are Considering Dropping Out?

In our study the students face/faced different kinds of problems (multiple answers are possible):

- a) academic (12%);
- b) administrative (8.5%);
- c) social: problems with others (6.6%);
- d) personal: d1) boredom/lack of interest (14.8%), d2) desire for reorientation (14.1%), d3) heavy workload (I don't feel able to do it), d4) health issues/stress (11.4%), d5) concern for the quality of my studies (9.5%), d6) bad feeling for delaying in studies (6%), d7) concern for the reputation of the institution (2.8%);
- e) economic: e1) need for work (4.6%), e2) economic difficulties (4.3%), e3) family responsibilities (2.3%), e4) relocation (1.4%);
- f) career prospects: unattractive career prospects (5.2%).

Therefore, despite the fact that this institution has a student population with an attractive student profile, its students have a number of problems. Because of these problems, one is considering dropping out. Specifically, 23.3% of students have thought or are thinking, even a little, of dropping out (too much 3.4%, much 3.9%, a little 16%). Also, another 4.5% prefers not to answer. As a result, about 1 in 4 students have considered dropping out.

C. Factor Analysis

Further, in order to investigate the factors that influence students' thoughts for drop out, we proceeded to the exploratory factor analysis (with Eigenvalue's criterion >1) for the two groups of students (variables used: a) social representation 'University', b) motivations for universities studies, Students' problems and meaning of student life separately the two groups of students). The first group consists of the new students (first year) and the second group

consist of experienced students (all other students). The Tables I-VIII present the factors and the loads of the variables (>0.30) on each factor after rotation (Varimax with Kaiser Normalization). Cronbach's alpha was used to estimate the internal consistency of the scales.

a) *New students*

1) *Social representation 'University'*

The exploratory factor analysis of the main axes of 10 variables showed three factors with a total explained variance of 50.578% (Cronbach's alpha 0.659).

TABLE I: EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATION (NEW STUDENTS)

Rotated Component Matrix	Component		
	1	2	3
Temple of knowledge	0.552		
Way to improve my life	0.592		
Institution that gives me prestige and social recognition	0.58		
Life experience that I wanted to live	0.68		
Opportunity to leave my family house			0.675
Way to delay entry into labor market			0.727
Place to build up a good social network	0.669		
Way to develop a professional plan	0.641		
Nothing! I just owed by parents		0.846	
I don't know		0.754	
% of Variance	26.197	13.813	10.568

The first factor consists of those who -in various ways- have given meaning to the social representation 'university' and state that 'I want to study' (for various reasons). Therefore, the first factor with explained variance of 26.197% can be called 'I want to study'.

The second factor, with an explained variance of 13.813%, consists of those who were either forced by their parents or don't know why they are in university. So, we have either a heterogeneity of meaning (parents) or no meaning at all. The second factor is called 'they forced me to study'.

The third factor consists of those freshmen who have given meaning to university as an alibi, opportunity to leave the family house and/or delay starting work. The third factor, with an explained variance of 10.568%, is called 'I use studies as an alibi'.

2) *Motivation for universities studies*

The exploratory factor analysis of the main axes of 10 variables showed three factors and with a total explained variance of 49.432% (Cronbach's alpha 0.592).

TABLE II: EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS OF MOTIVATIONS (NEW STUDENTS)

Rotated Component Matrix	Component		
	1	2	3
Future stable and permanent work	0.791		
Creative work without restrictions and hours of work		0.583	
Expectations for working with a social contribution		0.583	
Expectations for a job with good economic rewards	0.732		
Attraction to knowledge		0.728	
Relaxed work without stress	0.487		
Concrete life plan		0.475	
I did not have or did not know what else to do			0.761
Student life experience	0.572		
I don't know			0.752
% of Variance	22.742	15.789	10.901

The first factor consists of those who either aim at a future job with specific characteristics or want to live the myth of 'student life'. Therefore, the first factor, with explained variance of 22.742% can be called 'pragmatists'.

