Dropout Trends among Laotian Hmong Minority Lifelong Learners in Adult Education

Inaugural dissertation

for

Obtaining a Doctoral Degree

From the Faculty of Human Sciences at the

University of Cologne, Germany

Submitted by

Souksakhone Sengsouliya

from

Vientiane, Lao PDR

2024

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not have been possible without the invaluable support and contributions of several individuals and organizations. First of all, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Michael Schemmann, for his unwavering dedication and encouragement throughout this journey. His invaluable advice, constructive feedback, and generous assistance were instrumental in the successful completion of this study.

I am also immensely grateful to the faculty and staff at the Faculty of Education at the National University of Laos, Lao PDR, for their crucial role in facilitating the data collection of this project. Their contributions were vital, providing essential information on the target population and access to necessary contacts.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to my colleagues at the University of Cologne for their unwavering support and access to resources, which significantly contributed to the success of this project.

I am deeply thankful to my family and friends for their understanding, encouragement, and unwavering support during this challenging period. Their love and patience provided me with the strength and motivation needed to persevere.

A special thank you goes to DVV International Laos for their generous financial support. Their funding allowed me to access the necessary materials and resources during my research tenure at the University of Cologne, Germany.

To everyone who stood by me in ways both large and small, I offer my heartfelt thanks. Your contributions have been integral to the success of this dissertation, and I am truly grateful for your unwavering support.

Dropout Trends among Laotian Hmong Minority Lifelong Learners in Adult Education

1.   Introduction

The issue of minority dropout is a serious concern for several higher education institutions. This research area has garnered significant interest because it affects developmental dimensions, such as education, employment, and productivity (Buenaño et al., 2023). A reduction in dropout rates can predict an increase in a country's labor supply (Heublein, 2014). Carter (2006) notes that the underrepresentation of minority students creates a significant gap that impacts their long-term social mobility. Additionally, the dropout issue has negative consequences, hindering the achievement of UNESCO's sustainable development goal of ensuring quality education for all nations (UNESCO, 2015). According to Baltà-Salvador and colleagues (2022), students' intentions to drop out are often linked to experiences of discrimination. Stewart (1988) observes that universities have historically aimed at promoting equality on campuses by fostering persistence among minority students. Despite this, universities do not anticipate immoral phenomena such as bias, prejudice, inequity, and inequality among their students. However, some scholars, such as Botticello and West (2021), argue that inequalities persist in higher education. It is imperative for every institution to address these challenges and promote equality and equity. Espinoza (2007) emphasizes that equity is fundamentally connected to justice and fair practices in providing educational services. In a recent study, Baltà-Salvador and colleagues (2022) find that students often choose to drop out because they perceive low satisfaction and self-esteem and experience discrimination in educational environments. Marmot (2018) explains that discrimination is a fundamental cause of inequality, which results in some students having more opportunities, such as access, offers, and favorable conditions for well-being than others (Botticello & West, 2021). This issue of inequality highlights how people are treated differently and unequally in our world.

Specifically, the underrepresentation of minority students is linked to inequality and inequity in societies. The issue remains one of the most discussed topics in the educational community. According to Michalski and colleagues (2017), underrepresented groups include first-generation students, students from low-income families, Indigenous, and disabled students. Research on minority dropouts began several decades ago (Grubb, 1989; Rumberger, 2001; Samora, 1963; Tinto, 1975; Wong & Wong, 1980). Even though numerous studies have focused on minority

groups and their educational challenges, a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon is still lacking. Tinto (1975) views dropout as a complex issue because it involves multiple dimensions, including individual, structural, and national factors. Kehm and colleagues (2019) support this view. Consistently, it is difficult to explain why minority students withdraw from their studies, as there may be multiple reasons. These reasons could stem from institutional factors or from individual and family circumstances (Williamson, 2001). More research in this area should be encouraged to deepen our understanding of minority students and their educational experiences (Thao, 2015). Several authors (Baltà-Salvador et al., 2022; Buenaño et al., 2023) suggest that the dropout issue needs to be clearly defined, as this is essential for understanding the reality and developing effective policies to address the underrepresentation of minority students.

Past research has indicated that the majority of studies on minority student dropouts and retention have been conducted in the United States (Baltà-Salvador et al., 2022) and other Western contexts (Sengsouliya & Vannasy, 2023), which limits the generalizability of their findings to minority populations in different regions. For example, the education of Hmong minority students and their experiences in higher education represent a significant challenge in Laos, a country located in Southeast Asia. However, there appears to be a lack of specific investigations addressing this issue, and no studies have thoroughly analyzed the particular circumstances of Hmong students in Laos. This issue presents a major obstacle for Laos in achieving its strategic vision for 2030 (MoES, 2015), especially regarding its international mission to make education accessible to all. The dropout problem may also adversely affect the country's socioeconomic development (Kyophilavong et al., 2018). Moreover, the existing literature predominantly focuses on the educational retention and dropout rates of American Hmong students (Hang & Walsh, 2021; Xiong & Lee, 2011; Supple et al., 2010; Thao, 2015; Yang, 2023; Xiong, 2022) and some works on Hmong students in a Vietnamese context (Luong & Nieke, 2013). There is a significant gap in research examining Hmong students in higher education. To address this gap, the current author provides insights based on two previously published papers, with an emphasis on examining the factors contributing to the dropout rates among Hmong minority students within the Lao context. This paper aims to answer this central research question "What describes the dropout trends of Laotian Hmong students in higher education?

2. Review of literature

2.1 Theoretical perspectives on minority dropout

Understanding the complexities of the dropout issue among minority student groups is a challenging task. According to Tinto (1975), analyzing the concept of dropout is difficult due to its multifaceted nature, which encompasses individual, structural, and national factors. Similarly, Williamson (2001) argues that explaining why minority students withdraw from their studies is complicated because there are often multiple contributing factors. These factors may be related to institutional challenges or individual and family circumstances. Kehm and colleagues (2019) support this perspective, asserting that student dropout is a multidimensional issue that is difficult to comprehend fully. Buenaño and colleagues (2023) further suggest that research into dropouts must be conceptually framed, and the term "dropout" needs a precise definition. Moreover, researchers must distinguish between different types of dropouts, such as formal dropout and transfer (Kehm et al., 2019). Kehm and colleagues explain that dropout refers to students who leave school before completing their programs, while transfer involves students changing majors and/or institutions. Previous literature indicates a significant issue of underrepresentation of minority students in higher education. However, Noden and colleagues (2014) observe that minority students are disproportionately overrepresented in lower-status educational institutions. They attribute this trend to the inequitable distribution of opportunities, noting that minority groups are generally less likely to receive offers from prestigious institutions compared to their non-minority counterparts. This practice can lead minority students to perceive bias or discrimination on campuses. Recent literature shows that there is a relationship between students' persistence, lower completion rates, and perceived discrimination in higher education (Baltà-Salvador et al., 2022).

2.2 Dimensions related to minority dropout

Educational scholars have extensively investigated the reasons why minority students withdraw from schooling. According to literature, the factors contributing to early educational departure among these students are complex and highly context-dependent. These factors can be categorized into three major themes: the quality of family support, individual social interactions, and the extent of institutional support. Each of these dimensions is explored in the following sections.

- **The quality of family support**

The persistence or dropout decisions of minority students are significantly influenced by family-related factors rather than academic performance. The family domain is strongly associated with the retention of minority students within educational systems (Eimers & Pike, 1997). According to Williamson (2001), family factors are likely to be a strong predictor of dropout among minority students. Williamson cites Dorn (1993) to support this perspective, indicating that various family system components, such as family attention, attitudes, parental guidance, and economic conditions, profoundly influence students' learning environments. Numerous scholars have also claimed that students from economically disadvantaged families are more prone to abandoning their education (Kumar, 2023; Lofstrom, 2007; Hang & Walsh, 2021; Michalski et al., 2017; Rumberger, 2001; Tinto, 1975). For instance, Lofstrom (2007) analyzes empirical data and confirms a significant relationship between poverty and the likelihood of dropout. In addition, parental education appears to be a significant predictor of persistence among minority students. Tinto (1975) and Tidwell (1989) propose that students whose parents possess higher educational qualifications are more likely to continue their education journey. It is argued that such parents can provide valuable guidance and set higher aspirations for their children (Tidwell, 1989). This guidance serves as a powerful resource that positively affects the children's learning environment (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Rumberger and Lim further note that resources provided by families include both monetary (e.g., tuition fees, allowances) and non-monetary support (e.g., emotional encouragement). Consistent with this, past research has indicated that students who withdraw are more likely to come from families with limited resources (Chávez et al., 1991; Tidwell, 1989; Yang, 2023). Lacking such resources, these students are often compelled to work to fund their own education, which consumes time that could otherwise be devoted to studies. This situation is exacerbated by their difficulty in balancing the demands of work and study (Yang, 2023).

The absence of a role model within the family has also been identified as a significant predictor of students' leaving school. According to Csereklye (2008), when students lack a positive role model in the family, they are at a higher risk of dropping out because they must navigate their educational journey alone and receive minimal guidance from home. This phenomenon often occurs among first-generation college students, who have no family members to provide encouragement or academic support (Csereklye, 2008; Michalski et al., 2017). Recent studies have

confirmed that role models are influential factors in the educational pursuits of minority students. When students observe family members and siblings successfully experiencing university and college life, they become motivated and inspired to pursue higher educational levels themselves (Hang & Walsh, 2021). Another family-related domain that affects dropout rates is family structure, especially the size of the family. Chávez and colleagues (1991) find that family size is significantly linked to minority students' decisions to either continue or abandon their studies. Similarly, students from larger families are more likely to withdraw from school than those from smaller families (Farah & Upadhyay, 2017; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Additionally, students whose parents pay close attention, monitor their progress, and actively engage them in learning activities tend to be more highly motivated to achieve academic success (Hammond et al., 2007; Tran, 2013). This involvement reflects the perceived value of education by parents, as parental attitudes and values significantly contribute to their children's educational expectations (Hammond et al., 2007; Rasmy et al., 2017).

Another crucial family-related factor is the presence of difficulties in home situations, which have been found to be strong predictors of minority student dropout. Students facing crises within their families often become disengaged from learning and eventually leave school. Carvajal and Cervantes (2018) suggest that household emergencies can cause students to struggle with maintaining their studies. These crises may include financial constraints, illness, or the death pf a family member, and they often force students to seek solutions, such as dropping out of school, to alleviate family expenses and reduce stress at home (De Janvry et al., 2006). Moreover, these family-related issues are frequently associated with early marriage and pregnancy. It is common for minority students to cite pregnancy or marriage as reasons for dropping out (Videnovic & Lazarevic (2017). This situation arises because being married or pregnant while studying can be seen as embarrassing and is often against school regulations (Bull et al., 1991).

- **Social interaction**

According to Eimers and Pike (1997), a unique characteristic of minority students is their tendency to experience feelings of loneliness and isolation, which contribute significantly to their inclination to leave school before completing their programs. For these students, peer relationships are strongly associated with their retention in educational systems, while academic performance is not as influential (Eimers & Pike, 1997). Similarly, Williamson (2001) identifies adjustment difficulties as a critical issue leading to minority student dropout. This refers to the challenges that

students face when interacting with peers on campus. Seidman (2005) highlights that social and academic interactions are more substantial determinants of whether minority students drop out or remain in educational settings. Several scholars (Michalski et al., 2017; Xiong, 2022) concur with this perspective, arguing that minority students need supportive environmental and socio-psychological factors to successfully navigate their educational journeys. It is claimed that they require social and academic support to achieve their goals, including peers who prevent isolation, professors who provide academic guidance, counselors who facilitate access to resources, and institutions that establish supportive policies and practices.

This perspective aligns with Bourdieu's (1984) theory of habitus and capital, which suggests that minority dropout can best be understood through the interplay of these concepts. According to Bourdieu, educational and social capital are interconnected, and differences in individuals' social status can lead to inequalities in academic achievement. Consistent with this, Nagasawa and Wong (1997) note that minority dropout is closely linked to the presence or absence of a critical mass for campus socialization and social interaction. Social capital is often measured by societal and economic status (Bourdieu, 1984; Yang, 2023). Furthermore, a recent work by Yang (2023) underscores the importance of social capital for students in higher education. This factor pertains to students' social networks, which are essential for minority students navigating higher educational environments. By possessing a high level of social capital, students can leverage more advantages that propel them toward achieving their educational goals (Yang, 2023).

- **Institutional provisions**

Past research has highlighted the strong relationship between institutional practices and the learning environment of minority students. The decision of whether students choose to withdraw from or continue their studies can be significantly influenced by the treatment and support they receive from educational institutions. Evidence suggests that one major reason why minority students drop out is the reception of inappropriate offers from institutions (Noden et al., 2014). Botticello and West (2021) find that students from ethnic minority backgrounds often receive inadequate academic support, including insufficient access to technology, other campus services, peer social interactions, and mental health resources provided by institutions.

