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A Study on Measures to Increase Student Enrollment in Community Colleges : Based on the Case of G College

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Abstract

In this study, for students who gave up their studies midway through college, we investigate the reasons for dropping out of college, analyze the factors that caused students to drop out, and suggest improvement measures to effectively increase the recruitment rate of enrolled students.

This study explores measures to increase student enrollment in community colleges. For this purpose, it conducted a survey of students who dropped out of G College between 2018 and 2020 from June 28 to July 9, 2021. Its analysis is based on the results of 53 students who participated in the survey.

First, our results suggest that programs to develop interpersonal relationships between students, faculty, and staff are necessary. Such programs will cultivate a culture of solidarity and collective identity among students, which in turn will reinforce positive experiences in college. Moreover, by developing systems to form relationships between faculty and students, colleges can have a feedback mechanism, such as an open-study program, through which they learn what the students want and need. Through this effort, colleges can help their students adjust to campuses and enhance student satisfaction in college.

Second, it is necessary to develop various extracurricular programs not only for freshmen but existing students and to run hobby and leisure activity programs. To have continuous, standing extracurricular programs instead of one-time events, colleges should set up specific goals, delivery methods and strategies.

Third, colleges should renovate old and outdated buildings and facilities on campus to enhance the quality of campus life. Moreover, more comprehensive improvement of facilities and a campus environment by having various convenient and leisure facilities that meet the needs and demands of students.

Fourth, it is suggested to develop programs or systems that help students to more fully engage in campus lives and activities, which in turn increases confidence and self-efficacy among students. Through such programs, students can better adjust to their majors and, therefore, will be less likely to drop out of college.

Keywords: Student Enrollment, Interpersonal Relationships, Culture of Solidarity, Collective Identity

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2019, universities and colleges in South Korea have faced a dramatic decline in student enrollment due to the shrinking of student populations caused by low birthrates in the nation. Therefore, higher education institutions seriously feel threatened [1, 2]. This situation has cornered many institutions, putting them in danger of closing down. Further, the drop in new student enrollment results in financial strains, leading to the depreciation of education and services in colleges and universities, eventually causing existing students to drop out. The drop-out of existing students means the loss of future graduates from the perspective of colleges and universities. The more students who drop out, the more threatened universities and colleges become, contributing to the decline of their quality. The drop-out of existing students is more prominent in remote regions than in central and metropolitan regions in South Korea. Each institution is faced with the need to increase student satisfaction in its endeavor to maintain retention rates [3].

According to the statistics provided by Higher Education in Korea and the Korean Educational Development Institute, the student drop-out rates in community colleges were 7.9% in 2018, 8.2% in 2019, and 7.7% in 2020. Those in 4-year universities were 6.5% in 2018, 6.5% in 2019, and 6.4% in 2020, suggesting student drop-out rates are higher in community colleges.

Especially in 2021, the third year the Higher Education Basic Competence Assessment was conducted, the indicator for student enrollment was increased by 200% from the 10-point to 20-point scale, putting universities and colleges under more pressure to meet the requirement. This requires universities and colleges to pay closer attention to students on a leave of absence, as these students have the potential to drop out. By doing so, they can better reduce drop-out rates, which helps maintain student enrollment and stable financial resources [4].

To achieve this goal, however, comprehensive research should be done to identify factors that contribute to student drop-out. Unfortunately, the existing studies in the literature are primarily based on currently enrolled students [2, 3, 4].

This study focuses on students who dropped out of G College to explore the factors that caused them to leave college. Through its analysis, the study aims to propose measures to enhance student enrollment effectively.

2. METHOD OF RESEARCH

2.1 Subjects of research

The contacted 123 students who dropped out of G College between 2018 and 2020, explained the purpose and content of this study, informed them of privacy and confidentiality, and asked for their voluntary participation in the survey via phone. 53 of them agreed to participate, and we conducted a survey of these individuals.

2.2 Research tool

This study developed a survey instrument building upon the previous studies [5, 6, 7]. The questionnaire consists of 16 questions, including 6 general demographic questions, 1 question about the college's effort to prevent student drop-out, and 8 questions about reasons for drop-out.

