

Leave or stay? The reasons behind drop-out

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Abstract: *In Hungary, leaving school became a significant problem. The average of drop-out percent is around 40 to 50, which is almost the double of the top 15 “least likely to drop out” countries. There are a few base problems that covers most of the reasons why students leave school. They usually tend to lose their motivation, their community, friends, or they realize that in the long run, leaving school with their present skillset is more beneficial than finishing the university. While these might be an adequate way to define the fact of school-leaving, we wanted to dig deeper and look behind these problem-groups. As you would guess it, universities already trying to reduce this number, but they need feedback from students. Our school started mentor-program, tutoring, e-learning and much more unique solution, which did help lowering the leaving students amount, but these projects could be improved. We revised these programs, rated their efficiency, likability and compared them to student’s preferences. After that, we created a ranking where studs could rate every project to create an importance list, this way the university can easily see which ones need to be rethought. Our goal is to provide a reliable source of information to the university what can be used up to improve the overall likability of these programs.[13]*

Keywords: *Drop-out, Student-keeping projects, Junior preferences, Student reflection*

1 Dropping out of school

Falling out of school is often unplanned. Most of the times it is the consequences of their own choices, even though it is rarely a students will to leave. We can group their leaving by the future plans they have. The most common one is when they do not reapply to another university, contrary they give up on studying and start to work. Less common, but still often case is when they try to study afterwards even if their next choice is not a unviersity, they still have the motivation to master a profession.[1]

1.1 Definition of school leaving

“Dropping-out” is not just an incidence, it is a longer process where the student falls out of the educational system without an official document that confirms their work’s result. This starts with the student applying to the desired institution, since every single impact can form the decision even if it’s against the student’s

benefits. Horn's work stated that students, who leave the school are more likely to require social support and their chances to improve are lower. [2]

1.2 Crucial time before the application

We have to investigate this period of time first, since this is the most important part of a student's next 2 to 6 years. Even though universities and other institutes that give profession tries to show what each faculty stands for, thousands of pupils choose without the knowledge of what would be interesting for them. This might happen because the stress on their shoulder is exponentially bigger than usual and they get influenced easier. In the case of lowering the rate of dropping-out, it should be our main priority to help juniors make a wise and clean decision while they know how their desired faculty would work. It would favor the university as well, because more student would be actually interested about the knowledges they teach instead of the 80 – 20 rate, where 20 percent of students are not even sure they want to learn this kind of teachings from the beginning. Universities should target schools and hold events there, in addition of open days and profession nights.[4]

Most common ways to influence a student

In 2020, we take internet granted. Mobile phones, laptops, computers, they are all part of our life, this way it is almost impossible to not get influenced by the targeted advertisements all over the internet. Quite some pages start to review and rank universities around this application period, which can be damaging to the university's fame, especially if the review writer hasn't even attended there just read about it online or had a friend who had experiences there.[5][10]

Other times, students before ranking universities, they tend to check on them. They look at the webpage, read about the faculties, maybe look up earlier open days, studies, events that has been held by the chosen school. This is the reason why an institution that wants pupils to choose it, needs to create a proper and clean looking webpage that can impress the guest.[10]

Another influential part can be other's opinion about the school. Usually students ask seniors of the lived experience they have before applying to there. This is the most realistic way to get information about the raw experience that the pupil is going to have in the next few years. Usually the first thing they ask about are the teachers, how hard it is to finish subjects, then they get excited because of several unique events the university community can hold. In this case, the school has to create a balance between teaching and letting the students have fun. For example, in the University of Obuda, in addition to everyday teaching, the school holds several interesting events for the pupils.

Family status as influential factor

A student always takes into account his family's opinion about further education. Family status, parent's highest degree, parent's job, they all form the choice of the

child. If the pupil has a family with a lower socioeconomic status, it is unlikely that educating is going to be the top priority. Contrary, if someone lives in a family with highly educated parents, they will shift their kid's thoughts towards educating even if it is not conscious. The worse case, when this "forming their kid's thoughts" is forced, since it can easily set an unachievable goal and create stress between the elders and the child.[9]

1.3 Grouping the sides of a drop-out

We've read several grouping for this part of our research and we thought Hovdhaugen's viewpoint would be the most fitting. He chooses to divide these parts into national, institutional and individual levels. Every group is involved to decrease the rate of school-leaving, but their intentions and methods are significantly different. It is important to realize that we are not talking about people, but behind every level, there are dozens of helping individuals trying to reach the set goal.

