

The Phenomenon of Voluntary Dropout: An Investigation into Management Information Systems Students

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this research is to explore the factors contributing to voluntary dropout in higher education, and to suggest improvements for areas identified as deficient, drawing upon the views of students enrolled in the Management Information Systems Department. Utilizing a basic qualitative research design, this investigation was undertaken. The data were compiled using semi-structured interview forms, devised by the researchers. The study employed a purposive sampling technique, focusing on a sample group of 21 students from the Management Information Systems Department at State University. This group included students who had successfully transferred laterally, those who had attempted to but were unable to make such a transfer, and those who expressed a desire to do so in the future. Data collected were scrutinized through content analysis. Understanding the motives and implications of voluntary dropout is crucial in formulating educational policies with the intent of enhancing the quality of higher education, optimizing the utilization of resources allocated for education, and mitigating the adverse effects of school dropout. The study's findings suggest that factors such as the university's reputation, the opportunities it provides, personal and financial considerations, and the geographical location of the institution, significantly influence students' decisions to pursue lateral transfers.

Keywords: Voluntary dropout, dropout, quality in higher education, higher education policy.

INTRODUCTION

The Eleventh Development Plan emphasizes that the balance of supply and demand, as well as the relationship between education and employment, should be taken into account when setting higher education quotas and highlights that higher education institutions in Turkey have yet to reach the expected level of competitiveness on the international stage, suggesting a continued need for enhancement in these areas (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 2019). Turkey has embarked on a crucial era marked by efforts to meet the higher education needs of its burgeoning youth population, elevate the wellbeing of its citizens, and bolster its research and development capabilities. Consequently, due to shifts in Turkey's higher education policies, there has been a rapid escalation in the number of universities, departments, and students. A representation of the annual increase in the number of universities is provided in Graph 1.

As depicted in Graph 1, Turkey is home to 209 universities. A historical review of the establishment dates of these universities reveals that only a handful were founded prior to 1982. However, subsequent to that year, there has been a marked increase in the number of universities, with notable surges in certain years (1992, 2006, 2007, 2010, and 2018). This growth in the number of universities signifies a heightened allocation of resources to higher education. This proliferation of higher education institutions, however, has given rise to challenges related to funding, infrastructure, and faculty recruitment. A significant outcome of these issues is the phenomenon of school

switching in higher education. Lateral transfer mechanisms in higher education permit students to alter their choice of university and department. As per the Regulation on the Principles of Transition between Associate and Undergraduate Programs in Higher Education Institutions, Double Major, Minor, and Inter-Institutional Credit Transfer (2010), lateral transfers are permissible between associate and undergraduate degree programs within higher education institutions. The policy, initiated in 2006, to establish a university in every city has fostered competition for student enrolment, particularly among provincial universities. This development has largely been to the detriment of provincial universities (Okumuş and Duygun, 2008; Şahin et al., 2009; Bülbül, 2012; Osmanoğlu and Kaya, 2013).

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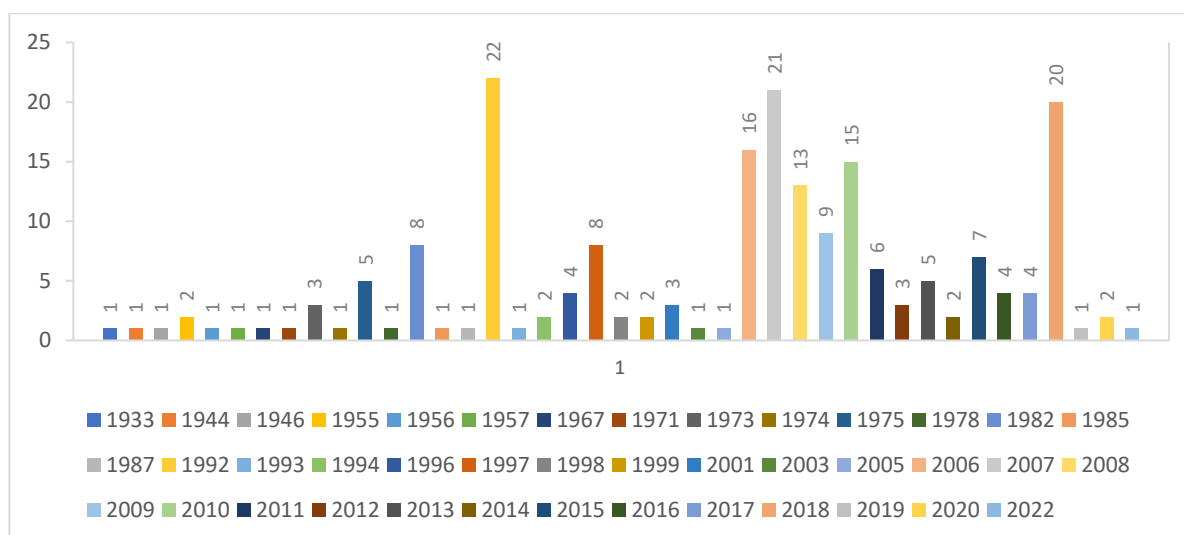
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Graph 1. The number of University opened by year (1933-2022)

It has been observed that students seeking lateral transfers typically gravitate from provincial universities to more established institutions.

Acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the reasons and repercussions of university transfers is vital in formulating strategies to elevate the quality of higher education, optimize the use of allocated educational resources, and reduce the rate of university transitions, even those that are voluntary. While international literature on higher education dropout rates is abundant (Albuquerque, 2008; Araque, Roldán, and Salguero, 2009; Belloc, Maruott, and Petrella, 2010; Di Pietro and Cutillo, 2007; Gury, 2011; Hovdhaugen, 2015; Lassibille and Gómez, 2008), and a few studies have been conducted in Turkey on the same (Bülbül, 2012; Uslu Gülşen, 2017; Yılmaz, 2020), only a single study (Çınar, 2016) pertains to lateral transfer (voluntary dropout) in higher education. It is postulated that factors such as the need for buildings, faculty, and equipment for newly established universities and departments, available financing, social opportunities provided, and the location of the higher education institution, all influence students' decisions to transfer to different universities. Leveraging the perspectives of university students, this research aimed to answer the following questions to uncover the influencing factors of school transfers in higher education and suggest potential improvements:

- What are students' views on changing universities?
- How do students perceive their current university and department choices?
- What are their opinions on the impact and implications of changes in university and department selection on universities, departments, and students themselves?

Voluntary Dropout in Higher Education

Both developed and developing nations have strategically aimed to boost enrolment rates in higher education, recognizing its role as a catalyst for socio-economic development (Günay and Günay, 2017). In alignment with these new strategic objectives, which mirror global trends, Turkey increased its number of public universities from 19 in 1981 to 27 in 1982 (The Council of Higher Education (CoHE), 1991). Since the year 2006, a total of 200 universities, including 125 foundation and public universities, has been established. Despite this quantitative expansion in Turkish higher education, it is evident that the desired improvement in educational quality has not been realized (Bahat, 2020). Societies anticipate the higher education system to cultivate the necessary skilled human resources, conduct academic research, make societal contributions, generate knowledge, and disseminate it at national and international levels (Okçabol, 2007). Within the context of Turkey's national education policies, the number of higher education institutions and enrolment quotas have been increased, with a goal to establish a university in each province (Çetinsaya, 2014). However, provinces and universities that lack competitiveness in terms of geographic location, climate, economic development, socio-cultural opportunities, and student services have started to experience a decrease in student population (Çınar, 2016). The establishment of universities and colleges often brings about an influx of students to cities, invigorating the local economy, fostering cultural exchange, and enhancing social life due to the increased youth population (Jeffrey, 2001; Kniazev, 2004; Newlands, 2003; Çetin, 2007; Sürmeli, 2008). However, students departing from their universities and departments inhibit the expected social, cultural, and economic transformations. A student departing from a university or department is considered a

dropout from the university they left, even if they later enrol in another higher education institution. A university dropout refers to a student who disengages from a university program without completing it, that is, without graduating for various reasons (Yılmaz, 2020). This complete departure from the school due to personal and social reasons is also considered dropping out (Şimşek, 2013). Leaving the school without obtaining a diploma from the institution where the student started their education also falls within the scope of school dropout (Entwistle, Alexander, and Olson, 2004). Chen (2008) categorizes dropout as follows:

- Taking a hiatus,
- Exiting the institution,
- Exiting the system.

Students who take a hiatus typically return to school after a period, while those who exit the institution may continue their education at a different school after leaving their current one. Students who exit the system completely abandon the higher education system for various reasons (Chen, 2008). Various models have sought to elucidate school dropout in higher education (Spady, 1970, 1971; Tinto 1975, 1993, 1997; Benn, 1980, 1983; Kerby, 2015). Among these, Tinto's "Student Integration Model (SIM)" (1975) has been broadly accepted and applied as an effective model and has been subsequently refined. University departures can either be obligatory or voluntary. Obligatory dropout may occur due to reasons such as academic failure, illness, alternative job opportunities, family and financial issues, and adaptation problems. Voluntary dropout often happens for reasons like dissatisfaction or boredom with the program, disliking the school, department, courses, or peers, difficulty adjusting to the city and environment, and feelings of inadequacy (Bennett, 2003).

University dropout should be considered in the context of voluntary and involuntary departure. Voluntary dropout refers to a high-achieving student deciding to leave the institution, while involuntary dropout occurs when a student's relationship with the institution is severed due to academic failure (Murray, 2014). The absence of a theoretical foundation for research in the field of school dropout (Spady, 1970 and Tinto, 1975), the lack of systematic data (Rodríguez-Gómez, Feixas, Gairín, and Munoz, 2015), and differing approaches to the issue in each country (De Witte, Cabus, Thyssen, Groot, and Van den Brink, 2013) constitute the main reasons for investigating voluntary dropout. According to Tinto, who views the university as a social system, students who fail to adapt either leave the institution or seek alternative options. Obligatory dropout, resulting from academic expulsion, differs from voluntary dropout, which arises from an individual's inability to integrate with the institution. School dropout is the outcome of a long-term interaction among individual, academic, and social variables (Tinto, 1975).

In the context of voluntary dropout as lateral

transfer, the decision to leave is driven by different reasons than obligatory dropout, and various factors influence the decision-making process. Students' voluntary decision to leave often results in institutional change. It is observed that internal university processes primarily lead to dropout behavior aimed at changing the institution (Kehm, Larsen, and Sommersel, 2019). The departure of students from a university can indicate that the institution and its city are not meeting student expectations (Çınar, 2015). While school dropout is influenced by external factors, internal factors, pre-education factors, and adaptation variables, voluntary dropout occurs among academically successful students and often for similar reasons as changing universities or departments (Yılmaz, 2020). The demonstrated academic achievement enables students to make choices based on their preferences and inclinations through lateral transfer, which permits them to enter a different department or university with their higher education transition score (CoHE, 2010). In his study, Çınar (2015) found that students who made lateral transfers (voluntary dropouts) were influenced by various factors including academic negativity, academics-student relationships, the location of their higher education institution, the instructional process, and the university they were attending.

