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ETHNIC MINORITIES' DROPOUT DECISIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW

ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to examine theoretical views on minority dropout decisions in higher education. This integrative review demonstrates that the dropout issue is highly complex and is comprised of different definitions and characteristics. It is required that educators clearly define the term. The review's findings also show that minority students' decisions to drop out from higher education involve factors of three different dimensions: psychological, physical, and environmental factors. Institutional support is necessary to assist minority students in their educational attainment. The review concludes that future research will be key in further exploring the issue of minority dropout.

Keywords: *dropout decisions, ethnic minorities, higher education, minority dropout*

ETNIČNE MANJŠINE IN OSIP V VISOKOŠOLSLEM IZOBRAŽEVANJU: INTEGRATIVNI PREGLED – POVZETEK

Cilj prispevka je preučiti teoretične poglede na odločitve o opustitvi izobraževanja pri pripadnikih manjšin v visokošolskem izobraževanju. Integrativni pregled je pokazal, da je vprašanje osipa izredno kompleksno ter ga zaznamujejo raznolike definicije in značilnosti, zato je treba jasno definirati sam pojem. Ugotovitve prav tako kažejo, da na odločitve predstavnikov manjšin, da opustijo študij, vplivajo dejavniki treh različnih dimenzij: psihološki, fizični in okoljski. Pri pridobivanju izobrazbe morajo ustanove te študente še posebej podpirati. Prispevek postavlja sklep, da je nadaljnje raziskovanje ključnega pomena pri preučevanju problematike osipa med etničnimi manjšinami.

Ključne besede: *odločitve o opustitvi študija, etnične manjšine, visokošolsko izobraževanje, osip med manjšinami*

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INTRODUCTION

This research reviews both theoretical and empirical literature, focusing on the issue of minority dropout in higher education. Minority dropout in the present paper discusses the educational failure, not restricted to a minority group, of students from minority backgrounds considered to be ethnically distinct and subordinate to a more dominant group in different contexts found in the reviewed literature. Likewise, in some contexts (e.g., in the UK, USA), immigrants are considered a minority group. In the present study, the literature review includes definitions of “dropout”, the use of terminology, minority groups and their respective education, as well as reasons for dropping out from schooling among minority students.

The minority dropout issue has been of great interest among researchers around the world for decades, especially dropout rates in higher education (e.g., Grubb, 1989; Reisel & Brekke, 2010; Rodgers, 2013; Samora, 1963; Williams, 2019; Wong & Wong, 1980). The focus of the scholarly discussion lies on withdrawal from higher education. Regarding the terminology, the literature indicates that in addition to “dropout”, several other terms exist which are used interchangeably, such as “withdrawal”, “non-completion”, “departing”, “leave or student leaver”, “non-persistence, non-persisters” (e.g., Astin & Cross, 1979; Bidgood et al., 2006; Gross et al., 2013; Meeuwisse et al. 2010; O’Keeffe, 2013; Woodfield, 2017). According to the literature review, “dropout” has been introduced with different terms in different studies. Moreover, defining “dropout” is quite complicated and it may lead to misunderstanding due to its several conditions, styles/types, and patterns. For instance, students transferring from one institution to another can be called “dropout” (as in the work of Grubb, 1989), but on the other hand, the case can be categorized as “switcher,” which is not really “dropout” as proposed by Meeuwisse et al. (2012). Likewise, “dropout” can be grouped into two sub-categories: voluntary and involuntary, as Wong and Wong (1980) mentioned. However, the definition of dropout for the present paper is about minority students leaving their studies in university and/or college. Furthermore, dropout decisions made by ethnic minority students involve several factors, for instance, poor learning history in past education (Attinasi, 1989), motivation (Bidgood et al., 2006), peer interaction (Azaola, 2020), parental education (Chen & Desjardins, 2010), etc. There have been a number of studies investigating the reasons members of ethnic minorities drop out or leave their studies, however, only a few have used an integrative review research approach.