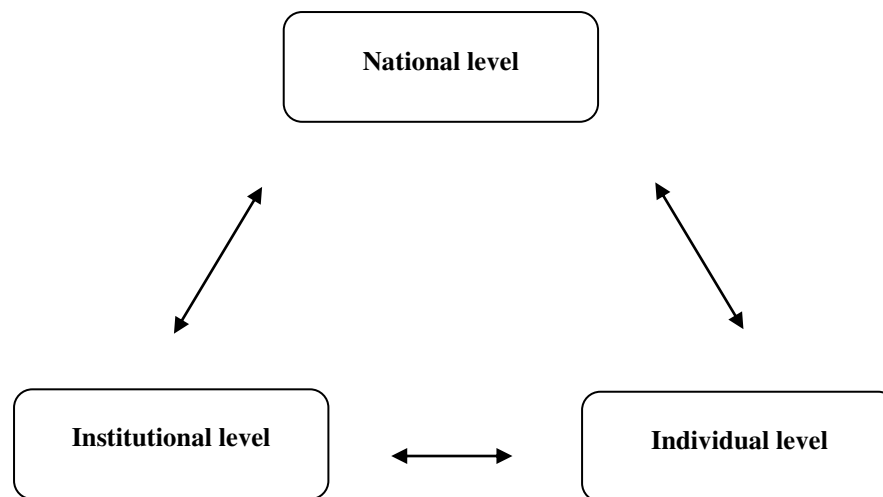


Figure 1

Hovdhaugen levels[3]

National level

As we stated before, this is the broadest level of the grouping. Main goal here is to help the individuals increasing their talents while making sure the nation as a whole benefits the most. This can be measured by how successful it is to integrate students to the labor market. If we can make sure that our support towards juniors does not go to waste, we can consider this goal as a completed task. In Hungary, our government encourages people with a wide variety of assistance. They grant reserved places for the good students, this way they don't have to pay for their scholarship, also they support these people with studentship, decreased dorm prices, petitions where enthusiasts can research and get mentored by experts.

Institutional level

On this level, drop-out rate can be measured the best, since nowadays every university keeps track of students who leave school, change faculty and things that changes their base idea of learning. For example, our university has multiple scales where they examine how many students left. This way the institution can react if there's a sizeable difference in the rates of leaving. Overall, every school has multiple projects to decrease this percent even if it looks like a program that makes a small impact, like mentor-program or rehearse groups, they can definitely be useful for the students. Although, the main problem with these programs is that they are not individually tested how much it affects the student drop-out. It should be a higher priority, since this way we could get an overall picture about a program's effectiveness. Just to come up with an example, here at the university students who hold rehearsal lessons does not earn an income, even though that would be a great motivation to become a 'teacher'.

Individual level

This might be the hardest level to analyze since it is out of boundary to question every pupil about the reason of leaving. We thought it would be a great way to add Jordan's and Watt & Roessingh's study to this part, because it creates a great grouping in a group. They made three main reason how an individual leaves school, push, pull and fall out.

The most common is the "push" part, since it happens because of the university makes you leave the school. This could happen if the student does not have good marks, missed too much lessons or just overall the school was way harder than expected.

When we say "pull" we mean that someone falls out of school because of a reason that has no connection to the university. Usually this happens when some family related issue comes up or a job proves to be more beneficial than studying further.