METHOD

The study adopted a qualitative research approach to investigate the perspectives of students who desired to, were unable to, or successfully executed a lateral transfer (voluntary dropout) from their current department. The identified areas of improvement were evaluated based on these findings.

Research Design

This study capitalized on the experiences of university students who desired, were unable to, or successfully undertook a lateral transfer (voluntary dropout). A basic qualitative research design was adopted. The objective of this approach is to discern how individuals interpret their lives, construct their realities, and make sense of their experiences (Merriam, 2013). In social science research utilizing qualitative methods, the primary data source is the human subject and the researcher does not merely gather data from an existing whole but rather reconstructs the data through dialogue with the interviewee (Kümbetoğlu, 2015).

Study Group

The study group was identified using the criterion sampling method, a type of purposive sampling method. Criterion sampling involves creating a sample from individuals, events, objects, or situations that possess characteristics pertinent to the problem (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2009). In qualitative research, purposive sampling is determined not by methodological requisites but by the

research objective, providing the researcher with the ability to select suitable participants (Creswell, 2017; Marvasti, 2004; Patton, 2002). The study group comprised Turkish students from the Management

Information Systems department of State University who did not wish to make a lateral transfer (7), wished to but were unable to make a lateral transfer (7), and those who successfully executed a lateral transfer (7).

Table 1: Details about the students participating in the study.

<i>Ran k</i>	<i>Gend er</i>	<i>Ag e</i>	<i>Year of Stud y</i>	<i>City of Residence</i>	<i>Visited City</i>	<i>Type of Accommodatio n</i>	<i>Family Monthly Income</i>	<i>Person al Monthl y Expens e</i>	<i>Scholarsh ip Status</i>	<i>Volunta ry Dropou t</i>
G1	Male	21	3	Manisa		*CHI Dormitory	10.000T L	700TL **	No	Remaini ng
G2	Fema le	21	3	İstanbul		CHI Dormitory	4.500T L	750TL	No	Remaini ng
G3	Fema le	22	4	Ankara		CHI Dormitory	12.000T L	1.500T L	Yes	Remaini ng
G4	Fema le	21	4	Adana		CHI Dormitory	15.000T L	2.500T L	Yes	Remaini ng
G5	Fema le	19	2	Ankara		CHI Dormitory	11.000T L	1.000T L	Yes	WLS***
G6	Fema le	19	2	Bolu	Bartın	CHI Dormitory	11.000T L	1.000T L	Yes	Leaving
G7	Fema le	19	2	Ankara	Bartın	CHI Dormitory	11.000T L	1.000T L	No	Leaving
G8	Male	22	3	Konya	Konya	CHI Dormitory	10.000T L	5.000T L	No	Leaving
G9	Male	19	2	Bursa	Bandır ma	Home	15.000T L	4.000T L	No	Leaving
G10	Male	22	4	Zongulda k		CHI Dormitory	15.000T L	1.500T L	No	Remaini ng
G11	Fema le	19	2	Balıkesir		CHI Dormitory	10.000T L	700TL	No	WLS
G12	Fema le	19	2	Antalya		CHI Dormitory	22.000T L	2.500T L	Yes	WLS
G13	Fema le	19	2	İzmir	İzmir	With Family	35.000T L	5.000T L	No	Leaving
G14	Male	23	4	Sinop	Trabzon	Home	5.000T L	5.000T L	No	Leaving
G15	Male	22	3	Kırıkkale		CHI Dormitory	9.500T L	1.000T L	No	WLS
G16	Fema le	23	4	Konya		CHI Dormitory	10.500T L	1.500T L	Yes	WLS
G17	Male	21	4	Ankara		CHI Dormitory	15.000T L	1.500T L	Yes	Remaini ng
G18	Fema le	22	4	İstanbul		CHI Dormitory	25.000T L	2.500T L	No	WLS
G19	Fema le	21	4	Ankara		CHI Dormitory	20.000T L	1.500T L	No	WLS
G20	Male	22	4	İstanbul		CHI Dormitory	20.000T L	3.000T L	No	Remaini ng
G21	Fema le	20	2	Konya	Burdur	Home	25.000T L	4.000T L	No	Leaving

* CHI: Credit and Hostels Institution

** TL: Turkish Liras

*** WLS: Wanted to Leave but Stayed

Data Collection Tools

In this study, a semi-structured interview format, developed by the researchers, was utilized to elucidate the factors influencing school changes in higher education. This approach harnessed the perspectives of the study group, determined in line with the study's objectives, regarding lateral transfers (Punch, 2014). Draft questions for the semi-structured interview, developed by reviewing relevant literature, were presented to five field experts for evaluation in terms of suitability and grammatical correctness. The final version of the interview form was shaped according to the feedback from these experts. Upon obtaining the participants' consent, interviews were recorded to prevent data loss. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participants' preferred time and location, promoting their freedom and impartiality in expression. The interview method is a potent tool for gleaning information about individuals' and groups' experiences, attitudes, sentiments, grievances, emotions, and beliefs (Güven, 2001; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Interviews, lasting approximately 20-40 minutes, were conducted at the participants' convenience and, with their consent, were audio-recorded. The researchers pursued answers to the following questions:

- What motivated students to select their current department?
- How do students perceive the university they left during their education?
- What is the influence of the academic activities and social ambiance provided by the university on students' emotional states?
- What emotions do students experience during the university change process?
- What suggestions do students have regarding university/department changes?

