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## *Student Dropout and Migration at Far Western University: Patterns and Causes*

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### Abstract

Article Info

**Purpose:** Student dropout and migration represent pressing challenges for higher education, particularly in Nepal's Sudurpaschim Province, impacting individual trajectories and regional development. This study investigates the patterns, driving factors, and consequences of these trends at Far Western University.

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**Methods:** A mixed-methods design was employed. The research analyzed quantitative data from university records and student surveys (N=113), complemented by qualitative insights from focus group discussions

**Results:** Findings revealed that economic factors were the predominant drivers, accounting for over 41% of dropouts and 32% of migration decisions. Traditional undergraduate programs (BA, BBS, B.Ed.) exhibited severe retention challenges, comprising nearly 34% drop-out despite high enrollments. A significant positive correlation demonstrated that increasing enrollment substantially exacerbated dropout rates. Qualitative data further underscored the influence of immediate employment opportunities, perceived academic difficulties, and personal life events such as marriage.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that addressing student attrition and mobility requires a comprehensive, strategic approach. Prioritizing curriculum relevance, robust academic advising, and specific interventions for vulnerable programs and campuses are vital to foster student persistence and mitigate talent loss in the region.

**Keywords:** Far Western University, Higher education, Students drop-out, Migration

**JEL Classification:** I23, I21, J61

### I. Introduction

Student dropout and migration have become pressing challenges in higher education globally, with significant implications for individual development, institutional performance, and national

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progress. These issues represent distinct yet interconnected dimensions of student mobility and persistence. Student dropout refers to the voluntary or involuntary withdrawal of a student from an academic program before its completion (Tinto, 1993). Globally, high dropout rates threaten the effectiveness of educational systems. For instance, international studies by the OECD highlight that failure to complete higher education is a significant waste of public and private investment, reducing an individual's lifetime earning potential and contributing to skills gaps in the workforce. Student migration refers to the movement of enrolled students from their local institution to another (internal migration) or to a foreign country (international migration) in pursuit of educational goals (Altbach & Knight, 2007). This trend, intensified by globalization and the internationalization of education, is tracked by organizations like UNESCO, which document millions of students crossing borders for study. Internationally, the drivers of student attrition are well-documented. Common academic obstacles include a lack of specialized academic support, insufficient academic preparation, and trouble adjusting to demanding courses (Tinto, 1993). One of the main causes of early higher education dropout is financial constraints, since many students find it difficult to keep up with growing living and tuition costs (Chen, 2008). Dropout rates are further caused by social adjustment, poor integration, and a lack of a supportive learning environment, particularly for students from rural and marginalized communities (Braxton et al., 2011).

Particularly in remote regions of Nepal such as the Sudurpaschim Province (formerly Far-Western Province), these issues are even more pronounced due to geographical, economic, and infrastructural disparities. Despite efforts to expand access to higher education, dropout rates among university students remain persistently high. Students mostly leave their study due to failure in early semesters, financial difficulties, marriage, and geographical challenges. The increasing trend of student migration, both internal and international, is a major problem not only in Sudurpaschim Province but also all over the nation. Students from Far-Western Nepal often migrate to urban centers or abroad in search of better educational quality, diverse academic programs, and improved career opportunities. The migration of students reflects systemic issues such as limited local opportunities and perceived quality gaps in education (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The increasing outreach programs and advertisement of foreign universities have intensified student mobility, making it a significant dimension of both global migration and local brain drain (OECD, 2022). The phenomenon of educational migration has serious consequences in Nepal and developing countries.

On one hand, it opens new pathways for personal growth and global engagement; on the other, it deprives local institutions of talented students, affecting their academic and economic sustainability. Moreover, this movement often reflects structural inequalities and policy gaps within the national education system (Khadka, 2016). While the global drivers of dropout and migration are understood, and their relevance in the Nepali context is asserted, evidence-based data and analysis on the combined dynamics of student dropout and migration in Nepal's Far-Western universities are scarce. Specific data linking institutional performance indicators (like enrollment figures from the University Grants Commission, UGC, Nepal) to localized drivers of attrition and mobility are largely missing. This lack of empirical insight makes it difficult for regional institutions to design targeted, effective retention and development strategies.

In this context, the present study aims to investigate the two critical issues of student dropout and migration at Far-Western University, a government university focusing primarily on students from rural and underprivileged backgrounds. The study seeks to fill the empirical gap by exploring the patterns, driving factors, and consequences of both dropout and migration, offering evidence-based recommendations to mitigate these challenges and strengthen institutional retention and regional development.

### **Problem Statement**

Higher education institutions in Nepal, particularly in underdeveloped regions such as the Sudurpaschim Province, face increasing challenges related to student dropout and migration.

Despite significant progress in improving access to higher education, many students enrolled at institutions like Far Western University discontinue their studies before graduation, a growing trend that undermines institutional performance and national goals for inclusive education (Ministry of Education, 2022). Student attrition is driven by a complex interplay of factors, strongly informed by established theoretical frameworks. The issue of academic and social withdrawal is primarily explained by Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (Tinto, 1993), which posits that students who fail to achieve sufficient academic and social integration due to under-preparedness, lack of support, or limited faculty engagement are likely to withdraw. Students from rural and marginalized communities also experience cultural adjustment difficulties and mental health challenges due to the absence of effective mentorship and peer support (Adhikari & Thapa, 2025). Simultaneously, the role of financial pressure, such as rising costs and inadequate aid, is best understood through Human Capital Theory, which views education as an investment; when the perceived costs (financial and opportunity) outweigh the expected future returns, students make the rational economic decision to exit the system to prioritize employment (Madai et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the challenge of student migration, both internal and international, is accelerated by a global landscape that values education for its potential returns. Although public universities in Nepal offer affordable education, many students choose to study abroad, citing better academic quality, infrastructure, and employment prospects (Rai, 2023), a trend aligning with Neoclassical Economic Theory, where students move to areas (urban centers or foreign countries) that offer better prospects to maximize their future utility (Altbach & Knight, 2007). This migration fuels a growing "brain drain" in regions like the Far West (Awale, 2024). While the national prevalence of these issues is acknowledged, a distinct lack of localized, empirical research exists that investigates the combined dynamics of dropout and migration specifically within the context of Far Western University's regional constraints and diverse program types.

