

## **A Study on the Dropouts of Higher National Diploma in Accounting (HNDA) Students with Special Reference to Advanced Technological Institute (ATI) Section, Batticaloa**

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigates the phenomenon of student dropout from technological education, a problem that has been rising at the Batticaloa ATI Section over the recent years. The total number of student pass out in ATI courses has been declining for the last 10 years. The statistics in the secondary data revealed that the dropout rates of students have been increasing in both full time and part time courses in ATI. This research has been developed to identify the reasons for student dropout. It is equally important to identify measures which would help the retention of students already in the system. The participants completed a structured questionnaire that was designed to assess their views towards the study environment during the study period, the reasons for the dropout and the measures suggested by the respondents in order to continue their study. Results found that changing of personal goals of the students are the main reason for the dropouts where the priority is given to jobs than doing a course as full or part time. Development of courses which ensure job opportunities to achieve the personal goals of the students and counseling and mentor support are the measures suggested to improve the course in the institutional side.*

**Keywords:** student, dropout, Course

### **Introduction**

Dropout, student attrition, withdrawal, failure, wastage, non-completion, discontinuation and student mortality are terms used by universities to describe students leaving an institution before the completion of a course (subject) or a programme of study (Lockhart, 2004). However, it has been found that these terms mean quite different things in different studies. At the ATI, the term dropout is used for the discontinuation of study *within the duration of a course or a subject of study within a programme*. The total number of student pass out in ATI courses has been declining for the last 10 years. The statistics in the secondary data revealed that the dropout rates of students have been increasing in both full time and part time courses in ATI. This research has been developed to identify reasons for student drop out and identify measures which would help to increase the retention of students already in the system. Student dropout is often linked to the wastage of resources and it is a continuing concern in educational institutions, although some see it as an inevitable part of the process. Dropout is also linked to the status of courses. Woodley (2004) pointed out that universities' funding levels were contingent upon their performance against several criteria, one of which is dropout rate; therefore, many universities and Higher Educational Institutions have been undertaking internal studies of this phenomenon.

Dropout is of particular concern to technological institutes as they traditionally have higher dropout rates compared to conventional universities. Simpson (2002) reported that student retention in open and distance learning was increasingly important due to issues of quality assessment, student assertiveness and institutional funding. Student dropout leads to a reduction in total student enrolment. While recognizing that not all factors for dropout can be addressed, for example factors such as age, gender and socioeconomic status, there are potentially many ways both the learners and the institution itself are able to act to prevent or reduce dropout (Burt, 1996; Simpson, 2002). Research findings on reasons or factors contributing to student dropout can shed light on areas ready for institutional intervention, such as improvement in course materials, course delivery and student support. Studies on student dropout also benefit students, because the problems as revealed by students can be more appropriately taken care of.

**Objectives**

The study has been carried out to identify the reasons for HNDA dropouts at ATI Section, Batticaloa and recommend remedial measures to overcome the problem of dropouts.

**Methodology**

A questionnaire survey was carried out among the HNDA dropouts of ATI - section, Batticaloa to assess the present socioeconomic problems and factors related to the issue. The questions in the questionnaire were based on the reasons for dropout and suggested measures to help students to continue with their study. The respondents were randomly selected from the dropouts and 100 samples were tested. A structured questionnaire was used to gather required data. The prepared questionnaire was pre-tested and necessary changes were made to enable easy recording of responses. The survey was carried out by one-to-one interviews using the structured questionnaires. Secondary data collection was carried out in relation to historical records of dropouts from the documents available in the ATI, section. Enrolment patterns and their dropout patterns over a period of time (2006-2013), with reference to students’ pass out rate in their studies both full time and part time were analyzed. Collected data were analyzed by using statistical software (SPSS and MS excel) packages in order to produce graphs and tables.

**Results and Discussion**

The study gives an overview of the dropouts in the HNDA, ATI, Section, Batticaloa. The most influencing factors were ranked according to the score given by the respondents and used to find the remedies to overcome the problem of dropouts. The data collection was carried out under three categories: surveys asking the dropout students how they felt during their period of study, the reasons why they dropped out, and their suggestions for improvement.