Data Analysis

Descriptive and content analysis techniques were applied in the analysis of the data. The descriptive analysis process was conducted through coding, categorizing, and describing (Glesne, 2012). Data compiled through the semi-structured interview form were analyzed using the content analysis technique. The objective of utilizing content analysis in the data analysis was to identify concepts and relationships that could elucidate the collected data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The coding phase of the findings from the research was executed simultaneously and in distinct locations by three researchers. The transcribed interviews were read repeatedly to aid researchers in comprehending the participants' views. To ensure "consensus" on the independent coding conducted by the researchers, the researchers convened at specified intervals. The outcome of these comparative discussions confirmed that inter-coder reliability was

achieved (Cresswell, 2018). Once the researchers had individually themed, categorized, and coded the data, a meeting was held to determine the final structure and reach consensus, thereby concluding the study.

During the research process, the collected data were transformed into themes and codes. Participants' names were altered to G1, G2, etc., during the analysis process. Data were analyzed using the MAXQDA program, with each researcher executing coding separately.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the data was ensured through consultation with two experts in the fields of program development and measurement and evaluation. These experts were asked to evaluate whether the generated codes accurately represented the themes. The validity of the study was further bolstered by providing detailed accounts of the data collection and analysis stages. During the interviews, participants were confirmed at regular intervals to have understood the semi-structured questions being asked. After the recorded interviews were transcribed, these transcriptions were shared with the participants for their final approval. In qualitative research, it is acknowledged that coding cannot be conducted independently of the personal assumptions and viewpoints of the researchers. Despite this, the utmost care was taken to prevent these from influencing the research. The data were initially coded independently by the researchers, with the final coding being achieved through consensus. In the thematic coding process, meticulous care was taken to ensure that the data under the themes formed a cohesive and meaningful entity for internal consistency, and that all themes were constructed in a manner that meaningfully explained the data obtained from the research for external consistency. The formula developed by Miles and Huberman (2015) was used to determine inter-coder reliability and internal consistency. After sequential codings by the researchers were compared, an average consensus of 87% was found. For a qualitative study to ensure internal consistency, the consensus in the comparisons made must be at least 80% (Miles & Huberman, 2015; Patton, 2002).

Transferability in this study was ensured through the use of detailed descriptions. Consistency in interviews was maintained by asking questions in a similar manner and recording them. All research data are stored for potential future revisions, thereby safeguarding the confirmability of the study.

In sum, this research aimed to understand the factors affecting students' decisions to change schools in higher education and their experiences throughout the process. By utilizing semi-structured interviews and content analysis techniques, valuable insights were gleaned into the factors that influence students' decisions, their sentiments about their former and

current universities, and their recommendations for future university or department changes. The validity and reliability of the research were ensured through comprehensive descriptions, expert opinions, and the use of established formulas for determining inter-coder reliability and internal consistency. By exploring students' perspectives on school changes in higher education, this study contributes to the existing literature and may assist institutions in better addressing the needs and concerns of their students in

the future.

FINDINGS

The experiences of the participating students concerning lateral transfers are presented in alignment with their own expressions. The themes, categories, and codes established based on university students' views on lateral transfers are illustrated in Figure 1.