Investigating minority dropout is not a new phenomenon and it is not a concern limited to the regional level; rather, it is a global issue. The UN (2015) and its *Agenda 2030* called for the global community to join hands to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which envisions the provision of quality education for all, promoting equity and equality in education, without discrimination based on social class, ethnicity, and gender. According to SDG 4, the quality of an educational system is measured through the equity and equality of educational access for all learners. Despite the global community’s agreement on working towards SDG 4, minority inclusion remains an issue in education. The existing literature reveals that minority students continue to lag behind their

non-minority peers, particularly in educational life as demonstrated by their underrepresentation in academia and low levels of academic attainment amongst minority groups. Minority students are more likely to leave or withdraw from their schooling without a degree, especially at the undergraduate level (Reisel & Brekke, 2010). In order to comprehend the issue of minority education and to contribute to the existing body of knowledge, the present paper looks into the theoretical views of minority dropout, with a particular focus on the structural reasons for dropout decisions in higher education amongst students who are from ethnic minorities. The guiding question for this research is: "How is dropout conceptualised and what reasons for ethnic minority dropout in higher education can be found in the integrative review of literature?"

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

An integrative review of literature was conducted for this research. We reviewed the existing literature to understand the theoretical perspectives on minority dropout and to identify the key issues driving minority students to drop out of higher education. This review follows the framework proposed by Tavares de Souza et al. (2010), analysing both theoretical and empirical studies to describe the problems of a particular concern. We executed five steps of the integrative review method. To begin with, the research question was developed. Secondly, we took stock of the existing literature. As a third step, the identified literature was evaluated and screened according to a set of criteria, and subsequently, data gathered in this way was analysed. Lastly, in line with Whittemore and Knaf's (2005) recommendation, we presented the results in a structured manner in the form of this paper. In addition to this integrative review method, this paper incorporates the systematic review method. This research method analyses secondary and primary data to present findings according to the established research questions (Newman & Gough, 2020).

We used several online databases to source appropriate literature, such as ASC, ERIC, SCOPUS, SocINDEX, and Web of Sciences. According to the nature of systematic review, we developed the search terms (keywords): "dropout," "minority," "adult education", then developed three search strings from the determined keywords using the Boolean operators "AND" and "OR" (see Fig. 1). This review searched with a combination of