Past studies have not adequately addressed the program-wise variation in attrition or the interplay between program nature and the likelihood of mobility. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the causes and consequences of student dropout and migration in Far Western University, specifically addressing the issues: What are the factors that affect students' migration and dropout from the constituent campuses of Far Western University? What is the condition of program-wise and overall dropout of students from the constituent campuses of Far Western University? What is the position of students' migration from the constituent campuses of Far Western University? and Does the nature of programs affect students' dropout and migration? The study's primary goal is to investigate the present situation and major causes of students' dropout and migration from the constituent campuses of Far Western University.

## **II. Reviews**

### **Students Dropout and Migration in Higher Education: The Nepali Context**

Student dropout in Nepalese higher education institutions has been a persistent concern, particularly in public universities serving rural and underdeveloped regions such as the Far-Western Province. Several studies have highlighted the multifaceted nature of dropout, emphasizing financial hardship, academic challenges, and socio-cultural factors as primary contributors (Madai et al., 2025; Adhikari & Thapa, 2025).

Financial difficulties remain the most cited reason for dropout in Nepal. Limited scholarship opportunities, increasing tuition fees, and the high cost of living force many students, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, to discontinue their education prematurely (Madai et al., 2025). These economic pressures are often compounded by the need for students to support their families, leading to the prioritization of work over study (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Academic preparedness also significantly impacts student retention. Many students entering

higher education from rural areas face challenges in adapting to the rigorous academic environment, lacking the foundational skills necessary to succeed (Tinto, 1993). The scarcity of adequate academic support services, such as tutoring and counseling, further exacerbates dropout risks (Adhikari & Thapa, 2025).

Although the Government of Nepal has introduced various retention policies, including scholarship programs and support services, these measures have yet to fully address the dropout problem, particularly in remote areas (Ministry of Education, 2022). Therefore, further research focusing on region-specific factors influencing dropout is necessary to design effective interventions.

Student migration has become a prominent feature of Nepal's higher education landscape, with increasing numbers of students seeking educational opportunities abroad despite the availability of local universities. This trend is particularly evident among students from economically disadvantaged and remote regions, including the Sudurpaschim Province (Adhikari & Thapa, 2025).

Regional disparities also influence migration patterns. Students from Far Western Nepal face more acute challenges such as inadequate access to quality education and financial constraints, which increase their likelihood of migrating for higher education (Adhikari & Thapa, 2025). This internal and international migration affects not only the demographic composition of universities like Far Western University but also the socio-economic development of such regions.

While student migration can facilitate global knowledge exchange and individual advancement, unchecked outflows pose risks to national development by weakening the capacity of local institutions and exacerbating regional inequalities (UNESCO IESALC, 2025). Thus, understanding the complex motivations and consequences of student migration is vital for designing policies that balance educational aspirations with sustainable national growth.

### **Empirical Reviews**

Troelsen and Laursen (2014) studied the variables affecting dropout rates in Denmark. Two theories, in their opinion, have an impact on dropout rates. The first theory holds that parental education and socioeconomic status have an impact on dropout rates. According to the second theory, student dropouts are a result of Danish government policies on education, which force students to switch universities, enroll in different study programs, or decide not to pursue their education at all. Since the variables driving dropout students vary across countries, choosing context-specific variables is one of the most important steps in predicting attrition.

Similarly, Chen et al. (2018) investigated dropout predictions in the US as well. Chen's study employed data from high school, demographics, college enrollment, and information per semester to predict dropout. The rationale behind using these factors in predictions is not made explicit; nonetheless, the chosen factors strongly influence student dropout rates, according to the analysis's findings.

Likewise, Mouton et al. (2020) reported that a variety of factors affect German student dropout rates. They found that dropout is usually caused by a confluence of many causes, and they utilized latent class analysis to identify dropping-out students. Based on socioeconomic considerations, academic achievement, academic self-concept, and desire to drop out, their results demonstrate the reasons students exit programs or institutions. In a contrasting context, Ortiz-Lozano et al. (2020) assessed the factors influencing student dropouts in Spain based on socio-demographic and academic criteria. The research findings indicate that this variable has a significant impact, yet the rationale for the selection of this variable is not entirely evident.

In terms of migration studies, the current body of literature offers significant knowledge about migration patterns and factors that affect students in different settings. The research

conducted by Acharya (2012), McGill (2013), Kharel (2022), and Deshmukh and Sankpal (2022) examines the topics of international student migration, Nepalese student migration to Japan, and the factors that influence Indian student migration, respectively.

