# CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS TO DROPPING OUT OF SVAY RIENG UNIVERSITY, CAMBODIA

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research was to determine causes and solutions on the decision to dropping out of Svay Rieng University, Cambodia. The study was employed a quantitative approach along with questionnaire used to collect primary data from 144 dropout students. A 5-point interval Likert scale was measured the respondents' perception on the major reasons driving university dropout at the respective campus under study. Six factors formulated in the questionnaire were reasons for dropout according to personal students, students' finance, student's study plan, family situation, university, and teachers. Reliability and validity tests of the measures from the questionnaire ware conducted to explore hidden dimensions of collected data prior to investigating statistically significant major factors driving university dropout. Mean and standard deviation techniques were applied to describe the perceptions of respondents of various reasons with the help of SPSS software. The results of the analysis showed that the reasons for decision to drop out of university consisted of low ability of foreign language, obligation to support families, difficulty in setting specific educational goals, low family income, improper maintenance of university infrastructure, and misapply theory to real practice. Recommendations for preventing the university dropout were strengthening foreign language skills, increasing well communication and counseling with students and families, improving university infrastructure, teaching qualifications, and connecting theory with real practice.
Keyword: Dropout, Higher Educational Institute

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In spite of the fact that the Svay Rieng University makes lots of effort to increase educational quality, there was still high dropout rate among students' enrollment. The report of the Svay Rieng University indicated that there were 1,266 students who enrolled in the first academic year 2019-2020 (SRU annual report 2019-2022). The report also revealed that the dropout rate was 30.7 percent (1,400 students) in second year and another 26.1 percent in third year. Noting the dropout rate was almost 50 percent while comparing the total number of students remaining in the third year to the number of students enrolled in the first year. As a result, this huge dropout indicates unemployment, lack of skills for the labor market in the province and leading to poverty. It also makes difficult for the country to develop in line with the government's vision.

Table 01: Number of students and dropouts from academic year 2019-2020 to 2021-2022

| Faculties | Year 1 | Year 2 | | Year 3 | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Students | Dropouts | Percent | Dropouts | Percent | Percent |
| Business Management | 604 | 191 | 31.6 | 76 | 18.4 | 44.2 |
| Agriculture | 48 | 17 | 35.4 | 9 | 29.0 | 54.2 |

| | 101 | 30 | 29.7 | 32 | 45.1 | 61.4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| IT | 101 | 30 | 29.7 | 32 | 45.1 | 61.4 |
| Social Science | 470 | 124 | 26.4 | 128 | 37.0 | 53.6 |
| Human Science | 43 | 19 | 44.2 | 3 | 12.5 | 51.2 |
| Total | 1266 | 381 | 30.7 | 248 | 26.1 | 49.7 |

Source: Secondary data

The reasons why the high rate of dropout in Svay Rieng University has still been unclear. Some existing informal studies investigate some reasons such as absenteeism, lack of parents' involvement, family structure and practice, but these studies do not focus broadly on socio-economic status of students, school and community which influence on dropout. Therefore, this present study aims to describe more clearly into the root causes of dropout. Geographically, Svay Rieng province relies on the ability of human resources to contribute to the province's economic growth. In fact, higher education institutions are considered as a training ground for careers, business and socio-economic development (Srairi, 2021). Successful graduates have a greater chance of success than those who do not. On the contrary, dropouts are a national debt and an obstacle to development. Studying dropout is not a new issue, but ignoring dropout is a major risk that hinders the government's vision and strategy. Therefore, research on causes and solutions for students dropping out of Svay Rieng University is carried out to contribute to solving human resource issue towards increasing knowledge and expanding opportunities with quality and efficiency.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the research was to determine causes and solutions on the decision to dropping out of Svay Rieng University, Cambodia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Definition

The term "dropout" is defined differently by many scholars and is based on aspects of use from elementary to higher education. On the other hand, the word dropout also has different meanings depending on the education system of the universities. According to Krstic et al., 2017, dropout refers to students who have left the education system without completing the school year in which they started, ie. those who are not eligible for the final degree for the school year. It is officially announced that they had dropped out of school. In addition, Pop at al., 2017 indicates that the term dropout describes the status of a student who has enrolled in an educational institution and left without a degree. In particular, Perry et al., 2008 identifies three factors of student dropout including institutional factor where students are unable to complete the program requirements. Second, student factor as a result of failing subjects in the curriculum and finally, factor of students leaving under various circumstances, regardless of the required curriculum. Cabrera et al., 2006 cites Castilian Spanish quotes about dropping out: 1. forcible departure such as violation of regulations or failure to meet administrative requirements; 2. leaving one academic major and starting another major in the same educational institution; 3. leaving to study at one university and start studying at another educational institution; 4. leaving one university and then finishing at another university; 5. Being abandoned from university to attend external training courses or join the workforce; 6. disrupting the intention to return to school in the future; 7. other possibilities.

