



Factors Affecting Dropouts Students in Arab Open University- Bahrain Branch

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that affecting the student dropouts in Arab Open University AOU- Bahrain branch. To achieve this objective, all AOU current students during the academic year 2007-2012 were examined including dropouts students. The current students were 1897 students, consisting of 809 female and 1088 male students, so the main objective of this research work is to conduct a survey using online questionnaire broken down by following students indices to evaluate the student dropouts, the Grade Point Average (GPA) of the student, score and kind of the high school certificate, nationality, lack of students knowledge in English language & mathematics, in addition the results revealed that younger students dropouts is higher than mature students and non-national students dropouts is lower than national student. The results further revealed that significant gender differences exists, female students dropouts is lower than male counterparts in line with a significant number of samples have been studied. More importantly, the results of the analysis indicated that marital status plays a significant role in determining the student's dropouts by confirming that married students dropouts lower than non-married counterparts & finally the employability (Working student or not) drop out between working students is higher than non working counterparts, finally we suggest some measures to prevent students dropouts.

Keywords: *E-Learning, Open Learning, Arab Open University, Student's performance, learning preferences*

1. INTRODUCTION

A significant amount of research has been conducted regarding online student attrition. In these studies, researchers followed different approaches to determine dropout problems, the three types of research approaches to examine student's dropout;

- Predicting the dropout by looking at student characteristics such as age, gender, employment status, and pervious education [2] ;
- Examining the features and format of the courses which possibly affect student dropouts [4] ;
- Gather students' perspectives [5]

In the literature, researchers report numerous reasons for student dropouts, for Example [8][10] classified the dropout problems of distance education into four categories: student barriers, faculty barriers, organizational barriers, and course consideration. Problems and barriers encountered by the students involved costs and motivators, feedback and teacher contact, student support and services, alienation and isolation, lack of experience, and training. Faculty problems were related to lack of staff training in course

development and technology, and lack of support for distance learning in general:

- Situational: Problems arise from a student's own life circumstances, such as changing employment situations or family obligations.
- Dispositional: Personal problems that influence the student's persistence behavior such as motivation [3].
- Institutional: Difficulties those students encounter with the institution, such as lack of support services [7].
- Epistemological: Difficulties faced by students while apprehending course content [11].
- Situational and dispositional barriers [6], [12] proved to be the primary causes of attrition in distance education.

2. METHODOLOGY

This article examines the factors affecting student withdrawal from AOU, arguing that some social, political and economical factors are located in the national context whilst others relate to the individual student's own personal



circumstances. The access movement has been commendably successful in increasing and widening the participation rates for those groups traditionally under-represented in higher education [8]. However widening access must include improving retention as well as increasing entry. Retention across AOU students is considered with particular emphasis on the drop-out of multinational students studying in open education with different educational background. Our task to design and to conduct a general framework according to following factors, where some questions have been asked to the drop out students using online survey system their answers have been used to evaluate the Drop out index factors.

- Gender (Male -Female),
- Nationality (Bahraini -Other)
- High School certificate (Scientific, literature or vocation school , private versus government schools)
- Marital status (Married or not) To search effects of carrying family responsibilities
- Skills and a shortage of science, mathematics,
- Skills and a shortage of English language,
- Programme (ITC-Business),
- Employ ability (Working student or not). To search effect of carrying work responsibilities
- Student's Grade Point Average (GPA)
- Number of Withdraw courses
- Age (Young entrants Versus Mature entrants)

Non-completion is measured by the number of students who have either voluntarily withdrawn from the University or have been forced to withdraw owing to their non-enrolment in 3 consecutive semesters (excluding summer). Progression is defined as those students who have a cumulative GPA>2. Figure 1, 2, and 3 show a profile of students from the academic year 2007-2008 to date (i.e. from September 2007 – June 2011) broken down by Progression and achievement ,nationality, gender and program respectively.