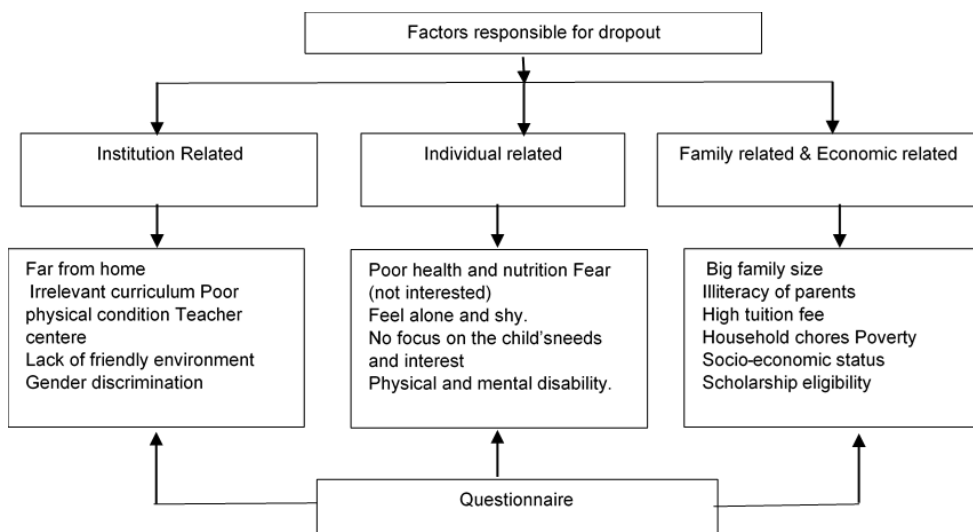
In contrast to the extensive international literature, there is a clear lack of study on student migration at higher education institutions, particularly in Far Western University. The international and national studies reviewed above, while establishing key influencing factors like socioeconomic status, academic integration, and policy context, do not specifically examine the distinct dynamics, obstacles, and combined factors that contribute to both student dropout and migration in the unique, resource-constrained setting of Far Western University. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the complex and unique elements that influence migration decisions in the local area is essential to developing precise plans and policies that may effectively retain local talent and handle the specific issues encountered by students in this region. Hence, the intended investigation seeks to fill this void in research by offering a detailed examination of the student movement in the distinct context of Far Western University, thereby giving valuable perspectives to the wider discussion on student mobility and contributing evidence-based strategies for regional talent retention.

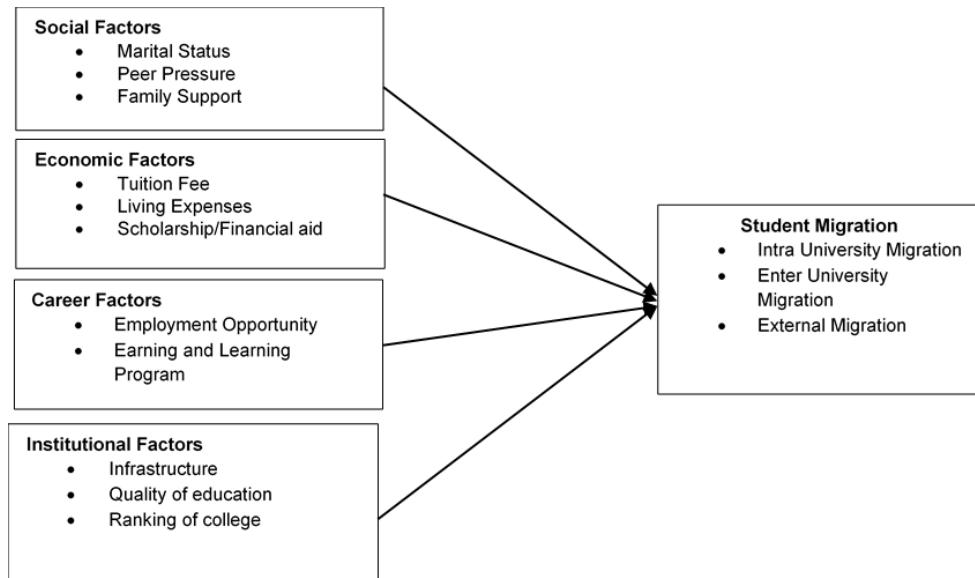
### Conceptual Framework

According to the relevant research studies, there are a few pushing and pulling factors that cause students to leave college and university. These can be divided into categories such as family background, socioeconomic status, types of education, instruction medium, distance between the campus and the student's home and surroundings, teaching methodology, interest/need, and health of the student, among others. These are the factors that are connected to student enrolment, achievement, repetition, irregularities, and dropout rates. To improve students' access to and achievement in their education from the above-mentioned variables, interventions must be undertaken in these areas.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Understanding of Student Dropout.*



**Figure 2***Conceptual Understanding of Student's Migration*

### III. Methodology

This section outlines the methodological approach adopted for the study titled Student Dropout and Migration in Far Western University. It includes the research design, study population and sample, sources and tools of data collection, and data analysis procedures.

#### Research Design

This study employed descriptive and analytical research designs. The descriptive design was used to assess the situation of dropout and migration through secondary data collected from the university's official records. It enabled a quantitative understanding of the scope and patterns of student withdrawal and outward migration over recent academic years.

In line with this design, the analytical component focused on the examination of underlying factors influencing students' decisions to drop out or migrate. For this purpose, primary data collected through a structured questionnaire were analyzed using relevant statistical tools, such as frequency distribution, mean, median, standard deviation, and cross-tabulation. The study applied inferential statistical tools specifically, Correlation and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Regression to examine the strength of relationships and the effects of independent variables on dropout, wherever applicable. This dual approach ensured that both the extent (what is happening) and causes (why it is happening) of dropout and migration were effectively addressed.

#### Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of all the students who had dropped out of their academic programs or had migrated for educational purposes. A total of 2,483 students were traced out but only 63 dropout students and 50 migrated students responded. Therefore, the sample size of this study was 113 students (N=113).