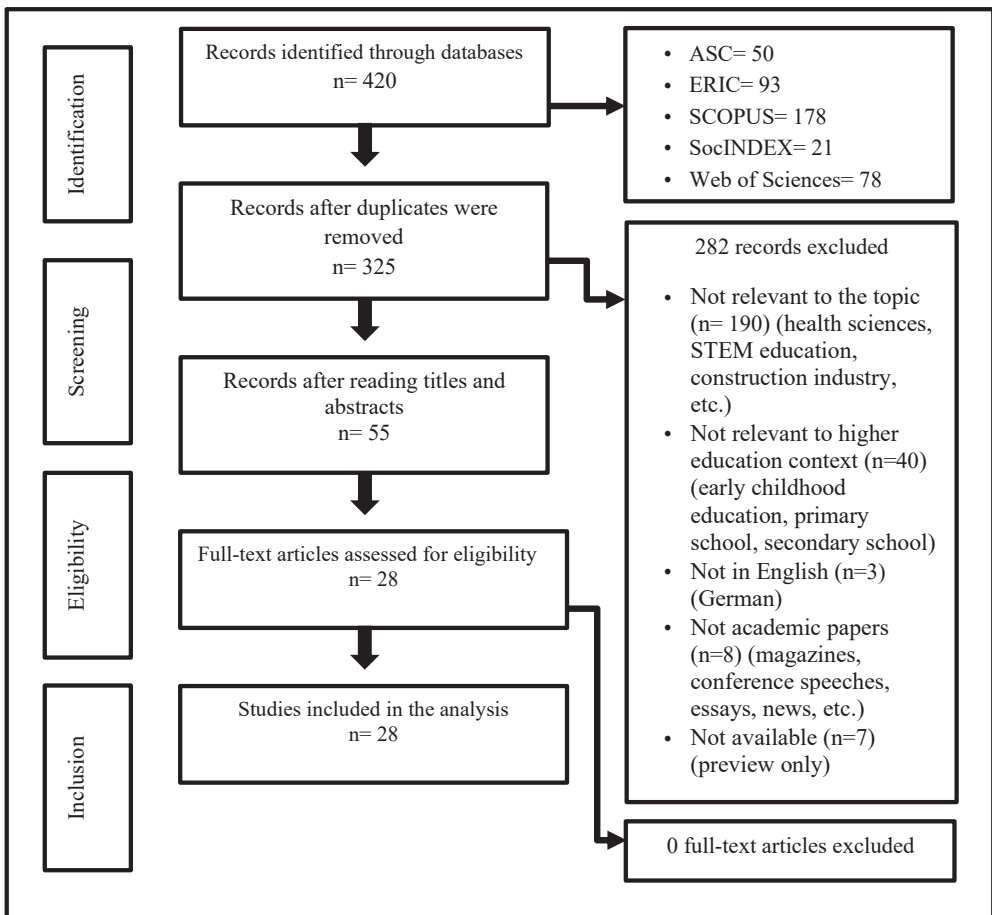
Figure 1

Search terms of the integrative review

1. ("dropout" OR "withdrawal" OR "loss")
AND
2. ("minority" OR "ethnic minority" OR "minority group" OR "indigenous group" OR "tribal group")
AND
3. ("adult education" OR "higher education" OR "lifelong learning" OR "further education" OR "continuing education" OR "further study" OR "university education" OR "lifelong education")

Figure 2

Flow chart of the screening process for the integrative review



the three search strings. This is a type of keyword search. It functions well in searching and broadening results on the web and in databases because the search looks for items of studies in every record to see if the words used are present in article titles, abstracts or keywords tagged to the text.

From a total pool of 420 papers examined, 28 were deemed appropriate and analysed for the purpose of this study. The exclusion criteria defined to reject/exclude articles were: articles not relevant to the topic, such as dropout issues in mainstream schools, STEM education, etc.; articles not published in English; articles not academic papers, such as magazines, news, conference speeches, etc.; and articles not available/not downloadable. On the other hand, articles met the review criteria if they discussed the keywords of this paper: minority dropout, dropout issues among minorities, dropout decisions at higher education or college level. The review took into consideration academic papers, empirical

research pieces, reports, and books concerned with minority dropout perspectives, as well as the reasons for the dropout decisions of minorities in higher education. The present study only considered sources written in English (see Fig. 2). In the synthesis process for this study, we listed all the findings from the included articles in an attempt to integrate all the information from the individual articles to produce a better response to the research question developed for the review. In the process, coding and making themes/categories were also conducted in order to present the findings in a structured way, in particular regarding the reasons for dropout decisions among minorities.

RESULTS

The results of the research question, “How is dropout conceptualised and what reasons for ethnic minority dropout in higher education can be found in the integrative review of literature?”, are reported in two parts: the conceptualisation of dropout and the reasons for dropout decisions in higher education amongst ethnic minority students.

The Conceptualisation of Dropout

The results from the present study showed that the term “dropout” has been introduced and/or replaced in the reviewed literature by words such as “withdrawal” (in the studies of Astin & Cross, 1979; Bidgood et al., 2006; Meeuwisse et al. 2010, Wong & Wong, 1980), “non-completion” (in the investigations of O’Keeffe, 2013; Rodgers, 2013), “departing” (in Gross et al., 2013; Radunzel, 2017), “leave, student leaver” (in Woodfield, 2017), and “non-persistence, non-persisters”. Even the antonym for the latter, “persistence”, has been used to compare, clarify, and explain the definition through contrasting (as shown in Astin & Cross, 1979; Attinasi, 1989; York et al., 1993). Regarding meaning, “dropout” is defined in different words, for instance, Reisel and Brekke (2010) noted that “dropout” refers to students leaving or withdrawing from their studies without degree completion and without plans to return within the next four semesters. In the same vein, Grubb (1989) stated that “dropout” refers to students who leave university and/or college without credentials. This definition also includes students who transfer to other institutions. Due to its many dimensions, the term “dropout” needs to be used carefully by educators. Astin and Cross (1979) noted that when students withdraw from higher education only temporarily, this phenomenon is called “stopout”. According to Chen (2008, as cited in Chen & DesJardins, 2010), there are three distinctive types of dropout in higher education: (1) “stopout” refers to students who quit their studies for some period of time and who subsequently return to continue their enrolment; (2) “institutional dropout” refers to those who leave their current institutions to transfer to another school; and (3) “system dropout” applies to students who completely withdraw from their education.