In the end, "fall out" is the time when none of the above is true. Demotivation, lack of social interaction and friends or just simply the student is disinterested. This can happen pretty often and usually it is harder to manage by universities,

since their power is limited in socializing everyone although, the part where the pupil loses interest could be and should be prioritized by the institution. [11]

2 Research and analyzed data

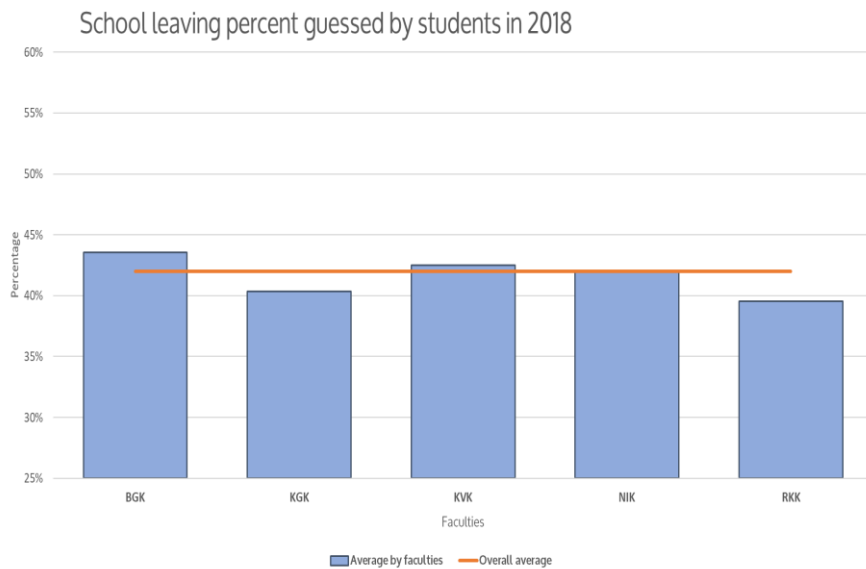
In our research, we applied a quantitative survey to ask students about their opinion of this matter. 200 pupils from the University of Obuda provided a feedback, where we tried to keep the faculty balance even. We made it anonym, this way we can not say that it was a representative survey, yet we had multiple open-ended questions where they could state their ideas or comments about the questions we asked. The form had 14 questions where most of them was about the reasons behind drop-out and the actual effectiveness of the programs the university gives. One of the question was to rank these projects, this way we could create the ranking system we objectively wanted to make. Every diagram we used are self-created and the title is on the upper left corner.

2.1 Hypotheses

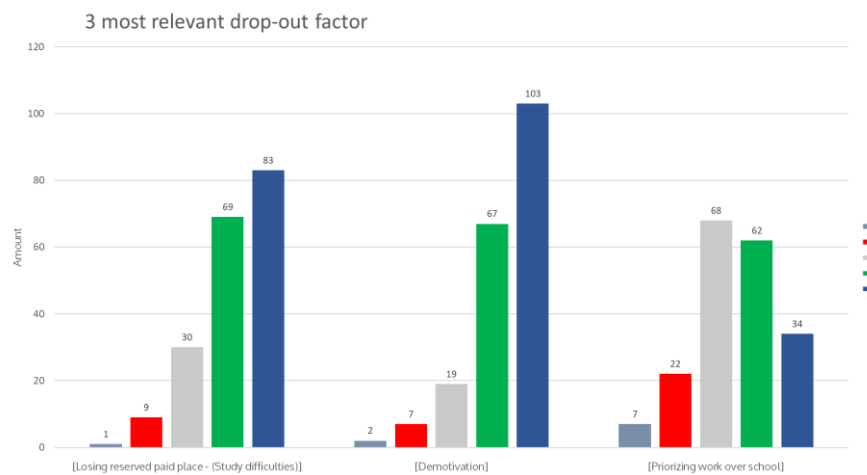
We came up with four hypothesis, where we analyzed every part of our form to approve or cancel these statements.