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to identify and survey students who had either:

- Discontinued their studies within the past three academic years, or
- Migrated abroad or to other institutions for higher education during the same period.

This technique was most appropriate because the target population (dropout and migrated students) is specific, difficult to access, and non-randomly distributed. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to deliberately select and reach information-rich cases identified through faculty records, administrative sources, and informal alumni tracking systems. Data were gathered from students identified through these tracking systems.

### **Data Sources and Tools**

Primary data were collected through a standardized, structured questionnaire administered to dropout and migrated students. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions related to:

1. Personal and academic background
2. Financial conditions
3. Institutional experiences
4. Motivations for migration or dropout
5. Perceptions of quality and support services

Efforts were made to reach students through in-person contact, phone calls, and online platforms (e.g., email, Messenger, WhatsApp) to ensure inclusivity and geographic coverage.

Similarly, secondary data were obtained from:

1. Official student enrollment and examination records of each constituent campus
2. Annual reports from the university's academic section and planning division
3. Internal dropout and transfer registers maintained by campus administrators

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) to summarize the demographic and academic profiles of respondents and to identify the prevalence of dropout and migration. Qualitative responses from open-ended questions were analyzed thematically to capture nuanced perspectives on academic dissatisfaction, cultural challenges, and financial constraints. Furthermore, inferential tools (Correlation and OLS Regression) were applied wherever applicable to test the relationships between key variables.

## **IV. Results and Discussion**

This section presents and examines the data gathered in response through focus group discussion and secondary data based on objectives outlined earlier. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, it provides a detailed account of student dropout and migration patterns across Far Western University's constituent campuses, as well as the underlying factors shaping these trends. The discussion begins with descriptive statistics drawn from institutional records and survey responses, highlighting the scale and nature of dropout and migration. It then moves toward exploring associations between different variables and the identified patterns, applying inferential analysis where relevant. To complement the statistical findings, thematic insights from focus group discussions are also incorporated, offering deeper context and interpretation of the observed outcomes.



**Table 1***Condition of Students Enrollment and Dropout of Constituent Colleges of Far Western University*

Program	Dropout %	Enrollment %	Dropout Enrollment Ratio
B.Ed.	26.86	26.59	31.70
BA	31.37	25.16	39.13
BALLB	0.44	1.69	8.21
BBA	1.97	4.22	14.67
BBS	29.04	28.14	32.38
B.Sc.	0.64	1.39	14.55
B.Sc. CSIT	0.48	1.72	8.82
M.Ed.	1.81	2.35	24.19
MA	4.87	5.83	26.25
MBA	0.32	0.35	28.57
MBS	2.17	2.57	26.60

*Note.*Field Survey, 2025

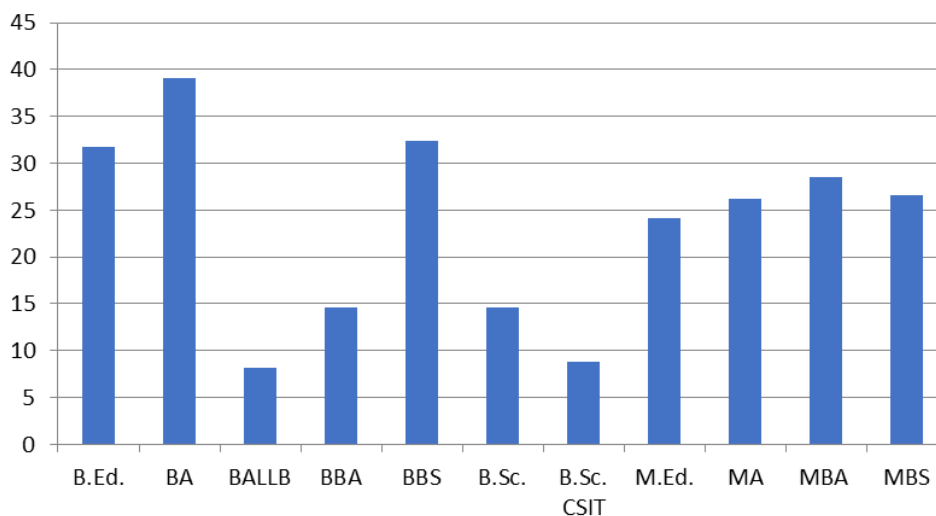
The table shows a comparative analysis of student dropout rates, enrollment proportions, and dropout-to-enrollment ratios across various academic programs. Among the undergraduate programs, BA (Bachelor of Arts) exhibits the highest dropout percentage at 31.37%, followed by BBS (29.04%) and B.Ed. (26.86%), indicating a significant attrition problem in general and education-focused disciplines. These programs also have high enrollment percentages, suggesting that while they attract a considerable number of students, a substantial proportion fail to complete their studies. Their dropout-to-enrollment ratios 39.13% (BA), 32.38% (BBS), and 31.70% (B.Ed.) reflect serious retention challenges.

In contrast, professional and technical programs such as BALLB, BBA, B.Sc., and B.Sc. CSIT show remarkably low dropout rates (below 2%), despite their relatively lower enrollment shares. This suggests a stronger commitment or possibly better support structures in these programs, leading to improved student retention. For instance, BALLB has a dropout rate of only 0.44% with a dropout-enrollment ratio of 8.21%, indicating high persistence among enrolled students.

At the postgraduate level, MA and MBS programs have slightly higher dropout rates (4.87% and 2.17%, respectively), whereas MBA and M.Ed. maintain very low dropout figures (0.32% and 1.81%, respectively). However, interestingly, even with low dropout percentages, the dropout-to-enrollment ratios in some postgraduate programs like MBA (28.57%) and M.Ed. (24.19%) remain notable, possibly due to small enrollment numbers magnifying the impact of individual dropouts.