In addition, Meeuwisse et al. (2010) referred to students who withdraw from their studies completely and do not return as the “dropout type”, whilst calling students who leave one program and shift to enrol in another “switchers”. According to Meeuwisse et al. (2010), “switchers” applies to students who transfer from one major to another as well

as to students who change their educational institution. Similarly, Kim et al. (2012) affirmed that the term “dropout” is concerned with different patterns of transfer: students transferring from a four-year institution to another four-year institution are referred to as “lateral transfers”, whilst a transfer from a four-year institution to a two-year institution is labelled a “reverse transfer”. Kim et al. (2012) agreed with Chen (2008, as cited in Chen & DesJardins, 2010) and argued that students who take a temporary break from their education and plan to return in the future are “stopouts”. An older study by Astin and Cross (1979) pointed out that the reasons students transfer are influenced by different factors such as their residence or accommodation while at university, career plans, social life, and attendance costs. For instance, students who change their career plans, live far away from university, struggle to pay their tuition fees, and do not experience a satisfying social life on campus are highly likely to withdraw from their current university and transfer to a university that they see as a better fit when it comes to the factors mentioned. Moreover, a recent study conducted by Radunzel (2017) found that students’ transfers are linked to their academic preparation, meaning that students who are better prepared for their studies have little tendency to transfer.

According to the literature, a succinct definition of the term “dropout” is necessary, especially for data analysis and interpretation. Dropout refers to an individual’s or learner’s decision to completely withdraw from their studies, including to quit all school-related activities, and having no plan to return to schooling in the future. Furthermore, there are plenty of conditions in dropout itself, especially in higher education, and the term “dropout” can be categorised by types/styles of leaving or withdrawing from education. The existing literature cautions researchers and educators to use the term “dropout” carefully and to define it clearly. Moreover, “dropout” has been categorised into two types: the voluntary (students who leave their schooling because of their academic failure) and the non-voluntary type (students who leave their schooling due to personal reasons).

Reasons for Dropout Decisions among Minority Students

This paper found a number of reasons why minority students decide to withdraw from schooling. The reasons are categorised into three different levels: the psychological level, which encompasses the individuals’ motivation, perception, attitudes, and learning; the physical level, referring to the individuals’ readiness in health for learning; and the environmental level, referring to the influences of family background, living environment, institutional support, and socialisation with others. Each level is further comprised of sub-categories and the detailed descriptions are indicated in Table 1 and the following paragraphs.

Table 1*Reasons for dropout decisions found in existing literature*

The psychological level: learning conditions, personal attitudes and learning aspirations	
Learning conditions:	
Poor learning performance	Meeuwisse et al. (2010); O'Keeffe (2013); Psathas (1968, as cited in Wong & Wong, 1980); Woodfield (2017)
Poor learning history in past education, specifically in high school	Astin & Cross (1979); Attinasi (1989); Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities (1982); Grubb (1989); Hoffman (2002); Radunzel (2017)
Little engagement in learning	Rodgers & Thandi (2010, as cited in Rodgers, 2013)
Personal attitudes and learning aspirations:	
Personal motivation	Bidgood et al. (2006); Grubb (1989); Samora (1963)
Self-determination to reach one's goals	Astin & Cross (1979); Chen & DesJardins (2010); Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities (1982)
Personal interest	Astin & Cross (1979); Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities (1982); Meeuwisse et al. (2010); Psathas (1968, as cited in Wong & Wong, 1980)
Self-esteem	Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities (1982)
Self-efficacy	Anderson (1985, as cited in Berry & Asamen, 1989); Meeuwisse et al. (2010)
The physical level: health issues	
Health issues:	
Health conditions (e.g., mental health)	O'Keeffe (2013); Woodfield (2017)
Anxiety, stress	Astin & Cross (1979); Meeuwisse et al. (2010)
The environmental level: need for employment, institutional support, social interactions, family background, and distance from home to school	
Need for employment:	
Off-campus job, full-time job	Astin & Cross (1979); Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities (1982); Grubb (1989)
Needs and expectations of employment	Meeuwisse et al. (2010); Radunzel (2017); Woodfield (2017)
Institutional supports:	
Policy body (recruitment, financial policies) and administrative system	Bernasconi (2015); Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities (1982); Gross et al. (2013); O'Keeffe (2013); Radunzel (2017); Rogers (2009); Samora (1963); Williams (2019); York et al. (1993)