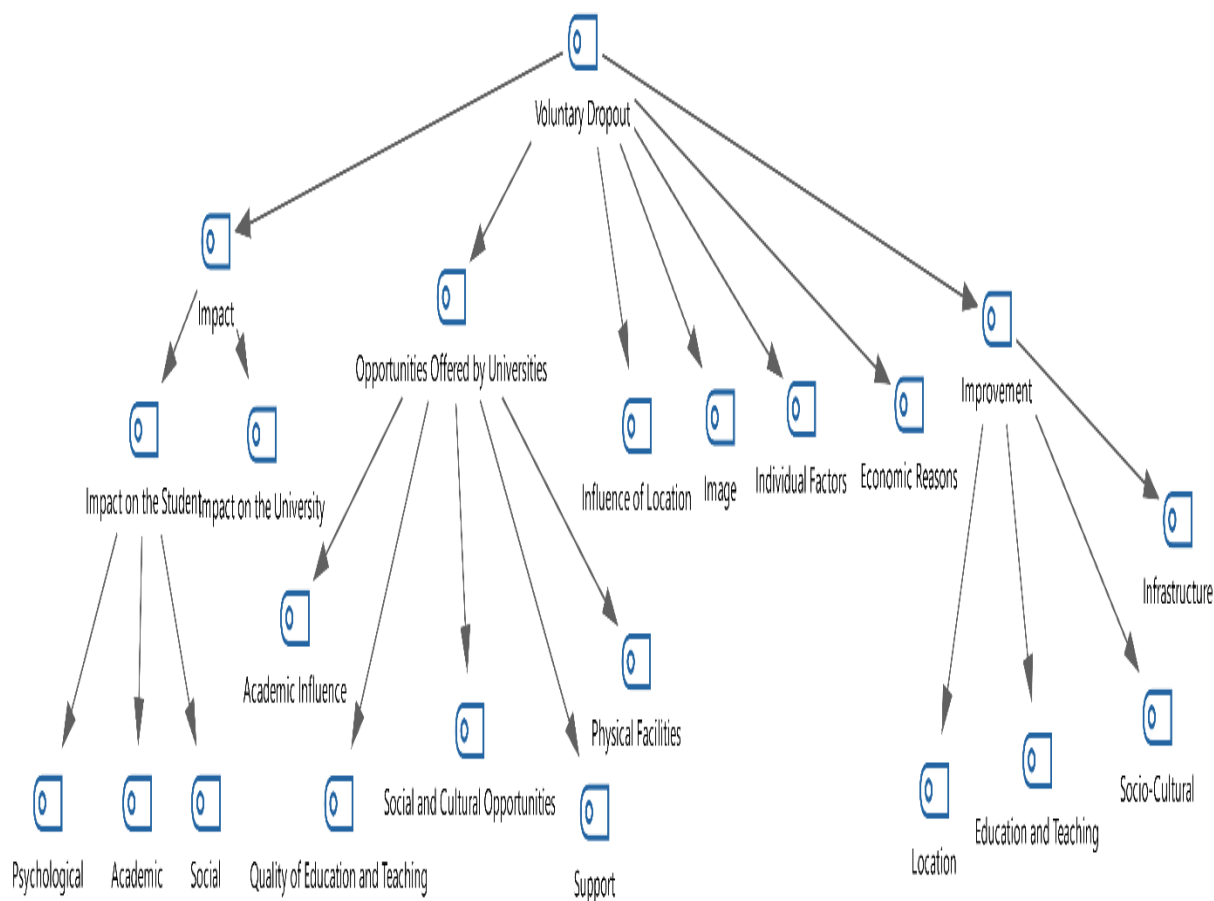


Figure 1: Themes, Categories, and Codes Derived from the Data of the Study

Through in-depth interviews conducted in this study to ascertain the reasons for school changes in the context of university students' opinions on lateral transfers, analysis of the data resulted in the theme "Voluntary Dropout," alongside sub-themes and codes such as "Impact," "Opportunities Offered by the University," "Image," "Individual Factors," "Economic Reasons," "Impact of Location," and "Improvement."

Voluntary Dropout

Upon scrutinizing the perspectives of the participating

students, all views coalesced under the theme of "Voluntary Dropout."

1.1. Impact

Figure 2 presents the category and codes related to the participating students' opinions on lateral transfer under the "Impact" category. Codes for the impact of lateral transfer associated with the "Impact" category have been defined as the effects on the "Student" (social, academic, and psychological) and the "University."

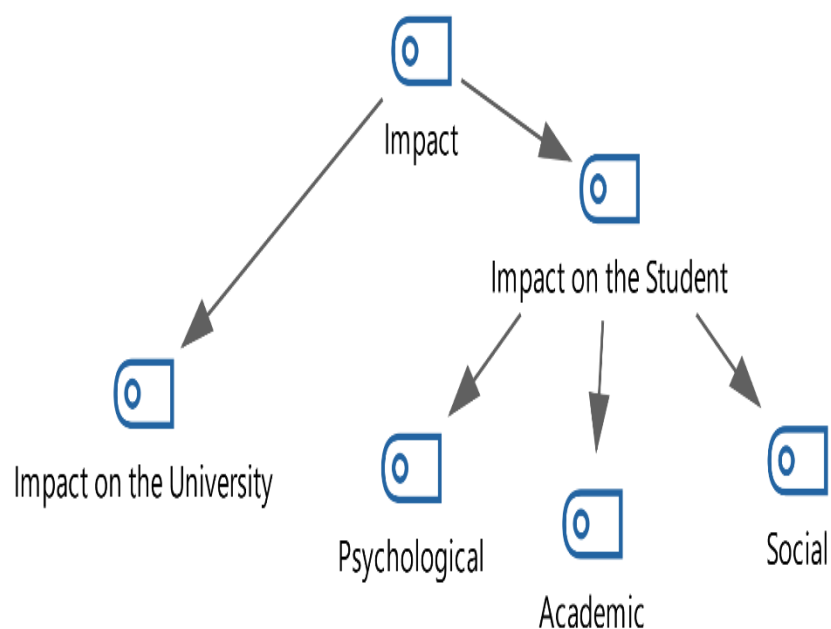


Figure 2: Impact Category and Codes

1.1.1. Student

Reviewing the participants' perspectives related to the influence of lateral transfer on the student, the codes "social," "academic," and "psychological" were identified.

Social

University students stated their opinions that the social opportunities of the locales where the universities are situated play a role in lateral transfer decisions. Some participant views related to the lateral transfer "social" code are provided below.

"Those who left are very satisfied both academically and in terms of social life" K4.

"When I came here, my social circle expanded greatly... It also has a cultural impact, and it has influenced my success; I believe I have developed further" G13.

Academic

University students expressed that the academic opportunities provided by universities are instrumental in their lateral transfer decisions. The views related to the "academic" code, which influence students' lateral transfer decisions, are provided below.

"The effect of lateral transfer on students who leave depends on the class level at which they make the transfer. Transferring in the 3rd year is disadvantageous because they cannot graduate. They have classes to make up, but they also get a chance to learn new things and improve themselves. Staying can also be advantageous" K1.

"It creates a situation where one has to take extra classes from the lower level. This leads to academic

struggles" GK18.