The Figures (1, 2, 3, and 4) charts give an overview of AOU-Bahrain's non-completion and progression patterns over the past 5 years. Also shown is the achievement pattern indicated by the numbers who have graduated so far. The low enrolment figure is due to limited campus capacity, AOU is moving to new campus within two years, this may reduce the dropouts' students and increase student's enrollment. The decreasing withdrawal statistics for the previous 3 years are more indicative of the pattern whereby students have become more comfortable with the study schedules as they fit well into

their work and family schedules. The withdrawn and graduated numbers include students who were enrolled from previous years. AOU-Bahrain students enter with High School certificates and have a dropout rate of 15% calculated as the number of students who withdrew during the first year as a percentage of the number of new enrolments in that year, nearly 13% of OU-UK students withdraws before course start and a further 35% become inactive before the first assignment [12]. These numbers, comparing dropouts between AOU-Bahrain and UK in the beginning of the study term, indicate that the Open University environment is a challenging one and student retention is of prime concern both at AOU-Bahrain and globally. The difficulty of juggling work and family responsibilities with an academic regime is one that students face in Bahrain. In order to inculcate the "one university" feeling amongst all students across branches, there should be easier transfer procedures and each branch should welcome another branch's students as their own. Granted that seamless transfers are a challenge given each country's different Ministry requirements, measures should be taken to ease the process for students. This should contribute towards better progression and retention for the University as a whole. The unified SIS should contribute towards this process where the student can take classes in any of the 7 countries but his or her student records are held on one central database. AOU-Bahrain's student gender ratio has been approximately 60:40 (male: female) consistently over the above period. There is a predominance of males compared with UK universities which generally have a 50:50 ratio. The AOU graduate profile however is tipped in favor of females with "more than 50% females. AOU-Bahrain's predominance of males can be attributed to evening classes that are offered. These are more suitable for working males but less so for women with family responsibilities. Also to be noted is that Bahrain as a country has a gender ratio of 1.33 male(s)/female in the 15-64 years age group. There are two reasons for the high proportion of Saudi students. The first is that AOU-Bahrain offers classes on Thursdays which is a weekend in KSA. This makes it convenient for Saudi students living in the Eastern province to cross the causeway and take classes at our campus. (There is a general tendency for Saudis in the Eastern province to spend their weekends in Bahrain). Secondly, AOU-Bahrain has a high reputation in Saudi Aramco and other Saudi companies, and graduates receive promotions based on our degree (despite the fact that the KSA Ministry of Education is yet to approve degrees from open learning institutions.)