The second factor, with an explained variance of 15.789%, consists of those freshmen who have an idealistic understanding of knowledge and of future professional activity. This factor is called 'intellectuals/visionaries'.

The third factor, with an explained variance of 10.901%, consists of those who do not seem to have either a motivation for studying or did not know what they wanted to do. These students could be named 'disoriented'.

3) *Students' problems*

The exploratory factor analysis of the main axes of 17 variables showed six factors - with a total explained variance of 60.913% (Cronbach's alpha 0.617).

TABLE III: EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PROBLEMS (NEW STUDENTS)

Rotated Component Matrix	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Lack of academic support	0.79					
Lack of administrative support	0.88					
Boredom/Lack of Interest						0.75
Unattractive career prospects						0.69
Desire to reorientation						0.53
Difficulties in relationships with others			0.503			
Economic difficulties		0.739				
Need for work		0.806				
Student workload	0.46					
Family responsibilities		0.597				
Delayed studies				0.69		
Health/Stress issues			0.649			
Negative institution reputation						0.77
Institution reputation				0.83		
Need for a break			0.764			
Concern for the quality on my studies						0.80
To travel						
% of Variance	16.2	10.77	10.49	8.53	8.43	6.44

The first factor of 'problems' concerns first-year students who refer to problems of an academic nature and has an explained variance of 16.222%. It can be called 'academic reasons'.

The second factor includes students who report economic and family difficulties. It has an explained dispersion of 10.776%. It is named 'economic/social reasons'.

The third factor with an explained variance of 10.493% concerns students who refer to individual problems and difficulties. It is named 'personal reasons'.

The fourth factor, with an explained variance of 8.533%, concerns students who essentially refer to the consequences of the problems of factors 1 and 2.

The fifth factor, with an explained variance of 8.435%, concerns students who express boredom, lack of interest and need for change. This factor can be called a 'need for reorientation'.

The sixth factor, with an explained variance of 6.449%, concerns students who doubt the quality of their studies and the good reputation of the institution. This factor is named ‘effect of excellence’.

4) *Meaning of student life*

The exploratory factor analysis of the main axes of 12 variables showed three factors with a total explained variance of 55.880% (Cronbach’s alpha 0.617).

TABLE IV: EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS OF MEANING OF STUDENT LIFE (NEW STUDENTS)

Rotated Component Matrix	Component		
	1	2	3
Difficult	0.744		
Carefree			0.680
Boring	0.493		
Full of happy moments		0.707	
Tiring	0.649		
Full of new experiences		0.753	
Oppressive	0.695		
Relaxed			0.829
Stressful	0.683		
Period of maturation and autonomy		0.634	
Sad	0.629		
A new beginning		0.669	
% of Variance	24.710	19.133	12.037

The first brings together students who signify student life negatively. The explained variance is 24.710%. It can be called ‘negative perception of student life’.

The second factor represents students who give positive meaning to student life. The explained variance is 19.133%. It is named ‘positive perception of student life’.

The third factor brings together students who have a perception of student life that seems distant from university studies (explained variance 12.037%). We call it ‘indifferent perception of student life’.

b) *Experienced students*

1) *The social representation “university”*

The exploratory factor analysis of the main axes of 10 variables showed three factors with a total explained variance of 45.945% (Cronbach’s alpha 0.559).

The first factor includes students who attribute a useful meaning to university and university studies. The factor, with an explained variance of 21.982%, can be called ‘utilitarians’.

TABLE V: EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATION ‘UNIVERSITY’ (EXPERIENCED STUDENTS)

Rotated Component Matrix	Component		
	1	2	3
Temple of knowledge		0.638	
Way to improve my life	0.642		
Institution that gives me prestige and social recognition		0.391	
Life experience that I wanted to live	0.727		
Opportunity to leave my family house	0.638		
Way to delay entry into labor market			0.669
Place to build up a good social network	0.576		
Way to develop a professional plan		0.333	
Nothing! I just owed by parents			0.693
I don’t know			
% of Variance	21.982	13.421	10.54

The second factor, with an explained variance of 13.421%, represents the students who perceive the university in an intellectual and visionary way. This factor is named ‘intellectuals/visionaries’.