Psychological

Students' psychological states have been determined to influence lateral transfer decisions. The perspectives related to the "psychological" code, which influence university students' lateral transfer decisions, are provided below.

"Once a student transitions to a new university, there is a necessary adaptation process. This proves to be a significant challenge for the student" GK18.

"At first, the adaptation is challenging for the student, but once acclimated, it becomes enjoyable. We have now adjusted and are content here" G7.

1.1.2. University

Participants' perspectives have suggested that students' lateral transfer decisions not only impact the student but also the university they leave from and the one they join. A few participant opinions on the "impact on the university" due to lateral transfer are presented below.

"There is a loss in terms of image. From the school's perspective, even if the students are not exceptionally brilliant or successful but average, the school maintains its mean. It does not suffer a significant loss from its perspective" GK15.

"It generates a negative image and perception for the school. A university being highly preferred creates a perception of popularity, being recognized as a preferred university" K20.

1.2. Opportunities Offered by the University

Upon reviewing the perspectives of participating students related to lateral transfer, their views on the

impact of the "Opportunities Offered by the University" on lateral transfer are presented in Figure 3. The codes related to the "Opportunities Offered by the University" category have been defined as

"Physical Facilities," "Support," "Social Cultural Opportunities," "Quality of Education-Teaching," and "Academic Staff Influence."



Figure 3: University-Provided Opportunities Category and Codes

1.2.1. Physical Facilities

The participants' opinions suggest that the physical facilities of the university they are attending influence their decision to transfer. A few participant opinions regarding the impact of "Physical Facilities" on lateral transfers are presented below.

"The university's internet service is quite speedy, and internet access is readily available. The website is well-structured, but unfortunately, our vocational school's website is not up to par. I consider the physical conditions quite adequate" K10.

"There are parts of the physical infrastructure that are sufficient and some that are not. The internet is good, and we can eat. But there is no library, or the canteen is small. It's not a place where we can sit and socialize. So it's inadequate" GK19.

1.2.2. Support

Universities are obligated to provide material and emotional support to their students in alignment with their missions. In this context, the quality of "support" services offered by universities is found to influence students' lateral transfer decisions. A few participant opinions regarding the effect of "support" on lateral transfer decisions are presented below.

"When first arriving here, they contemplate transferring due to fear. Despite many disadvantages here, there are also advantages. Direct communication and interaction with teachers provide a significant benefit for us" K20.

"What affected me here was the beautiful friendships. Our communication with our teachers was also influential. We wouldn't find this sincerity

elsewhere. So we didn't transfer" GK19.

1.2.3. Social and Cultural Facilities

University students anticipate their academic needs to be met alongside the provision of social and cultural facilities. A limited range of social and cultural facilities, or those that fail to meet expectations, can influence students' decisions to transfer laterally, as highlighted in participant responses. Some statements related to the "Social and Cultural Facilities" code are presented below.

"The opportunities for social and cultural activities are quite limited, particularly for our department" K3.

"I find our school and department lacking in cultural, social, and academic aspects" GK12.

1.2.4. Quality of Education and Instruction

The quality of education and instruction offered at universities is noted as a significant factor in influencing lateral transfer decisions, as per student opinions. Some participant perspectives related to the "Quality of Education and Instruction" code are given below.

"The education and informatics could have been better. We take courses in two disciplines; the informatics could have been improved" K4.

"I find the university's academic opportunities sufficient, the education is well-conducted, and the activities are satisfactory" G7.

"I find the academic opportunities lacking. I believe the quality of education and instruction is

inadequate for both the department and the university" GK16.

1.2.5. Academic Influence

The faculty-student relationship in universities encompasses various aspects, including the student advisory relationship, which involves academic processes. Students noted that faculty members' attitudes towards students were influential in their lateral transfer decisions. Some participant perspectives related to the "Academic Influence" code are presented below.

"After all, studying in larger and more crowded classrooms proved challenging. Communication is highly beneficial for me. I appreciate the additions this place has made to me. Being able to ask when I don't understand something boosts my confidence" GK11.

"We encountered issues; there were missing teachers in terms of teachers. There was also a deficiency in terms of course adequacy. However, I believe the faculty teaching the courses are proficient in their fields" K4.

"The relationships between teachers and students are strong, and there is no significant barrier between students and teachers" G21.

1.7. Improvement

Participants have suggested "Improvement" measures to mitigate the negative impact of lateral transfers. Based on participants' views, the "Improvement" category has been segmented into four codes: "Infrastructure", "Location", "Socio-Cultural", and "Education and Teaching."