The 8 questions about reasons for drop-out were measured on a 5-point Likert scale with 1, indicating 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 'Strongly Agree' and these measures' Cronbach's α was .890.

2.3 Research proceedings

2.3.1 Data Collection

The survey was conducted from June 28 to July 9, 2021 online via Google Form, and each survey took approximately 10 minutes

2.3.2 Data analysis method

The SPSS 26.0 for Windows was used for data analysis.

First, we conducted a frequency analysis to figure out factors that affected the individuals' decision to enter G College and choose their majors, such as gender and year. Also, the motivations to choose majors and factors that affected their grades were analyzed through this frequency analysis.

Second, we conducted another frequency analysis to examine the causes for the individuals to drop out and G College's effort to prevent students from dropping out.

Third, in order to identify the reasons and compare differences between different years in college, we calculated basic statistics (means, standard deviations) and conducted a t-test for the independent samples.

3. RESULT OF RESEARCH

3.1 The General characteristics of subjects

The subjects of this study is 53. Concerning the general demographics and characteristics of those who dropped out of college, the survey contained 6 questions, which included gender, year in college, major, factors affecting the decision to enter G College, motivations to choose the major, and GPAs. Among the participants in the survey, men accounted for 69.8% and women 30.2%. 77.4% responded they dropped out during their first year in college, and 22.6% responded it was their second year in college.

Regarding majors, the results show that 'architecture and interior design' 9.6%, 'computer engineering' 3.8%, 'firefighting and electricity' 9.4%, 'drone and civil engineering' 13.2%, 'nursing' 7.5%, 'beauty and wellness' 5.7%, 'tax, accounting, and distribution' 3.8%, 'automobile and machinery' 9.4%, 'public health and administration' 11.3%, 'child education and welfare' 5.7%, and 'aviation maintenance' 20.8%.

The most important factor that made the individuals decide to enter G College was 'myself' 47.2%, 'parent' 26.4%, 'teacher' 11.3%, 'friend/senior student' 9.4%, 'Internet, TV, newspapers, etc.' 3.8%, 'advertisement' 1.9%, other .0%. It shows the most important factor in their decision to enter college was the students themselves.

The motivations for them to choose their majors turned out to be 'my aptitude' 32.1%, 'career prospect' and 'recommendation from others' 26.4%, 'my grade' 9.4%, 'other' 3.8%, and 'no response' 1.9%.

The grades when the students dropped out showed that 35.2% were 'below 3.0', 32.1% were 'between 3.0 and 4.0', 11.3% were 'over 4.0', and 20.8% gave 'no response', indicating that those with lower grades were more likely to drop out.

Table 1 shows General characteristics of subjects.

3.2 Efforts the College Could Make to Prevent Students from Dropping Out

Table 2 shows the results of Measures the College Could Take to Prevent Students from Dropping Out.

This study asked the participants what they believed to be the most effective ways for G College to adopt to prevent students from dropping out. The participants were allowed to choose multiple responses regardless of the order of their preferences. The results showed that 23.7% answered 'tuition and stipends through various

scholarships’, 20.6% answered ‘customized education services’, 19.6% answered ‘active career counseling and employment support’, 15.5 answered ‘to motivate students through regular counseling and care’, and 6.2% answered ‘to improve campus life and experiences through student self-governance and cultural activities’ and ‘to reinforce education in coordination with 4-year universities in other regions’, respectively. 4.1% of respondents said ‘to improve campus facilities’, 2.1% said ‘to improve education services’ and ‘to present the vision and goals of the college’, respectively, .0% said ‘other’. In short, the most important measures that the college could take to prevent students from dropping out turned out to be ‘tuition and stipends through various scholarships’, followed by ‘customized education services’, ‘active career counseling and employment support’, and ‘to motivate students through regular counseling and care’.