Literature indicates that students often leave their studies due to dissatisfaction with their programs and school-related activities (Astin & Cross, 1979). Minority students, in particular, tend to experience feelings of loneliness and isolation, which hinder their likelihood of engaging and

expressing their opinions (Eimers & Pike, 1997). Consequently, when minority students are dissatisfied with the services provided, they may hesitate to participate in their learning environment, leading them to drop out of school. In four-year universities, students from minority backgrounds frequently encounter institutional barriers that impede their academic progress (Redd, 2018). Several scholars have consistently emphasized the importance of institutional support in reducing dropout rates. Providing substantial attention to improving students' school relationships and offering robust socio-academic support programs can enhance the well-being of minority students (Anderson et al., 2018; Hoffman, 2002; Ntiri, 2001; Xiong & Lee, 2011). Institutions must actively ensure the participation of minority students in all campus activities, integrating them into every aspect of campus life (Lee & Walsh, 2020; Ntiri, 2001). On-campus activities are vital for the support of minority students in completing their studies (Lee & Walsh, 2020). Developing a welcoming and inclusive campus environment is an effective strategy to engage students from minority backgrounds (Botticello & West, 2021; Hang & Walsh, 2021; Michalski et al., 2017; Yang, 2023).

One effective strategy that institutions can implement is providing opportunities for students to share their opinions. According to Museus and colleagues (2019), incorporating students' voices is instrumental in enhancing the campus climate, thereby learning achievements. Additionally, institutions should consider implementing tuition fee discounts as a policy to reduce the likelihood of student dropout (Buenaño et al., 2023). In higher education, the primary responsibility of administrators is to ensure that students have access to educational opportunities and can achieve academic success. This can be accomplished by designing programs that are financially accessible to students from minority backgrounds who are economically disadvantaged (Carter, 2006). Institutions should also make a concerted effort to address racial inequality through initiatives such as professional development programs focused on diversity and anti-racism for both faculty and students (Arday et al., 2022). In educational settings, minority issues must be approached with cultural sensitivity (Thao, 2015). Recruiting minority faculty members can significantly enhance the learning experience for minority students. According to Kumar (2023), barriers to educational attainment and success for minority students do not only include financial constraints but also limited diversity among faculty members and staff, as well as prevailing stereotypes. A lack of diversity in instructors and staff can lead to minority students feeling unsupported and discouraged (Carter, 2006; Kumar, 2023).

Ntiri (2018) also notes that minority students experience increased self-worth and self-esteem when the curriculum is culturally responsive to minority identities. Liu (2021) supports this by stating that when students' cultural and linguistic characteristics are acknowledged in educational environments, they feel a greater sense of belonging on campus. According to Luong and Nieke (2013), educational environments play a crucial role in fostering students' political and social engagement. These settings have the potential to enhance social integration among minority students through the design of culturally responsive curricula and pedagogies. Luong and Nieke further suggest that students from minority backgrounds expect their identities to be preserved in educational environments. Consequently, they should be granted autonomy for action and participate in social and decision-making processes.

2.3   Hmong minority students and their educational situations

The Hmong are an indigenous ethnic minority group originally rooted in China, where they lived for several millennia before migrating to Southeast Asia a few hundred years ago (Vang, 2003). Today, Hmong communities can be found in the mountainous regions of several countries, including China, Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos. In Laos, following the independence of the country in 1975, a significant number of Hmong migrated abroad to countries, such as the United States, Australia, Canada, and France (Vang, 2003). Hmong typically prefer to reside together with their family members or near relatives (Vang, 2003). Like many other minority groups, Hmong individuals tend to be hesitant to engage with their peers in educational settings, often described as quiet, shy, and culturally reserved (Luong & Nieke, 2013; Vang, 2003). A recent study finds that Hmong minority students are fearful of being bullied and appearing foolish (Luong & Nieke, 2013). Such psychologically harmful experiences diminish their confidence in communicating with others. Luong and Nieke further explain that, as a minority group, Hmong students perceive themselves as disadvantaged and of lower status, leading to low self-esteem on campus. This self-perception restricts their opportunities and affects their interactions with peers, as Hmong tend to carefully observe others' attitudes and honesty before engaging (Luong & Nieke, 2013).

According to literature, numerous studies have explored the challenges faced by Hmong students in their pursuit of higher education, but most of this research has focused on the United States, with participants being Hmong students residing in American states. For instance, Lee and colleagues (2008) reveal that Hmong students often encounter difficulties in higher education due

to cultural factors, traditional beliefs, gender roles, family responsibilities, and intergeneration issues (as cited in Thao, 2015). Subsequent studies (Supple et al., 2010; Xiong & Lam, 2013) have corroborated these findings, particularly highlighting the importance of gender perspectives. Hmong parents typically place higher value on sons and are more inclined to support male children in pursuing higher education (Supple et al., 2010). Xiong and Lam (2013) note that parental expectations for daughters and sons differ significantly; daughters face pressure from their families to fulfill numerous household responsibilities and are subjected to stricter parental control, whereas sons enjoy greater freedom (Xiong & Lam, 2013). Based on the aforementioned studies, it appears that parental factors exert both positive and negative influences on Hmong students' educational experiences. For example, Supple and colleagues find that Hmong students' educational success is shaped by parental support, control, and obligations. While these factors motivate students to persevere in their studies and complete their education, they also place considerable pressure on them. Parents expect their children to uphold the family honor and demonstrate the strength of Hmong identity, showcasing what Hmong individuals can achieve. This cultural expectation instills a strong desire in Hmong adolescents to accomplish their educational goals.

Parental control and obligations can create a significant cultural gap for Hmong students. According to Supple and colleagues (2010), there are cultural differences between the traditional Hmong orientation of parents and the mainstream values of non-Hmong peers, which contribute to the stress felt by Hmong students. This disparity forces them to adapt, respect, and adjust themselves in order to succeed in educational environments (Supple et al., 2010). Such cultural conflicts within the family can lead to difficulties and barriers for Hmong students as they navigate higher education. The cultural gap between younger and older generations arises when children struggle to understand the purpose of their parents' obligations and traditional practices, while parents often fail to comprehend the pressures and socialization experienced by their children (Supple et al., 2010). Individual factors also serve as obstacles that lead to negative experiences for Hmong students in higher education. These factors include a lack of adequate time to focus on learning, poor academic performance, and poor time management skills (Xiong & Lee, 2011). However, Thao (2015) finds that personal hardships and the expectation for a better life serve as strong motivators for Hmong students' educational achievements. Another study by Luong and Nieke (2013) examines the issue of low academic performance among Vietnamese Hmong students. The findings indicate that the educational experiences of Hmong students are influenced

by their roles and positions in society. To enhance their academic success, these students must be encouraged to participate in political and social activities. Educational institutions and related entities should consider these factors when working to improve the educational outcomes of minority groups.

2.4 Barriers to engaging minority students in research

Accessing minority populations presents a significant challenge for educational scholars (Burlew et al., 2019; Ellard-Gray et al., 2015; Waheed et al., 2015). According to literature, populations and/or participants from minority backgrounds are often hidden and difficult to reach. Several authors have explored the reasons for this issue. For instance, Ellard-Gray and colleagues (2015) note that the difficulty in accessing these populations may be due to factors related to their physical location and accessibility. Barriers to reaching hidden groups can be categorized into two groups: individual and sampling barriers. Individual barriers include the challenges of labeling/identifying this fraction of the population, mistrust of researchers, perceived participation risks, and participants' constraints regarding research (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Ellard-Gray and colleagues further point out that mistrust is one of the primary barriers preventing vulnerable groups from participating in the research process. This mistrust may stem from past experiences in which participants felt harmed or violated by investigators, leading to reluctance to engage in conversations with researchers. Consistently, hidden participants, particularly those from ethnic minority groups, are more likely to be willing to participate in research if they are properly informed about the purpose of the research and process and how they can contribute to the study (Redwood et al., 2013). Another reason for the reluctance to participate is that the research project may not seem relevant or beneficial to the participants' communities (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015; Redwood et al., 2013). Additionally, members of hard-to-reach populations may refuse to participate in research due to fears of losing private information, the sensitive nature of the research topic (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015), or language barriers, as investigators may not speak the same language as the hidden populations (Shedlin et al., 2011, as cited in Ellard-Gray et al., 2015).

Another significant barrier to recruiting hard-to-reach groups for research purposes is the issue of "participant resource constraints." This factor is recognized as a unique challenge among vulnerable populations (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). To address these constraints, researchers can provide reimbursement for childcare and transportation costs for the participants. Alternatively, conducting research in locations convenient for the participants can be an effective solution

(Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Regarding the sampling process, Ellard-Gray and colleagues argue that a snowball sampling technique and process may not be ideal when working with hard-to-reach populations. This is because participants in these groups may know each other, compromising confidentiality (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Furthermore, snowball sampling might lead to unwanted sample homogeneity, as initially recruited participants are likely to invite individuals from their networks or peer groups, thereby limiting the diversity of the sample. Additionally, it is advised against using personal power or position to engage these hidden populations. Botticello and West (2021) highlight an issue from their own research experience, where one of their team members was a lecturer to the participants. This dynamic resulted in unclear data due to fear and/or influence from the investigator.

Similarly, Waheed and colleagues (2015) acknowledge the difficulties associated with engaging minority participants in research. Their study identifies 33 barriers to recruiting minority groups in mental health research, which they categorized into five major groups: participant-related barriers (e.g., trust, language use), practical issues (e.g., financial restrictions, transportation reimbursement), family/community-related barriers (e.g., spousal influence), health service-related barriers (e.g., staff personal characteristics), and research process-related barriers (e.g., limited motivation and enthusiasm). In light of these barriers, Waheed and colleagues recommend that investigators develop multiple strategies to address challenges encountered to identify practical guidance best practices from various case studies and works (Burlew et al., 2019).

2.5 Possible solutions for engaging hidden populations

Understanding the characteristics and challenges associated with hard-to-reach and hidden populations is critical for researchers working in minority-related disciplines or investigating sensitive topics. Such populations include minority groups and individuals who are victims or subjects of sensitive cases. Consequently, investigators need to develop effective strategies for engaging these vulnerable groups as research participants. According to previous literature, qualitative research designs are particularly well-suited for studying hidden and vulnerable populations, as they allow investigators to employ exploratory research questions tailored to the populations' understudied characteristics (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). The flexibility of qualitative research methods enables researchers to adapt their approaches and consider multiple strategies throughout the research process (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). However, this research method has a

significant limitation in maintaining participant confidentiality and anonymity, especially when face-to-face or focus group interviews are conducted (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). To address these challenges, Keyzer and colleagues (2005) propose several practical strategies for overcoming barriers in recruiting minority participants for research. Their recommendations include demonstrating flexibility in scheduling interviews, such as offering weekend or evening times; selecting interview locations that are most convenient for participants; and coordinating interview details and follow-ups with participants prior to the investigation.

Keyzer and colleagues (2005) acknowledge the complexity of gaining access to minority populations. They emphasize the importance of investigators having a fundamental understanding of the participants' ethnic backgrounds and preparing an adequate budget to compensate for their time and participation costs. More importantly, investigators must develop rapport with potential participants and their families or communities (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015; Keyzer et al., 2005). Establishing a strong relationship with participants can significantly reduce mistrust in the research process (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Ellard-Gray and colleagues (2015) further suggest that developing such a relationship with the population often requires facilitation and assistance from community representatives. These representatives can act as gatekeepers, protecting hidden groups and facilitating access to them. Some scholars (Mier et al., 2006; Otado et al., 2015) propose that including research team members who are culturally competent is crucial. Such team members can play key roles in engaging with the target population and earning their respect, trust, and attention. Moreover, it is essential for investigators to understand that once potential participants are recruited, they must be given the respect and autonomy to decide whether to continue or withdraw from the research process at any point (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Regarding the sampling process, literature points out several biases and limitations inherent in snowball sampling methods, such as the risk of recruiting a homogeneous sample. However, investigators must exercise careful consideration and judgment when recruiting, as this approach might be the only workable and feasible option for accessing hidden, vulnerable, and hard-to-reach populations in sensitive research projects (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015).

3.   Methodology

This section focuses on the methods and steps undertaken by the current author in his research on minority dropouts in higher education. Of his three previously published papers, the first paper analyzed non-empirical data through an integrative review of literature, while the other

two employed empirical data collected using an interview method. In the first paper, the author aimed to understand the theoretical perspectives on minority students' learning situations, educational processes, and their reasons for dropping out of higher education. The author chose this design due to its systematic analytical approach. By using this method, he reviewed both theoretical and empirical studies to explore his area of interest and understand specific concerns (Newman & Gough, 2020). The author adhered to the five-step integrative review approach proposed by Whittemore and Knafl (2005). This approach includes Step One: Establishing a central research question; Step Two: Compiling a stock of existing related documents; Step Three: Evaluating the relevance of the identified papers based on set criteria; Step Four: Analyzing the selected documents; and Step Five: Presenting the results in a structured form. By following the framework of this research design, the author selected 28 papers from a total pool of 420 articles obtained from various databases, including ASC, ERIC, SCOPUS, SocINDEX, and Web of Science.