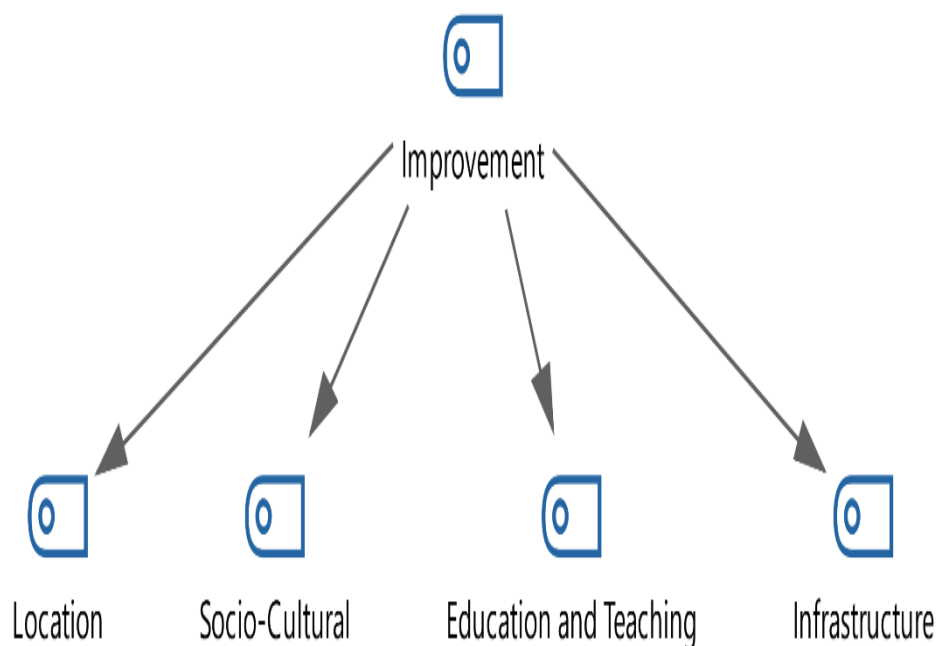


Figure 4: Improvement Category and Codes

1.7.1. Infrastructure

Student participants have suggested that enhancements in "infrastructure" are needed to minimize the negative impact of lateral transfers. It has been noted in student views that infrastructure deficiencies can sway students' decisions to transfer laterally. Some participant perspectives related to the "Infrastructure" code are provided below.

"I would try to focus more on infrastructure, taking measures like improving libraries and course resources." G20.

"By first identifying students' expectations, any deficiencies, such as in the library, can be addressed.K10.

"In a department focused on technology, we really need a wealth of technological materials. We are

limited in what we can do here. If I were in a position of authority, I would strive to meet the needs and desires of the students. This would likely decrease the number of lateral transfers." GK12.

1.7.2. Location

In student opinions, it has been noted that deficiencies in the amenities provided by the institution can influence students' decisions to transfer laterally. Some participant perspectives related to the "Location" code are provided below.

"Relocating this school to a campus would be the first measure I would implement." K2.

"I would relocate the department I came from to the center. Given the influx of students this year, I would coordinate more activities, partnering with

establishments like youth centers." G6.

1.7.3. Socio-Cultural

Participant opinions indicate that the degree to which the university and its region meet students' expectations with the socio-cultural opportunities offered can impact lateral transfer decisions. Students have suggested that enhancements in socio-cultural opportunities should be implemented to reduce the negative impact of lateral transfers. Some participant perspectives related to the "Socio-Cultural" code are provided below.

"We could improve course offerings, relationships with academics, social activities, clubs, and projects to minimize student departures." K3.

"I would organize more social events." GK5.

"I would establish more clubs; clubs are very beneficial. We learn many things from clubs. I would increase the number of social activities and camps." G6.

1.7.4. Education-Teaching

Student participants have suggested that steps to improve the quality of education and instruction should be taken to mitigate the negative impact of lateral transfers. It has been noted that curricula should be reviewed and updated to meet the demands of the current era and should be supplemented with project-based learning. Some participant perspectives related to the "Education-Teaching" code are provided below.

"Improving course offerings, relationships with academics, social activities, clubs, and projects could all contribute to reducing student departures." K3.

"I would place more emphasis on practical learning. I believe TUBITAK projects are highly significant." GK5.

"I would like the curriculum of the management information systems department to be reviewed for students like me who are genuinely motivated to improve themselves." G8.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research has established that students' decisions to transfer to a different university or department have psychological, social, and academic implications for both the students themselves and the university they depart from. Key factors prompting students' lateral transfers include the social opportunities offered by the university. According to Aypay, Sever, and Demirhan (2012), although university students' levels of social integration tend to increase over time, this factor plays a decisive role in students' decisions to persist in their education.

Academic opportunities provided by universities are influential in students' decisions to transfer laterally. Şimşek's (2013) study underscored that academic performance plays a pivotal role in these decisions and is often cited as a reason for school

dropout. For lateral transfers, students must maintain a high academic average to voluntarily move to their preferred university or department. This research has identified that students' psychological states also shape their lateral transfer decisions, with feelings of dissatisfaction and disliking their peers cited as reasons for voluntary transfers (Bennett, 2003). According to Truta, Parv, and Topala (2018), satisfaction and engagement after starting university reduce the propensity for dropout. A sense of disconnection and a lack of fit with the university culture also lead students to leave (Lehmann, 2007). Roso-Bas, Jimenez, and Garcia-Buades (2016) have established a significant correlation between pessimism and school dropout.

Student participants believe that their lateral transfer decisions impact both the institutions they leave and those they join. They also emphasize the role of the universities' facilities in their transfer decisions. The physical amenities of their current university influence students' academic success and their adaptation to the university and department (Bennett, 2003; Şimşek, 2013; Uslu Gülşen, 2017; Boyacı, Karacabey, Özdere, and Öz, 2018).

The research indicates that students expect universities to provide both tangible and emotional support. Findings from studies exploring higher education students' adaptation issues (Bennett, 2003; Şimşek, 2013; Uslu and Gülşen, 2017) underscore the significance of universities' support missions, as students' failure to integrate into their current university increases the risk of dropout (Troelsen and Laursen, 2014).