### Reasons for dropping out

Finding out why students drop out is a difficult task although many findings explain why students drop out. However, several studies have shown similar results about why students drop out of

university, including four main reasons: firstly, reasons for student situation; secondly, reasons for family situation; thirdly, reasons for university status and last reasons from community and country (Srairi, 2021).

### Reasons for student status

This reason describes the activities of students in and out of the university where they study. Often, negative student behavior is the main reason for both voluntary and compulsory dropout. The results show that dropout is directly related to student issues such as academic outcomes and behavioral factors (Rumberger, 1983; Entwisle et al., 2004).

### Reasons for family situation

The quality of the family influences the level of student dropout. In fact, family life, education level, family size, support, motivation reflect the lifestyle and study of students. Based on a study by Srairi (2021), family status includes family structure, family resources, and family practices.

### Reasons for University Situation

The management structure, leadership, discipline and operational activities of the university staff have a significant impact on the learning of the students currently studying. Declining university culture and teaching standards lead students to change universities or drop out. Srairi (2021) Synthesizes university dropout including university resources, curriculum, university regulations, and teacher quality.

### Reasons from community and country

Community and country status play an important role in impacting student learning. Living in a good community, such as non-discrimination, having a culture of helping each other, as well as a happy environment, promotes a better learning environment. At the same time, politics, economy, employment and employment are important parts of promoting education for the nation. A study by Cooper, Chavira, & Mena, (2009) reveals that community conditions include local infrastructure, urban areas (urban or suburban), and geographical areas of family life are affected both directly and indirectly. At the same time, political stability, economic conditions, government support, unemployment in the country are also influencing student dropout (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004).

**Solution for dropping out**

Many studies have suggested solutions for preventing dropout. Braxton & McCledon (2002); Cabrera et. al. (2006); and Năstase & Stăiculescu (2018) implement recommendations regarding the reduction of dropout include establish counseling or academic advice to provide counseling and supporting students mentally, physically and academically. Develop rules and regulations for students, such as study principles, grading and other requirements so that students meet and respect the study conditions provided by the university. Manage student enrollment, student information, student enrollment expectations, financial aid, etc. Develop capacity in the faculty related to teaching methods and techniques, motivate and send staff to participate in useful seminars or training courses. Establish an incentive system for staff to participate in keeping students from dropping out. Orientation programs for students in the first year such as internal regulations of the university, law, discipline in study, social activities in the university, etc. Improve the life of students closer in the university by giving students work together so that they can understand each other, share values, characteristics as well as interests of study. Develop student affairs programs to help students understand and enhance their academic and career skills. Programs can include workshops, events, cultural and art programs, etc. for students to enjoy university life.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The study was employed a quantitative research approach to explore and analyze causes and solutions on the factors influencing the dropout in Svay Rieng University. A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data on the factors driving university dropout. The respondents selected for this study were mainly students who already left university unsuccessfully after their first enrollment in academic year 2019-2020. The sample size was set at 144 (n=144) respondents inclusive of both students selected from the population of 629 (N=629). A 5-point interval Likert scale was used to measure the respondents' perception on the major factors driving university dropout at the respective campus under study. The Likert scale factors examines how strongly respondents agree or disagree ranging from 1-representing strongly disagree to 5-representing strongly agree with statements that measure variables of the study. Six factors formulated in the questionnaire were factor for dropout according to personal students, factor for dropout according to students' finance, factor for dropout according to student's study plan, factor for dropout according to family situation, factor for dropout according to university, and factor for dropout according to teachers. Reliability and validity tests of the measures from the questionnaire were conducted to explore hidden dimensions of collected data prior to investigating statistically significant major factors driving university dropout. Finally, mean and standard deviation test techniques were applied to describe the perceptions of respondents of various factors that are responsible for high dropout from the university. These factors were determined via factor analytic procedures using SPSS software.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

### Profile of the respondents

The result in table 02 shows that among the sample size of 144 respondents, there are 91 males and 53 females. Regarding to the dropouts by the five faculties, number of dropouts from faculty of business management is the highest percentage which equals to 40.3 percent. The second highest number of dropouts is the faculty of social science accounted for 37.5 percent. The lowest number of dropouts is faculty of agriculture. In addition, 57.6 percent of dropout is in the first semester, and 18.8 percent is in the second semester, 13.2 percent of dropout in the third semester and another 10.4 percent is in the fourth semester accordingly.