In the last two papers, a qualitative research design was employed to analyze and capture two primary objectives: the patterns of reasons proposed by Hmong minority students for their dropout decisions and the influence of family aspects on their educational experiences. This research design was chosen due to its suitability for the study's topics. According to Rubin and Babbie (2008), a qualitative research design is more flexible in its methods and is particularly effective for conducting research with hidden and vulnerable groups, as it allows investigators to use exploratory research questions (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Consistently, this research method is frequently employed in sociology to explore specific tendencies in human behavior (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The data analyzed in these two papers were collected from interviews with 11 Hmong minority students who had completely withdrawn from a Laotian university. The informants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique, recognized as an effective method for accessing hard-to-reach populations (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Of the total 11 cases, 10 informants were interviewed via phone call, and one was interviewed face-to-face. Since most Hmong students return to their hometowns after leaving their studies, the author was only able to contact them through WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger due to personal convenience and the informants' individual circumstances. To ensure the validity of the interview data, the author conducted the interviews personally, which allowed him to ask more specific questions when responses were unclear. Most of the interview questions were open-ended, encouraging informants

to describe and share their educational experiences, issues, challenges, and reasons for their dropout decisions. Some of the questions posed included: "*How was your study in the faculty? Were there any barriers to your learning? What made you decide to drop out? How did your parents react when they learned of your decision to quit your studies? Were there any individuals offering assistance or support for your education?*" In some instances, informants provided minimum information in response to certain questions, necessitating the use of additional probing techniques to elicit more detailed and factual insights. The author employed qualitative content analysis to analyze the collected data. This analytical method is characterized by its systematic approach to analyzing interview data and is particularly useful for quantifying categories of data (Schreier, 2014). Following the framework of qualitative content analysis, a mixed procedure of deductive category assignment and inductive category formation was utilized. Initially, the author established a coding framework that included category definitions, anchor examples, and coding rules (Mayring, 2014). This coding framework serves as a crucial guideline, encapsulating the major content and interpretation of the research findings (Schreier, 2014). To conduct the data analysis, the free software "QCAmap," developed by Mayring (2014), was employed.

4.   The presentation of three papers

This section introduces the presentation of three papers previously published by the author. Each paper is discussed in detail, focusing on its unique contribution to the understanding of ethnic minority dropout issues in higher education. The papers are organized as follows: **Sub-study One**, entitled "*Ethnic Minorities' Dropout Decisions in Higher Education: An Integrative Review*," explores the theoretical frameworks and existing literature on the dropout decisions of ethnic minority students. **Sub-study Two**, "*The Pattern of Reasons Why Minority Students Dropout: An Empirical Study of the Hmong Minority in Laos*," investigates the specific reasons contributing to dropout rates among Hmong students, supported by empirical data. **Sub-study Three,** "*Minority Dropouts in Higher Education: The Influence of Family Factors*," examines the role of family dynamics and their impact on minority students' educational persistence. Each of these sub-studies is introduced briefly, highlighting their significant contributions to the field. The detailed descriptions are provided as follows.

4.1 Sub-study 1: "Ethnic Minorities' Dropout Decisions in Higher Education: An Integrative Review"

This article was officially published in *Studies in Adult Education and Learning* (SAEL) in 2023. The impetus for this research arose from the persistent underrepresentation of minority groups in higher education, which still continues to pose a significant challenge. Although a substantial body of literature has explored learning environments and educational issues faced by minority groups in higher education, the generalization of these findings to capture the full scope of the issue remains difficult. Furthermore, previous scholars have emphasized the need for further research on the conceptualization of minority dropouts. This paper aims to examine relevant theoretical perspectives and analyze the underlying causes of dropout among minority students.

The central research question guiding this study is *"How is dropout conceptualized, and what reasons for ethnic minority dropout in higher education can be identified through an integrative review of the literature?"* For the methodological design, the author employed an integrative literature review. Following the established framework of this design, 420 papers were identified using various online databases, including ASC, ERIC, SCOPUS, SocINDEX, and Web of Science. Through a rigorous evaluation process consisting of screening, qualifying, and selection, 28 papers were chosen as the primary sources for this review based on specific criteria such as relevance to minority-related dropout, focus on high education contexts, and the inclusion of academic papers, reports, books, and empirical research. The findings of this review indicate that dropouts can be categorized into different types: voluntary and involuntary ones. Additionally, they can be characterized by multiple features, including stopout, institutional dropout, and system dropout. Concerning dropout decisions, the author classifies them into three distinct levels: psychological reasons, such as learning conditions, personal attitudes, and learning aspirations; physical-related reasons, such as health issues; and environmental-related reasons, including employment needs, institutional support, social interactions, family background, and the distance from home to school.

This sub-study makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on minority dropout in higher education. The review highlights the complexity of the dropout phenomenon, which poses challenges for scholars in educational research and related fields. It underscores the necessity for researchers to clearly define the term "dropout" when conducting empirical studies. Furthermore, the development of solutions to address this issue must carefully consider the

contextual characteristics relevant to each specific case. The published article is accessible electronically at:

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 VISOKOŠOLSKEM IZOBRAŽEVANJU: INTERGRATIVNI PREGLED – POVZETEK

Cilj prispevka je preučiti teoretične poglede na odločitve o osipu s strani pripadnikov manjšin v visokošolskem izobraževanju. Integrativni pregled je pokazal, da je vprašanje osipa izredno kompleksno in ga zaznamujejo raznolike definicije in značilnosti. Potrebno je jasno definirati sam pojem. Ugotovitve prav tako kažejo, da na odločitve predstavnikov manjšin, da prenehajo s študijem, vplivajo dejavniki treh različnih dimenzij: psihološki, fizični in okoljski dejavniki. Pri pridobivanju izobrazbe morajo ustanove še posebej podpirati te študente. Prispevek pride do zaključka, da je nadaljnjo raziskovanje ključnega pomena pri preučevanju problematike osipa etničnih manjšin.

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 Knafl'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 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.
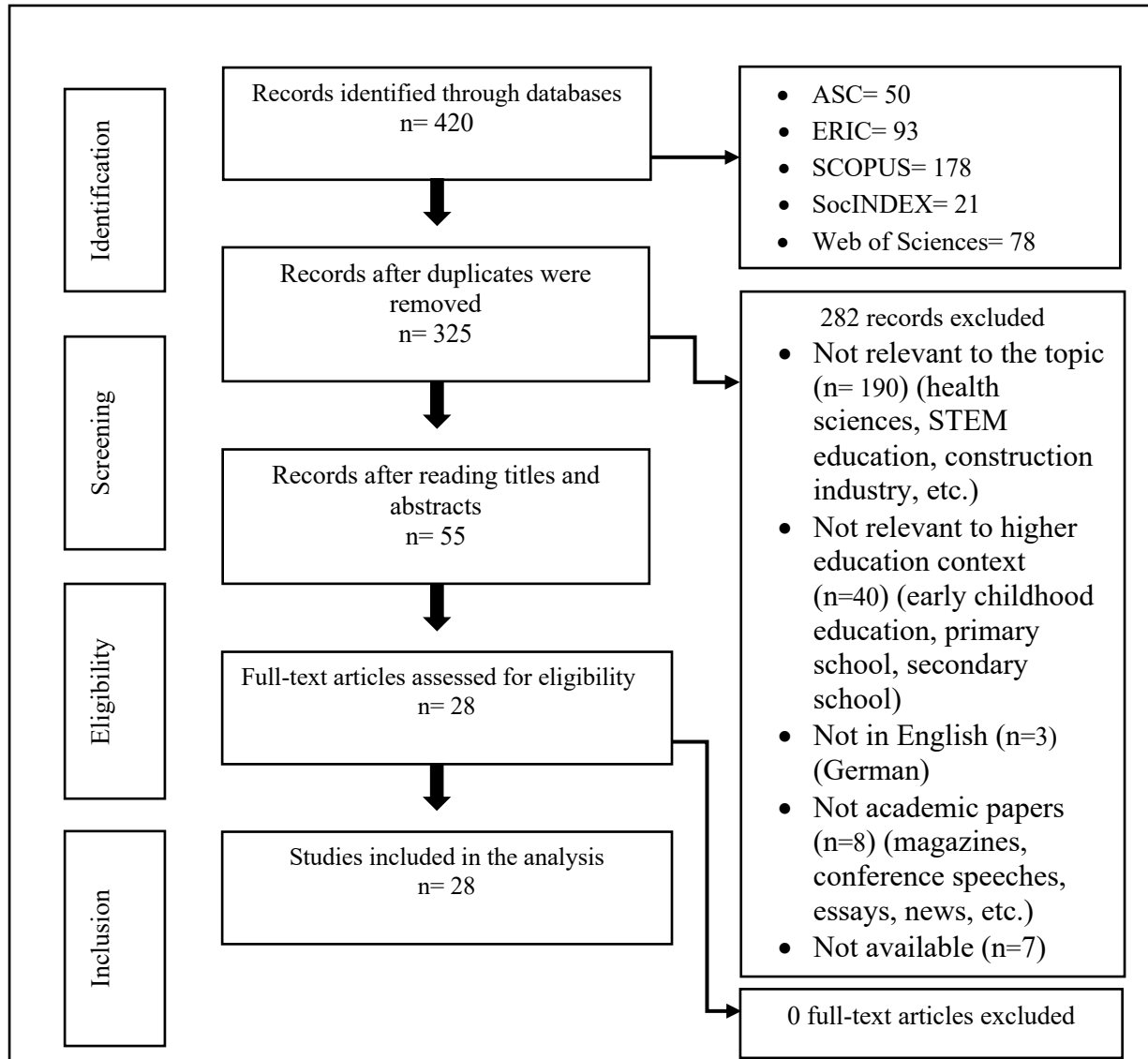
Figure 1. *Search terms of the integrative review*

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")

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.

Figure 2. *Flow chart of the screening process for the integrative review*

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 dropouts 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 enrolees 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.

REFERENCES

Andersen, S., Rod, M. H., Holmberg, T., Ingholt, L., Ersbøll, A. K., & Tolstrup, J. S. (2018). Effectiveness of the settings-based intervention shaping the social on preventing dropout from vocational education: A Danish non-randomized controlled trial. *BMC Psychology, 6*(1), 45. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-018-0258-8

Astin, H. S., & Cross, P. H. (1979). *Student financial aid and persistence in college* [Research report]. Higher Education Research Institute.

Attinasi, L. C., Jr. (1989). Getting in: Mexican Americans' perceptions of university attendance and the implications for freshman year persistence. *Journal of Higher Education, 60*(3), 247–277.

Azaola, M. C. (2020). Support from extended family in higher education: A narrative literature review. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 44*(8), 1065–1079. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1648775

Baysu, G., & Phalet, K. (2012). Staying on or dropping out? The role of intergroup friendship and perceived teacher support in minority and nonminority school careers. *Teachers College Record, 114*(5), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811211400507

Bernasconi, A. (2015). Inclusion programs at elite universities: The case of Chile. In R. T. Teranishi, L. B. Pazich, M. Knobel, & W. R. Allen (Eds.), *Mitigating Inequality: Higher Education Research, Policy, and Practice in an Era of Massification and Stratification* (pp. 303–310). Emerald. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-358X20150000011018

Berry, G. L., & Asamen, J. K. (Eds.). (1989). *Black students: Psychosocial issues and academic achievement.* Sage Publications.

Bidgood, P., Saebi, N., & May, S. (2006). Influences on student withdrawal from further education: A case study. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training, 58*(2), 223–236. https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820600815951

Chen, R., & DesJardins, S. L. (2010). Investigating the impact of financial aid on student dropout risks: Racial and ethnic differences. *Journal of Higher Education, 81*(2), 179–208. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2010.11779048

Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities. (1982). *Final report on the higher education of minorities*. Higher Education Research Institute.

Deil-Amen, R. (2011). Socio-academic integrative moments: Rethinking academic and social integration among two-year college students in career-related programs. *Journal of Higher Education, 82*(1), 51–91. https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2011.0006

Gross, J. P. K., Torres, V., & Zerquera, D. (2013). Financial aid and attainment among students in a state with changing demographics. *Research in Higher Education, 54*(4), 383–406. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-012-9276-1

Grubb, W. N. (1989). *Access, achievement, completion, and "milling around" in postsecondary vocational education*. MPR Associates.

Hoffman, J. L. (2002). The impact of student cocurricular involvement on student success: Racial and religious differences. *Journal of College Student Development, 43*(5), 712–739.

Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education, 70*(4), 324–345. https://doi.org/10.2307/2673270

Kim, D., Saatcioglu, A., & Neufeld, A. (2012). College departure: Exploring student aid effects on multiple mobility patterns from four-year Institutions. *Journal of Student Financial Aid, 42*(3), 3–24.

Meeuwisse, M., Severiens, S. E., & Born, M. P. (2010). Reasons for withdrawal from higher vocational education: A comparison of ethnic minority and majority non-completers. *Studies in Higher Education, 35*(1), 93–111. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070902906780

Nagasawa, R., & Wong, P. (1999). A theory of minority students' survival in college. *Sociological Inquiry, 69*(1), 76–90. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.1999.tb00490.x

Newman, M., & Gough, D. (2020). Systematic reviews in educational research: Methodology, perspectives and application. In O. Zawacki-Richter, M. Kerres, S. Bedenlier, M. Bond, &

K. Buntins (Eds.), *Systematic Reviews in Educational Research* (pp. 3–22). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-27602-7_1

O'Keeffe, P. (2013). A Sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal, 47*(4), 605–613.

Radunzel, J. (2017). *Using incoming student information to identify students at-risk of not returning to their initial institution in year two* [ACT Research Report 2017-10]. ACT. https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/R1655-at-risk-of-not-returning-2017-12.pdf

Reisel, L., & Brekke, I. (2010). Minority dropout in higher education: A comparison of the United States and Norway using competing risk event history analysis. *European Sociological Review, 26*(6), 691–712. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcp045

Rodgers, T. (2013). Should high non-completion rates amongst ethnic minority students be seen as an ethnicity issue? Evidence from a case study of a student cohort from a British University. *Higher Education*, *66*(5), 553–550. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9620-1

Rogers, R. N. (2009). "No one helped out. It was like, 'Get on with it. You're an adult now. it's up to you.' You don't ... It's not like you reach 17 and suddenly you don't need any help anymore": A study into post-16 pastoral support for "Aimhigher students". *Pastoral Care in Education, 27*(2), 109–118. https://doi.org/10.1080/02643940902897673

Samora, J. (1963). The educational status of a minority. *Theory into Practice, 2*(3), 144–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405846309541853

Tavares de Souza, M., Dias da Silva, M., & de Carvalho, R. (2010). Integrative review: What is it? How to do it? *Einstein (Sao Paulo), 8*(1), 102–106. https://doi.org/10.1590/S1679-45082010RW1134

UN. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.* UN.