Table 1. Analysis of General Characteristics of Subjects (N=53)

	Categories	N (%)
	Male	37 (69.8)
	Female	16 (30.2)
Year in College	1 st	41 (77.4)
	2 nd	12 (22.6)
Majors	Architecture and Interior Design	5 (9.6)
	Computer Engineering	2 (3.8)
	Firefighting and Electricity	5 (9.4)
	Drone and Civil Engineering	7 (13.2)
	Nursing	4 (7.5)
	Beauty & Wellness	3 (5.7)
	Tax, Accounting, and Distribution	2 (3.8)
	Automobile and Machinery	5 (9.4)
	Public Health and Administration	6 (11.3)
	Child Education and Welfare	3 (5.7)
	Aviation Maintenance	11 (20.8)
Factors that affected one's decision to enter G College	Myself	25 (47.2)
	Parent	14 (26.4)
	Teacher	6 (11.3)
	Friend/Senior Student	5 (9.4)
	Advertisement	1 (1.9)
	Internet, TV, Newspapers, etc.	2 (3.8)
Motivations to choose one's major	Career prospect	14 (26.4)
	My aptitude	17 (32.1)
	My grade	5 (9.4)
	Recommendations from others	14 (26.4)
	Other	2 (3.8)
	No response	1 (1.9)
Grades	Over 4.0	6 (11.3)
	Between 3.0 and 4.0	17 (32.1)
	Below 3.0	19 (35.2)
	No response	11 (20.8)
	Total	53 (100.0)

Table 2. Measures the College Could Take to Prevent Students from Dropping Out(N=97)

	Categories	N (%)
Measures the College Could Take to Prevent Students from Dropping Out	Customized education services	20 (20.6)
	To motivate students through regular counseling and care	15 (15.5)
	Tuition and stipends through various scholarships	23 (23.7)
	Active career counseling and employment support	19 (19.6)
	To improve education services	2 (2.1)
	To present the vision and goals of the college	2 (2.1)
	To improve campus facilities	4 (4.1)
	To improve campus life and experiences through student self-governance and cultural activities	6 (6.2)
	To reinforce education in coordination with 4-year universities in other regions	6 (6.2)
	Total	97 (100.0)

3.3 Reasons to Drop Out

Tables 3 shows the results of Reasons to Drop Out.

Table 3. Reasons to Drop Out (N=53)

	Categories	N (%)	Mean
Due to financial difficulties such as tuition and living expenses	Strongly Disagree	16 (30.2)	2.36
	Disagree	16 (30.2)	
	Moderate	11 (20.8)	
	Agree	6 (11.3)	
	Strongly Agree	4 (7.5)	
My pride in attending college disappeared over time	Strongly Disagree	11 (20.8)	2.57
	Disagree	16 (30.2)	
	Moderate	14 (26.4)	
	Agree	9 (17.0)	
	Strongly Agree	3 (5.7)	
My major did not fit me	Strongly Disagree	8 (15.1)	3.19
	Disagree	10 (18.9)	
	Moderate	12 (22.6)	
	Agree	10 (18.9)	
	Strongly Agree	13 (24.5)	
Education programs and the overall quality of education did not meet my expectations	Strongly Disagree	7 (13.2)	2.79
	Disagree	15 (28.3)	
	Moderate	19 (35.8)	
	Agree	6 (11.3)	
	Strongly Agree	6 (11.3)	

Due to my inferiority complex as a student at a community college	Strongly Disagree	13 (24.5)	2.42
	Disagree	14 (26.4)	
	Moderate	17 (32.1)	
	Agree	9 (17.0)	
	Strongly Agree	0 (0.0)	
Due to the bias toward community colleges in our society	Strongly Disagree	15 (28.3)	2.34
	Disagree	14 (26.4)	
	Moderate	16 (30.2)	
	Agree	7 (13.2)	
	Strongly Agree	1 (1.9)	
I was worried I would not be able to get a job after graduation	Strongly Disagree	13 (24.5)	2.45
	Disagree	14 (26.4)	
	Moderate	17 (32.1)	
	Agree	7 (13.2)	
	Strongly Agree	2 (3.8)	
Due to problems in interpersonal relations on campus such as with romantic partners, friends and senior students	Strongly Disagree	15 (28.3)	2.32
	Disagree	14 (26.4)	
	Moderate	18 (34.0)	
	Agree	4 (7.5)	
	Strongly Agree	2 (3.8)	
Total		53 (100.0)	2.55

Concerning financial considerations—difficulties paying tuition and living expenses— as a reason to drop out, 30.2% of the respondents said ‘Strongly Disagree’, another 30.2% said ‘Disagree’, and 20.8% said ‘Moderate’, while 11.3% answered ‘Agree’ and 7.5% answered ‘Strongly Agree’. In short, 18.8% of the respondents reported dropping out of college due to financial difficulties.