The third factor includes students who do attribute meaning to university or are there by force. This factor is called ‘without meaning/oppressed’.

2) *Motivations for university studies*

The exploratory factor analysis of the main axes of 10 variables showed four factors with a total explained variance of 59,957% (Cronbach’s alpha 0.543).

The first factor expresses an explained variance of 21.701%. It includes students without a plan and without a concrete idea as to the reasons for their existence at the university. This factor is named ‘disoriented’.

The second factor includes students who have a pragmatic approach to university and university studies (explained variance 16.569%). It is called ‘utilitarians’.

The third factor, with an explained variance of 11.307%, indicates students who have an intellectual and/or idealistic approach to university. It is called ‘intellectuals /visionaries’.

Finally, the fourth factor, with an explained variance of 10.380%, represents students who do not seem to have clear ideas about their motivations. It is named ‘confused’.

TABLE VI: EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATION (EXPERIENCED STUDENTS)

Rotated Component Matrix	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Future stable and permanent work		0.82		
Creative work without restrictions and hours of work				0.77
Expectations for working with a social contribution			0.77	
Expectations for a job with good economic rewards		0.77		
Attraction for knowledge			0.78	
Relaxed work without stress				0.75
Concrete life plan				0.32
I did not have or did not know what else to do	0.81			
Student life experience		0.45		
I don’t know	0.75			
% of Variance	21.7	16.5	11.3	10.3

3) *Students’ problems*

The exploratory factor analysis of the main axes of 17 variables showed six factors and with a total explained variance of 57.413% (Cronbach’s alpha 0.508). A factor (the 5th) contains only one variable it is subtracted.

The first factor represents students who refer to academic problems (explained variance 13.815%). It is called ‘academic reasons’. The second factor includes students who refer to personal problems (explained variance 12.815%). It is named ‘personal reason’. The third factor, with an explained variance of 10.751%, refers to students with economic/social problems. It is called ‘economic social reasons’. The fourth factor, with an explained variance of 8.108%, is composed by students in the consequences of factors 1 and 2. The fifth factor is excluded. The sixth factor, with an explained variance of 6.215%, concerns students who express fatigue and burnout. It is called ‘burnout’.

TABLE VII: EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PROBLEMS (EXPERIENCED STUDENTS)

Rotated Component Matrix	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Lack of academic support	0.74					
Lack of administrative support	0.79					
Boredom/Lack of Interest				0.82		
Unattractive career prospects				0.51		
Desire to reorientation				0.68		
Difficulties in relationships with others		0.65				
Economic difficulties			0.725			
Need for work			0.622			
Student workload		0.412			0.47	
Family responsibilities						
Delayed studies		0.591				
Health/Stress issues		0.674				
Negative institution reputation	0.66					
Institution reputation			0.771			
Need for a break					0.60	
Concern for the quality om my studies	0.65					
To travel					0.78	
% of Variance	13.8	12.1	10.7	8.1	6.3	6.2

4) Meaning of student life

The exploratory factor analysis of the main axes of 12 variables showed three factors with a total explained variance of 53.824% (Cronbach's alpha 0.513).

The first factor involves students interpreting student life experiences in a negative way (explained variance of 23.617%). It is called 'negative perception of student life' (regarding university obligations).

TABLE VIII: EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS OF MEANING OF STUDENT LIFE (EXPERIENCED STUDENTS)

Rotated Component Matrix	Component		
	1	2	3
Difficult	0.726		
Carefree		0.513	
Boring			0.735
Full of happy moments		0.663	
Tiring	0.724		
Full of new experiences		0.688	
Oppressive	0.592		
Relaxed			0.513
Stressful	0.72		
Period of maturation and autonomy		0.635	
Sad			0.58
A new beginning		0.717	
% of Variance	23.62	18.10	12.10

The second factor, with an explained variance of 18.103%, represents students who have a positive perception of student life. It is named 'positive perception of student life'.