Whittemore, R., & Knafl, K. (2005). The integrative review: Updated methodology. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 52*(5), 546–553. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2005.03621.x

Williams, M. T. (2019). Adverse racial climates in academia: Conceptualization, interventions, and call to action. *New Ideas in Psychology,* 55, 58–67. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2019.05.002

Wong, S., & Wong, J. (1980). Representation of racial minority students in selected Canadian university schools of nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 5*(1), 83–90. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1980.tb00212.x

Woodfield, R. (2017). Undergraduate students who are required to withdraw from university: The role of ethnicity. *British Educational Research Journal, 43*(2), 230–252. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3259

York, C. M., Bollar, S., & Schoob, C. (1993, August 23). *Causes of college retention: A systems perspective* [Paper presentation]. 101st Convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

4.2 Sub-study 2: "The Pattern of Reasons why Minority Students Drop out: An Empirical Study of the Hmong Minority in Laos"

This article was published online in the *Hmong Studies Journal* (HSJ) in 2023. The impetus for this research stems from the observation that much of the existing evidence on minority dropouts pertains primarily to Western contexts. Few scholars have addressed dropout issues within the Southeast Asian region, particularly focusing on the learning challenges and dropout patterns among Hmong minority students. Previous studies have indicated a need for a deeper analysis of dropout decision patterns to better understand this phenomenon. Furthermore, while case studies on Hmong students' non-persistence are available, they predominantly focus on Hmong individuals in the U.S., leaving a gap in the understanding of Laotian Hmong students and their university dropout tendencies.

The research was guided by two research questions: *(1) "What are the possible reasons for dropout as described by minority student-leavers?" and (2) "What patterns of these reasons can be identified among minority student-leavers?"* A qualitative research approach was employed to investigate the reasons behind dropout decisions in higher education. Data were collected through interviews with 11 Hmong minority students classified as system dropouts. The study specifically targeted individuals who had withdrawn from their studies within the past three years to ensure accurate recall of their higher education experiences. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method, with participants recruited using a snowball sampling technique. Participants were asked to offer others within their network who had also left their studies. To analyze the data, the study utilized a mixed procedure of deductive category assignment and inductive category formation (Mayring, 2014). The QCAmap software, a free tool, was used to facilitate the data analysis process. The findings revealed distinct patterns in the dropout among minority students, with most informants citing family-related factors. Participants reported that financial difficulties, including issues with tuition fees, materials, and living expenses, were significant contributors to their decision to withdraw. Additionally, personal and family emergencies were identified as major factors undermining their motivation to continue their education.

This study provides crucial evidence that the higher educational trajectories of minority students are strongly influenced by their family backgrounds. Both financial and non-financial resources from home play a significant role in determining whether students persist or drop out of

higher education institutions. The study also corroborates existing literature suggesting that increased parental involvement in academic activities organized by educational institutions may positively impact student retention. The published article can be accessed electronically at the following link:

https://www.hmongstudiesjournal.org/hsj-volume-252023.html

Sengsouliya, S., & Vannasy, V. (2023). The pattern of reasons why minority students drop out: An empirical study of the Hmong minority in Laos. *Hmong Studies Journal*, *25*, 1-31.

The pattern of reasons why minority students drop out: An empirical study of the Hmong minority in Laos

Abstract

Inquiry into the issue of minority dropout is complex. This paper looks into the reasons for dropping out of higher education among Laotian Hmong minority students and further analyzes the patterns of the emergent reasons. 11 Hmong student-leavers were recruited as the key informants, using a snowball sampling technique. The participants were invited to a self-report interview study. The paper employed a qualitative content analysis for processing the obtained data. The findings revealed a clear pattern, in which the majority of participants' reasons for dropping out fell into only one group. Furthermore, the study also found that family-related reasons appear to be the most frequently cited. A further inquiry into the subject is strongly recommended.

Introduction

It is claimed that minority students are underrepresented and tend to lag behind their non-minority counterparts in academic achievement in higher education (Grubb, 1989; Samora, 1963; Williams, 2019; Wong & Wong, 1980). Students of minority backgrounds are the most likely to drop out prior to completing a program (Baysu & Phalet, 2012; Chen & Desjardins, 2010; Reisel & Brekke, 2010). This may reflect an inequality issue in society and the whole country but a serious dropout rate has an impact on the country's economic development (Kyophilavong et al., 2018; Rumberger, 2001; Tidwell, 1989). Knowing why students drop out can be useful in

addressing educational issues (Rumberger, 2001). The reasons behind dropping out among minority students seem to be an ongoing problem and this has led to several studies having already been conducted. According to previous studies, for instance, York et al. (1993), several reasons why minority students drop out were identified, including poor learning ability, financial restrictions, administrative-related problems, lack of social and academic interaction, and curriculum-related problems. Meeuwisse et al. (2010) noted that minority students drop out due to several reasons, such as poor learning, worries regarding future employment, home problems, culture, and the content of education. Some other authors have assumed that minority dropout is associated with their peer socialization (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999), and their social class (Bourdieu, 1984). This tendency overall points out that there may not be just a single reason for minority students dropping out.

The rich theoretical perspectives on minority dropout tend to be merged from Western contexts, which may describe only the situations of dropout among Western minority students. Little data on minority dropouts from the Southeast Asian Region is known or has been conceptualized. This research area is an ongoing one and it is hard to generalize the reality of the situation (Bidgood et al., 2006; Rumberger, 2001). Moreover, analyzing patterns of reasons why students of minority backgrounds drop out is limited in past studies. Therefore, this present study probes into the reasons for university dropout of Hmong minority students and investigates the patterns of these reasons. This case study of the Laotian Hmong minority may result in knowing the patterns of dropout reasons and contribute to the existing knowledge of the dropout issue in higher education. This research paper may serve as a reference in planning for inclusive education within Laos as well as in other pluralistic contexts with culturally diverse structures. The research questions for this study are guided by (1) What could the possible reasons be for dropping out, as described by minority student-leavers? and (2) What is the pattern of these reasons among minority student-leavers?

This paper is structured into the following sections: Section 1 presents the research context of the Hmong minority in Laotian higher education and the dropout issue of the Hmong. Section 2 reviews certain theoretical perspectives on minority dropout. Section 3 outlines key theoretical assumptions regarding minority dropout reasons, as well as the conceptual framework for our present study. Section 4 discusses the methodology including sampling, data collection

procedures, and analysis strategy. Section 5 presents the findings and links these to existing studies before offering the conclusion.

Hmong Minority in Laotian Higher Education: A Research Context

The Hmong, an indigenous ethnic minority group, are originally from China, having lived in China for a few thousand years prior to migrating to Southeast Asia a few hundred years ago (Vang, 2003). At present, Hmong people live in the mountainous areas of China, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand. In Laos, the Hmong rank as the 3rd largest ethnic minority group (UNPO, 2021). After 1975, when Laos gained its independence, more Hmong started to migrate abroad: they can currently be found in countries such as France, USA, Australia, and Canada. Socially, the Hmong are likely to prefer living with family or near their relatives. In school environments, the Hmong appear culturally reserved, shy, and quiet to others (Vang, 2003). In Laotian higher education, Hmong students are seen as underrepresented - the statistical data for the academic year 2021-2022 shows approximately 11% out of the total 19,106 students who enrolled at the National University of Laos are occupied by Hmong (NUoL, 2022). With such a small portion of Hmong students in the NUoL, however, there appears, at a faculty within the university (as the sampled faculty for this research), that Hmong students left prior to completing their programs every year in the past 3 years (academic years 2018-2020). For instance, 26% out of the total 27 student-leavers at the faculty in 2019 were the Hmong minority. The causes behind their dropout are unknown, and only the confirmation of their dropout by the related departments is noted in the faculty's database. There have been, in literature, plenty of studies investigating Hmong American students' dropouts and difficult situations in higher education (Hang & Walsh, 2021; Vang, 2015; Xiong & Lee, 2011; Xiong, 2018). Among others, a recent work by Xiong (2020) has proposed that Laotian Hmong students often encounter a financial barrier when entering higher education, however, this present study looks further into the matter and analyzes patterns of reasons that are related to their dropouts.

Theoretical Perspectives on Minority Dropout

A minority group refers to a group of people whose characteristics, such as physical, social, cultural, and other dimensions set them apart from the larger society. These differential treatments also include educational opportunities that make minority people unequal to the non-minority group (Wong & Wong, 1979). It is seen as the nature of minorities that when they are marginalized on campus, they feel isolated (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). Most often, it is claimed that minorities

are underrepresented in higher education, compared to their non-minority counterparts (Wong & Wong, 1980). Furthermore, minority students are found to have greater issues with completing a degree and they drop out prior to graduation (Baysu & Phalet, 2012; Chen & Desjardins, 2010; Grubb, 1989; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999; Reisel & Brekke, 2010).

Investigations into minority dropouts are not a new endeavor. The term "dropout," therefore, has been defined in different wordings. For instance, Reisel and Brekke (2010) defined dropout as a situation in which a student leaves without obtaining a degree. For Grubb (1989), dropout signifies students' leaving an educational institution without credentials, including students who have transferred to another institution. However, this case, in which students move or transfer to another program or institution, can be categorized as a "switcher". Furthermore, dropouts can be grouped into sub-categories: voluntary and involuntary patterns (Wong & Wong, 1980). According to Chen (2008, as cited in Chen & DesJardins, 2010, p. 186), there are three distinctive types of dropouts in higher education: (1) "stopout" referring to students who quit their studies temporarily and later return to continue their enrolment; (2) "institutional dropout" referring to those students who move out from one institution to another, and (3) "system dropout" referring to students who completely withdraw from their education. Based on the perspectives mentioned above, the definition of dropout needs to be clear when investigating this issue. It may lead to misunderstandings if researchers fail to define it clearly in their studies. The issue of minority dropout may be explained better by a theory of habitus and capital, proposed by Bourdieu (1984). According to Bourdieu, there is a link between education and social capital, that is, the differences in social and economic status can predict the students' inequality in academic achievement. Students of minority backgrounds and those from a lower socioeconomic level tend to lag behind. Moreover, Nagasawa and Wong (1997) have assumed that the issue of minority dropout is linked to the presence or absence of a critical mass or campus socialization/social interaction. When discussing the dropout issue, the scholarly research community often pays attention to the reasons for the dropouts. According to the literature reviewed, it seems that the possible reasons that minority students are often legitimate for dropping out fall into three groups of reasons, those being individual-related, family-related, and institutional-related reasons. The discussion of the three categories of dropout reasons is here follows.

▪ **Minority Dropout and Individual-related Reasons**

One reason for minority students dropping out is often related to personal issues. The findings of previous studies have reported that a reason for dropping out among minority students is due to their unclear future plans and expectations (Astin & Cross, 1979; Desjardins, 2010; Rodgers, 2013), which also includes a negative view of their prospects for future employment (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Grubb (1989) has proposed a similar view: the dropout may be concerned with their unspecified goals, and in some cases a student might enroll in higher education as an experiment, not knowing which courses they actually prefer. For them, whenever a good job is offered to them by chance, they are likely to take up employment without completing their degree (Grubb, 1989). From such a perspective, it might be said that learning with unspecified future goals creates a lack of true inspiration and motivation for learning. It is evident that students with low motivation are likely to drop out (Bidgood et al., 2006; Grubb, 1989). Moreover, minority students appear to experience a greater level of academic problems. For instance, in an interview study by York et al. (1993), the sampled student leavers reported poor learning performance as a major reason for dropping out. Meeuwisse et al. (2010) also found the same tendency, that minority students' dropout relates to their low academic performance. Meeuwisse and colleagues further noted that minority students tend to be limited in learning abilities, rooted in language barriers, cultural differences, and structural disadvantages. More recent works (O'Keeffe, 2013; Woodfield, 2017) confirm the inability to perform well academically as a cause for withdrawing from the program. In addition, minority students are often seen as isolated from others. According to Nagasawa and Wong (1999), minority students are viewed as outsiders in higher education and for them it is quite challenging to adapt themselves to a good campus life, causing them to feel anonymous and lacking in networks with subcultural groups and peers on campus, leading to many of them abandoning their studies prior to graduation (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). In conclusion, the above reasons for dropping out are also obviously linked to students' personal attributes, such as individual attitudes, expectations, and behaviors, as well as the conditions of their academic experiences and performance. Therefore, one reason for minority dropout is explained by individual-related circumstances.