Overall, the data suggests that traditional and general education programs face higher dropout concerns, whereas professional, technical, and management-oriented programs perform better in student retention. This could imply differences in academic engagement, career prospects, or program delivery between disciplines.



**Figure 2***Condition of Enrollment to Dropout Ratio of Constituent Campuses of Far Western University*

The bar-diagram clearly depicts the Dropout Enrollment Ratio (DER), which, as the ratio of dropouts to enrollment, represents the dropout risk in a program (A higher ratio indicates higher dropout risk).

The data reveals that the BA program stands out with the highest DER, estimated at approximately 39.13. This indicates the highest dropout risk, suggesting the program experiences the most dropouts relative to its enrollment. Close behind are BBS and B.Ed., both exhibiting high DERs around 32.38 and 31.70, respectively. These three programs demonstrate the most challenging scenarios for student persistence, possibly reflecting a disconnect between student preparedness/expectations and program demands, or significant external pressures like economic issues.

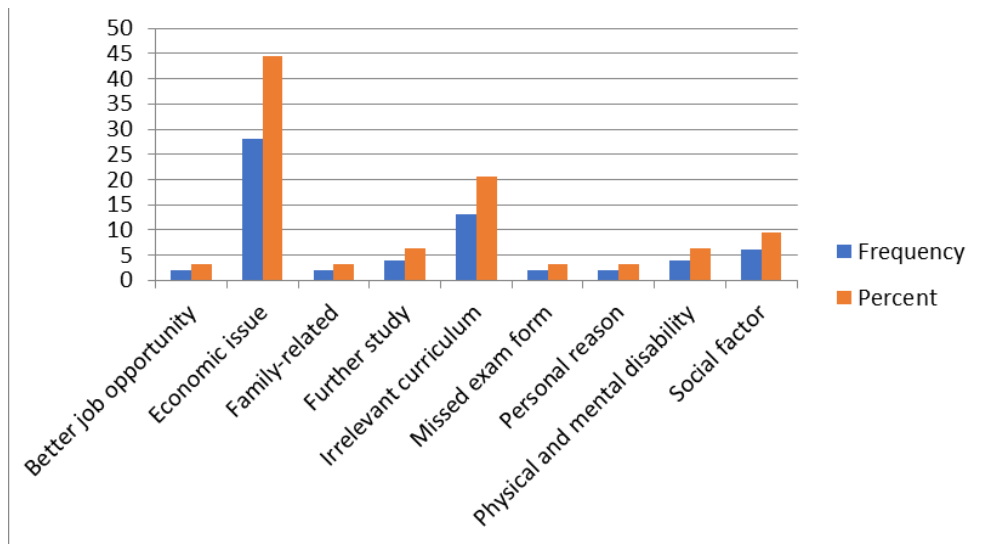
In stark contrast, BALLB and B.Sc. CSIT present the most successful persistence scenarios. BALLB records the lowest ratio at approximately 8.21, closely followed by B.Sc. CSIT at about 8.82. These critically low DERs suggest that these programs face the fewest issues with student attrition, with a large number of persisting enrollments per dropout compared to other programs. This could point to areas of strong commitment, effective program design, or strong alignment between student expectations and program outcomes.

The postgraduate programs MBA (around 28.57), MBS (around 26.60), MA (approximately 26.25), and M.Ed. (around 24.19) collectively show a robust mid-to-high range of DERs. While they do not reach the low-risk performance of BALLB or B.Sc. CSIT, their ratios are generally robust for postgraduate studies where students are generally expected to be more committed. M.Ed. appears to have the most favorable persistence among the Master's programs. Lastly, BBA and B.Sc. display moderate DERs, around 14.67 and 14.55 respectively. While not as high-risk as BA, BBS, or B.Ed., their performance indicates room for improvement in student persistence when compared to the lowest-risk programs.

In summary, the chart, when interpreted as the Dropout Enrollment Ratio, reveals clear leaders in persistence (BALLB, B.Sc. CSIT), programs facing the most significant dropout challenges (BA, BBS, B.Ed.), and a strong, consistent performance among postgraduate studies.

**Table 2***Factors Influencing Students Dropouts*

Reasons of student dropout	Frequency	Percent
Better job opportunity	2	3.2
Economic issue	28	44.5
Family-related	2	3.2
Further study	4	6.3
Irrelevant curriculum	13	20.6
Missed exam form	2	3.2
Personal reason	2	3.2
Physical and mental disability	4	6.3
Social factor	6	9.5
Total	63	100

*Note.* Field Survey, 2025**Figure 3***Factors Influencing Student Dropouts of Constituents Campuses of Far Western University*

The bar chart visually represents the causes of student dropouts based on the survey responses of 63 dropout students (N=63), illustrating both the absolute Frequency and the corresponding Percent for each identified reason.

Unmistakably, “Economic issue” stands out as the overwhelming primary cause of student dropouts, reported by 28 students and accounting for 44.5% of all cases. This visual dominance clearly indicates that financial challenges are the most significant barrier to students completing their education.

Similarly, the second most prominent cause is “Irrelevant curriculum”, reported by 13 students,

accounting for 20.6% of dropouts. This visually emphasizes the importance of curriculum relevance in student retention. Following these two major causes, "Social factor" emerges as the third most significant, reported by 6 students, contributing 9.5% of dropouts.

Other reasons are visually represented by smaller bars, indicating their lesser but still present impact. "Further study" and "Physical and mental disability" have similarly sized bars, each reported by 4 students and accounting for approximately 6.3% of dropouts. The smallest bars belong to categories such as "Better job opportunity," "Family-related," "Missed exam form," and "Personal reason," each reported by 2 students (or 3.2%).