The third factor, with an explained variance of 12.104%, includes students with a negative perception of (student) life, without direct relation to university obligations. It is named 'negative perception of student life in general'.

D. Looking for Explanatory Patterns: Regressions

In order to be able to test various explanatory models of the factors that influence students' thinking about dropping out, we thought as follows. The social representation for the

university is the first to be constructed (or not). Motivations are then gradually formed on the basis of the meaning of social representation. However, the motivations for going to university may or may not exist, but within the university they can evolve, reshape, be formed if they did not initially exist (or not be formed). Over time, the daily life of university life creates a series of experiences, sometimes positive and sometimes negative. Finally, on the basis of experiences, a perception of student life is formed. Eventually, with the interaction of social representation, motivation, problems and perception of student life, some students are pushed to think about dropping out of their studies. Our expectation was that we would form an explanatory scenario through different regression scenarios, with direct and indirect effects on some students' thought of dropping out. The results of those regressions are presented in Tables IX, X.

TABLE IX: REGRESSIONS (STEPWISE METHOD) - NEW STUDENTS

Dependent variable	Independents variables with positive and significance effect (b*, p<0.05)	R	R ² ** (p<0.01)
Negative perception	I want to study (0.716) disoriented (0.799) need for reorientation (0.234)	0.568	0.322
Positive perception	I want to study (0.418) pragmatists (0.275)	0.666	0.444
Indifferent perception	I use studies as an alibi (0.418) pragmatists (0.275)	0.529	0.280
Thought of drop out	negative perception (0.151)	0.320	0.103
	They force me to study (0.51) need for reorientation (0.176)	0.429	0.184

TABLE X: REGRESSIONS (STEPWISE METHOD) - EXPERIENCED STUDENTS

Dependent variable	Independents variables with positive and significance effect (b*, p<0.05)	R	R ² ** (p<0.01)
Negative perception of student life (regarding university obligations)	academic reasons (0.207) personal reasons (0.552)	0.420	0.177
Positive perception of student life	Utilitarians (0.297) Disoriented (0.296) intellectuals/visionaries (2) (0.363)	0.495	0.245
Negative perception of student life in general	without meaning/oppressed (0.330) Disoriented (0.323) personal reasons (0.143)	0.365	0.134
Thought of drop out	negative perception of student life (regarding university obligations) (0.149)	0.333	0.111
	negative perception of student life in general (0.222)		
	academic reasons (0.205) personal reasons (0.114) Need for reorientation (0.204)	0.14	0.172

a) New students

The following figure illustrates an explanatory model for first-year students who are considering or have considered dropping out of school. This model shows the (statistically significant) positive effects of variables.

More specifically, the thought of dropping out seems to be statistically significantly influenced by variables with indirect and direct effects.

The direct effects are:

- a. 'they force me to study'
- b. 'need for reorientation'
- c. 'negative perception of student life'.

The indirect influences are expressed by those freshmen who:

- a. While they started by saying 'I want to study', it seems that they later formed a negative perception of student life
- b. Started university studies without motivation ('disoriented') and then formed a negative perception of student life, and

- c. Students referred to problems as 'personal reasons' and formed a negative perception of student life.

b) Experienced students

The following figure illustrates an explanatory model for experienced students who are considering or have considered dropping out of school. This model shows the (statistically significant) positive effects of variables.