**Table 1: Student Admission and Pass out Details in HNDA, ATI, Batticaloa**

2006		2009		2007		2010		2008		2011		2009		2012		2010		2013	
Admission		Pass out		Admission		Pass out		Admission		Pass out		Admission		Pass out		Admission		Pass out	
F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T
77	86	54	44	30	45	14	26	42	64	20	30	62	78	49	33	49	65	29	23

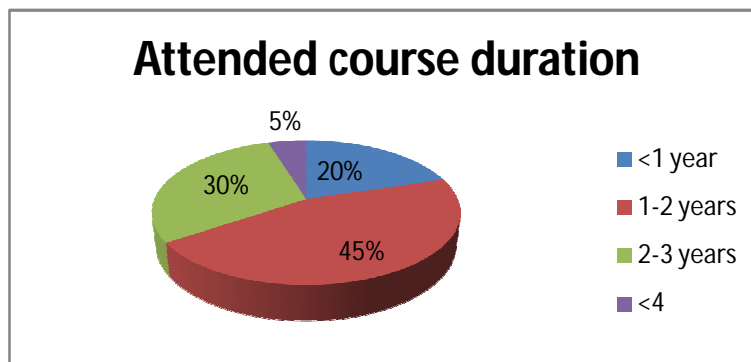
The above table shows the phenomenon of the admission and pass out details in HNDA for the last 10 years in both full and part time courses. The table clearly shows the increasing problem in the dropout rates in the above course in ATI, Batticaloa.

**1. Demographic Details of the Dropouts**

The study reveals that the respondents (dropouts) are from Batticaloa and Ampara Districts of the Eastern Province. The age of the respondents vary from 19 to 36 years of age.

**1.1 Duration of Course Attended**

The following chart shows the percentage of respondents who attended the course from 1 - 4 years



**Chart 1: Duration of Course Attended**

The study reveals that the majority of the respondents (45%) dropped out of the course during 1-2 years of the course duration. Around 30% of the respondents dropped out of the course during 2-3 years of the study programme, where the course duration is 4 years.

1.2. Sex

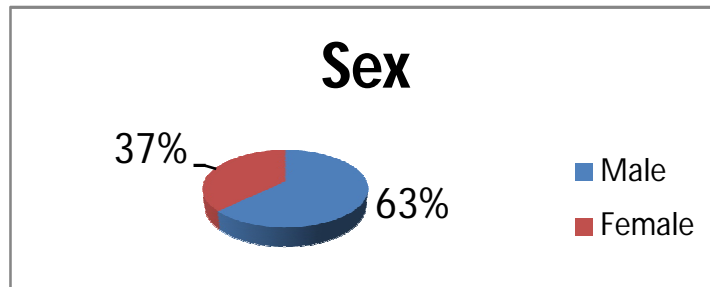


Chart 2: Dropouts Based on Sex

The findings revealed that the majority of the dropouts were males (63%) whereas the female dropouts amounted to 37%. This may be due to the employment opportunities for the male students and their willingness to work for the income.

1.3. Family Background of the Dropouts

Majority of the dropouts (96%) lived with their families while only 4% of the respondents lived with relatives or alone. The results do not show any significance to the dropout rate in the HNDA course. The study reveals that more than 50% of the dropout students' parents had tertiary level education whereas 30% of students' parents had secondary level education and this shows that parents or guardians education level does not give a significant impact on dropout rate of the students (Chart 3).

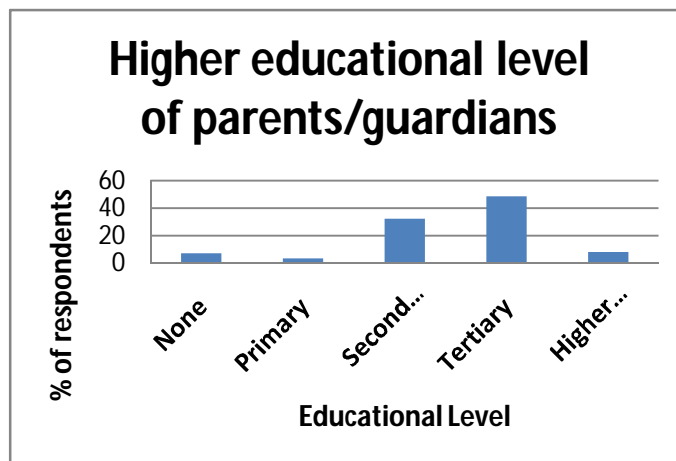


Chart 3: Higher Educational level of Parents/Guardians

Around 72% of the respondents' family received more than Rs. 15,000 as monthly income which does not give any significant impact on the dropout rate.