▪ **Minority Dropout and Family-related Reasons**

It is found that dropout also occurs as a result of family-related reasons. According to Astin & Cross (1979), minority students often struggle with the cost of attendance, such as tuition fees,

rent, course materials, etc. and they are likely to drop out if their families cannot afford to finance their studies. York, Bollar, and Schoob (1993) found that "Money Problems" are among the top five reasons for dropping out of higher education. Several authors confirmed this tendency: the family's limited financial support contributes to dropping out (Bidgood et al., 2006; Rodgers, 2013; Rogers, 2009; Vang, 2015; Xiong & Lee, 2011). Furthermore, parents unwilling to help and support their children through further education appear to be another factor in dropping out. Some past works (Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Samora, 1963) seem to support this tendency, that a lack of family support matters. According to Meeuwisse and colleagues, the family has two, both positive and negative, impacts on minority students' educational persistence, meaning that a family could support them to persist in their schooling, or, on the other hand, that the care and responsibilities required by the family may hinder the student in their learning accomplishments. According to Astin and Cross (1979); and The Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities, hereafter written as "The CHEM" (1982), students coming from single-parent families, especially ethnic group students, tend to have more responsibilities in taking care of their family or a parent. Vang (2015) showed that Hmong American students encountered a divorce in the family that caused a challenge in their tertiary education journey. In addition, minority students who are from a family with low educational levels are likely to drop out (Grubb, 1989; Radunzel, 2017), which is probably due to the parents' limited experiences and knowledge regarding the higher education system as well as that of the school in which their child is enrolled. The parents, therefore, tend not to fully support their children in pursuing higher education (Reisel & Brekke, 2010). This tendency also includes students who are the first generation of the family to manage to transition to higher education, so they receive little encouragement from the family (Radunzel, 2017; Yang, 2023). To conclude, the above reasons for minority students dropping out are associated with the family's situation and the extent to which they can support further education, considering socioeconomic status, parents' encouragement, as well as the extent of the family's appreciation for education. From this perspective, family-related reasons constitute an important factor in students of minority groups dropping out.

- **Minority Dropout and Institutional-related Reasons**

Another point of consideration is that the dropout of minority students is strongly correlated to institutional structures and policy systems (O'Keeffe, 2013; Radunzel, 2017; Rogers, 2009; Samora, 1963). From this perspective, it can be claimed that minority students drop out of

schooling due to certain institutional-related reasons. According to Samora (1963), students who are from a lower-class background, and those from an ethnic minority may not fit the mold. They are less likely to perform well and take great risks by dropping out (Samora, 1963). Samora further added that the dropout is influenced by several aspects of institutional support, such as a lack of facilities, unqualified teachers, a lack of counseling services, few supporting staff, and a mismatch in the curriculum. Similarly, Astin and Cross (1979) have indicated that student leavers often encounter problems in fitting in with a program and school activities. Consequently, they get bored as they are uninterested in the course. A most recent work by Xiong (2018) pointed out that minority students face a challenge with the curriculum; they find the materials designed for the courses difficult for them. Moreover, a more recent work by Meeuwisse and colleagues (2010) reported a similar tendency: minority dropout is associated with a dislike of the program and its contents. An empirical study by York, Bollar, and Schoob (1993) also pointed out that the "Administrative Facilities/Units" appears to be a reason for dropping out. It is asserted that students of minority backgrounds often have very limited or no interactions with peers on campus. Tinto (1987) stressed the significance of social and academic interactions in student persistence in education (cited in Nagasawa & Wong, 1997). In this respect, the minority dropout issue may be well explained by students' adaptive behaviors. Nagasawa and Wong (1997) noted that a lack of critical mass in subcultural groups and socialization on campus can be a reason for dropping out minority students. Without support in students' well-being offered by the institution, students may find it hard to adapt themselves to the campus environment and may leave midway, without completing the program. Astin and Cross (1979) have asserted the need for student support in campus life, for instance, by inviting students to reside on the campus itself. By staying in dormitories, students may find their learning conditions improved because they can interact with peers and they are more likely to have more opportunities to participate in academic and non-academic activities offered by the faculty or university (Astin & Cross, 1979). Moreover, Astin and Cross (1979) especially asserted that those students who live in dormitories are more likely to persist in school. The institution's attention to student well-being, such as by developing students' school connectedness, and teacher relatedness, as well as providing social integration activities, can reduce the high risk of dropping out (Anderson et al., 2018; Azaola, 2019; Deil-Amen, 2011; Hoffman, 2002) A recent work (Yang, 2023) has pointed out students of ethnic minority backgrounds are often considered marginalized and that universities cannot accommodate their

needs/voices, so they have to navigate through educational system themselves. To conclude, the reasons minority students drop out are related to institutional structures and systems, such as programs, requirements, provision of facilities, as well as all practices regarding inclusion. Therefore, institutional-related reasons constitute an important factor in students of minority groups dropping out.

Defining Minority Dropout Reasons as the Purpose for this Current Study

As discussed in the previous section, the reasons for minority students withdrawing from schooling are so diverse. Even though existing literature has provided extensive research on minority students' dropout, none of them have focused on the Hmong minority. Likewise, some works (e.g., Nagasawa & Wong, 1999) do not provide any empirical evidence. The authors of the current paper are interested in redefining and further investigating the reasons Laotian Hmong minority students drop out of higher education. To do so, key previous works (Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999; Sengsouliya & Vannasy, 2022; The CHEM, 1982; York et al., 1993) have been collated together and synthesized. From that, we gathered a list of 10 potential dropout reasons, which can be grouped into three main categorizations: individual-related, family-related, and institutional-related reasons (see *Table 1*). A detailed discussion now follows.

(1) *Low academic performance*: this reason refers to a minority student having dropped out due to the inability to perform well academically while on campus. This category resembles the terms used in past works, such as "Lacking good study habits," (The CHEM, 1982), "Academic problems," (in York et al., 1993), "Ability," (in Meeuwisse et al., 2010), and "Poor learning conditions," that are used in a work of Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022). All these wordings similarly suggest low academic performance as being a reason for dropping out.

(2) *Lacking minority peers*: yet another reason for minority students dropping out is the inability to socialize/network with other minority students on campus. This category resembles the terms used in past works, such as The CHEM (1982): "A lack of commitment to minority students",Nagasawa & Wong (1999): "Absence of a critical mass of ethnic minority peers", and Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022): "Low interaction with peers" - all these terms share a similar meaning, namely, dropout because of a lack of social interaction with fellow minority peers.

(3) *Worry about unemployment:* another reason for minority students dropping out is their negative perception of future job prospects after graduating. This category is connected to the term used in past work, "Future job" (Meeuwisse et al., 2010).

All three sub-categories above-mentioned are grouped into individual-related reasons. This group represents the reasons for dropping out which are in relation to an individual's attitudes, actions, as well as their personal conditions for learning.

Table 1. Outlining Minority Students' Dropout Reasons

Previous works (Identified minority dropout reasons)	**The present study** (A framework on minority dropout reasons)	**Categorizations**
The CHEM (1982) *"Lacking good study habits"* York et al. (1993) *"Academic problems"* Meeuwisse et al. (2010) *"Ability"* Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022) *"Poor Learning conditions"*	*"Low academic performance"*	Individual-related reasons
The CHEM (1982) *"A lack of commitment to minority students"* Nagasawa & Wong (1999) *"Absence of a critical mass of ethnic minority peers"* Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022) *"Low interaction with peers"*	*"Lacking minority peers"*	
Meeuwisse et al. (2010) *"Future jobs"*	*"Worry about unemployment"*	

The CHEM (1982) *"Outside jobs"* Meeuwisse et al. (2010) *"Home situation"* Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022) *"Need for employment"*	*"Family responsibilities/tasks"*	Family-related reasons
The CHEM (1982) *"Heavy financial problems"* York et al. (1993) *"Money problems"* Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022) *"Family's financial constraints"*	*"Low socioeconomic family"*	
Meeuwisse et al. (2010) *"Home situation"* Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022) *"Parents with little appreciation for education"*	*"Family's little appreciation for education"*	
Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022) *"Parents' low educational qualification"*	*"Parents' low educational qualification"*	
The CHEM (1982) "*Culture shock*" *"Institutional ethnocentricity"* York et al. (1992) *"Administrative facilities/units"* Meeuwisse et al. (2010) *"Culture"* Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022) *"Mismatch in cultures"*	*"Administrative system for inclusion"*	Institutional-related reasons

The CHEM (1982) ***"Social isolation & loneliness"*** York et al. (1993) ***"Lack of communication within system"*** Nagasawa & Wong (1999) ***"Absence of campus social networks"*** Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022) ***"School connectedness"***	***"A lack of quality of instruction"***	
York et al. (1993) ***"Narrow curriculum"*** Meeuwisse et al. (2010) ***"Content of education"***	***"Curriculum structure"***	

Source: A demonstration by the authors

(4) *Family responsibilities/tasks:* this reason refers to minority dropout due to difficult situations at home/within their family, such as having to take care of family members, or taking on employment to support the family. This category is from the past works of The CHEM (1982): "Outside jobs" Meeuwisse et al. (2010) "Home situation" and of Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022): "Need for employment" The wordings from these works share similar ideas that dropout can occur due to the students' responsibilities and/or tasks.

(5) *Low socioeconomic family:* another factor in minority students dropping out is the parents' low socioeconomic status and lack of money for educational expenses. This category resembles works of The CHEM (1982): "Heavy financial problems", York et al. (1993): "Money problems" Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022): "Family's financial constraints", where the terms used are similar in meaning, indicating that dropout can occur because of the low socioeconomic status of the family.

(6) *Family's little appreciation for education:* this refers to dropping out due to a lack of support and encouragement from parents. This category emerged from the terms used in past works, such as "Home situation" (in Meeuwisse et al., 2010), and "Parents with little appreciation

for education" (in Sengsouliya & Vannasy, 2022). They have similarly asserted that dropout happens because of the family's little appreciation for education.

(7) *Parents' low educational qualifications:* another reason contributing to minority dropout is the parents' lack of higher educational experiences. This category resembles the works of Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022): "Parents' low educational qualification".

All the four sub-categories mentioned above are within the group of family-related reasons, namely problems in the family's situations and the lack of support from family members, causing minority students to drop out of education.

(8) *Administrative system for inclusion:* this refers to a minority student dropping out due to the administrative system, policies, and facilities provided by the institution. This resembles terms used in past works, such as "Culture shock" and "Institutional ethnocentricity" in The CHEM (1982), "Administrative facilities/units" in York et al. (1992), "Culture" in Meeuwisse et al. (2010), and Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022) who used "Mismatch in cultures". All these similarly suggest that dropout occurs due to a lack of quality in the administrative system for inclusion.

(9) *A lack of quality of instruction:* this refers to a minority student dropping out due to poor teaching methods and poor faculty-student relationships. This category emerges from the review of the terms used in past works, such as The CHEM (1982): "Social isolation & loneliness" York et al. (1993): "Lack of communication within system" Nagasawa & Wong (1999): "Absence of campus social networks", Sengsouliya & Vannasy (2022), using the term: "School connectedness". All these similarly state that dropout can occur due to a lack of quality instruction.

(10) *Curriculum structure:* another reason for minority students dropping out is uninteresting courses and study time/schedules. This category resembles the works of York et al. (1993), using the terms "Narrow curriculum" and "Content of education" in Meeuwisse et al. (2010). These all similarly suggest that a minority student may drop out because of an uninteresting curriculum.

All three sub-categories mentioned above are within the group of institution-related reasons, meaning they relate to the problems of the institutional system, its practices, and policies that cause minority students to drop out of education.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was carried out with the interview research method. The participants were invited to a semi-structured interview and they were probed to describe their university life and the reasons they stated for dropping out. It is an appropriate research approach within sociology for investigating a particular situation of human behaviors (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Dawson, 2002). This current study, therefore, employed a qualitative research design in probing minority students' reasons for dropping out of their higher education studies.

Sampling, Data Collection Procedures, and Preparation for Analysis

The authors of the current paper managed to select 11 participants (2 females) among Hmong student leavers at a faculty in a Laotian university, using a snowball sampling technique. Access to the cases was made by asking for assistance from people with close contact or having good relations with Hmong students. Dropout is a sensitive topic because it is an issue of students' educational loss and letdown. Therefore, it is advantageous to consider a snowball sampling method for this paper in approaching the sample, considered to be hidden and of socially atypical traits (Laerd Dissertation, 2012). The recruited sample was based on students who had dropped out no earlier than in the past 3 years (at the time of investigation). The control of this characteristic in the sample was in place because students who had left 5 or more years prior tended to forget some parts of their campus life and may not have been able to reflect on all their educational experiences (Meeuwisse et al., 2010).

Almost all of the recruited participants were interviewed by the same author, however, the two female cases were interviewed in collaboration with a female colleague because Hmong females are quite reserved, shy, and not very comfortable talking with male strangers. The interviews were carried out in the Lao language as a means of conversation and in different forms due to the personal convenience of the participants. Among the 11 cases, 2 consisted of a face-to-face interview, 1 did a voice message on WhatsApp, and the other 8 were via voice calls on WhatsApp. To ensure the validity of the interview protocol, the interview questions were proof-checked by an expert in the field of adult education, and some wording was revised accordingly. Furthermore, a pilot study with one case was carried out, which confirmed the clarity and validity of the questions. During the interview, the interviewer asked the sample for permission to record the conversations. Some key questions in the interviews included: "*How was your study in the*

faculty? Are there any barriers to your learning/study? What made you decide to drop out of the study? etc." The length of time for the interviews ranged from 12-20 minutes. Every single word of the interviews, including the interviewees' responses and the interviewer's questions, was then transcribed into text materials (Schreier, 2014). Data collection, processing, and analyses were carried out in Lao. The English translation was made only for publication. Since the current paper also set out to analyze the patterns of dropout reasons, three patterns were established beforehand, namely "Only one group of reasons," "Two groups of reasons intertwined," and "Complex intertwinement of all the groups of reasons", based on the individual-related, the family-related, and the institutional-related reasons.