Table 02: Profile of respondents

| Variables | Groupings | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | 91 | 63.2 |
| | Female | 53 | 36.8 |
| | Total | 144 | 100.0 |
| **Dropout by Faculty** | Business | 58 | 40.3 |
| | Agriculture | 4 | 2.8 |
| | Human Science | 4 | 3.5 |
| | IT | 23 | 16.0 |
| | Social Science | 54 | 37.5 |
| | Total | 144 | 100.0 |
| **Dropout** | Semester 1 | 83 | 57.6 |
| | Semester 2 | 27 | 18.8 |
| | Semester 3 | 19 | 13.2 |
| | Semester 4 | 15 | 10.4 |
| | Total | 144 | 100.0 |

Source: Primary data

**Analyze factors related to drop out**

A total of 144 dropouts responded to factors related to dropout, which included person students, students' finance, students' study plan, family situation, university, and teachers. The questionnaire was utilized with Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagreement (1) to strong agreement (5). To make the data more reliable and trustworthy in the analysis, the Alpha Cronbach was also used to each factor.

*Reasons for Dropout According to Personal Students*

Nine reasons directly related to personal students who play a role in analyzing dropout decisions. These were poor learning from high school, more absences in class, low foreign language, physical disability, class repetition, young marriage, leas desire to learn, employment, and discrimination. Mean and standard deviation were used with the support of SPSS. The calculation of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was 0.841, indicated that the reliability of the variables answered by the respondent.

The table 03 shows the mean score and standard deviation the reasons for decision to drop out university according to students themselves. The highest mean score 2.50 is low proficiency of foreign language, meaning that the respondents decide to drop out of school for the main reason of low proficiency of foreign language. This concludes that if students do not improve their foreign language skills for further study at the university, their educational difficulties will increase and they will drop out.

Table 03: Reasons for Dropout According to Personal Students

| Cause of Dropout | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Poor learning from high school | 1.94 | 1.15 |
| More absences in class | 1.60 | 1.03 |
| Low proficiency of foreign language | 2.50 | 1.25 |
| Physical disability | 1.25 | 0.77 |
| Class Repetition | 1.41 | 0.95 |
| Young marriage | 1.33 | 0.84 |
| Less desire to learn | 1.77 | 1.20 |
| Employment | 1.94 | 1.24 |
| Discrimination | 1.45 | 1.03 |
| **Total average** | **1.69** | |

Source: Primary data

*Reasons for Dropout According to Students' Finance*

Eight reasons directly related to students' finance which play a role in analyzing dropout decisions. These were not receiving a scholarship, parents lose their jobs, work overtime, support the family income, not receiving university's accommodation, fear of losing a job, low salary from work, and work long hours. Mean and standard deviation were used with the support of SPSS. The calculation of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was 0.884, indicated that the reliability of the variables answered by the respondent.

The table 04 shows the mean score and standard deviation the reasons for decision to drop out university according to students' finance. The highest mean score is 2.65, indicating that the respondents decide to drop out of school for the primary reason of support the family income. As a result, it can be understood that the family situation is facing economic problems that motivate

students to earn income to support family and also the reason why students decide to drop out of school.

Table 04: Reasons for Dropout According to Students' Finance

| Cause of Dropout | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Not receiving a scholarship | 2.34 | 1.45 |
| Parents lose their jobs | 1.83 | 1.25 |
| Work overtime | 2.42 | 1.39 |
| Support the family income | 2.67 | 1.44 |
| Not receiving university's accommodation | 2.22 | 1.37 |
| Fear of losing a job | 2.06 | 1.24 |
| Low salary from work | 2.17 | 1.29 |
| Work long hours | 2.31 | 1.43 |
| **Total average** | **2.25** | |

Source: Primary data

### *Reasons for Dropout According to Students' Study Plan*

Six reasons directly related to students' study plan which play a role in analyzing dropout decisions. These were cannot follow the study plan, do not know how to plan a study, hard to find suitable group study, cannot concentrate while studying, Contrary to the expect of high school goals, and cannot set specific academic goals to achieve. Mean and standard deviation were used with the support of SPSS. The calculation of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was 0.859, indicated that the reliability of the variables answered by the respondent.