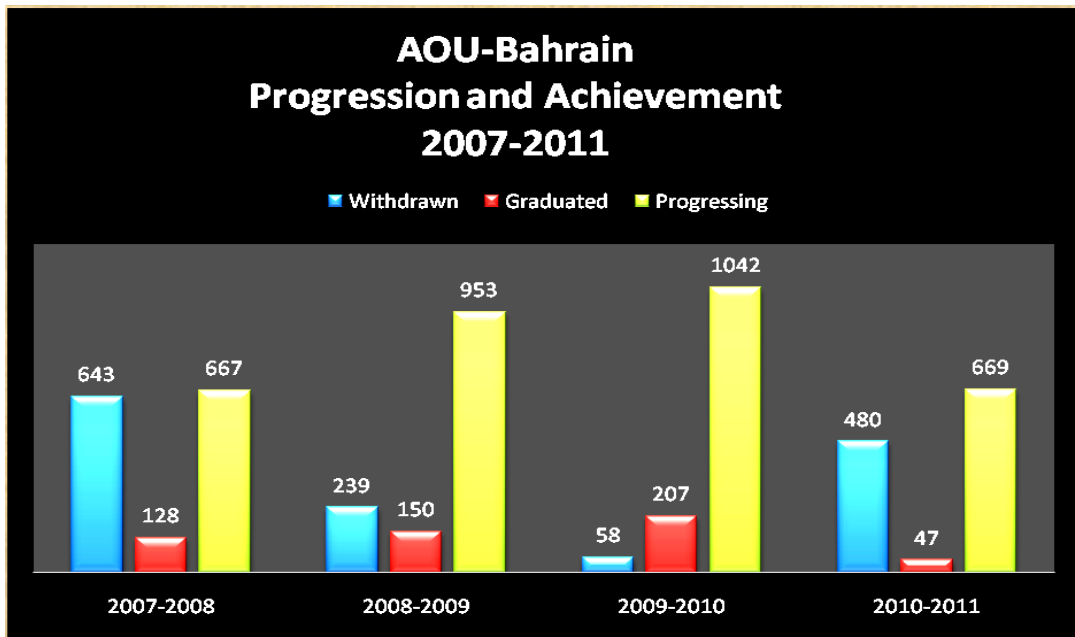


Figure 1: Profile of Students broken down by Progression and Achievement.