- We think that if we average the answers for “How big was the drop-out rate in 2018?”, they will reflect the actual percentage, which is around 40%. Students exactly know how big of a threat this can be and they are enlightened about the size and volume of the school leaving.[13]
- We agreed on the most impactful reason why someone would leave school is demotivation. Students usually give up after the blockades they meet in the first few semester. This part is the hardest to analyze because multiple reasons can cause loss of motivation. We will try to inspect this reason thoroughly.[6][7]
- Patronage is always a controversial topic, this is the reason we thought it would be good to analyze how students react to this lesson. We thought that it would be an unlikely project, since most of the pupils does not even attend to it.
- We believed that the overall happiness tends to go towards being negative, instead of being on the positive side. We expect to get a rating under 3, since students does not really realize how much work the university does to maintain these programs.[8]

2.2 Provings



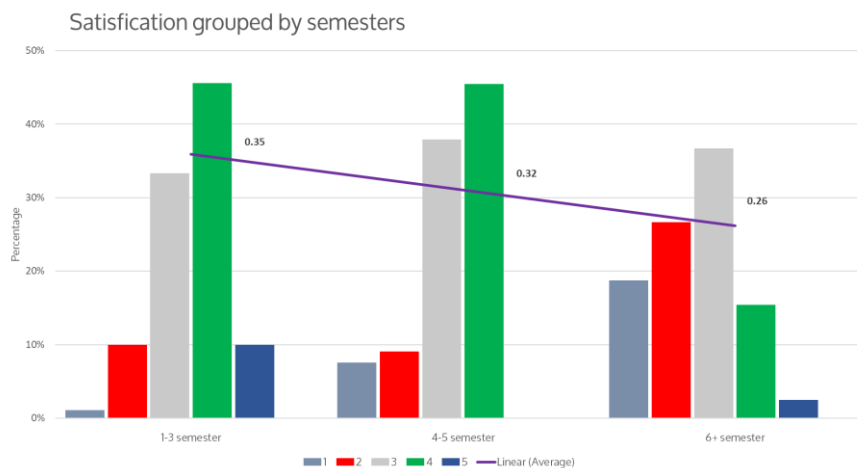
As the diagram shows, the overall average became 42% which is 2% off the official drop-out rate. This shows that students are mostly enlightened about these problems and they see it relevantly. Every faculty guessed almost the same, this way we made sure there are no anomalies where a faculty would be way harder or expected to have a higher rate.



Here, we proved that demotivation did become the first relevant problem, continued by study difficulties. Students mentioned that they felt unsatisfied how the university rewards them and slowly they get disenchanted.

	Number of answers						Weighted sum
	1. place	2. place	3. place	4. place	5. place	6. place	
[Mentor program]	25	29	36	37	40	33	737
[Rehearsal lesson]	70	46	45	19	12	8	481
[E-learning]	35	34	33	38	33	27	681
[Patronage lesson]	13	19	25	33	49	61	869
[Consultation]	34	60	38	38	21	9	579
[Dual system]	23	12	23	35	45	62	853

Here we structured a ranking system where the students could vote about the most effective programs. Rehearsal lesson became the most effective way for the students, continued by Consultation, E-learning, Mentor program, Dual system and Patronage lesson as the least effective one. This creates a paradox, since teachers are mostly positive about this lesson and they feel like it creates a friendly connection with the students. This comes down to the stigma they attend to get in middle school, where it is usually a dissatisfying lesson to be. This case requires more attention further on if we want to come up with a solution.



We grouped overall happiness by semesters and as you can see, only the ones who are further into the university feels less satisfied than “neutral”. This creates a parallel problem with the students who feel like university is no longer a great way for them to improve. Our institution should pay more attention to these students, this way we could improve grading statistics.

Conclusion

We reached the end of this research, for now. The importance of this topic needs constant analyzing, this is why we hope we can continue our work in the future. Right now, University of Obuda has 6-7 active programs that help decreasing student leaving and we think that their effectiveness could be further increased. Our idea of “mentor program” became a reality since from the next semester, there are going to be a program like this that is going to help the newcomers to integrate into university life.

We achieved our goals, created a ranking system for the programs that are active, made assumptions from the massive feedback that the pupils provided and analyzed their viewpoint on this matter. Even if our research decreases the drop-out rate by one percent, we consider it as a success. We are positive about the future of our work and seeing how cooperative the pupils were, it is likely that we will see changes in the future.

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