Mismatches in cultures, interests between students and the university	Jenkins & Guthrie (1976, as cited in Berry & Asamen, 1989); Kim et al. (2012); Radunzel (2017); Samora (1963); Williams (2019)
School connectedness (supportive learning environment, counselling desk)	Anderson et al. (2018); Astin & Cross (1979); Azaola (2020); Deil-Amen (2011); Radunzel (2017); Rogers (2009); York et al. (1993)
Faculty/body catering to the needs of minorities	Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities (1982); Williams (2019)
Social interactions:	
Providing involvement/feeling of belonging/ not feeling rejected	Nagasawa & Wong (1997); Hoffman (2002); Hurtado & Carter (1997); O'Keeffe (2013)
Interactions with peers	Attinasi (1989); Azaola, 2020; Baysu & Phalet (2012); Deil-Amen (2011); Gross et al. (2013); Meeuwisse et al. (2010); Samora (1963)
Interactions with faculty/mentors	Attinasi (1989); Baysu & Phalet (2012); Deil-Amen (2011); Gross et al. (2013); Meeuwisse et al. (2010); Samora (1963)
Family background:	
Parents' educational qualifications	Astin & Cross (1979); Chen & DesJardins (2010); Grubb (1989); Radunzel (2017); Reisel & Brekke (2010)
Parents with little appreciation for education	Astin & Cross (1979); Meeuwisse et al. (2010); Samora (1963)
Family's financial constraints	Astin & Cross (1979); Bidgood et al. (2006); Rodgers (2013); Rogers (2009); York et al. (1993)
Distance from home to school:	
Living far away from home at the time of studying	Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities (1982); Mattern et al. (2013, as cited in Radunzel, 2017)
Staying in university accommodation	Astin & Cross (1979)

The Psychological Level

This level focuses on the individuals' psychological reasons for withdrawing from education. It includes several factors which may contribute to student dropout decisions: the learning conditions of individuals, their personal attitudes and learning aspirations. According to the review, the ability to learn and study habits are strongly associated with dropping out from schooling among minority students. That means students with previous poor learning outcomes and limited academic readiness are most likely to perform poorly in future education also, which eventually leads them to leaving their studies without a degree. Moreover, personal attitudes and aspiration for learning, self-efficacy as well as self-determination matter. Simply speaking, students with high self-efficacy and

self-esteem who don't possess positive attitudes towards the program they are studying, will tend to push themselves to step away from schooling and not engage in learning tasks anymore.

Learning conditions

Meeuwisse et al. (2010) found that minority dropout is linked to concerns about their restricted learning abilities rooted in language barriers, cultural differences, and structural disadvantages. O'Keeffe (2013) found the same tendency that students' inability to perform well is highly likely to contribute to non-completion of a program. Rodgers (2013), citing a previous piece of research by Rodgers and Thandi (2010), stated that the underperformance of ethnic minority students is rooted in their low socioeconomic backgrounds and lack of their perceived expectations of the institution and of potential future employers, causing low engagement in learning processes. Moreover, the learning environments of past educational stages matter. Students who experienced poor learning outcomes and who acquired only a limited extent of academic readiness during the previous stages of their education are most likely to continue performing poorly during the subsequent stage, which might lead them to leave their studies prior to completion. Grubb (1989) proposed that the phenomenon of dropouts strongly correlates with the experience of poor learning environments during high school, such as lenient performance control in the form of few assignments or negligent attendance standards enabling students to skip class and work during school time. Grubb added that students with poor learning outcomes in high school tend to have similarly low performance at higher education levels. Attinasi (1989) agreed with this view and stated that high school curricula have far-reaching effects on students beyond the stage of high school education alone.

Personal attitudes and learning aspirations

Students who do not see the intrinsic value of education tend to neglect their studies and eventually withdraw entirely. According to the literature reviewed (e.g., Bidgood et al., 2006; Chen & DesJardins, 2010; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Rodgers, 2013; Samora, 1963), personal attitudes and learning aspirations, as well as uncertainty about the future, influence the dropout decision. Samora (1963) conducted a study with Spanish-speaking students in the south-west of the United States and found that this particular group of students demonstrated low levels of motivation to persist in school. The students did not see their education as effective in furthering their economic and social upward mobility. The perceived value of education was low and the students consequently did not invest high levels of energy into their studies (Samora, 1963). Accordingly, students with limited educational aspirations will tend to be disengaged from educational activities and they might eventually withdraw from school (Grubb, 1989). Chen and DesJardins (2010) pointed out that several factors influence students' decisions to drop out of higher education, including age, being a first-year student, and personal educational goals. The latter issue is mainly linked to personal attitudes towards the chosen subject, course, or program. This finding is consistent with Astin and Cross (1979), who explained that students