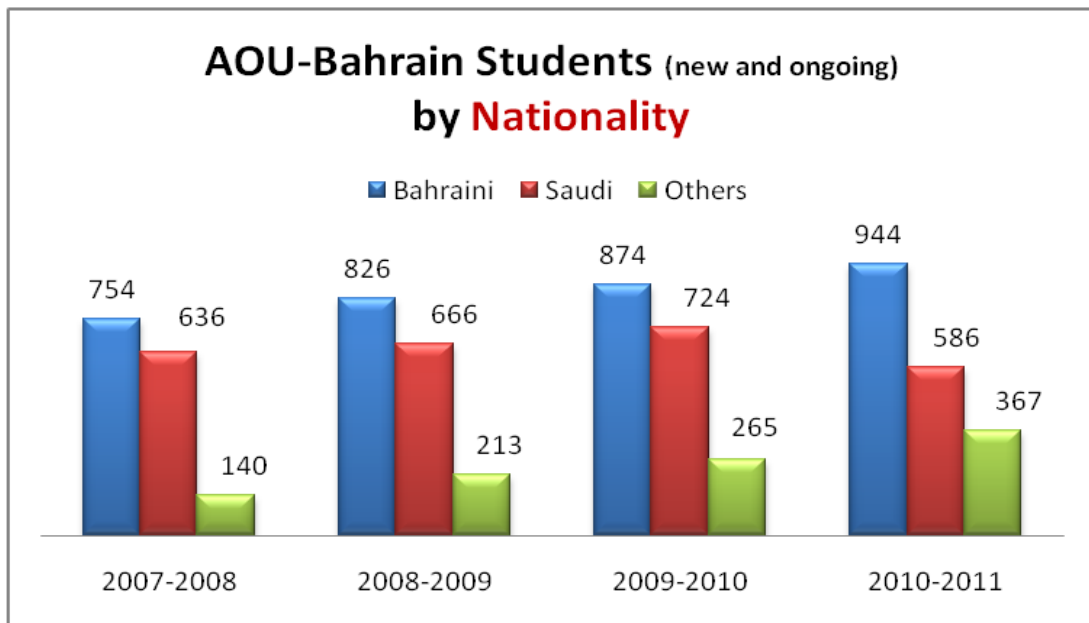


Figure 2: Profile of Students broken down by Nationality

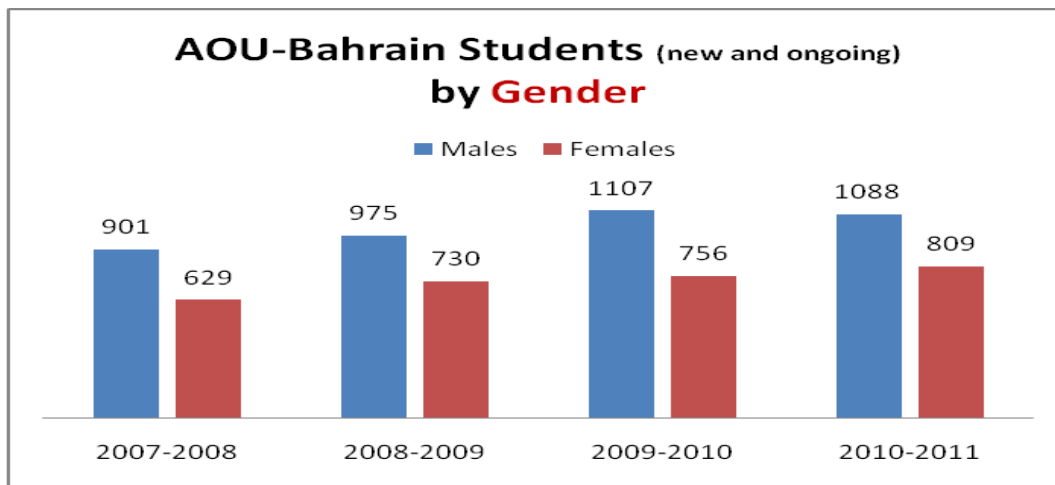


Figure 3: Profile of Students broken down by Gender

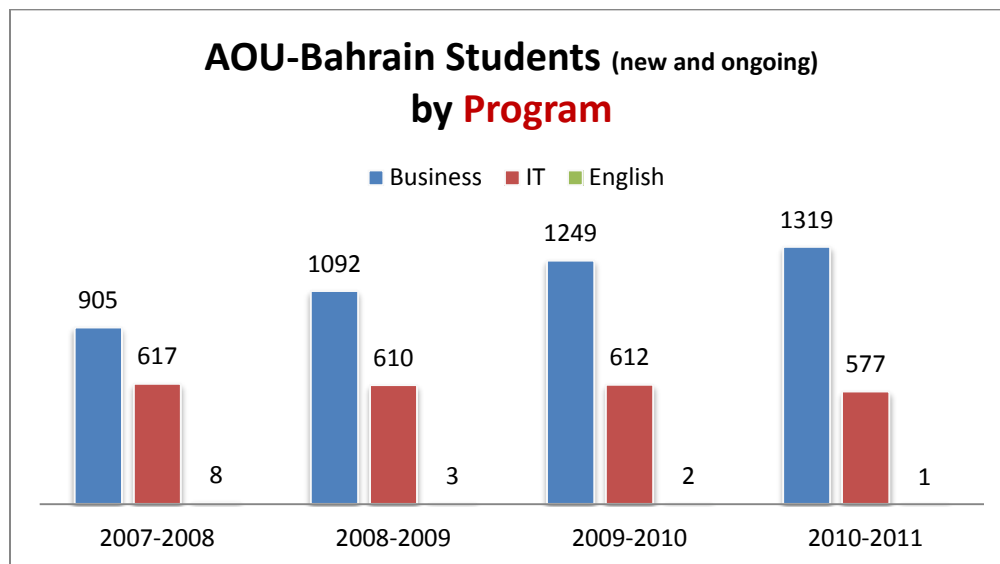


Figure 4: Profile of Students broken down by Program

In the current research paper, the concentration is to investigate on another factors of students retention ratio factors were not taken into consideration before such as gender, nationality , age, high school certificate, marital status & employability, the survey conducted to include the questions about these indices and deployed to 1805 students who were active during 2007-2012, we requested that only the dropouts students (139 out of 1805) reply to the survey , so the 139 dropouts students visited the survey, and 71 of them completed all the questions. More importantly, as results of this survey some of dropouts students return back to enroll and register again in AOU in the current summer courses

2012, figure (5) shows the reasons for students enrollment and dropouts in AOU, as the results of this analysis indicated that studied indices such as marital status plays a significant role in determining the student's dropouts by confirming that married students dropouts lower than non-married counterparts, also the score and kind of the high school certificate, nationality, lack of students knowledge in English language & mathematics significantly increase dropout ration in AOU, finally the employability (Working student or not) drop out between working students is higher than non working counterparts.