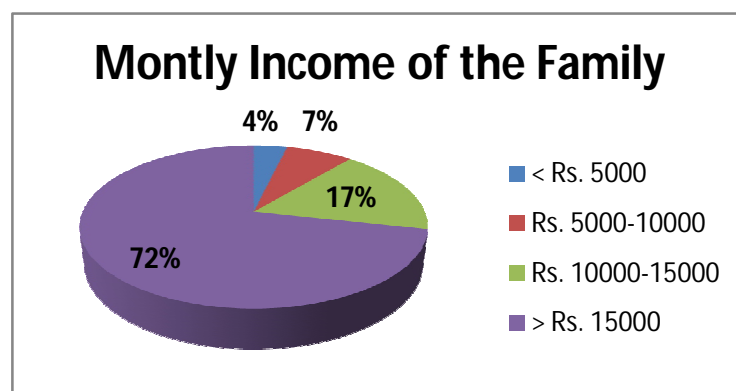
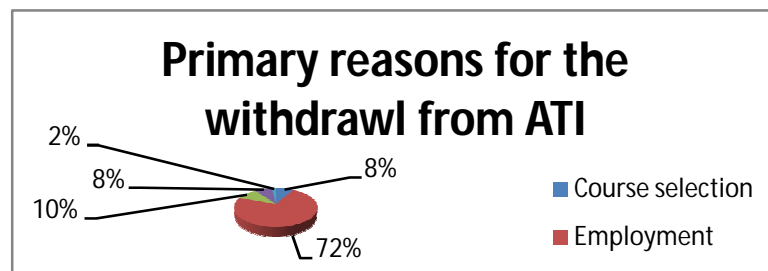


Chart 4: Monthly income of the dropouts' families

## 1.4 Primary Reasons for the Dropout



**Chart 5: Primary reasons for the withdrawal from ATI**

Among the identified primary reasons such as Course selection, Employment, Expulsion, Student/teacher conflict, Marriage, Family Problems, Failing classes, Pregnancy, Boredom and Illness; 72% of the respondents pointed at employment as the primary reasons for the dropout. Unemployment and underemployment is a common problem in developing countries including Sri Lanka. Therefore, the youth prefer the employment opportunities rather than spending many years solely in education. The other main reasons as identified are marriage (10%), course selection and family problems (8%) and failing classes (2%).

## 2. How Respondents felt during the Study Period at ATI

The questions asking about respondents' feeling during the study period at ATI in HNDA course were intended to help students to recall their feelings during their study period and easily identify the reason for the dropout from their course. A total of 17 possible variables were identified to express their feelings from the previous studies on dropouts and respondents were asked of their opinion on whether each of those responses were 'Agree', 'Somewhat agree' 'Neutral' 'Not agree' and 'Strongly not agree' which were ranked on a 5-1 scale. The following table (table 2) shows the questionnaire survey results on how they felt during the study period at ATI.

**Table 2: The Questionnaire Survey Results on feel during the Study Period at ATI**

No	Response	Agree (%)	Somewhat agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Not agree (%)	Strongly not agree (%)
1	Happy with the results	20.5	47.7	13.6	6.8	2.3
2	Happy with the peer students	34.1	45.5	10.2	2.3	0.0
3	Happy with the instructors	22.7	54.5	9.1	4.5	1.1
4	Happy in college environment	13.6	47.7	22.7	6.8	0.0
5	The instructors have a good relationship with the students	28.4	51.1	9.1	1.1	2.3
6	The instructors show interest in our institute results	25.0	44.3	15.9	3.4	3.4
7	You were treated fairly	27.3	39.8	8.0	11.4	3.4
8	A colleague irritated you or laughed at you	1.1	21.6	22.7	26.1	14.8
9	A colleague didn't want to be friendly with you	2.3	12.5	17.0	47.7	12.5
10	You felt rejected at the institute	1.1	8.0	21.6	42.0	18.2
11	You felt that you didn't like being at the institute	8.0	14.8	52.3	15.9	0.0
12	Fights with colleagues or other students	1.1	6.8	13.6	48.9	2.7
13	Caught smoking or drinking at institute	1.1	6.8	37.5	47.7	0.0
14	Warned by principal or instructors because of your behavior	1.1	10.2	15.9	30.7	34.1
15	Sometimes you felt that your assignments were too difficult	1.1	12.5	28.4	37.5	13.6
16	Could do your assignments without help	5.7	20.5	30.7	28.4	8.0
17	Could find somebody who understood your problems at institute	11.4	34.1	18.2	23.9	5.7

The results from the above table show that that the students were exposed to both positive and negative responses during their study period at ATI.