Application of a Qualitative Content Analysis Approach

This study employed qualitative content analysis, using a mixed procedure of a deductive category assignment and a deductive category formation, for analyzing the data (Mayring, 2014). According to Schreier (2014). Qualitative content analysis is a systematic procedure for analyzing large amounts of interview data and it is useful for researchers to quantify categories of data systematically. In conducting the data analyses, the free software "QCAmap," developed by Mayring (2014), was applied. For running the analyses, a coding framework was developed, including category definitions, anchor examples, and coding rules. The coding framework serves as a guideline and it is the most important part of qualitative content analysis as it gives details of all the aspects of the research body, as well as of the interpretation of the study (Schreier, 2014).

Table 2. An overview of the categories applied in the coding process.

Main categories	Sub-categories
A. Individual-related reasons (consisting of 3 sub-categories)	A1. Low academic performance A2. Lack of minority peers A3. Worry about unemployment
B. Family-related reasons (consisting of 6 sub-categories)	B1. Family responsibilities/tasks B2. Low socioeconomic family B3. Family's little appreciation for education B4. Parents' low educational qualification

	B5. Marriage and early parenthood**
	B6. Being homesick**
C. Institutional-related reasons (consisting of 3 sub-categories)	C1. Administrative system for inclusion
	C2. A lack of quality of instruction
	C3. Curriculum structure

Note: ** (an inductively added category)

To ensure the quality of the coding framework and the categories within, a testing coding was conducted, and based on this conduct, the coding framework was revised (Mayring, 2014). Once the coding framework was prepared, the coding started and was run on a line-to-line basis. Having finished the process, two additional sub-categories, "Marriage and early parenthood" and "Being homesick", emerged and were then inductively added to the categories list. The added category was from a particular sample's statements regarding their reasons for dropping out from schooling, and that was not mentioned in the theoretical background reviewed (Mayring, 2014). The overview of the main categories and sub-categories in the coding process is presented (see *Table 2*).

Findings

This section presents the findings of the study in which two parts of the findings are discussed, namely reasons why minority students drop out and the patterns of those reasons. The presentation begins with the patterns, which give a clear overview of the complexity of minority dropout. Then the reporting of the reasons legitimated for not persisting in education follows.

Patterns of Dropout Reasons:

As indicated earlier, the present paper investigates the reasons minority students drop out and analyzes the emerging patterns of those reasons. According to the findings (see *Table 3*), there are different patterns of reasons. There appears to be a clear pattern indicating that the majority of student leavers dropped out due to only one group of reasons. Looking more closely at this pattern, it can be seen that six participants' (Case 1; 4; 6; 7; 8; & 11) reasons for their dropout concerned family-related factors. Another pattern appears to be that some participants dropped out for a combination of two groups of reasons. In this pattern, four participants (Case 3; 5; 9; & 10) all had

a mix of reasons for dropping out. For instance, Case 3's reasons were both family-related and institutional-related factors, Case 5's were both individual-related and family-related reasons and so on. Furthermore, one last pattern is also found: some leaver participants dropped out because of the complex intertwinement of all the groups of reasons. This is the case with one participant, (Case 2), who dropped out due to different factors, including individual-related, family-related, and institutional-related reasons.

Table 3. An analysis of the patterns of participants' reasons for dropping out

Patterns	Cases	Ind.*	Fam.*	Inst.*	No. of Cases (summing up to 11)
Only one group of reasons	Case 1.	No	Yes	No	6
	Case 4.	No	Yes	No	
	Case 6.	No	Yes	No	
	Case 7.	No	Yes	No	
	Case 8.	No	Yes	No	
	Case 11.	No	Yes	No	
Two groups of reasons	Case 3.	No	Yes	Yes	4
	Case 5.	Yes	Yes	No	
	Case 9.	Yes	Yes	No	
	Case 10.	No	Yes	Yes	
Complex intertwinement of all the groups of reasons	Case 2.	Yes	Yes	Yes	1

Note: Ind.= Individual; Fam.= Family; Inst.= Institution

Reasons for minority students dropping out:

Another objective of this present paper is to look further into the reasons for dropping out from their studies given by minority students. The findings indicated that three groups of reasons appear to be related to dropping out, namely family-related, individual-related, and institutional-related reasons.

- Family-related reasons

Referring to *Table 3*, it can be seen that family-related reasons tend to be the most frequently cited by minority students. The majority of the participants in the study, 10 out of 11, stated that they had dropped out because they were unable to afford educational expenses, such as tuition fees, the cost of living, etc. According to them, they come from poor families and their parents do not have sufficient money for them to persist in their education. The following quote provides a sample reason for the situation:

> My family didn't feel like encouraging me to study
> anymore because they could not afford for me to
> continue, (Case 7).

The poverty of the family also causes the participants to have to do something extra to survive at university. For instance, one participant has a part-time job to get extra money for his education and to support the family. As a result of having this job, however, the participant started to skip classes and was having a hard time studying. A sample comment is described in the following quote:

> Once I found a part-time job in a private agency
> and worked there for a while, I felt so uncomfortable
> to study and that caused me to skip classes and decide
> to fully quit my education" (Case 1).

Some participants, 3 in total, said that they dropped out due to their responsibilities at home. Difficult situations in their family that they felt obliged to take care of included, for instance, having to look after a sick family member, or an elderly parent, as well as helping out on the family farm. This sample statement describes the situation:

> My major reason for dropping out from my study
> was that my parents got old and no one took care of them.
> My brother, who lived in hometown but his job is 4-hour
> ride from the house, was not able to offer a full care of them
> due to working in a different area, (Case 3).

Marriage and/or becoming a young parent is another reason for minority students dropping out, as stated by 3 participants. Upon getting married, they became very busy with their many roles in the family, causing them to change their life goals. They dropped out of university and prepared instead to take on the responsibilities of parenthood and spend more time with their spouse at home. This is illustrated by the following words:

> After getting married, I started thinking of dropping
> out from my studies due to the load of responsibility
> …and when my wife had a baby, she could not live
> without me in my parents' house, (Case 8).

Furthermore, their parents' little appreciation for education seems to be another factor in reasons for a student dropping out. One participant reported that she had to make a decision on everything about education by herself. Another reason is that the parents worry about their children's job prospects. The parent does not seem to trust that completing a degree will be beneficial as they have seen many graduates who are unemployed after graduation. As a result of this, the parent believes completing a university degree to be pointless in securing a good job thereafter. One last reason found is the students' feeling of homesickness, as stated by one participant. For him, staying alone in an apartment made him feel too lonely and that caused him to miss home.

- ▪ Individual-related reasons

The present paper revealed that some participants of the study dropped out of university for individual-related reasons. According to 2 participants, a lack of friendship/good relations appears to have been a reason. They felt isolated while on campus as they didn't have the opportunity to network sufficiently with peers from the same minority background. It would have been better for them to have been able to meet and socialize with minority peers. The following statement describes the situation:

> I had little peer interaction while I was studying,
> it was rare to see female Hmong students on
> the university campus (Case 9).

Moreover, the potential prospect of unemployment tends to be part of the reason for dropping out. Some of them think that it is hard to get a job after graduation as they have seen a lot of new graduates working as temp staff for several years without being recruited into full-time employment. This situation worries them too much and makes them too demotivated to persevere. An example statement follows:

> A reason for dropping out from my studies was that
> there were many new graduates who remained unrecruited
> as permanent staff, even though they had about 5-6 years working
> as a temporary employee, and that worried me a lot, (Case 5).

- Institutional-related reasons

In the interview data, it is revealed that institutional-related reasons for dropping out tend to be involved, but less frequently cited. Dissatisfaction with the faculty's program and its subjects is one of those institutional-related reasons. One participant claimed that he disliked the program because there were too many subjects and that made him have to study too hard. Before arriving at the university, he expected to study only subjects relevant to the specific program. This is illustrated in the following quote:

> I did not feel happy with the fact that I had to study so many
> subjects in the program. I thought that I learned many
> subjects already in high school and I would expect
> to focus more on my enrolled major. In my major "English
> Education" I thought that I would study only relevant subjects
> in English but that was not the reality, (Case 3).

Another reason is dissatisfaction with the teaching approach during the Covid 19 pandemic. Learning in the format of virtual classes became boring, as stated by one participant. He did not enjoy the virtual classes because he felt they offered no learning. Furthermore, one last reason relates to the university's administrative system for inclusion. One participant expressed his dissatisfaction with the dormitories provided by the university. He explained that he was eligible to stay in a dormitory but he chose not to because he did not feel comfortable sharing a room with other students. He could not find a roommate from the same Hmong background, and he was

slightly concerned about living in the dorm because of possible issues with things like cooking and sharing food and keeping valuable things safe in the dormitory room. This is reflected in the following statement:

> I felt hesitant to stay in a dormitory provided by the university because there were no Hmong roommates. I chose to live off-campus due to difficulties regarding cooking and keeping money safe, (Case 3).

Discussion, Limitations, and Perspectives for Future Research

Discussion

This qualitative study found a clear pattern in the reasons for dropping out, in which minority students frequently cited only one group of reasons as factors in making that decision. The findings also indicated that family-related reasons weigh more heavily than other reasons for dropping out among minority students. The student participants often referred to the fact that they were from poor families with limited finances. This tendency is consistent with past works (York et al., 1993; Bidgood et al., 2006; Chen & Desjardins, 2010; Rodgers, 2013, etc.). Hmong students often face a challenge in paying tuition fees when coming to higher education (Xiong, 2020). "Financial hardship" plays a big role in a student's decision to drop out (Bidgood et al., 2006). It is well consistent with studies on Hmong students, even in a different context, for instance, Hmong Americans, that they accept that they are from poor families and fall into a financial struggle in pursuing higher education (Vang, 2015; Xiong & Lee, 2011). Moreover, family responsibilities are another reason found in the present study. The participants are too concerned about their family as there are a lot of problems that call for help from them, such as taking care of parents, and a family member, and helping out on the family farm. When encountering such problems, they become stressed, and worried and have lowered motivation for learning, and this home-life difficulty causes them to drop out (Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Rogers, 2009). This study also pointed out that marriage and/or becoming a parent creates difficulties in persisting at university. This finding may connect with the work of Astin and Cross (1979), which suggests students who have a spouse are more likely to drop out of their studies.

Other previous works (Grubb, 1989; Reisel & Brekke, 2010; Radunzel, 2017) have confirmed that having parents with low educational backgrounds is likely to hinder the students'

persistence in education. However, this study found little influence on the family's low educational qualifications. Only one participant raised this issue as part of her reasoning for dropping out. The current paper also found another contrasting result, which is that poor academic performance is not relevant to minority students' reasons for dropping out. According to several authors (Meeuwisse et al., 2010; O'Keeffe, 2013; Radunzel, 2017; Woodfield, 2017), minority dropout is most likely caused by poor academic achievement. Nagasawa and Wong (1997) assumed that the ability to network with peers of ethnic minority backgrounds can predict the persistence in school. However, this study found only one participant who mentioned the lack of a minority peer on campus as part of their reasons for leaving. In addition, some authors (Deil-Amen, 2011; Radunzel, 2017; York et al., 1993) have stressed the influence of institutional support on minority students' educational achievement. However, the present study found that only a few participants mentioned this factor. They described some of their dissatisfaction with the university's administrative system for inclusion, the instructional approach, and the curriculum structure as contributing to their reasons for dropping out. This finding contributes to previous work (Xiong, 2018), which found that Hmong students (living in the US) face a challenge with the curriculum; they claimed that the materials and the courses are too challenging for them. Last but not least, the present paper also revealed that one participant dropped out to transfer to another institution. This case may be considered as a switcher (Meeuwisse et al., 2010) or as an institutional dropout (Chen 2008, in Chen & DesJardins, 2010), referring to those students who move from one institution to another. Moreover, from the present authors' view, minority dropouts are likely to be influenced by disciplinary background and types of transition to higher education (recruitment system and policy); most participants in this study were from soft sciences and transitioned to the university through the non-quota system (in which students pay full tuition fee and other related costs by themselves).

Limitations and Perspectives for Future Research

This research paper offers an understanding of the patterns in reasons for dropping out among minority students. However, the findings of the present study should be used with caution due to some limitations. One, the findings were obtained from a qualitative research design, interviewing 11 Hmong minority students, meaning the interpretation of the findings cannot be generalized nor be representative of a larger population of Hmong students. Likewise, the interpretation was dependent on the interview materials only, using a mixed procedure of a

deductive category assignment and a deductive category formation (Mayring, 2014). Another limitation is that the findings were from the minority student-leavers, via a self-report interview. It would be more interesting to hear some further viewpoints of the people surrounding them, such as teachers, peers, parents, and cousins. Moreover, the majority of interviews were made via WhatsApp calls, while only two cases were through face-to-face interviews. An online interview can miss some hidden responses from the participants. Future research may manage to include more face-to-face interviews to get factual views and more natural reactions. Moreover, more interview time with the participants should be considered in future research so that researchers can probe further for particular situations and reasons. This paper did not involve an equal number of female and male students: among a total of 11 participants, there were just two females. Even though family-related reasons seem to be the most frequently cited ones by minority students, some aspects of the family-related reasons, such as being homesick, and marriage and early parenthood, should be further tested by future research.