Concerning the statement that I have lost pride in going to college as a reason, 20.8% responded ‘Strongly Disagree’, 30.2% responded ‘Disagree’, and 26.4% responded ‘Moderate’, while only a minority number of individuals responded in affirmation with 17.0% saying ‘Agree’ and 5.7% ‘Strongly Agree’. This suggests that the disappearance or lack of pride in going to college does not constitute the major reason for students to leave college.

Concerning the reason that a major does not fit me, 15.1% of the respondents said ‘Strongly Disagree’, 18.9% said ‘Disagree’ and 22.6% said ‘Moderate’, whereas 18.9% said ‘Agree’ and 24.5% said ‘Strongly Agree’. In short, 43.4% of the respondents left the college because they believed their majors did not fit them.

Concerning the reason that educational programs and the overall quality of education did not meet my expectations, 13.2% said ‘Strongly Disagree’, 28.3% said ‘Disagree’, 35.8% said ‘Moderate’, and 11.3% said ‘Agree’ and ‘Strongly Agree’, respectively. It indicates that only 22.6% of the respondents left the college because the education and programs provided by the college did not meet their expectations. In other words, this did not play a major role in students’ decision to drop out.

Concerning the statement that it was due to my inferiority complex as a student of a community college, 24.5% said ‘Strongly Disagree’, 26.4% said ‘Disagree’, 32.1% said ‘Moderate’, 17.0% said ‘Agree’ and 0.0% said ‘Strongly Agree’. The result shows that only 17.0% of the respondents dropped out due to their inferiority complex.

Concerning the statement that it was due to the general bias toward community colleges in our society, the vast majority of the respondents reported disagreement. 28.3% answered ‘Strongly Disagree’, 26.4% answered ‘Disagree’, 30.2% answered ‘Moderate’, 13.2% answered ‘Agree’, and only 1.9% answered ‘Strongly Disagree’. In other words, only 15.1% of the respondents reported society’s bias toward community colleges to be the reason for them to drop out of college.

Concerning the statement that I was worried I would not get a job after completing my degree, 24.5% responded ‘Strongly Disagree’, 26.4% responded ‘Disagree’, 32.1% responded ‘Moderate’, 13.2% responded ‘Agree’ and 3.8% responded ‘Strongly Agree’. This indicates that 17.0% of the respondents left college because of their worry they would not get a job after completing their degrees in college.

Concerning the statement that it was due to problems in interpersonal relationships in college, such as romantic relationships and relationships with friends and senior students, 28.3% responded ‘Strongly Disagree’ and 26.4% responded ‘Disagree’. 34.0% responded ‘Moderate’, 7.5% responded ‘Agree’, and 3.8% responded ‘Strongly Agree’. It shows that 11.3% dropped out due to problems in interpersonal relationships in college.

Other reasons that respondents mentioned for them to leave G College included the following: “I wanted to help my family by working instead of attending college”, “I wanted to go to a different school, I wanted to change my major, it didn’t fit my aptitude”, and “I wanted to go to a school that is closer to my house”.

If we focus on the mean scores for each item of the reasons for their drop-out, the item that the major did not fit me got the score of 3.19. The item the education and programs did not meet my expectations got the score of 2.79, the item that the pride in going to college decreased over time got the score of 2.57, the item that I was worried about not getting a job after graduation got the score of 2.45, the item that I had an inferiority complex because I went to a community college got the score of 2.42, the item that I had financial difficulties such as tuition and living expenses got the score of 2.36, the item that it was due to the bias toward community colleges got the score of 2.34, and the item that it was due to the problems in interpersonal relationships, such as with romantic partners, friends, and senior students got the score of 2.32. The only item that received a score above 3.0 was the item that ‘the major did not fit me’, indicating that it was the most significant reason for students to leave the college.