might reject to continue their studies when they are under-stimulated in school and lose interest in their courses. The interests of students who persist in their studies, in contrast, are more likely to fit well with their respective programs. Persisting students also tend to be engaged in several school activities, such as sports, music, student organisations, and other school events. Low self-efficacy and self-esteem also matter. Astin and Cross noted that withdrawing students tend to engage in self-deprecating behaviour and have low levels of self-esteem. This behaviour can even extend to the dropouts' physical presentation of themselves (Astin & Cross, 1979).

The Physical Level

This level is concerned with the physical readiness of individuals for learning. It takes into account health issues (both physical and mental conditions) which may aggravate educational attainment among minority students. According to the review, students with a health issue, physical or mental conditions will have problems with their learning progress and that negatively affects their persistence or stay in education because this factor is key to readiness for learning. That means if students are strong in both mental and physical health, they have more possibility to study and remain in schooling.

Health issues

The present review found health issues to be a dropout reason for students from ethnic minority backgrounds. O'Keeffe (2013) found that students with mental health issues are more likely to have a risk of non-completion or drop out midway in their studies, especially members of minority groups. O'Keeffe highlighted that mental health matters and that it influences student retention. Other authors supported this notion and emphasized that anxieties around one's personal life, lack of confidence, dissatisfaction with one's physical appearance (Astin & Cross, 1979), financial stress (Rodgers, 2013), or worries about the home and family-related responsibilities (Meeuwisse et al., 2010) can negatively impact educational attainment. However, little attention has been paid to this factor.

The Environmental Level

This level is concerned with environmental dimensions that may have an impact on minority groups' dropout decisions, including the need for employment (during and after their studies), institutional support, social interactions, family background, and the distance from home to school. Institutions of higher education and their staff, such as administrators, teaching staff, faculty mentors, and other relevant persons, are very influential to students' feelings of belonging and their learning success. The need for employment has a strong impact on minority students' education as well. Having a part-time or full-time job tends to decrease engagement in learning and tolerance for learning activities. Moreover, institutional support, for instance, a caring policy and facilities provided by the institution could help minimise the thoughts of transfer, withdrawal, and attrition among students, in particular those who are from ethnic minority groups. Social interaction is another element on the environmental level that is linked to the dropout decisions

of minority students. It likely relates to the development of feelings of belonging. Class interaction, which involves teacher-student and student-student interaction, can be enhanced by providing both formal and informal study group environments. Furthermore, the key parental support includes not only encouragement and payment of expenses, but is also linked to the parents' educational experiences and value orientations. If students lack such support, they will likely find it difficult to learn and remain in higher education. Finally, the distance from home to school affects the dropout decisions of minority students. For instance, students who take plenty of time travelling home will miss opportunities for participating in school-related activities and peer interaction. If they study far from their hometown, without visiting or travelling back home so often, they could experience better social and academic integration, which could affect their learning engagement and success of learning.

Need for employment

Need for employment is found to have a strong impact on minority students' education. Grubb (1989) suggested that some students, whom he calls "experimenters", enrol in higher education driven by the knowledge that completing a higher education program will enhance their employment prospects, but without having identified a specific course they are invested in. Should "experimenters" be offered an appealing job, they are likely to leave their studies to take up employment prior to degree completion. Grubb added that an increase of the dropout rate is affected by "cyclical forces" rather than "underlying trends". This is to say, a higher unemployment rate can reduce a high dropout rate as students will have fewer reasons in the form of potential employment opportunities to leave school prematurely. Similarly, Astin and Cross (1979) pointed out that students who work hard in off-campus jobs, for instance, more than 21 hours per week, are more likely to withdraw from their studies. Two more studies (Radunzel, 2017; Woodfield, 2017) also found that the issue of dropping out from higher education is linked to the students' needs centred around employment whilst studying as well as expectations of future employment.