Conclusion

The present qualitative study sets out to investigate the patterns in reasons for dropping out among minority students and further looks into those possible reasons. For this case study 11 Hmong minority student leavers participated in a semi-structured interview. The findings indicate that the participants had a mix of reasons (concerning these three factors: individual-related, family-related, and institutional-related) for their dropouts. However, when categorizing the patterns (*Only one group of reasons, Two groups of reasons, and Complex intertwinement of all the groups of reasons*), the study shows a clear pattern, with the majority of minority students dropping out due to only one group of reasons. According to the data, family-related reasons weigh more heavily than other reasons. In this group of family-related reasons, the participants reported issues such as a lack of money, as, coming from a poor family, the parents cannot afford the expenses of the cost of living, the materials, tuition fees, and so on. Moreover, other family-related reasons for dropping out, as described by the minority students, include having a lot of home responsibilities (e.g., taking care of a parent, or a family member, having to help on a farm, etc.), as well as an overall lack of parental support for education. In this regard, the family can be perceived as being mean to Hmong minority students. They have a strong relationship with their family. For them, family factors alone may prevent them from dropping out of education, if only the family had financial stability and could give sufficient encouragement. Last but not least,

Hmong minority students are claimed as just like other marginalized groups; they have poor learning conditions, compared to other non-minority peers and they have little support from home family, so educators should acknowledge their background uniqueness when planning and/or providing educational supports. Most importantly, campus support from both faculty and social networks is very necessary for their academic enhancement. Making them feel belonging to the campus could enhance their school-related activities participation and that may prevent them from thinking of dropping out of school. Finally, further inquiry into the relationship between dropping out and individual, institutional, and family conditions is strongly recommended.

References

Anderson, S., Rod, M. H., Holmberg, T., Ingholt, L., Ersboll, A. K. & Tolstrup, J. S. (2018). Effectiveness of the settings-based intervention shaping the Social on preventing dropout from vocational education: A Danish non-randomized controlled trial. *BMC Psychology, 6*(1), 1-11. DOI:10.1186/s40359-018-0258-8.

Astin, H. S. & Cross, P. H. (1979). Student Financial Aid and Persistence in College. (Report). Higher Education Research Inst., Inc., Los Angeles, Calif. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED221078&site=ehost-live

Azaola, M. C. (2019). Support from extended family in higher education: A narrative literature review. *Journal of Further and Higher Education.* DOI: 10.1080/0309877X.2019.1648775

Baysu, G. & Phalet, K. (2012). Staying on or dropping out? The role of intergroup friendship and perceived teacher support in minority and nonminority school careers. *Teachers College Record, 114*(5), 1-25. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=76503648&site=ehost-live

Bidgood, P., Saebi, N. & May, S. (2006). Influences on student withdrawal from further education: A case study. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training, 58*(2), 223-236. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ741985&site=ehost-live

Bourdieu, P. (1986). *Chapter 1: The forms of capital, in Richardson, J., Handbook of Theory and*

Research for the Sociology of Education (1986), Westport, CT: Greenwood, pp. 241–58

Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006). *Conducting in-depth interviews: A guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews for evaluation input*. Pathfinder international

Chen, R. & DesJardins, S. L. (2010). Investigating the impact of financial aid on student dropout risks: Racial and ethnic differences. *Journal of Higher Education, 81*(2), 179-208. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=48558482&site=ehost-live

Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities. (1982). *Final Report of the Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities*. Higher Education Research Institute. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED214457&site=ehost-live

Dawson, C. (2002). *Practical research method: A user-friendly guide to measuring research*. How To Books, UK.

Deil-Amen, R. (2011). Socio-academic integrative moments: Rethinking academic and social integration among two-year college students in career-related programs. *Journal of Higher Education, 82*(1), 51-91. DOI: 10.1353/jhe.2011.0006

Grubb, W. N. (1989). Access, Achievement, Completion, and "Milling Around" in Postsecondary Vocational Education (Report). MPR Associates, Berkeley, CA. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED315548&site=ehost-live

Hang, A., & Walsh, N. (2021). Environmental factors for motivation of first-generation Hmong American college students in academic attainment. *Education Quarterly Reviews, 4*(3), 142-154.

Hoffman, J. L. (2002). The impact of student cocurricular involvement on student success: Racial and religious differences. *Journal of College Student Development, 43*(5), 712-739.

Kyophilavong, P., Ogawa, K., Kim, B., & Nouansavanh, K. (2018). Does education promote economic growth in Lao PDR? Evidence from cointegration and granger causality approaches. *The Journal of Developing Areas, 52(2),* 1–11.

Laerd Dissertation (2012) Snowball sampling. https://dissertation.laerd.com/snowball- sampling.php

Meeuwisse, M. Severiens, S. E. & Born, M. P. (2010). Reasons for withdrawal from higher

vocational education. A comparison of ethnic minority and majority non-completers. *Studies in Higher Education, 35*(1), 93-111. DOI: 10.1080/03075070902906780

Mayring, P. (2014). *Qualitative content analysis: theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution*. http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-395173

Nagasawa, R. & Wong, P. (1999). A theory of minority students' survival in college. *Sociological Inquiry, 69*(1), 76-90. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=1971517&site=ehost-live

National University of Laos. (2020). NUOL Brochure. https://nuol.edu.la/index.php/lo/

O'Keeffe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal, 47*(4), 605-613. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=93813989&site=ehost-live

Radunzel, J. (2017). Using incoming student information to identify students at-risk of not returning to their initial institution in year two. (Report) ACT Research Report Series 2017-10. ACT, Inc. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED583556&site=ehost-live

Reisel, L. & Brekke, I. (2010). Minority dropout in higher education: A comparison of the United States and Norway using competing risk event history analysis. *European Sociological Review, 26*(6), 691-712. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=55534709&site=ehost-live

Rodgers, T. (2013). Should high non-completion rates amongst ethnic minority students be seen as an ethnicity issue? Evidence from a case study of a student cohort from a British University. *Higher Education, 66*, 535-550. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=91528680&site=ehost-live

Rogers, R. N. (2009). "No One Helped Out. It Was Like, "Get on with It. You're an Adult Now. It's up to You". You Don't ... It's Not like You Reach 17 and Suddenly You Don't Need Any Help Anymore": A Study into Post-16 Pastoral Support for "Aimhigher Students"

Pastoral Care in Education, 27(2), 109-118.

https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ856100&site=ehost-live

Rumberger, R. W. (2001). *Why students drop out of school and what can be done*. A paper prepared for the conference, "Dropouts in America: How severe is the problem? What do we know about intervention and prevention" Harvard University, January 13, 2001.

Samora, J. (1963). The educational status of a minority. *Theory into Practice, 2*(3), 144-150.

https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED002635&site=ehost-live

Schreier, M. (2014). *Qualitative content analysis*. In the Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis, edited by Uwe Flick. SAGE.

Sengsouliya, S. & Vannasy, V. (2022). Ethnic minorities' dropout decisions in higher education: An integrative review. *Andragoška spoznanja/Studies in Adult Education and Learning,* 1-17. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4312/as/10444

Tidwell, R. (1989). *Academic success and the school dropout: A minority perspective*. In the Sage Book of Black Students: Psychological issues and academic achievement, edited by Gordon LaVern Berry and Joy Keiko Asamen. SAGE Publication, Inc.

UNPO (2021). Member profile: Hmong, Congress of World Hmong People (CWHP)

https://unpo.org/members/7891

Vang, F. (2015). Barriers that impact Hmong students in post-secondary education. Retrieved from Sophia, the St. Catherine University repository website:

https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers/531

Vang, C. T. (2003). Learning more about Hmong students (a learning material for Multicultural Education). California State University.

Williams, M. T. (2019). Adverse racial climates in academia: Conceptualization, interventions, and call to action. *New Ideas in Psychology, 55*, 58-67. DOI: 10.1016/j.newideapsych.2019.05.002

Wong, S. & Wong, J. (1980). Representation of racial minority students in selected Canadian university schools of nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing (Wiley-Blackwell), 5*(1), 83-90.

https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=14358147&site=ehost-live

Woodfield, R. (2017). Undergraduate students who are required to withdraw from university: The role of ethnicity. *British Educational Research Journal, 43*(2), 230-252. DOI: 10.1002/berj.3259

Xiong, K. (2020). Factors influencing Hmong college students' persistence and retention in Laos: A case study (Thesis, Concordia University, St. Paul). Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup_commons_grad_edd/463

Xiong, S. & Lee, S. E. (2011). Hmong students in higher education and academic support programs. *Hmong Studies Journal, 12,* 1-20.

Xiong, S. (2018). *Factors influencing Hmong American students' academic success in higher education.* (Master thesis, California State University)

Yang, K. (2023). *AHMong students in academia: Understanding Hmong stop-out students at universities in California* (Doctoral dissertation, San Francisco State University)

York, C. M. & Association (1993). Causes of College Retention: A Systems Perspective. (Paper presented at the Convention of the American Psychological Association, 101st, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August 20-24, 1993). https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED369027&site=ehost-live

4.3   Sub-study 3: "Minority Dropouts in Higher Education: The Influence of

Family Factors"

This article was published online in the *Indonesian Journal of Adult and Community Education* (IJACE*)* in 2023. The article explores the influence of family factors on the educational experiences of Hmong minority students, inspired by previous literature that highlights the significant impact of family characteristics on learning processes among minority students. The study was motivated by both the existing research and the author's personal interest in examining how family dynamics affect the educational trajectories of Hmong students.

The central research question guiding this study was: *"What family aspects contribute to dropout among minority students?"* To address this question, a qualitative research design was employed, involving interviews with Hmong minority students who had completely withdrawn from university. The participants were engaged through either mobile calls or in-person meetings, depending on their convenience. The collected data were transcribed and screened, analyzed, and interpreted using a mixed approach that combined deductive category assignment with inductive category formation. Prior to the analysis, the author developed ten sub-categories, including family economic status, parental educational background, and family employment, among others. Data analysis was conducted using the free software, "QCAmap." The findings indicated that family factors exert both direct and indirect effects on the higher education experiences of Hmong minority students. Key contributors to dropout decisions included economic status, parental attitudes, early marriage, and other home-related situations. The study highlights that academic performance was not identified as a primary factor in the dropout decisions of Hmong minority students. Instead, the influence of family support and readiness, as well as the overall home environment, were found to be more significant. The author also acknowledged some limitations of the qualitative methodology employed, noting the need for further research and statistical validation of the identified variables.

The paper contributes to the existing literature by demonstrating that family support is crucial in the context of Hmong students' higher education. For further details, the full article can be accessed via the following link:

Minority Dropouts in Higher Education: The Influence of Family Factors

Abstract

According to existing literature, familial support has been shown to be a significant predictor of students' success or failure in school. In this paper, we investigate family-related factors that contribute to minority students dropping out. A qualitative research approach was employed in this study, which involved 11 Hmong student-leavers as key interviewees. Participants were asked about their university education experiences and why they discontinued their studies. The data obtained from interviews were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. As the findings of the study indicate, four family-related factors were most prevalent in causing minority students to withdraw from their studies: family economic situation, parental attitudes, marriage/early parenthood, and home life situations. Future research in this area is strongly recommended.

Keywords: Family-related factors, Higher Education, Hmong minority, Minority dropout

Introduction

According to the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030, the world has set out several key actions as part of a comprehensive vision for education: "Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we, therefore, commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. No education target should be considered met unless met by all." (UNESCO, 2015, p.7). However, a high dropout rate of minority students remains a serious issue in different contexts. Student dropout harms a country's social and economic aspects (Tidwell, 1989). Rumberger (2001) argues that dropouts are more likely to commit crimes, and therefore pose a threat to society. A country's economic development may also be stalled if the dropout issue is not resolved (Kyophilavong et al., 2018; Rumberger, 2001; Tidwell, 1989).

Knowing why students drop out can offer a useful direction in improving quality education (Rumberger, 2001).

Addressing the issue of minority dropouts is not a new endeavor; several studies (e.g., Csereklye, 2008; Grubb, 1989; Reisel & Brekke, 2010; Rodgers, 2013; Rumberger, 2001; Samora, 1963; Williams, 2019; Wong & Wong, 1980; etc.) have attempted to understand the reality behind this problem. Among a pool of scholarly discussions, it is suggested that minority students dropping out is caused by individual factors, such as poor learning, personal aspiration and motivation (Meeuwisse et al., 2010; O'Keeffe, 2013; Woodfield, 2017; etc.), family conditions, social class (Bidgood et al., 2006; Bourdieu, 1984; Rodgers, 2013; Rogers, 2009; etc.), and institutional-related factors, including irrelevant policies and administrative systems (Gross et al., 2013; Radunzel, 2017; Williams, 2019; etc.).

A wide array of research on minority dropouts (Dennis et al., 2005; Jordan et al., 1994; Lofstrom, 2007; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tinto, 1975; Tran, 2013; Williamson, 2001; etc.) has posited a significant influence of family-related factors on minority students' outcomes and their persistence in education: especially for students at college level, parental support is a means for academic achievement (Sax & Wartman, 2010). According to Meeuwisse et al. (2010), however, a family can have both positive and negative impacts on minority students' educational engagement, meaning that while on the one hand the family could be of support in the student persisting; on the other hand, responsibilities at home can cause them to drop out. Despite a wide array of research that has identified many aspects of family that are influential to a student's educational progress. This perspective, however, tends to appear less in qualitative research papers. A qualitative-based study is an appropriate approach for understanding a specific issue in human behaviors (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Dawson, 2002). In Laotian higher education, the minority dropout issue seems to remain unsolved, especially since Hmong minority students have a relatively low rate of graduation at bachelor-degree level. A recent study has proposed that the family factor is one of the key predictors of Hmong students' further education (Xiong, 2020). How family influences Hmong minority students' educational process is of interest to this current study. In order to contribute to the existing knowledge on the relationship between family and children's education, this present study, therefore, aims to look into what aspects of family play a role in Hmong students dropping out. This paper is guided by the research question "What family

aspects play a role in minority dropout?" The findings of this paper are of significance to the existing literature on the influences of family-related factors on minority students dropping out.