Overall, the bar chart effectively communicates the hierarchy of dropout causes, visually reinforcing that economic issues are the most critical factor, followed by concerns about curriculum relevance, while other factors play more minor, individual roles.

**Table 3**

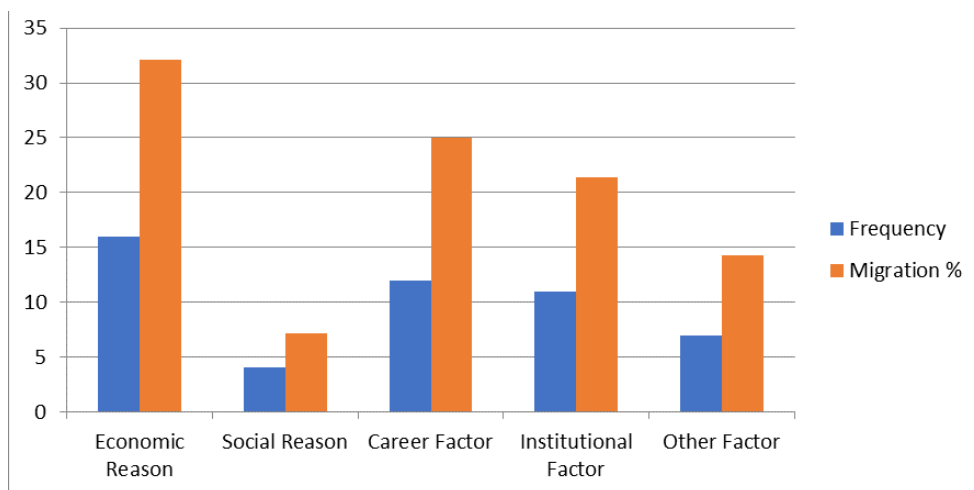
*Factors Influencing Student Migration*

Reason for Migration	Frequency	Migration %
Economic Reason	16	32.14
Social Reason	4	7.14
Career Factor	12	25
Institutional Factor	11	21.43
Other Factor	7	14.29
Total	50	100

*Note.* Field Survey, 2025

**Figure 4**

*Factors Influencing Student Migration*



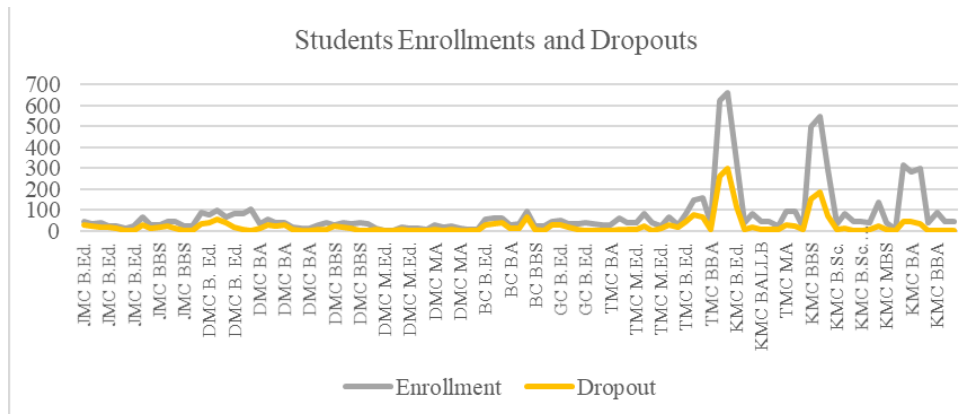
The bar diagram effectively visualizes the factors influencing student migration, based on the responses of 50 migrated students (N=50). The visualization includes both the absolute Frequency and the corresponding Migration %.

The most prominent factor driving student migration is “Economic Reason,” reported by 16 students and accounting for 32.14%. This visually underscores that financial considerations are the primary force behind students choosing to migrate. Following economic reasons, “Career Factor” is the second most influential, reported by 12 students at 25%. Similarly, “Institutional Factor” emerges as the third most considerable influence, reported by 11 students and reaching 21.43%. This indicates that aspects pertaining to the educational institutions themselves play a substantial role in students’ decisions to migrate.

The category of “Other Factor” was cited by 7 students (14.29%). In contrast, “Social Reason” is visibly the least impactful factor, reported by only 4 students, contributing only 7.14% of migration decisions among the listed categories.

**Figure 5**

*Students Enrollments and Dropout of Constituent Campuses of Far Western University*



The graph reveals a concerning trends dropout numbers and enrollments, especially in larger campuses like Kailali Multiple Campus and Tikapur Multiple Campus. While overall student engagement is growing in some areas, the high dropout rates particularly in Kailali highlight urgent needs for improved student support systems, academic counseling, and retention strategies. The relatively stable performance of smaller campuses may offer models for better management or reflect different local dynamics worth exploring further.

**Table 4**

*Correlation between Enrollment and Dropout of the student at Far Western University*

Semester	Enrollment	Dropout	
1	-0.0622	-0.2079	Semester
	1	0.9269	Enrollment
		1	Dropout

*Note.* Correlation coefficients, using the observations 1 – 105, 5% critical value (two-tailed) = 0.1918 for n = 105

The correlation matrix presents the relationships among three variables: semester, enrollment, and dropout, based on 105 observations. The correlation between semester and dropout is -0.2079, this implies that as the semester goes up the dropout of the students decreases. It means in the earlier semester the dropout of the student is high as the semester goes up the dropout decreases. This suggests that dropout rates have declined over time, possibly

due to improved institutional practices or student retention efforts. The correlation between semester and Enrollments -0.0622, which is weak and not statistically significant, implying that enrollment numbers have remained relatively stable over time. The strongest correlation is observed between Enrollment and Dropout, with a value of 0.9269, indicating a very strong positive relationship. This means that as enrollment increases, dropout numbers also rise substantially, highlighting potential challenges in accommodating and supporting a growing student population. Overall, the data reveals that while time is associated with a decline in dropout, rising enrollments are closely linked to increased dropout rates, underscoring the need for strategies to manage larger student bodies effectively.