3.4 Differences in Reasons for Dropping Out by Year in College

Tables 4 shows the results of Comparison of Reasons for Dropping Out by Year in College.

Table 4. Comparison of Reasons for Dropping Out by Year in College(N=53)

Variables	1 st Year (n=41)		2 nd Year (n=12)		t Value
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Due to financial difficulties such as tuition and living expenses	2.41	1.28	2.17	1.12	.605
My pride in attending college disappeared over time	2.49	1.12	2.83	1.34	-.899
My major did not fit me	3.05	1.34	3.67	1.56	-.1354
Education programs and the overall quality of education did not meet my expectations	2.80	1.19	2.75	1.14	.142

Due to my inferiority complex as a student at a community college	2.39	1.09	2.50	.91	-.317
Due to the bias toward community colleges in our society	2.37	1.16	2.25	.87	.321
I was worried I would not be able to get a job after graduation	2.37	1.14	2.75	1.06	-1.047
Due to problems in interpersonal relations on campus, such as with romantic partners, friends and senior students	2.24	1.14	2.58	.90	-.950

The results shows that there is no significant difference in reasons for students to drop out of college by year. It holds across the 8 items considered (financial difficulties such as tuition and living expenses, the disappearance of pride in attending college, my major did not fit me, education programs and the quality of education did not meet my expectations, my inferiority complex as a student at a community college, social bias toward community colleges, worry about not being able to get a job after graduation, problems in interpersonal relationships on campus with romantic partners, friends, and senior students).

4. DISCUSSION

According to results, male students dropped out of college significantly more than their female counterparts for the past three years, with 69.8% being male students and 30.2% female students. We believe that this is partially because our college has a high proportion of sciences and engineering programs, where more male students are found than female students. Due to this, we argue that the share of male students who dropped out turns out to be higher than that of their female counterparts.

The majority of students dropped out during their first year in college(77.4%), while only 22.6% of students dropped out in their second year. This finding is in line with the previous research that over 50% of students dropped out of community colleges or 4-year universities during their first year [8]. This also suggests that many students find it challenging to adjust themselves to a new environment and start having relationships with strangers during their first year in college. We surmise that such challenges and failure in their adjustment lead some students to drop out of college. Therefore, we believe that it is important to develop systematic programs to help freshmen be accustomed to school and their major.

As the most important factor that affected their decision to enter college, 47.2% of the respondents said it was themselves, followed by 26.4% reporting parents' recommendations and 20.7% reporting recommendations from teachers, friends, or senior students. Many students at community colleges are shown to choose their majors more based on career prospects or recommendations from other people than based on their aptitude. Considering this, it becomes more important to provide systematic career advice and programs to students, beginning from high school, who go to a community college than others. Therefore, it is important to think of ways to link curricula in high school and college in this regard.

Concerning the motivations for choosing their major, 32.1% of the respondents said their aptitude, followed by career prospect(26.4%) and recommendations from others(14 respondents, or 26.4%). This suggests that students chose their majors because they believed they fit their aptitude, but due to the heavy courseload that involves theoretic classes and practicum in community college, some fall behind. Considering the heavy coursework and workload characteristic of community colleges, we believe there should be some programs or measures to increase and maintain the curiosity and interest of students in their majors.

Concerning the question about grades, the most frequent response was below 3.0(35.2%), followed by

between 3.0 and 4.0(32.1%), no response(20.8%), and over 4.0(11.3%). This finding is in agreement with the previous research that students with grades between 2.6 and 3.0 are most likely to drop out, and students with lower grades are more likely to drop out [9]. Put differently, the higher the grades, the less likely the students to drop out. Therefore, we believe that it is important to develop programs that motivate students to attend classes and provide students with advice and guidance on how to maintain good grades, manage time, and prepare for exams.

Concerning the ways the college could take to prevent students from dropping out, the response with the most frequency was 'tuition support and stipends through various scholarships'(23.7%), followed by 'customized education services'(20.6%), 'active career counseling and employment support'(19.6%), 'to keep students motivated through regular counseling and care'(15.5%), 'to improve campus life and experiences through student self-governance and cultural activities', and 'to reinforce education in coordination with 4-year universities in other regions'. Based on this finding, we suggest prioritizing student welfare and student activities and providing customized educational services regarding budgeting. By doing so, we can increase students' satisfaction with the college.

