

Dropouts in Higher Education: An Experience and Social Responsibility for Curbing Dropouts

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Abstract—The rising rate of dropouts in higher education is a source of concern both at the individual level and the institutional level. This paper delves into the critical role of higher education in shaping the individual and the society, reasons influencing the increasing rate of dropout from colleges affiliated to University of North Bengal, its effects, and proposes some counter measures for the same. Using quantitative data from registration and completion records, and qualitative insights from student and faculty, the paper identifies the role of financial constraints, inadequate academic preparedness, limited career guidance, and institutional challenges in contributing to the discontinuation of studies. The paper aims to inform policy makers, administrators, and educators in designing sustainable measures to reduce dropout rates and promote inclusive, equitable access to higher education in North Bengal.

Index Terms—Higher Education, Importance of Higher Education, Dropout, Reasons for Dropouts, Dropout Impact, Measures against dropout, North Bengal, College, University, North Bengal University.

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is seen as a gateway for career opportunities, social mobility and personal growth. However, as seen in the recent years, many students have started to discontinue their studies before completion of their course leading to what is called academic dropout. The rising trend in dropout rate reflects deeper systemic and socio – economic challenges that go beyond individual performance. According to the data on student enrolment in colleges affiliated with University of North Bengal, 44288 students had registered for U.G course in the session 2022 – 2023, and 49832 students for the session 2023 – 2024. Although enrolment figures suggest growth, they mask significant attrition during programme

progression, especially where academic and economic pressures intensify. This research paper seeks to analyse the dropout phenomenon in higher education in colleges affiliated with North Bengal University, exploring its causes, patterns, and impacts and provide insights that can inform interventions for reducing dropout rates and strengthening the higher education system.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Higher education opens research – driven education which helps students to engage deeply with subjects, improving analytical and critical thinking skills. Students benefit from exposure to new knowledge beyond exams and assignments, preparing them for real-world challenges. It is essential for innovation, technological advancement, increasing national competitiveness and societal development (Khan, 2023).
2. In the era of globalisation, Higher Education institutions play a pivotal role in knowledge creation, innovation, and nation building. Universities act as nodal centres for R&D contributing to economic, social, scientific, and political development through teaching, research, and knowledge transfer (Sharma, 2023).
3. Sain and Rajpal (2025) used UDISE Plus data (2013–2022) and applied regression analysis to identify correlations between dropout rates and educational/economic variables to analyse the dropout trend in West Bengal. The key determinants for the increasing dropout rate were low literacy rates, lower income per capita, and high pupil – teacher ratio. Also, the dropout rates remain uneven across districts, with rural and

economically weaker regions showing higher dropout. Even though the enrolment has expanded, but completion rates lag behind, indicating systemic inefficiencies. Gender disparities persist, though schemes like Kanyashree have helped reduce dropout among girls.

4. Das (2023) has laid emphasis on poverty being a primary driver of dropout in higher education. The empirical analysis discusses that financial hardship forces students to abandon studies prematurely. It has proposed ICT-based monitoring and e-learning as effective tools to enhance Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER).
5. Media analyses, such as The Wire (Chatterjee, 2025), have drawn attention to the dropout of

students from West Bengal’s higher education institutions due to lack of teachers, financial hardship, and migration to other states.

III. OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse dropout trends in U.G. colleges affiliated with North Bengal University.
2. To identify the factors contributing to dropout.
3. To evaluate the impact of dropouts on individuals, institutions and society.
4. To assess the effectiveness of existing policy interventions.
5. To propose recommendations to enhance student retention and completion rates.

Findings

1. Overall Dropout Trend in U.G. Course under North Bengal University:

1.1. CBCS Session 2022 – 2023:

Stage	Total students	Dropouts	Percentage Dropouts
Registration 2022	44,288	-	-
Sem 1 (Dec 2022)	37,014	7,274	16.4%
Sem 2 (June 2023)	31,524	5,490	28.8%
Sem 3 (Dec 2023)	26,671	4,853	39.8%
Sem 4 (June 2024)	23,055	3,616	47.9%
Sem 5 (Dec 2024)	20,415	2,640	53.9%
Sem 6 (June 2025)	15,955	4,460	64.0%

Table 1 Students Enrolled v/s Dropout for the CBCS session 2022 – 20232024
Branch, North Bengal University