**Table 5**

*Effect of Program, Enrollment and Semester on Dropout*

Models	Constant	Enrollment	Program	Semester	Adj. R2
Model 1	8229.91 (0.0001)	0.347 (0.0001)	-0.422 (0.4052)	-3.961 (0.0001)	0.879
Model 2	11050.8 (0.0358)		-2.954 (0.0344)	-5.299 (0.0365)	0.066
Model 3	8263.59 (0.000)	0.349 (0.000)		-3.978 (0.000)	0.879
Model 4	-0.287794 (0.932)	0.351 (0.000)	-0.472900 (0.390)		0.857

*Note.* The student dropout is dependent variable and enrollment of the student, programs and semesters are independent variables.

The OLS regression model analyzes the factors influencing student dropout using 105 observations, with dropout as the dependent variable and enrollment, program, and semester as predictors. The results show that enrollment has a statistically significant and positive effect on dropout, meaning that as more students enroll, dropout numbers also tend to rise. Specifically, for every additional student enrolled, dropout increases by approximately 0.35 students, suggesting that growing student numbers may be putting pressure on available resources or institutional capacity. Conversely, the semester variable has a significant negative effect, indicating that dropout rates are decreasing over time as the semester goes higher dropout decreases. The program variable does not show a significant impact, implying that the type of academic program does not meaningfully affect dropout rates. With an R-squared value while incorporating enrollment as explaining variable is more than 80 percent, the model explains more than 80 percent regarding the student dropout. Whereas, excluding the enrollment it significantly decreases, this implies that the enrollment is a significant variable to explain the dropout of the student, highlighting its strong predictive ability. Additionally, the non-linearity test confirms that a linear model is appropriate for this data. Overall, the analysis reveals that while enrollments are increasing, institutions may need to strengthen student support systems to reduce the corresponding rise in dropouts.

The analysis clearly establishes that financial hardship (economic issues) is the dominant cause for both student dropout (44.5%) and migration (32.14%) at Far Western University. This is closely followed by issues of irrelevant curriculum (20.6% for dropout) and career/institutional factors (25% and 21.43% for migration). The institutional data reveals a critical dropout crisis in general programs (BA, BBS, B.Ed.) which exhibit the highest Dropout Enrollment Ratios, in stark contrast to the strong persistence in professional programs (BALLB, B.Sc. CSIT). Furthermore, the strong positive correlation between enrollment and dropout ( $r=0.9269$ ) and the significant OLS regression coefficient for enrollment confirm that institutional capacity is being strained by growing student numbers, with the highest dropout

risk occurring in the initial semesters. These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted financial aid, improved program relevance, and strengthened early-semester support systems to manage the corresponding rise in attrition.

The study identifies a critical concentration of retention issues in traditional undergraduate programs, with BA, BBS, and B.Ed. collectively accounting for nearly 87% of all dropouts. These streams represent 80% of total enrollment. The BA (39%), BBS (32%), and B.Ed. (31%) programs exhibit the highest Dropout-to-Enrollment Ratios (DERs), signifying the most challenging student persistence scenarios. Conversely, programs like BALLB and B.Sc. CSIT show the lowest DERs (around 8%-9%) and remarkably low absolute dropout rates (below 2%). "Economic issue" is the overwhelming primary cause of student dropout, accounting for 41.3% of cases. For migration, "Economic Reason" is the most prominent factor (32.14%), followed by "Career Factor" (25%) and "Institutional Factor" (21.43%). "Irrelevant curriculum" is the second most significant reason for dropout (20.6%), followed by "Social factor" (9.5%). Key stakeholder discussions confirmed that attrition is primarily driven by the pursuit of immediate employment or superior economic opportunities abroad, compounded by internal academic challenges (e.g., semester system struggles) and personal life events (e.g., marriage).

### **Key Stakeholder Perspectives on Student Dropout and Migration at Far Western University's Constituent Colleges**

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with key stakeholders across various constituent colleges of Far Western University to gather qualitative insights into the underlying causes of student dropout and migration, illuminating several critical, often interconnected, factors. Qualitative data were collected through four separate FGDs, one at each of the four main constituent colleges, with participants (N=8–10 per group) selected via purposive sampling, including students, faculty, and administrators. The sessions, held on the college premises and lasting 60 to 90 minutes, were conducted entirely in Nepali to facilitate natural and in-depth expression. The analysis employed Thematic Analysis, involving repeated transcript reading, initial coding, and grouping similar ideas; member checking was also used to ensure fairness.

Thematic findings revealed that Economic Pressures were the foundational barrier to persistence, pushing students to seek immediate income ("The biggest problem is money. Students here often need to earn for their families, not just for fees. When a paying job appears, the degree becomes secondary."). Closely related were Employment Pull Factors, where specific opportunities, especially government jobs or migration overseas, drew students away ("Many leave right after passing the written police or army exams. They see guaranteed income now as better than a degree in five years. The chance to go to Korea or the Gulf is also a huge magnet for migration."). Academic Challenges were also significant, with students citing struggles with the semester system and lack of confidence ("A lot of students just don't feel ready for the semester system; the pressure of continuous assessment is too much. They leave because they believed they could not pass the exams."). Finally, Social and Personal Circumstances, such as marriage for female students, acted as decisive withdrawal factors ("For many female students, marriage is a point of withdrawal. The family responsibilities and traditional expectations often mean they cannot continue attending classes or studying").