In this study, students voiced their expectations for universities to offer high-quality academic opportunities and to fulfill their socio-cultural expectations. Limited social and cultural opportunities or unmet expectations influence students' lateral transfer decisions, consistent with the existing literature. Socialization challenges experienced by students both during and outside university life, as well as dissatisfaction in terms of social adaptation, affect their decisions to leave the institution (Troelsen & Laursen, 2014; Şimşek, 2013). A lack of sufficient social activity opportunities for students at rural universities often prompts decisions to switch schools (Erdoğan, Şanlı, and Bekir, 2005; Biber, 2013).

The research indicates that the quality of education provided by universities influences lateral transfer decisions, aligning with the literature. In various studies, the quality of the teaching process has been identified as a factor compelling students to change universities (Erdoğan, Şanlı, and Bekir, 2005; Biber, 2013). Boyacı, Karacabey, Özdere, and Öz (2018) found that perceptions of low educational quality at a student's current institution can motivate them to leave and transfer to another. The attitudes of faculty members towards students within the student-teacher relationship also impact students' lateral transfer decisions. According to Çınar (2016), negative

academic experiences are a primary reason for wanting to transfer to other universities. Students perceive their educators as inadequate. Boyacı, Karacabey, Özdere, and Öz (2018) further assert that weak student-teacher interactions can lead students to depart from their current institutions and seek enrolment elsewhere.

This study discovered that the image of a university significantly influences students' lateral transfer decisions. The reputation of a university enhances its appeal to high-caliber students (Köse, 2012). Factors shaping a university's image include societal perceptions, centralized placement exam scores, and graduates' employability.

The study reveals that the weight of individual factors in students' lateral transfer decisions is contingent on whether their expectations are met. It further highlights that students' unique characteristics, along with faulty decision-making and guidance during the university selection process, contribute to these decisions. Unfulfilled educational expectations in higher education prompt transfers to alternative universities (Boyacı, Karacabey, Özdere, and Öz, 2018). Students without clear educational goals or who are compelled to study in undesired programs are more likely to leave school (Belloc, Maruotti, and Petrella, 2010; Lassibille and Gómez, 2008).

The research concludes that economic factors also significantly influence decisions to change universities. Students' socio-economic backgrounds, financial constraints, and pressures to work due to economic hardship are identified as key determinants of university dropouts and transfers (Lee & Staff, 2007; Yi et al., 2015; Uslu Gülşen, 2017; Bülbül, 2020). The inability of families to invest adequate resources into education, coupled with an expectation for the individual to work and earn, heightens the risk of school dropout due to poverty (Lavrijssen and Nicaise, 2015).

The study observed that a university's location, particularly when campuses are not centrally located, impacts lateral transfer decisions. In cities hosting provincial universities, the city's influence and students' dissatisfaction are cited as reasons for changing institutions (Üskül, 1990; İmamoğlu and Gültekin, 1993; Yeşilyaprak, Öztürk, and Kısaç, 2001; Erdoğan, Şanlı, and Bekir, 2005; Biber, 2013).

The study recommends enhancements in infrastructure, socio-cultural, and educational opportunities, as well as improvements in location, to mitigate the negative impact of lateral transfers. Suggestions for infrastructure and location-related enhancements align with existing literature. According to Yılmaz (2020), infrastructure challenges in higher education are recognized as reasons for school dropouts. Students' levels of social integration within the university environment vary based on the location and conditions of the city (Aypay, Sever, and Demirhan, 2012). As Bennett (2003) suggests, an inability to adjust to the city and its environment influences the decision to leave the university.

The degree to which a university and its region's socio-cultural opportunities align with students' expectations affects lateral transfer decisions. The literature similarly indicates that dissatisfaction with the city and socio-cultural opportunities often prompt students to switch universities (İmamoğlu and Gültekin, 1993; Yeşilyaprak, Öztürk, and Kısaç, 2001; Erdoğan, Şanlı, and Bekir, 2005; Biber, 2013). This study anticipates that measures to enhance the quality of education and training will reduce the negative impact of lateral transfers. Accordingly, it proposes that curricula should be reviewed, updated to meet contemporary needs, and augmented with projects. Some studies demonstrate that unmet student expectations trigger departures from educational institutions (Lee & Staff, 2007; Boyacı, Karacabey, Özdere, and Öz, 2018).

Though the types and reasons for higher education dropouts vary globally, it is a pressing issue for many countries. All higher education stakeholders must undertake the responsibility to accurately identify the reasons for school changes, considering the social and individual costs for each student. School changes in higher education not only negatively impact society and individuals economically but also impose a financial burden on nations.

By fostering a skilled workforce in higher education, the subsequent employment of such a workforce will positively influence development. In this regard, lateral transfers between institutions may serve as a solution to mitigate the negative economic impact on the state due to the per-student education costs resulting from students dropping out of school.

The research indicates that students largely perceive lateral transfer opportunities positively. Nevertheless, it is imperative that all higher education stakeholders collaboratively develop and implement measures to mitigate the adverse effects of such transfers. Guiding students towards appropriate fields from secondary education onwards, ensuring the necessary financial and housing resources for their continued education, addressing infrastructure necessities, enhancing collaboration between universities and local governments, and fostering increased partnerships are of paramount importance. Additionally, tailoring social and cultural activities to align with student expectations, reassessing teaching programs in accordance with contemporary needs and stakeholder input, promoting international student mobility, ensuring the quantitative increase in universities is matched with a proportional enhancement in quality, and augmenting the image of universities will all contribute to mitigating the negative impacts of lateral transfers.

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