Source: Examination

1.2. FYUGP Session 2023 – 2024:

Stage	Total students	Dropouts	Percentage Dropouts
Registration 2023	49,832	-	-
Sem 1 (Dec 2023)	41,215	8,617	17.3%
Sem 2 (June 2024)	31,069	10,146	37.7%
Sem 3 (Dec 2024)	24,073	6,996	51.7%
Sem 4 (June 2025)	21,385	2,688	57.1%
Sem 5 (Dec 2025)	18,819	2,566	62.2%

Table 2 Students Enrolled v/s Dropouts for FYUGP Session 2023-20242024
Branch, North Bengal University

Source: Examination

1.3. Comparison between percentage of dropouts for CBCS and FYUGP:

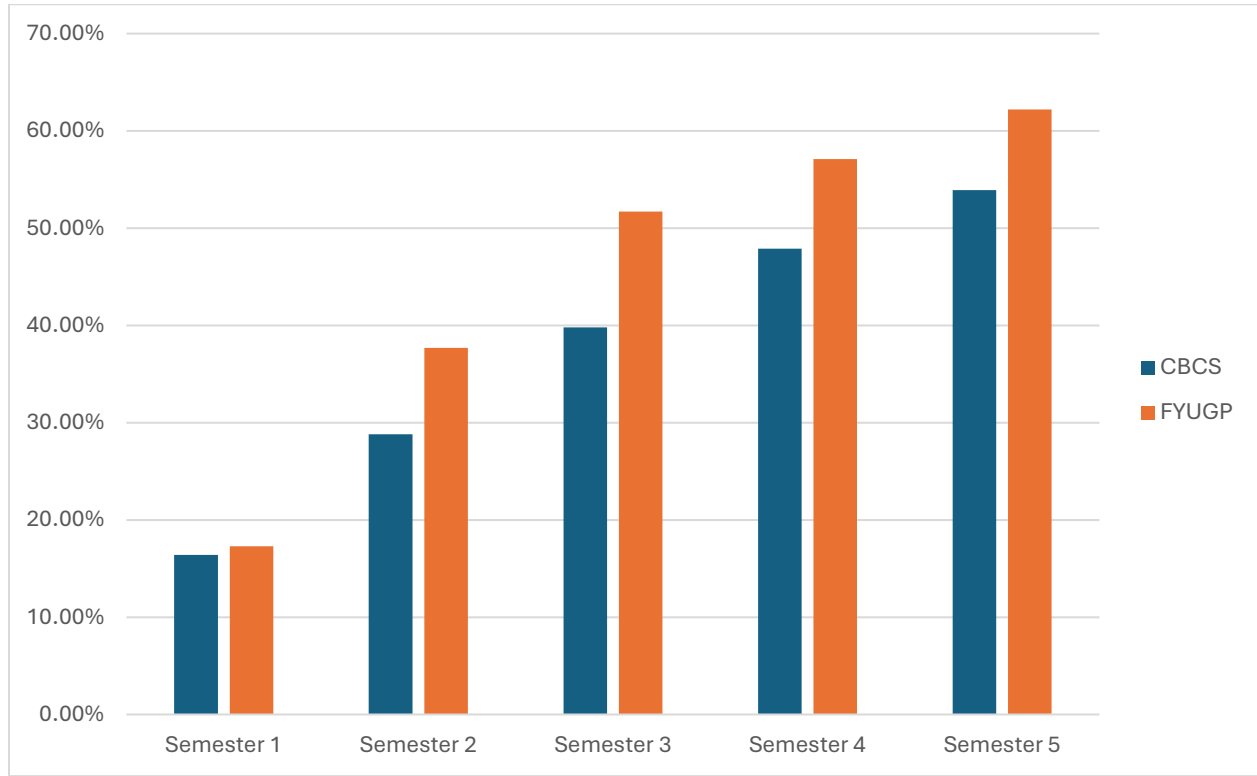


Figure 1 Student dropout percentage for CBCS and FYUGP

Observations:

- a. Nearly two – thirds of the students enrolled in the year 2022 – 2023 has dropped out by Semester 6.
- b. The trend observed in the dropout for the year 2022 – 2023 is not sudden, rather progressive which indicates structural and systemic issues.
- c. Also, FYUGP session 2023 – 2024 shows a faster dropout in early semesters as compared to CBCS with more than 50% of students dropping out by semester 3.