Concerning the reasons they dropped out of college, the mean scores of each item were reported from high to low as follows: my major did not fit me(3.19), education programs and the overall quality of education did not meet my expectations(2.79), my pride in attending college disappeared over time(2.57), I was worried I would not be able to get a job after graduation(2.45), I had an inferiority complex because I attended a community college (2.42), I had financial difficulties such as tuition and living expenses(2.36), it was due to the bias toward community colleges in our society(2.34), and I had problems in interpersonal relationships on campus, such as with romantic partners, friends, or senior students(2.32). The only item whose mean score exceeded 3.0 was 'My major did not fit me', constituting the most significant reason that caused students to drop out. Similar results were found in [10] that such factors as 'the fit of one's major and aptitude', 'career prospect of the major', and 'student satisfaction with the college or university' affect students' drop-out rates. Our results also conform to the previous studies [11, 12] that especially, low congruence between the major, aptitude, career options and low satisfaction with the college or university, and low social experiences on campus leads to a higher propensity of drop-out. Our study is also in line with the previous study [13] that students with high GPAs and clearly identified goals are more likely to drop out of community colleges because they tend to transfer from institutions in remote regions to those in the central, metropolitan regions.

There is a higher proportion of students who unwillingly attend school in community colleges due to a lack of academic motivation or academic competence. Also, chances are high for students to give up on their schooling due to the failure to adjust themselves to college [14]. Many students also blindly choose their majors based on their grades without career or academic goals. Some go through conflicts and struggles, although they deliberately chose their majors because they did not explore the options sufficiently but depended on superficial judgments [15].

The results discussed above suggest that students without clear career goals could end up stopping their college education. For this reason, if a college or each department provides clear advice or mentoring to students by presenting the visions and directions of the major, students may develop their interests in their majors. Given that when students are not satisfied with their major, they tend to pause their schooling to explore their aptitude and other career options [16], we argue that it is important to develop counseling programs to enhance first-year students' understanding of their majors and career options. In addition, career and experiential activities or programs will be helpful in increasing students' satisfaction with their majors and college in general.

Community colleges are designed to offer practical and vocational education in order to cultivate a

professional workforce. For this reason, the course workload is heavy, requiring students to complete theoretical classes and practicum in two years. Under such circumstances, many students may feel overwhelmed with the heavy workload and stressed. Addressing this, mentors or advisors among faculty need to consult their students closely, understand the stress and struggles their students go through, and run extracurricular programs to relieve students' stress and pressure.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As the level of satisfaction students have with their college life or major goes up, they become less likely to drop out and this will help a college maintain student enrollment. Based on the results of this study, we can summarize some measures to improve student enrollment as follows.

First, it is important to develop programs to help students adjust to college and have stronger bonds with friends, faculty and staff, allowing the students to experience collective culture and solidarity. This will reinforce the positive factors of college life. Specifically, it is important to develop systems through which faculty and students can form relationships and open-study programs designed to enhance students' satisfaction with the college by reflecting the needs and demands of students.

Second, it is necessary to develop and run systematic extracurricular programs not only for freshmen but also for existing students, as well as leisure programs linked with curricula. These extracurricular programs should not be one-time events but continuous, systematic programs. For this purpose, these programs should have detailed goals and strategies to achieve them.

Third, in order to improve the quality of the college to the extent students can feel it, it is important to renovate old buildings and outdated facilities. Also, it is required to enhance facilities and campus environment by providing convenient and leisure facilities meeting the needs of students.

Fourth, it is recommended to develop programs or systems designed to help students more fully engage in campus life and activities, which in turn can increase the confidence and self-efficacy among students. By doing so, we expect to reduce the number of students who give up on their college education.

Therefore, the most important things that the college should focus on in order to reduce student drop-out rates include the following: to clearly present the visions and features of the college and each major as part of its student recruitment efforts; to motivate not only freshmen but existing students to engage in their majors to adjust themselves to their majors better and settle; and to expose students to more experiences on campus, increase their awareness, and motivate them to participate more fully.

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