Institutional support

Some authors suggested that appropriate institutional support can not only reduce the likelihood of minority dropout but may additionally enhance the educational progress of minority students (e.g., O'Keeffe, 2013; Radunzel, 2017; Rogers, 2009; Samora, 1963). Andersen et al. (2018) showed that student well-being factors (school connectedness, student support, being able to relate to one's teachers, and valuing one's subject/program) influence student performance and are therefore predictors of student dropout. School connectedness is particularly important as it makes students feel comfortable and happy relating to their peers and their faculty, and it enhances the students' positive attitudes towards the institution. Azaola (2020) agreed that social support can help students who are at risk of dropping out if support is offered during the first year of entering university or college. Azaola (2020) wrote that universities should invest efforts into developing

student networks and activities fostering student gatherings and communication both on and off campus, facilitated through both online and traditional platforms. Institutions should note that “one size cannot fit all”. York et al. (1993) pointed out that one of the reasons for withdrawing from university and areas causing dissatisfaction amongst non-persisters may include “administrative facilities and/or units” (p. 7). Thus, social support could be a way of assisting new enrollees in adapting themselves to a new learning environment (Deil-Amen, 2011; York et al., 1993) and helping them develop a sound relationship with their faculty (Rogers, 2009). It can be challenging for minority students in higher education to adjust to campus life without social support provided by the educational institution (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). In the same vein, a study by Meeuwisse et al. (2010) showed that a lack of support within the academic system and a lack of social integration with peers are reasons minority students decide to withdraw from their studies. Astin and Cross (1979) also suggested that providing psychological support to minority students could help prevent them from withdrawing from school.

Social interactions

Social interaction constitutes a crucial factor influencing minority dropout decisions. It refers to relationships or social interactions on the student-student and student-instructor level; these interactions are likely to be connected to students developing feelings of belonging. Hoffman (2002) supported this perspective and stated that student involvement in school-provided activities is especially important for the educational attainment of minority students, and that it enhances academic integration. Attinasi (1989) explored Mexican-American students’ decision making to remain at or withdraw from university. Attinasi analysed data from interviews with 18 then-current and former students, 13 of whom were enrolled students during their second year, and five of whom had dropped out during their first year. The study found that interactions and friendship with peers and mentors influenced the students to remain in school. Attinasi stated that such interaction facilitates cognitive skills, fosters socialisation, and supports physical and academic interactions. The level of anticipatory socialisation has an effect on student decisions regarding both college-going and persistence in college. Having a sense of belonging is linked to students’ experiences of social and academic integration (Deil-Amen, 2011; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). O’Keeffe (2013) noted that it is not easy for students to develop a good relationship with their faculty. Especially reticent students are likely to communicate with their instructors or faculty members through digital channels rather than face-to-face. Students from minority backgrounds who may be more likely to have low levels of confidence and self-esteem might find it particularly challenging to contact their instructors or faculty personnel for academic support (Kelly et al., 2004, as cited in O’Keeffe, 2013).

Family background

Much evidence in the literature confirms the influence of familial or parental support in this field. The key behaviours of parental support include encouragement, payment of

expenses, as well as appreciation for education by the parents themselves. Several scholars demonstrated that minority dropout is influenced by family background, regarding families' financial constraints (e.g., Astin & Cross, 1979; Bidgood et al., 2006; Chen & DesJardins, 2010; Woodfield, 2017), parents with low educational qualifications (Grubb, 1989; Radunzel, 2017; Reisel & Brekke, 2010), and parents who provide little encouragement to their children regarding education (Astin & Cross, 1979; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Samora, 1963). According to Astin and Cross (1979), financial worries are linked to withdrawing from school, and the withdrawers are the most likely to be anxious about their families not being able to afford to pay for their education. York et al. (1993) agreed with this perspective, arguing that financial concerns are amongst the five leading reasons minority students drop out of higher education. Similarly, a study conducted by Bidgood et al. (2006) explored influential factors predicting student withdrawal from further education in the United Kingdom. The study analysed withdrawal issues across White and Black groups (Black groups, for the purpose of that study, included all students of colour). The authors showed that financial difficulties strongly impact educational retention by tending to cause students to drop out. A recent work by Radunzel (2017) also found that students who are the first in their families to endeavour to attain higher education are more likely to drop out. This is in line with the findings of Reisel and Brekke (2010), who argued that parents of minority students who are not familiar with their children's educational system, the language and culture of the institution, are less likely to support their children's study efforts. Lack of parental support is a strong factor influencing minority dropout as encouragement from family members, especially parents, is seen to be key to keeping students in school. Astin and Cross (1979) agreed that students from families who are not supportive of their studies are likely to leave prematurely.