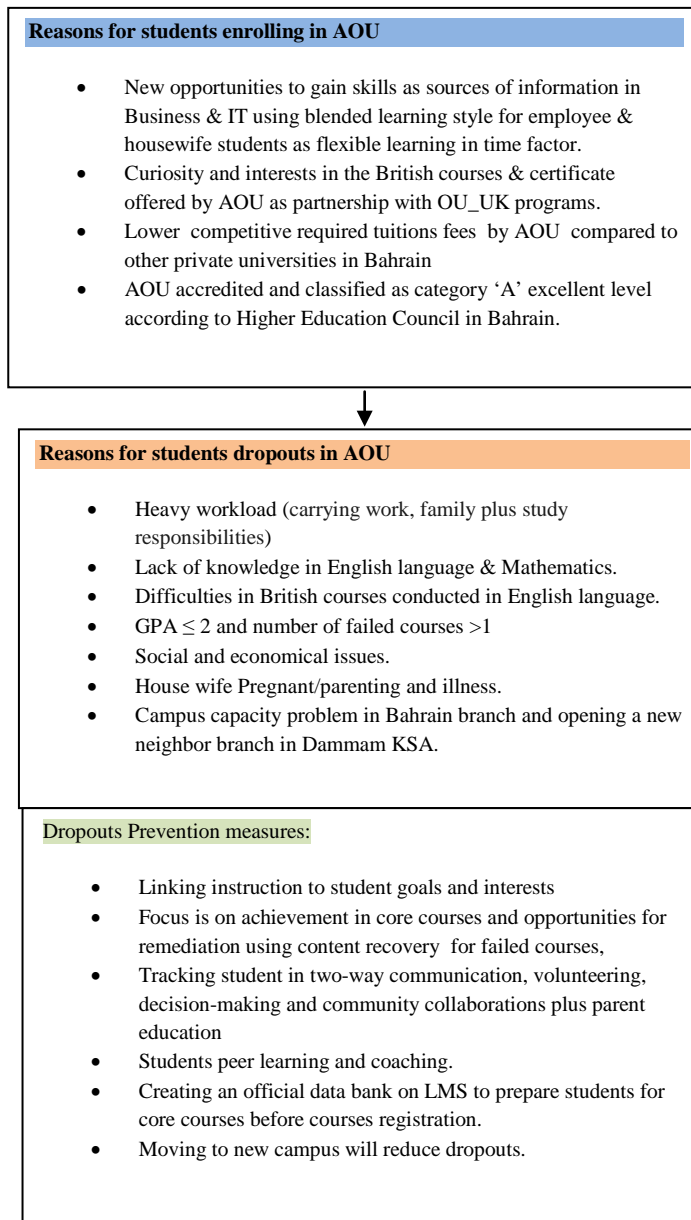


Figure 5: Significant Reasons for Student's Enrollment versus dropouts Prevention Suggestions

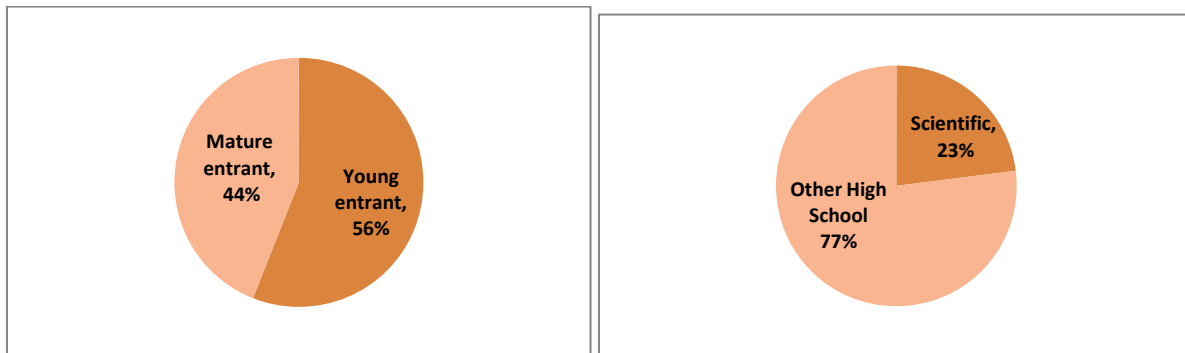
The outcome of the analysis revealed that the dropouts indices shown in Figure (6) indicates the six profiles of students dropouts statistics in AOU done by gender (graph-A), nationality (graph-B), age (graph-C), high school certificate