2. Gender – wise Dropout Analysis:

2.1. CBCS Session 2022 – 2023:

Semester	Total Male Enrolment	Male Dropouts	Male Dropout Percentage	Total Female Enrolment	Female Dropouts	Female Dropout Percentage
Registration 2022	20038	-	-	24250	-	-
Sem 1 (Dec 2022)	16050	3988	19.90%	20964	3286	13.55%
Sem 2 (June 2023)	13076	2974	34.74%	18448	2516	23.93%
Sem 3 (Dec 2023)	10684	2392	46.68%	15987	2461	34.07%
Sem 4 (June 2024)	8997	1687	55.10%	14058	1929	42.03%
Sem 5 (Dec 2024)	7828	1169	60.93%	12587	1471	48.09%
Sem 6 (June 2025)	5899	1929	70.56%	10056	2531	58.53%

Table 3 Gender wise Dropout percentage for CBCS session 2022 - 2023/2024
Branch, North Bengal University

Source: Examination

2.2. FYGUP Session 2023 – 2024:

Semester	Total Male Enrolment	Male Dropouts	Male Dropout Percentage	Total Female Enrolment	Female Dropouts	Female Dropout Percentage
Registration 2023	20772	-	-	29060	-	-
Sem 1 (Dec 2023)	16298	4474	21.54%	24917	4143	14.26%
Sem 2 (June 2024)	11436	4862	44.95%	19633	5284	32.44%
Sem 3 (Dec 2024)	8471	2965	59.22%	15602	4031	46.31%
Sem 4 (June 2025)	7424	1047	64.26%	13961	1641	51.96%
Sem 5 (Dec 2025)	6426	998	69.06%	12393	1568	57.35%

Table 4 Gender wise Dropout percentage for FYUGP session 2023 – 2024 Source: Examination Branch, North Bengal University

2.3. Comparison of the gender – wise dropouts for CBCS (2022 – 2023) and FYGUP (2023 – 2024):

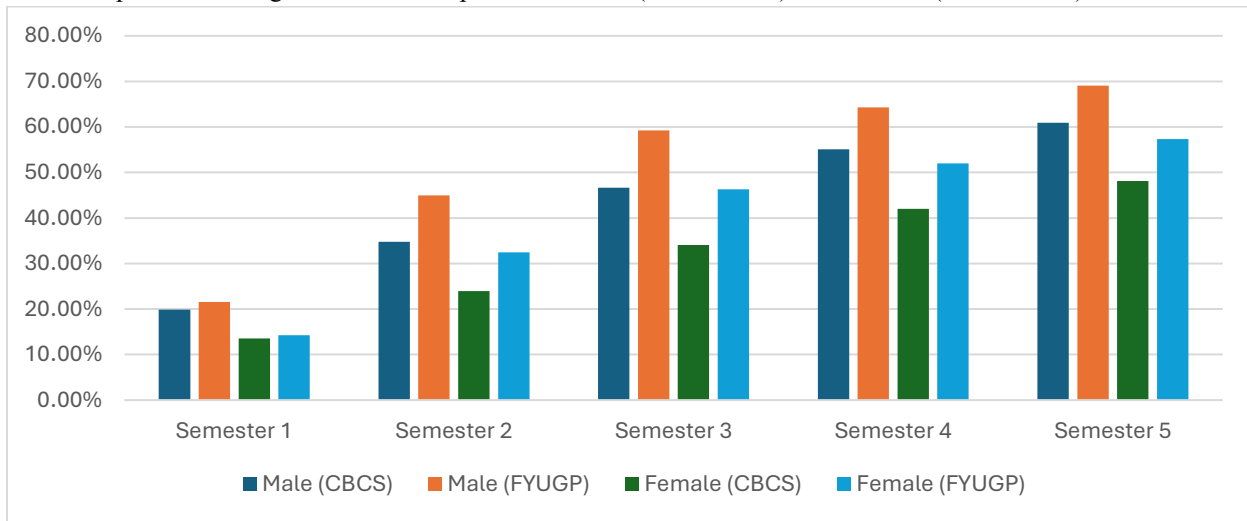


Figure 2: Comparison of the gender – wise dropouts for CBCS (2022 – 2023) and FYGUP (2023 – 2024)

Observations:

- a. Male dropout shows a consistent 10 – 12% higher percentage than female dropout in CBCS.
 - b. Male dropout is considerably higher in FYUGP as compared to CBCS which might be due to family pressure for early income.
 - c. In CBCS system, the approximate ratio of male to female dropout is 1.2 : 1, whereas it widens to 1.3 : 1 in the FYUGP system suggesting a greater vulnerability of students to disengagement due to family care roles, marriage, and financial constraints.
3. Nature of the trend: The pattern identified for the rate of dropouts is stepwise - gradual, stage-by-stage reduction of students throughout the course which can be attributed to the following reasons:
- 3.1. Semester 1 – 2: Students may have problems adjusting to the academic pressure.

