



UNDERSTANDING COLLEGE DROPOUT IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT:

College dropout is a student who leaves the college before finishing their degree. Normally, the student is admitted but doesn't finish the programme. The rate of college dropout has been increasing day by day. The objectives of the study is to understand the factors contributing the college dropout and explore the approaches to reduce the dropout rates of college. This study adopted a review approach based on secondary data collection. Information was gathered from existing sources, including research articles, published reports, books, and other relevant literature related to college dropout. This review paper summarizes strategies for addressing student disengagement and reducing dropout rates in the present era. The conclusion emphasized that college student dropout can be reduced through coordinated academic, social, and financial support.

KEYWORDS:

DROP OUT, HIGHER EDUCATION, INDIA.

PAPER ACCEPTED DATE:

26th May 2026

PAPER PUBLISHED DATE:

30th May 2026

PAPER DOI NO:

10.5281/zenodo.21076008

PAPER DOI LINK:

<https://zenodo.org/records/21076008>

INTRODUCTION

In India, over 22,000 additional higher education institutions were reported in the period 2006- 2018, reaching over 40,000 (Williams, J. and Usher, A., 2022)

Number of higher education institutions by region, 55 countries, 2006-2018

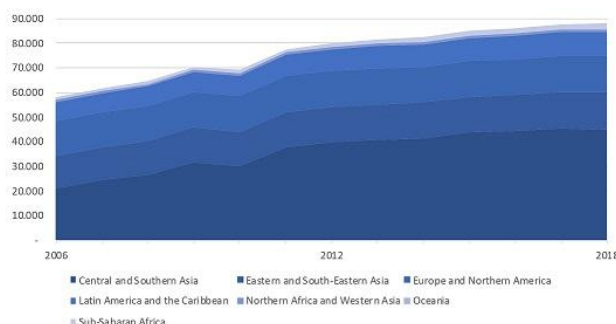


FIGURE 1

NUMBER OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS BY REGION, 2006-2018.

Note. Adapted from Higher education global data report: A contribution to the World Higher Education Conference (Working document, p. 12), by UNESCO, 2022.

According to UNESCO, Half of the global total of higher education institutions were in Central and Southern Asia in 2018 (51%), including the great majority (79%) of the

institutions added from 2006 to 2018. This was almost entirely due to India, which alone added 22,249 institutions in this period, accounting for 74% of the world's growth in institution counts (UNESCO Higher Education Global Data Report, 2022). In India, the higher education framework under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 claimed that 'there was no concept of dropping out in higher education,' which was based on the introduction of flexible academic structures such as multiple entry and exit options and the Academic Bank of Credits (National Education Policy, 2020).

Kumar et al. (2023) reported that married older girls in India had an 84% dropout rate. Paid work, substance use among boys, and gender-discriminatory parenting practices increased the risk of dropout. Momo et al. (2018) observed that low income, parents' education and employment status, single-parent household structure, and region of residence were identified as recurrent causes of school dropout in Africa and Asia. Prakash et al. (2017) also observed that bullying and poor learning environments increased the risk of school dropout, which was identified as a hidden factor in rural Karnataka, South

India.

Thus, limited studies addressed college dropout and its remedies in the present era.

FACTORS OF COLLEGE DROP OUT:

In the modern era, college dropout in India and other countries is influenced by the interaction of financial, academic, institutional, gender, psychological, and social factors.

GENDER FACTOR:

Gender norms and early marriage in particular affect women, as marriage and pregnancy are major reasons why women drop out of higher education (Solanki, 2025).

ACADEMIC FACTOR:

Leaving is more likely when students are academically unprepared, experience learning difficulties (Kumar et al., 2023). Limited institutional support (counselling, advising, mentoring) and weak relationships between teachers and students facilitate disengagement and withdrawal (Solanki, 2025).

CASTE FACTOR:

Higher dropout is linked to discrimination, limited opportunities and lower household resources through h Caste, minority status and rural residence (Kumar et al., 2023)

FAMILY FACTOR:

Students, particularly girls, are forced out of college by parental attitudes and lack of family support, such as a preference for educating sons or pressure to conform to traditional roles (Rani, 2025).

GEOGRAPHICAL FACTOR:

Rural location and distance to institutions continue to be significant barriers, especially where access and infrastructure are weak (Pradhan & Vaidya, 2025).

Psychological factor: student's Stress, loneliness, low motivation, and poor social integration are important but often under-addressed by authority (Sihare, 2024).

FINANCIAL FACTOR:

Monetary constraints is one of the most consistent causes, such as living costs, course fees, limited household wealth, and the opportunity cost of staying admitted rather than working (Maggo&Gupt, 2023). There are also attractive factors of paid work and job-related pressures, particularly when work interferes with study period and students leave for occupations(N et al., 2023).

REMEDIAL STRATEGIES FOR COLLEGE DROPOUT PREVENTION:

Dropping out of college has become an international issue in recent times with serious individual and financial consequences. This challenge can be addressed by effective solutions applied by various countries across the globe, India included.

1. Develop early warning systems that target grades

and class participation, not just database record. Prediction boosts once course attainment is evident (Von et al., 2020).

2. Combining risk detection with interpersonal support was vital, as one field experiment found that accurate alerts alone did not upgrade student performance in tertiary education(Plak et al., 2021).
3. Cultural differences, social withdrawal,fiscal limitations and linguistic difficulties are significant factors influencing dropout. Institutions implement academic support, cultural adaptation programs, and community-building initiatives to enhance student retention(Cotton et al., 2017).
4. Predictive analytics and early-warning systems can identify students at risk and trigger outreach efforts (such as texts, calls, and emails), which have been shown to improve retention at scale and at low cost(Tsai et al., 2025).
5. Counselling was also found to reduce the intention to drop out, loneliness, and difficulties in emotion regulation(Caldarelli et al., 2025). Thus, counselling services appeared to contribute to improved academic success and retention, with higher GPA growth after counselling and increased retention and graduation rates (LeViness, 2024).
6. College film screenings generally proved to be effective language learning activities when films were used in conjunction with guided activities rather than for entertainment alone. Use of films in a structured way increased self-efficacy and improved different communication proficiency. Film-based interventions resulted in 18.2% gains in listening, 22.2% gains in vocabulary and 15.3% gains in culture (Babayev, 2026).

DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research should investigate how strengthening collaborations between NGOs and universities within Indian higher education can contribute to reducing dropout rates by enhancing students' sense of belonging, emotional well-being, and academic motivation.

CONCLUSION

In the 21st century, college dropout is not only an academic problem but also a concern related to cognitive and affective factors, infrastructure, and teacher-student relationships. In India and other countries, student dropout is rarely caused by a single factor; rather, students leave higher education due to the accumulation of multiple pressures. Few undergraduate and postgraduate institutions face insufficient infrastructure, political bullying, and weak transportation facilities nowadays. Many departments do not have permanent lecturer, which impacts the instructional quality and student welfare mechanisms. Both Students and teaching faculty have also faced multifaceted challenges in current educational

landscape. Hence, coordinated psychosocial support, financial support and learning support frameworks can curtail college dropout.

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