(graph-D), marital status (graph-E) & employability (graph-F) respectively, where some questions have been asked to the dropouts students using online survey system and their answers have been used to evaluate the Dropouts indices.



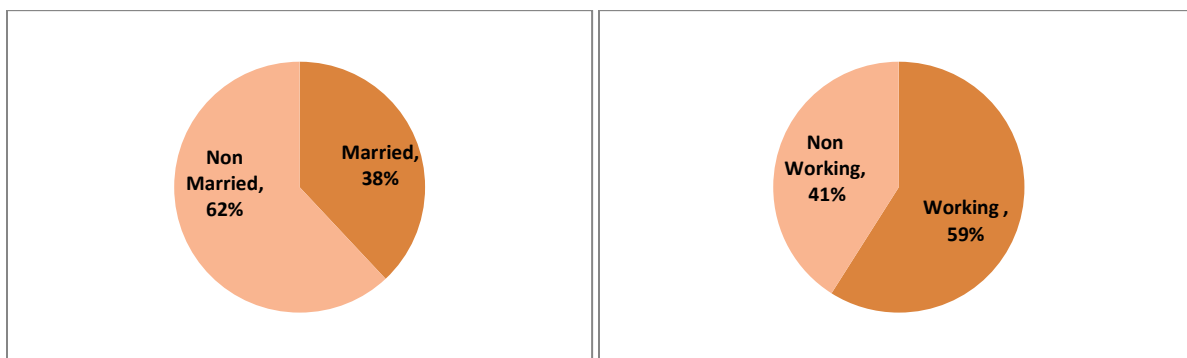
A- Profile of students dropouts factor, Gender

B- Profile of students dropouts factor, Nationality



C- Profile of students dropouts factor, Age

D-Dropouts factor, High school certificate



E- Dropouts factor, marital status

F- Dropouts factor, Employ ability

Figure 6: Profile of Students dropouts factors statistics glance done by Gender, Nationality , age, High school certificate, Marital status & Employability respectively .



3. CONCLUSION

The outcome of the analysis illustrate a general framework according to dropouts factors shown in Figure (6) the profile of students dropouts factors statistics glance done by gender, nationality, age, high school certificate, marital status & employability respectively. As final conclusions, the suggested dropout's framework has the following characteristics given as below:

- Gender (Male 68%-Female 32%), so the female student's dropouts are lower than male counterparts.
- Nationality (Bahraini 65%-Other 35%), non-national students dropouts is lower than Bahraini students, is clear and concise
- Age (Young entrants 66% Versus Mature entrants 34%), this indicates that the younger students dropouts is higher than mature students.
- High School certificate (Scientific 23%, literature or vocation school 77%), so the students with scientific high school certificate dropouts is much lower than literature or vocation school certificates.
- Marital status (Married 38% or not 62%) To search effects of carrying family responsibilities, so married students dropouts lower than non-married counterparts
- Employability (Working student 59% or not 41%), so effect of carrying work responsibilities drop out between working students is higher than non working counterparts.

In spite of the above conclusions, AOU analyzed the factors related to dropouts of adult students and formed a call center to call those students to encourage them to register back and continue their studies by such as offering payment in two installments, record session of all courses on live and as students can follow the classes & repeat the WebEx sessions, even if their circumstances regarding work and family are hard thus not allow them to attend classes regularly. Also flexible attendance system is there, which help students to attend other classes easily if they missed their schedule session.

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