Distance from home to school

According to the literature reviewed, a considerable distance from home to school also has an influence on the decision to drop out or remain in higher education. An investigation of the Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities (1982) showed that students who live far away from home at the time of studying are more likely to persist in college or university than those who live near or at home with their family. The underlying argument is that students whose hometown is far from their school are more committed to their studies and have more time to engage in learning as they have fewer opportunities to go home and visit their families. Astin and Cross (1979) supported this notion and argued that students who live in dormitories or university accommodation on campus are more likely to persist in school whilst students who live with their spouses and/or with other family members are more likely to drop out. Staying in university dormitories may facilitate learning conditions as students are able to interact with peers and classmates, and they are more likely to have the opportunity to participate in academic and non-academic activities organised by their faculty or university. Moreover, travelling home infrequently can reduce expenses and help save money which may be of particular importance for

students from low-income backgrounds, which minority students are more likely to come from. Students who often make time to go back home could be limited in their capacity to study as visits take time, reduce opportunities for peer interaction, and may distract them from their studies by being recruited for domestic and/or family chores. However, a more recent piece of research conducted by Mattern et al. (2013, as cited in Radunzel, 2017) found a contrary trend, arguing that students who enrol in an institution far away from their home are more likely to withdraw or transfer to another institution which is closer to their home.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

An integrative review was designed for this study. We reviewed the literature systematically to examine the conceptualisation of “dropout” and find out the structural reasons minority students leave their studies in university/college. Thus, the guiding research question for the study was: “How is dropout conceptualised and what reasons for ethnic minority dropout in higher education can be found in the integrative review of literature?” The review’s findings show that several authors define “dropout” as students who leave their schooling without a degree. Certain terms provide a more detailed account of the dropout issue. Dropout is a complex issue as there are different types and styles of dropout. Previous literature revealed that three distinctive types of dropouts can be determined at the higher education level, namely (1) “stopout”, (2) “institutional dropout”, and (3) “system dropout”. “Dropout” has been categorised into two types: the voluntary and the non-voluntary type. The empirical literature also noted that minority dropout in higher education is a serious issue as minority students are much more likely to leave school without a degree than their non-minority peers, especially at the undergraduate level. The literature demonstrated that there are a number of reasons facilitating dropout decisions among minority students. We grouped these into three levels of structural reasons for dropping out or withdrawing from schooling. The first level encompasses psychological reasons, including students’ personal attitudes, motivation, and/or learning aspirations, as well as the learning conditions of the individual. The second level is concerned with the physical dimension, i.e., the physical learning readiness based on students’ physical and mental health. The third level involves environmental factors such as the need for employment, institutional support, social interaction, family background, and the distance from home to school.

This paper supports the development of feelings of belonging and appreciation of education amongst minority students as these elements could foster their educational attainment. Special support for minority students from institutions should not be limited to standard provisions such as guidance and enabling recruitment policies, but it should encompass additional measures such as facilitating opportunities for meaningful participation in campus life, scholarships covering tuition fees, improving faculty-student relationships, and offering flexible degree-completion schemes. Importantly, a stringent monitoring system including follow-ups is required to ensure the efficient implementation

of these special support provisions. What seems to be an issue found in the literature reviewed is that “dropout” is actually defined extensively, however, “minority” or “minority dropout” is not really mentioned clearly because in some contexts, immigrants can also represent a minority group. This study employed an integrative review of literature and reviewed theoretical and empirical data only; future research could consider a mix of a systematic review and collecting actual quantitative data from a case study of target minorities to comprehend a full overview of their dropout issues. Furthermore, the literature reviewed did not really discuss demographic dimensions, such as age, class, and gender, in exploring dropout issues among minorities. Previous literature lacks an understanding of female students’ needs, especially regarding their educational attainment. We believe that a gender-sensitive analysis would offer a more granular picture of reasons for dropout decisions in higher education. Another limitation of this study concerns the restricted final number of papers. The present paper did not use a search filter in its search strategy. Using an appropriate filter helps to narrow the search and look for more relevant articles on the research question. Future research on the related area/topic might consider this point and use a search filter (e.g., article/publication type, publication dates). Moreover, primary data collection through direct interviews with minority students who dropped out is strongly recommended.

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