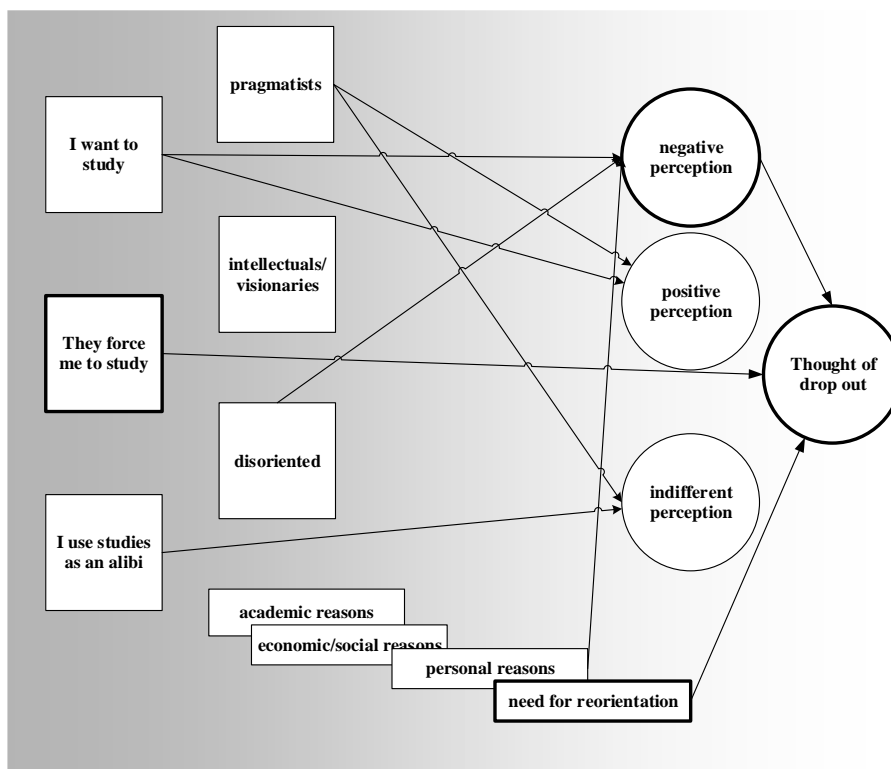


Fig.1: Explanatory model for thought of drop out / new studentsy.

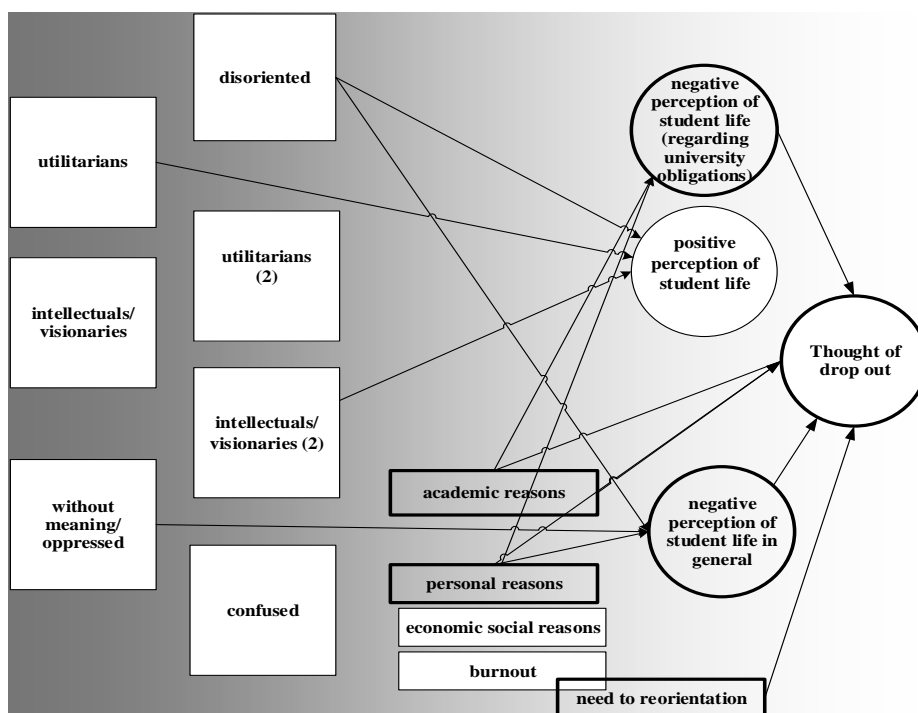


Fig. 2. Explanatory model for thought of drop out experienced students.