The table 05 explains the mean score and standard deviation the reasons for decision to drop out university according to students' study plan. The highest mean score is 2.02, indicating that the respondents decide to drop out of school for the main reason of being unable to set specific academic goals. This implies that students are not able to fully focus on learning, which leads to confusion in study, eventually students do not get good academic results and lead to university dropout.

Table 05: Reasons for Dropout According to Students' Study Plan

| Cause of Dropout | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Cannot follow the study plan | 1.93 | 1.23 |
| Do not know how to plan a study | 1.94 | 1.20 |
| Hard to find suitable group study | 1.92 | 1.20 |
| Cannot concentrate while studying | 1.94 | 1.28 |
| Contrary to the expect of high school goals | 1.94 | 1.25 |
| Cannot set specific academic goals | 2.02 | 1.21 |
| **Total average** | **1.98** | |

Source: Primary data

### *Reasons for Dropout According to Family Situation*

Seven reasons directly related to family situation which play a role in analyzing dropout decisions. These were parents are low education, less members in family, family income is low, family demotivated family in education, university is far away from home, orphanage in the family, lack communication with university. Mean and standard deviation were used with the support of SPSS. The calculation of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was 0.851, indicated that the reliability of the variables answered by the respondent.

The table 06 describes the mean score and standard deviation the reasons for decision to drop out university according to family situation. The highest mean score is 2.53, indicating that students

drop out university due to low family income and students obligate to earn income to support family. This concludes that having a job during school hours affects students' time and energy to focus on their studies, and this can be a challenge to drop out.

Table 06: Reasons for Dropout According to Family Situation

| Cause of Dropout | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Parents are low education | 2.08 | 1.27 |
| Less members in family | 2.17 | 1.32 |
| Family income is low | 2.53 | 1.40 |
| Demotivated family in education | 1.83 | 1.16 |
| University is far away from home | 2.36 | 1.38 |
| Orphanage in the family | 1.44 | 0.99 |
| Lack communication with university | 1.83 | 1.17 |
| **Total average** | **2.03** | |

Source: Primary data

*Reasons for Dropout According to University*

Ten reasons directly related to university which play a role in analyzing dropout decisions. These were lack mechanisms to track the study, does not offer extracurricular, does not recognize the educational quality, low provision of student support services, lacks sufficient study materials, cannot use the internet in university, application of strict discipline, excessive students in classroom, improper attitude of service staff, and improper maintenance of university infrastructure. Mean and standard deviation were used with the support of SPSS. The calculation of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was 0.943, indicated that the reliability of the variables answered by the respondent.

The table 07 shows the mean score and standard deviation the reasons for decision to drop out according to university. The highest mean score is 1.74, indicating that students drop out of university due to improper maintenance of university infrastructure. This concludes that the lack of teaching materials, poor hygiene in both bathrooms and classrooms as well as improper campus ordering has the effect of dropping out of school.

Table 07: Reasons for Dropout According to University

| Cause of Dropout | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Lack mechanisms to track the study | 1.52 | 0.99 |
| Does not offer extracurricular | 1.66 | 1.06 |
| Does not recognize the educational quality | 1.53 | 0.97 |
| Low provision of student support services | 1.72 | 1.16 |
| Lacks sufficient study materials | 1.63 | 1.10 |
| Cannot use the internet in university | 1.69 | 1.09 |
| Application of strict discipline | 1.46 | 1.94 |
| Excessive students in classroom | 1.62 | 1.08 |
| Improper attitude of service staff | 1.49 | 1.03 |
| Improper maintenance of university infrastructure | 1.74 | 1.18 |
| **Total average** | 1.60 | |

Source: Primary data

*Reasons for Dropout According to Teachers*

Ten reasons directly related to teachers which play a role in analyzing dropout decisions. These were lack of lesson preparation, lack of teaching methodology, lack of lesson explanation, absenteeism, teacher qualification is still low, lack of student encouragement, complicated

assignment, misapply theory to real practice, difficult exam to be solved, low score from exam. Mean and standard deviation were used with the support of SPSS. The calculation of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was 0.953, indicated that the reliability of the variables answered by the respondent.