- 3.2. Semester 2 – 3: Financial constraints, exam pressures begin to pile up.
- 3.3. Semester 3 onwards: Degree is observed to be less economically rewarding.

Discussion

1. Factors affecting dropouts:

- 1.1. CBCS and FYUGP: Higher education in India has undergone significant reforms, with the FYUGP (Four Year Undergraduate Programme) introduced as part of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. While it intends to provide holistic and flexible learning, observations have suggested that the dropout rates are higher in FYUGP as compared to CBCS. Understanding the reasons behind this trend is critical for policymakers, institutions, and students. The

higher dropout ratio in FYUGP can be attributed to the following reasons:

- a. Financial Stress: An extra year in FYGUP as compared to CBCS increases fees and living expenses discouraging the economically weaker students.
 - b. Academic Preparedness: CBCS provides a balanced workload in which students can pace their own learning as compared to more semesters, and interdisciplinary courses in FYUGP which adds on more stress for the students. Also, the modular nature of CBCS which allows credit transfer and flexible subject choices is seen to be more flexible as compared to the rigid structure of FYUGP with fewer exit points.
 - c. Institutional Transition Issues: Colleges adapting to FYUGP may lack necessary mentoring and infrastructure.
 - d. Employability Doubts: Under FYUGP, students remain uncertain about the fact whether the extra year would improve their job prospects.
 - e. Mental Health & Motivation: Longer duration increases fatigue and stress.
 - f. Socio-cultural Pressures: Family expectations (early marriage, earning responsibilities) make longer courses less feasible.
- 1.2. Poverty and financial constraints: This is one of the most powerful and significant reasons for dropouts in higher education especially for students belonging to marginalized or first – generation backgrounds. Students have been found to dropout of higher education because they cannot afford tuition, accommodation, or study materials (Breier, 2010). Some students from economically weaker family work part time jobs to support their education which leads to less study time and more stress (Mohammad F. K., 2025). Also, the socio – economic background of the students has a high impact on the dropout rate with students from disadvantaged or marginalized groups being more vulnerable to financial stress (Breier, 2010). As seen from figure 2, the number of dropouts is considerably higher for FYUGP session which indicates that a four – year undergraduate course is seen financially challenging for students from economically weaker backgrounds.
- 1.3. Gender specific reasons:

- a. Male: Male students have been seen to dropout more than female students with peak dropouts for FYUGP session. The reason can be contributed to the cultural and societal expectations from men being the earners of the family which pushes to students to seek employment and take up jobs even before the completion of their course (Solanki, 2025).
 - b. Female: According to Upadhyay (2024), gender disparities exist in the enrolment and dropout ratio of students with cultural norms restricting women. Despite progress, women suffer from various societal and cultural setbacks:
 - Early marriage and parenthood especially in the rural areas.
 - Traditional roles associated with women like caregivers and homemakers may deter families from investing in their daughters’ education as compared to their sons’ education.
- 1.4. Academic Preparedness: Weak foundations in school level subjects and poor study habits put an academic pressure on the students in higher education which ultimately leads to attrition when they become unable to handle the stress and study pressure associated with higher education (Solanki, 2025).
2. Impact of Dropouts: The impact of attrition in higher education affects not only the individual but also the society at large.
- 2.1. Individual Level: Attrition leads to loss of better career opportunities with a higher pay – scale. Education contributes to the self – esteem and social identity of an individual and dropouts may feel stigmatized and less capable than their peers which ultimately leads to a loss of identity and low self - confidence. When students dropout, they miss out on enhancing their talents, creativity, and intellectual capacity.
 - 2.2. Institutional Level: Attrition from higher education institutions is responsible for direct financial loss, especially in tuition-dependent institutions. It also causes damage to the reputation of the institute as institutions with attrition rates may be perceived to be failing to prepare students adequately. In addition to it, faculty may be demotivated as they perceive their teachings highly undermined. Institutions with high dropout rates may also find it difficult to acquire grants from the Government. As seen with

the shut – down of primary schools across West Bengal due to low enrolment and higher dropouts of students, there may come a time when higher education institutes are also disbanded owing to high dropout of student from the said institutes.