The highest number of respondents gave their rank to 'somewhat agree' to the positive responses as well as 'not agree' to the negative responses. This shows that the dropout students did not feel uncomfortable in the study environment during their course period. Among the responses the highest score is given to 'Happy with the peer students' and the lowest score is given to 'Caught smoking or drinking at institute'. The study and institutional environment did not make the students to drop the course. Similar results were observed in the study of dropouts at the Open University, Hong Kong where the students drop the course due to the high course fee even though they had better environment to study (Yuen *et al.*, 2008).

### 3. Reasons for Dropout Obtained through Questionnaire

A questionnaire survey, asking about respondents' reasons for dropping out, and measures they could suggest that would help students to continue with their study was designed based on the previous research studies. The reasons were categorized into five classes namely, personal, economy, work, course subject design and teaching support and administrative arrangement of the institution. A total of 22 possible variables were identified to express their feelings on dropouts and respondents were asked of their opinion on whether 'Agree', 'Somewhat agree', 'Neutral', 'Not agree' and 'Strongly not agree' which were ranked from 5-1 scale. The following table (table 3) shows the questionnaire survey results on reasons for dropout at ATI.

**Table 3: The Questionnaire Survey Results on Reasons for Dropout at ATI**

	No	Reason for dropout	Agree (%)	Somewhat agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Not agree (%)	Strongly not agree (%)
<b>Personal Reason</b>	1	Failed to complete part or all of the subjects or failed the exam	13.1	18.0	27.9	26.2	14.8
	2	Enrolled in a programme or course offered by other institutions	18.0	19.7	14.8	29.5	16.4
	3	Not enough time to learn	26.2	21.3	26.2	26.2	0.0
	4	Personal goals change	41.0	24.6	14.8	18.0	0.0
	5	Loss or lack of interest in the course	14.8	16.4	31.1	19.7	16.4
	6	Lack of discipline or losing momentum	4.9	21.3	16.4	39.3	16.4
	7	Do not like / not suited to ATI courses	6.6	18.0	27.9	29.5	16.4
	8	Lack of basic knowledge in English, mathematics or computer	4.9	16.4	31.1	27.9	14.8
	9	Health problems (midway illness, or mental / physical strength)	6.6	18.0	18.0	34.4	23.0
	10	Family reasons (family members do not support )	8.2	11.5	19.7	39.3	19.7
<b>Economical Reason</b>	11	Course fee is too expensive (not affordable, or feel it is higher than in other institutions)	6.6	4.9	21.3	54.1	11.5
	12	Have applied for scholarships, grants failure (Mahapola/Bursary)	11.5	11.5	18.0	45.9	11.5
<b>Work Reason</b>	13	Employers do not support, or lack of employer-sponsored (part time students) courses	23.0	13.1	31.1	29.5	1.6
	14	Unemployed, changing jobs, overtime, shift .....	8.2	14.8	29.5	39.3	4.9
<b>Course Subject Design And Teaching Support</b>	15	No suitable courses, subjects, or teaching languages to choose	14.8	32.8	18.0	21.3	13.1
	16	Chose the wrong course or courses	19.7	14.8	24.6	27.9	134.1
	17	Completing the entire course takes too many credits or takes too long	16.4	11.5	16.4	37.7	18.0
	18	Lack of mentor support	13.1	13.1	36.1	32.8	4.9
	19	Instructors' teaching attitude or approach unsatisfactory	13.1	4.9	36.1	29.5	14.8
<b>Administrative Arrangement</b>	20	Overload of learning and homework and lessons too fast	11.5	11.5	39.3	18.0	16.4
	21	Inadequate consultation and counseling services	14.8	19.7	19.7	27.9	14.8
	22	Problems with institutional procedures (e.g. procedures too complicated and time-consuming to apply for credit exemption, deferment of exam, changing tutorial sessions)	21.3	16.4	13.1	27.9	0.0

Based on the average ranking score of the above results, the highest average score has been given to the 'Personal goals change' and the lowest average score has been given to 'Family reasons (family members do not support )' in the personal reasons. Almost equal average scores were given to the economy reasons and work reasons for the dropout.