More specifically, the thought of dropping out seems to be statistically significantly influenced by variables with indirect and direct effects.

The direct effects are:

- a. Negative perception of student life;
- b. Negative perception of student life in general;
- c. Academic reasons;
- d. Personal reasons;
- e. Need for reorientation.

The indirect influences express those experienced students for whom:

- a. The factor ‘negative perception of student life’ is influenced by ‘academic reasons’ and ‘personal reasons’. This proves the power of these two factors to the extent that they affect the thought of dropping out both directly and indirectly.
- b. The factor ‘negative perception of student life in general’ is influenced by ‘without meaning/oppressed’, ‘disoriented’ (no motivations) and ‘personal reasons’.

The first two indirectly influence the thought of dropping out. The factor ‘personal reasons’ seems to be crucial to the extent that it directly affects the thought of dropping out and indirectly both ‘negative perception of student life’ and ‘negative perception of student life in general’.

III. COMPARISON – CONCLUSIONS

Our research sought to investigate those students who have considered or are considering dropping out even at a university with a seemingly ideal student profile. To make the investigation possible, four main variables were used: a) social representation ‘university’, b) motivation for studies, c) perception of student life and d) problems from student life. Our analysis led to the formation of two groups of students (young and experienced) and their comparison. Thus, we came to the configuration and comparison of two models.

The comparison of the two models shows that the model for first year students is simpler and depends more on the starting points, i.e., on social representation and (initial) motivations (or absence of these). The thought of dropping out depends directly on those who have been forced to go to university and indirectly on those who form a negative perception of student life and those who state they feel the need for reorientation (of their life).

On the other hand, the thought of dropping out for experienced students comes from more complex processes that do not depend directly on starting points but more on the experiences at the university. Thus, those who think about dropping out are those who: a) form a negative perception of student life and their lives in general, c) refer to personal problems, and d) feel the need to reorient their life. It should be noted that academic and personal reasons contribute not only directly to the thought of dropping out, but also indirectly to the extent that they fuel the formation of a negative perception of student life. A special case seems to be those experienced students who have a negative perception of life as a whole. These seem to be fueled by those who: a) did

not have a clear meaning and motivations concerning university studies and/or are forced to go to university, and b) those who refer to ‘personal reasons’. This group of experienced students seems to be the most unhappy.

On the other hand, the happiest students seem to be those who formulate positive thinking about student life.

To conclude, even in a university that is generally chosen positively by the students, there are some who are considering dropping out. The research showed that the thought of dropping out is formed differently by first-year and experienced students. New students are still dependent on the initial ideas they formed as high school students. The experienced students are influenced by the experiences of real university life.

Consequently, a student may consider dropping out at any time during their university life, but the reasons are not the same throughout time.

In conclusion, even a university with an ‘ideal’ student population seems to be having problems with drop-out students. This shows why drop out is a global problem that affects every institution. This also explains its extent¹. Consequently, all institutions should have student support services aimed at reducing drop out. These services should be diversified to the extent that the needs of students are multidimensional and of different origins. But even if these services exist if they are not specialized in the differentiated needs of students, depending on whether they are young or experienced students, they risk being ineffective. Therefore, an institution that would like to help students should create specialized support services for their specific needs.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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¹ Actually, in the global university reality of lock down due to covid-19, there are new students who have not experienced the university environment at all and the experienced students who do courses from their home, cut off the classrooms and university relationships, as they were used until the

pandemic. Do the factors that lead students to think of dropout still exist or even the intensity of these factors is increases? What are university structures that can support these students?

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