- 2.3. Societal Level: Dropouts from economically weaker background perpetuate the cycle of poverty as dropouts don't have the necessary degree and skills to earn a more favourable income which ultimately hinders the attainment of social equity. The labour market loses competitiveness and innovation enhancements which ultimately affects the growth of the Nation as it fails to compete in the global economies. Increasing rate of dropouts means a reduction in the number of potential researchers, entrepreneurs who might have driven progress, increasing the ranking of the Nation globally.
3. Assessment of Existing Policy Interventions and Recommendations for Increasing the Retention Rate of Students in Higher Education Institutions:
 - 3.1. Financial Support Policies: The policies introduced at the central level like National Scholarship Portal (NSP), Post-Matric Scholarships (SC/ST/OBC/Minorities), Central Sector Scheme of Scholarships for College and University Students, National Fellowship & Scholarship for Higher Education of ST Students, Education Loan Interest Subsidy Scheme, and also policies introduced by the Government of West Bengal like Kanyashree Prakalpa, Swami Vivekananda Merit-cum-Means Scholarship, and OASIS scholarships for SC/ST/OBC students. The said financial support schemes have seemed to have reduced dropout rates among disadvantaged groups, especially girls and rural students, but research has shown that uneven implementation, delays in disbursement, and limited awareness has undermined the value of their effectiveness.
 - 3.2. Academic Preparedness & Bridge Programs: Bridging programmes are effective in providing academic support and better prepare the students for higher education so as to reduce number of early dropouts from the underrepresented/ disadvantaged groups. (Bettinger, 2009) (Black, 2023). It has been found that structured peer tutoring and mentoring increase student engagement and retention (Tinto, 2012).

- 3.3. Mentoring and Counselling: Dropouts may stem from various factors but research has shown that effective mentoring and counselling may support the students academically, socially and personally which may help to curb the dropout rate from higher education institutions. According to Mansuri (2023) and Guerreiro (2025) peer mentoring has been found to be quite effective in enhancing the retention rate of the students in higher education institutions as it helps in greater academic integration, increases engagement and increases emotional resilience among students.
- 3.4. Role of the Local Government: The increasing rate of dropouts from higher education institutions is not just an academic problem but also a livelihood management challenge. Increasing the retention rate of students is not just the responsibility of the University and Colleges, but also the Local Government. Local Government can create opportunities for students which higher education institutions cannot do.
 - 3.4.1. Economic Measures: The Local Government can create opportunities for the students from weak financial backgrounds to earn and yet remain enrolled.
 - a. Local part – time linkages with warehouse and logistic firms, tourism and hospitality sector, or municipal services reduces the pressure from students to start earning before completion of their degrees and keeps them economically active while still being enrolled.
 - b. Local bodies can also work towards a small amount of district grant to students linking this grant to minimum attendance and semester progression.
 - c. Establishment of Academic Support Centres with peer tutors.
 - d. Issue student bus pass to reduces the hidden dropout factor of transport cost.
 - e. Planning local career fairs, job and internship fairs for students.
 - 3.4.2. Community and Family Engagement:
 - a. Organization of parent awareness drives explaining the value of degree completion.
 - b. Outreach rural students via Panchayat members and local NGOs.
 - 3.4.3. Establishment of Vocational training centres: It is crucial to understand, that students are not rejecting education – rather they are

rejecting an education which delays earning and income. So, a simple and yet powerful local intervention can be the establishment of vocational centres which fuse the skills learned with the general education coursework to design a system where students can earn only when they are enrolled. As such, colleges become an education and livelihood support system, and not a financial burden – students will stay enrolled because their income depends on their attendance. The skill training that the students receive at the vocational centres can be acknowledged by Government – recognized certificates, and academic credits. Also, dropouts are usually family decisions, but when students are gaining skill, earning and making progress in college, the mentality of the families can be positively altered.

IV. CONCLUSION

Dropouts from higher education is not just an individual setback but a systemic failure to understand student needs and retain students. Evidence from national and international studies has contributed a multifaceted cause for dropouts – financial constraints, academic preparedness, socio-cultural factors, and institutional practices. Numerous policy interventions have shown measurable success in reducing attrition but their effectiveness is uneven owing to reasons such as implementation gaps, digital divides, and limited institutional capacity. By joining hand with the Local Government, University and the colleges, can help to increase the retention rates gradually over the few years so that higher education institutions can serve its purpose of being a driver of equity, empowerment, and sustainable development.

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