### **Discussion**

The analysis reveals that economic factors are the predominant drivers of both student dropout and migration, accounting for over 41% of dropouts and 32% of migrations. The quantitative evidence that "Economic issue" is the primary cause of dropout and migration is strongly aligned with national literature. This finding reinforces arguments that financial hardship, limited scholarships, and the high cost of living are primary reasons for student attrition and outward mobility in Nepal (Madai, Chand, Sapkota, and Pant, 2025; Adhikari and Thapa, 2025; Ministry of Education, 2022). This is further reinforced by qualitative findings

confirming that the pursuit of immediate employment or superior economic opportunities abroad often overrides academic commitment.

A critical finding indicates severe retention challenges in traditional undergraduate programs (BA, BBS, B.Ed.). Despite attracting 80% of enrollments, these programs collectively represent nearly 87% of all dropouts and suffer the highest dropout-to-enrollment ratios (31%–39%). In contrast, professional programs show lower attrition. Crucially, a very strong positive correlation (0.9269) between student enrollment and dropout numbers confirms that increased enrollment significantly leads to more dropouts, suggesting a strain on institutional capacity. Conversely, while dropout rates decrease as semesters progress, the overall impact of program type on dropout is not statistically significant in the regression model when enrollment is considered.

Secondary causes of dropout include “Irrelevant curriculum” (20.6%) and “Social factor” (9.5%). These findings resonate with concerns about academic preparedness (Tinto, 1993; Adhikari and Thapa, 2025) and socio-cultural factors (Madai et al., 2025; Rai, 2023). Likewise, for migration, “Career Factor” (25%) and “Institutional Factor” (21.43%) are significant. This is consistent with students seeking better prospects and quality abroad due to perceived gaps in local offerings (Madai et al., 2025; Acharya, 2012; Deshmukh & Sankpal, 2022). The increasing outward mobility fuels concerns about “brain drain” (Awale, 2024), exacerbated by regional disparities (Adhikari & Thapa, 2025).

Furthermore, larger campuses, such as Kailali Multiple Campus, show particular vulnerability to high dropout trends. The finding that increased enrollment exacerbates dropout rates highlights the issue of institutional capacity strain, a challenge often cited in contexts of rapid educational expansion in Nepal (Ministry of Education, 2022). In essence, financial vulnerability profoundly impacts student persistence and mobility, while the rapid growth in traditional program enrollments appears to exacerbate dropout rates.

To mitigate these challenges, the university must implement targeted interventions: establishing needs-based financial aid specifically for high-risk BA, BBS, and B.Ed. students; addressing the irrelevance of curriculum by integrating market-relevant skills; and immediately strengthening institutional capacity through enhanced support services and academic counseling during the high-risk initial semesters at campuses like Kailali Multiple Campus.

## **V. Conclusion and Implications**

This study utilized a combined statistical and qualitative approach to reveal the severe and complex retention crisis facing Far Western University. Financial hardship is confirmed as the most decisive factor driving both student withdrawal and outward migration, reflecting a widespread national trend where economic pressures force students to abandon their studies for immediate work or foreign opportunities.

The core of the institutional challenge lies in the traditional undergraduate programs (BA, BBS, and B.Ed.). Although these streams dominate enrollment, they exhibit the highest dropout rates, underscoring systemic weaknesses in student support and engagement. This retention crisis is intensified by growing enrollment, which strains existing university resources and increases the overall risk of attrition. Beyond financial issues, academic relevance (e.g., “irrelevant curriculum”) and inadequate support in early semesters are also significant contributors to attrition.

The combined effect of student dropout and outward migration represents a profound loss of regional human capital, hindering economic development and straining the university's capacity.

Addressing these challenges requires immediate and prioritized action. First, to mitigate the primary economic barrier, the university must implement needs-based financial aid and scholarship programs, specifically prioritizing students in the high-attrition, high-enrollment BA, BBS, and B.Ed. programs.



Second, focusing on institutional capacity and the highest-risk period, the university needs to strengthen capacity and allocate resources to vulnerable, large-volume campuses like Kailali Multiple Campus. This must include concentrating efforts on early-semester academic counseling and psychosocial support systems to address the highest attrition risk.

Third, to improve relevance and counter outward migration, the university should re-evaluate the curriculum to integrate market-relevant skills, thereby addressing the “irrelevant curriculum” factor and improving graduate employability.

For university administration, the primary focus must be on prioritizing financial aid and scholarships to combat economic drivers of dropout and migration. Strategic enrollment management is crucial to align student intake with resources, preventing strained capacity from increasing attrition. Targeted support, including enhanced academic advising and curriculum relevance, is vital for traditional undergraduate programs and vulnerable campuses. Policymakers should consider increasing funding for higher education scholarships and developing policies to improve local employment opportunities and educational quality, thereby mitigating outward student migration and brain drain. Students are encouraged to thoroughly assess financial preparedness and proactively utilize available academic and personal support services. Finally, the study highlights avenues for future research, suggesting deeper qualitative and longitudinal studies to track intervention effectiveness and explore specific dropout factors in more detail.

This study provides foundational evidence but is limited by its sample size and regional scope. Future research should expand the study’s breadth to include comparative analysis with technical institutions and analyze long-term career outcomes to further inform national human capital policy.

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