However, the highest average score has been given to the 'Lack of mentor support' among the Course subject design and teaching support. Compared to other responses low scores were given to the Administrative Arrangements of the institution. Based on the overall ranking score, the results revealed that personal goals change which leads to the employment concern and opportunities in the dropouts' point of view as well as lack of mentor support in the institutional point of view seemed to be the most considerable reasons for the dropout of the course study.

#### 4. Measures Students Believed that Could have helped them continue with their Study

The results of the questionnaire survey on measures which the ATI, Batticaloa could take to help students to continue with their study are given below in Table 4.

**Table 4: Measures Suggested by Respondents which would help them to Continue with their Studies**

	No	Reforms and improvements to minimize the dropouts	Accepted (%)	Not accepted (%)	Rank
<b>Personal Coach</b>	1	Increase in jobs devoted techniques and tutorials of exam answers	87.5	4.5	<b>1</b>
	2	Allocate time to teach students to learn	78.4	11.4	<b>13</b>
	3	Conducting self-awareness' workshops to teach students self-discipline and persistence	72.7	19.3	<b>11</b>
	4	Set email alert 'system (remind students on tutorials, homework, exam date and time) and learning management systems	63.6	28.4	<b>18</b>
	5	More face to face classroom interactions , explanation of course content	69.3	22.7	<b>14</b>
	6	Additional rewards (such as issuing certificates or rewards to students who pass the examination)	81.8	10.2	<b>3</b>
	7	Run workshops to help students improve their English, math and computer literacy	80.7	11.4	<b>4</b>
	8	For students and their families to start, care and support 'workshops to help students strive for family support	69.3	21.6	<b>12</b>
<b>Economy Measure</b>	9	Reduce course fees, students completing the course receive tuition refunds or discounts	51.1	40.9	<b>21</b>
	10	Deferred or installment charge course fees	42.0	48.9	<b>22</b>
	11	To provide more grants and scholarships	76.1	15.9	<b>7</b>
<b>Course /Subject Design and Teaching Support</b>	12	Video tutorials, uploaded onto the Internet, to enable the students to revisit	77.3	14.8	<b>6</b>
	13	Offer a greater variety of courses or subjects	67.0	25.0	<b>16</b>
	14	Offer more primary or basic subjects	68.2	23.9	<b>15</b>
	15	Provide consulting services Subject-wise	55.7	36.4	<b>20</b>
	16	Shorten the course completion time, reduced course credit requirements	58.0	34.1	<b>19</b>
	17	To extend the time to ask questions in the tutorial, so instructors answer students' questions	83.0	9.1	<b>2</b>
	18	Instructors to improve the attitude towards students and improve teaching methods	76.1	15.9	<b>8</b>
<b>Administrative Arrangement</b>	19	Concise textbook provides a summary and notes, reducing learning time and amount of homework	75.0	17.0	<b>10</b>
	20	Increase student enrollment, provide more course or courses and subject selection, offer career guidance and counseling services	76.1	15.9	<b>9</b>
	21	Streamline exemption credits, offer grace period for exam applications , flexibility in matters of tutorials, shorten the waiting time for results, and organize more seminars on administrative matters	79.5	12.5	<b>5</b>
	22	Publish the results as soon as possible after the exams, so that students have no space to join other institutions during the waiting time	54.5	19.3	<b>17</b>

The most frequently quoted measures which respondents believe would help students continue with their study is to 'Increase in jobs devoted techniques and tutorials exam answers' (rank = 1).

This shows how much the students are concerned in the employment based studies and opportunities. Other frequently suggested measures favour the extending of the time to ask questions in the tutorial, so instructors answer students' questions (rank = 2) in the Course subject design and teaching support. Additional rewards (such as issuing certificates or rewards to students who pass the examination) (rank = 3) is continued as respondents' expectation. Other less frequently recommended measures which need consideration are: Reduced course fees, tuition refunds or discounts to students completing the course e (rank =21) and facility for deferred or installment payment of course fees (rank=22).

### ***Conclusion***

Based on the reasons for dropout revealed by these students, possible measures to help reduce dropout could include:

- Development of courses which ensure job opportunities to achieve the personal goals of the students
- Provision of adequate counseling and mentor support
- A system to award students in their examinations and tutorials.
- Run workshops to help students improve their English, math and computer literacy along with their study courses.

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