The table 08 shows the mean score and standard deviation the reasons for decision to drop out according to the teacher. The highest mean score is 1.61, indicating that students drop out of university due to misapply theory to real practice. This concludes that students who study only much theory and cannot apply to practical work lead to boredom in study and even drop out of school.

Table 08: Reasons for Dropout According to Teachers

| Cause of Dropout | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Lacks of lesson preparation | 1.38 | 0.84 |
| Lack of teaching methodology | 1.45 | 0.97 |
| Lacks of lesson explanation | 1.44 | 0.91 |
| Absenteeism | 1.48 | 0.97 |
| Teacher qualification is still low | 1.46 | 0.90 |
| Lack of student encouragement | 1.56 | 1.01 |
| Complicated assignment | 1.54 | 0.92 |
| Misapply theory to real practice | 1.61 | 1.01 |
| Difficult exam to be solved | 1.45 | 0.79 |
| Low score from exam | 1.38 | 0.79 |
| **Total average** | **1.47** | |

Source: Primary data

**Top Ranked Reasons for Dropout**

Six factors are studied to reflect the issues that motivate students to drop out of Svay Rieng University, including factors related to students, factors related to students' finance, factors related to study plan, factors related to family situation, factors related to the university and teachers. The results of the mean scores of the six factors show that the responses of 144 dropouts decide to drop out of the university where they attended is due to the financial situation being the biggest cause. However, the teacher status factor is the lowest of the average scores answered by dropouts. By comparing the average scores of these six factors, the researchers can conclude that the main motivating factor for students deciding to leave the university without successfully completing their study program is in a non-university environment, but the financial issue requires students earn income to support their families.

Table 09: Top Ranked Reasons for Dropout

| Factors of Dropout | Mean | Rank |
|---|---|---|
| Factors related to students' financial | 2.25 | 1 |
| Factors related to family situation | 2.03 | 2 |
| Factors related to study plan | 1.98 | 3 |
| Factors related to university | 1.74 | 4 |
| Factors related to students | 1.69 | 5 |
| Factors related to teachers | 1.47 | 6 |

## Conclusion

In view of the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Reasons for dropout according to personal student, the result shows that low proficiency of foreign language is the main reason for decision to drop out.
- Reasons for dropout according to students' finance, the result indicates that supporting the family income is the primary reason for decision to drop out.
- Reasons for dropout according to students' study plan, the finding reveals that being unable to set specific academic goals to achieve is the main reason for decision to drop out.
- Reasons for dropout according to family situation, the finding shows that low family income is the main reason for decision to drop out.
- Reasons for dropout according to university, the result find that improper maintenance of university infrastructure is the primary reason for decision to drop out.
- Reasons for dropout according to teacher, the finding indicates that misapply theory to practice is the main reason for decision to drop out.
- By comparing to the total average scores of the six factors, the top rank of reason for dropout is relating to students' finance.

## Recommendation

A number of recommendations have been made to contribute to the improvement and development of the university in reducing dropout rates:

- Foreign language ability - Faculties should conduct placement test in English before enrollment or should provide one term program focus on general English to strengthen language skills. This can be done through summer course or in cooperation with recognized foreign language institutes locally.
- Communication and Consultation - Teachers should liaise with students' parents, provide counseling to students in terms of learning difficulties or any problems in the family, workplace, as well as personal lives. The university must have a systematic mechanism and a policy to encourage teachers to do this.
- University Infrastructure - University infrastructure and environment have a positive impact on student learning. Universities need to equip study facilities timely, strengthen student information services, strengthen security, order, and improve hygiene both inside and outside the classroom.
- Teacher Qualification - The faculty should select at least one core subject according to the student's major in the first and second year and assign highly qualified teachers to teach. Providing qualified teachers with high educational background and attractive teaching are important parts of promoting student learning effectively.
- Linking practices - It is imperative for each faculty to connect theory with real practice, which enhances students learning and reduces dropouts. At the same time, the linkage with industrial sectors is responsive to the current market needs, such as internships, work orientation workshops, study visits, short training courses, etc. The faculty can arrange for practical implementation in private institutions as well as public institutions through cooperation between faculties and related institutions.

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