This research is structured in different sections: in section 1, readers are introduced to the theoretical perspectives on family-related aspects that have a relationship with students' academic achievement, in which ten key aspects of family are used as the conceptual framework for the study. Section 2 focuses on the methodological components, including sample selection, data collection, and data analysis techniques. In section 3, key findings of the study are reported, followed by the discussion section, in which some interesting results are linked with previous theoretical perspectives and related studies; and the last section presents a conclusion, together with some recommendations for future studies in this area.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, readers are introduced to an overview of past literature on family-related factors that have an impact on student dropout from education. According to the review, ten potential attributes as familial factors have been identified. That means existing literature has pointed out that there are certain circumstances contributing to students withdrawing from their studies, including family economic situation (Aina et al., 2018; Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; etc.), parents' low occupation status (Aina et al., 2018; Behr et al., 2020; etc.), family's low educational background (Tidwell, 1989; Tinto, 1975; etc.), first-generation of higher education students (Dennis et al., 2005; Terenzini et al., 1995; etc.), lack of family resources (Tsolou & Babalis, 2020; Williamson, 2001; etc.), large family size (Chávez et al., 1991; Effiong & Edet, 2020; etc.), parents' negative attitudes to education (Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tinto, 1975; etc.), family emergencies (Jordan et al., 1994; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; etc.), single-parent households (Bull et al., 1994; Chávez et al., 1991; etc.), and marriage and early parenthood (Tidwell, 1989; Vergidis & Panagiotakopoulos, 2002; Videnovic & Lazarevic, 2017; etc.). A detailed discussion of the above-mentioned dimensions here follows.

Family economic situation

It is widely claimed in the existing literature that low socio-economic families are in strong association with students dropping out of their schooling (Astin & Cross, 1979; Bidgood et al., 2006; Chen & DesJardins, 2010; Effiong & Edet, 2020; Farah & Upadhyay, 2017; Hammond et al., 2007; De Janvry et al., 2006; Lofstrom, 2007; Phan & Vu, 2019; Rasmy et al., 2017; Rodgers, 2013; Rogers, 2009; Rumberger, 2001; Sohn, 2018; Terenzini et al., 1995; Tidwell, 1989; Tinto,

1975; Williamson, 2001; Woodfield, 2017; York et al., 1993). For instance, Lofstrom (2007) tested and confirmed there is a significant influence of poverty on dropout probability. This tendency is also found among others. Students from poorer families are more likely to abandon their studies, compared to students who come from families of better socioeconomic backgrounds (Rumberger, 2001; Tinto, 1975; Williamson, 2001). Students who are poor must earn money to stay in school. Some authors explained that students whose parents are economically disadvantaged are likely to seek or take employment to get extra money (Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities, 1982; Tidwell, 1989), and they are required to work or help their families in the farming (De Janvry et al., 2006; Yokozeki, 1996). Families of student-leavers are often facing a crisis of economic instability (Yokozeki, 1996), and this may lead the families to borrow (Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities, 1982; De Janvry et al., 2006). This is a condition that forces students to discontinue their education. The financial support of the family can be provided by various family members, according to Yokozeki (1996). Most persistent students receive financial assistance from their parents. However, a few students who persist, as well as dropouts, obtain money for their education from grandparents and other cousins, especially from uncles and aunts.

Parents' low occupational status

In the literature, it is also indicated that parental occupation has a significant relationship with students' educational failure or achievement. For instance, a study by Johnes and McNabb (2004) revealed that parents' occupation is a factor influencing student dropout, stating that students whose parents work an unskilled job are more likely to drop out (cited in Aina et al., 2018). In addition, a review study by Aina and colleagues (2018) also found a consistent tendency, that the educational level of parents has a negative correlation with dropout probability. Seemingly, Behr et al. 2020 provide evidence that, in comparison to two groups of graduates and dropouts, the parents of graduates are more likely to hold a higher occupational status than dropouts' parents. Notwithstanding, a recent study by Contini & Zotti (2022) tested a hypothesis and indicated that the influence of parental jobs had no significant effect on student dropout.

Family's low educational background

Several past studies (Aina et al., 2018; Behr et al., 2020; Casanova et al., 2018; Chávez et al., 1991; Effiong & Edet, 2020; Farah & Upadhyay, 2017; Grubb, 1989; Radunzel, 2017; Reisel & Brekke, 2010; Rasmy et al., 2017; Tidwell, 1989; Tinto, 1975) have agreed that the influence of parental education on student dropout is a factor. For instance, Tinto (1975) proposed that

students whose parents have a higher level of education are likely to remain in education. Similarly, Tidwell (1989) noted that parents who possess a higher level of education tend to have a positive impact on children's persistence as they can act as positive role models, and increase their children's learning abilities and aspirations. This assumption seems to be accurate, as Casanova et al. (2018) noted that students from families with better educational backgrounds have better learning conditions. Likewise, students who left schooling are more likely to come from families whose parents are less educated (Aina et al., 2018; Behr et al., 2020; Effiong & Edet, 2020; Farah & Upadhyay, 2017; Rasmy et al., 2017). Reisel and Brekke (2010) added to this issue that parents, who lack experience in higher education, are often not familiar with their children's education system and are consequently less inclined to encourage their children's academic efforts. Moreover, the family's educational background also covers a family member's failure/unsuccessful experience in education. There is a case in which students whose siblings left their studies shows it is more likely they themselves will drop out as well (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). In contrast, Contini & Zotti (2022) found parental education had a weaker effect on student dropout.

First generation

Another family attribute contributing to student dropout is the matter of first generation. Existing literature (Dennis et al., 2005; Radunzel, 2017; Terenzini et al., 1995) has proposed that a student who is the first generation in his/her family to reach higher education is more likely to drop out of studies. According to Terenzini et al. (1995), first-generation students, in comparison to their traditional counterparts, are more likely to encounter difficulties, such as receiving less parental support and encouragement for further education, and therefore become anxious and stressed about academic situations, have less academic integration, and work more hours. Moreover, first-generation students tend to possess lower cognitive skills, with poorer reading, math, and critical thinking skills. Dennis et al. (2005) found a similar tendency that minority first-generation students typically perform less well academically. One who is a first-generation student must be self-resilient and navigate learning alone since they have no positive role models in the family, or receive only minimal motivation from home (Csereklye, 2008).

Lack of family resources

Family resources are a means to students' academic development. However, according to the literature reviewed, only limited research has examined distinctive aspects of family resources and how they have an impact on students' learning progress. Rumberger & Lim (2008), after reviewing a number of research papers, proposed that there may be a variety of types of family resources. The authors of the present paper, based on the work of Rumberger & Lim (2008), view resources given by families as two major types: monetary and non-monetary resources. The monetary resource refers to the family's support for attendance costs, such as tuition fees, daily living allowance, related materials, etc., and this monetary resource can also be used to fund additional academic opportunities (e.g., extra classes/tutorials, more books, computers, etc.). Rumberger & Lim further noted that the lack of monetary resources is a severe barrier causing a dropout crisis. This tendency is also consistent with other works, positing that students who drop out are more likely to be from families with few possessions and a lack of reading materials at home (Chávez et al., 1991; Tidwell, 1989). Parents' non-monetary resources include paying attention, monitoring, providing emotional support, and fostering close relationships with their children. These aspects are referred to as "parental human resources" and "social resources" in Rumberger & Lim (2008).

More past authors (Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; Casanova et al., 2018; Csereklye, 2008; Dennis et al., 2005; Hammond et al., 2007; Phan & Vu, 2019; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Sütő, 2020; Terenzini et al., 1995; Tinto, 1975; Tsolou & Babalis, 2020; Williamson, 2001) have also suggested that parental support and encouragement could predict student dropout. According to Tinto (1975), students who persist are more likely to have received advice, praise, and attention from families. Based on Tinto's perspective, family encouragement seems to be a very significant factor in children's educational accomplishments. Parental encouragement can be in the form of monitoring children's academic conditions (Hammond et al., 2007) and nurturing relationships within the family (Sax & Wartman, 2010; Tinto, 1975; Williamson, 2001). According to Sax & Wartman (2010), a strong relationship between parents and students can have a positive impact on students' learning outcomes. More importantly, conflict may take place if there is a lack of positive relationships in the family (Tinto, 1975) and such a conflict may bring about stress or tension between children and parents, resulting in students skipping classes and eventually abandoning their education (Hammond et al., 2007; Sohn, 2018; Williamson, 2001). Other authors (Meeuwisse

et al., 2010; Samora, 1963; Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019) have also confirmed the importance of parental encouragement. For instance, students lacking emotional support from their families are likely to feel lonely and have lowered self-efficacy (Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019) and decreased motivation for learning (Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018).

Large family size

According to the literature reviewed, a family with a larger size of family members has a significant link to children's educational failure (Chávez et al., 1991; Effiong & Edet, 2020; Farah & Upadhyay, 2017; Rasmy et al., 2017; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tidwell, 1989; Yokozeki, 1996). Family size is measured by how many siblings or family members are within the household (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). According to Chávez et al. (1991), among African-American students, family size appeared to be a strong contributor to whether these minority students abandoned or continue their studies. Other research has found that students whose parents have many children are more likely to leave school before completing a program as compared to students from smaller families (Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tidwell, 1989). Consistently, Farah & Upadhyay (2017) found a similar result: a household with more than three children is likely to lead to a higher probability of dropout. To this tendency, Rumberger & Lim (2008) further noted that larger families may not be able to provide sufficient resources for learning to each of their children. This may be due to larger families' economic fragility or income instability meaning they cannot provide their children with a supportive learning environment (Effiong & Edet, 2020).

Parents' negative attitudes to education

Yet another family aspect that has a significant relationship with student dropout is parental attitudes, values and expectations (Csereklye, 2008; Effiong & Edet, 2020; Hammond et al., 2007; Rasmy et al., 2017; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tinto, 1975; Tran, 2013; Yokozeki, 1996). Yokozeki (1996) noted that there is a case in which students are encouraged by their families to focus on earning rather than school work and this familial attitude causes a student to discontinue their schooling. According to Tinto (1975), students who can persist in education are more likely to have heightened expectations from parents. A review study by Rumberger & Lim (2008) also finds that greater parental expectations are linked to a decreased risk of dropping out and a much higher rate of graduation. More recent studies (Csereklye, 2008; Hammond et al., 2007; Rasmy et al., 2017) have also found that parents' perceived value of education is a major predictor of children's educational attainment, as parents' attitudes and values affect students' educational expectations

(Hammond et al., 2007), students become highly motivated by their studies if parents demonstrate interest, high value, and attention to education (Tran, 2013). Furthermore, parental attitudes can be predicted by parents' educational background, meaning that more educated parents tend to place a higher value on education than do less educated ones (Yokozeki, 1996).

Home life situations/emergencies

Another family attribute predicting whether a student will give up or continue his/her education relates to home-life situations or so-called family emergencies. Several previous research papers (Bull et al., 1994; Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; Hammond et al., 2007; De Janvry et al., 2006; Jordan et al., 1994; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Phan & Vu, 2019; Vergidis & Panagiotakopoulos, 2002; Yokozeki, 1996) have maintained that family unexpected events have a negative influence on student's educational life. This factor includes parent's unemployment (Bull et al., 1994), income decrease or economic crisis (De Janvry et al., 2006; Vergidis & Panagiotakopoulos, 2002), parents' job change (Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018), illness and/or death of family members or relatives (Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; De Janvry et al., 2006; Jordan et al., 1994), and parental divorce (Bull et al., 1994). Furthermore, change in living location seems to be another key predictor. There is a significant correlation between a family's residential move and dropout probability (Hammond et al., 2007; Phan & Vu, 2019; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). The aforementioned problems are considered emergencies or stressful situations in households in which children suffer and can find it difficult to persist in their studies (Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Possibly, one explanation for this problem is that some emergencies (e.g., income crisis, illness) result in high costs and that one solution in such a situation is to reduce the family's expenses by withdrawing the children from school (De Janvry et al., 2006; Yokozeki, 1996).

Single-parent

According to past literature (Bull et al., 1994; Chávez et al., 1991; Hammond et al., 2007; Rumberger, 2001; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tidwell, 1989; Yokozeki, 1996), single parenting seems to be a block hindering students' persistence in schooling. Yokozeki (1996) compared persistent students and leavers and found that some leavers had divorced parents. Research from previous studies (Rumberger, 2001; Tidwell, 1989) also showed that students from single-parent families are more likely to leave their studies than those who have both a father and a mother. This issue seems to apply to students whose parents get remarried as well. Students living in

stepfamilies are also associated with a higher probability of dropping out (Rumberger, 2001). Bull et al. (1994) posited that it is more typical for minority students to experience the problem of residing in single-parent families than it is for their non-minority counterparts. A concern for living with a stepmother or a stepfather or in single-parent families is that familial support (monitoring and advice giving/encouragement) for education is less, as compared with traditional families (Astone & McLanahan, 1991, cited in Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Marriage and early parenthood

An overwhelming array of literature (Bull et al., 1994; Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; Chávez et al., 1991; Jordan et al., 1994; Tidwell, 1989; Vergidis & Panagiotakopoulos, 2002; Videnovic & Lazarevic, 2017) has proposed that young marriage and/or early parenthood is another familial factor contributing to students dropping out of education. In their review of past literature, Bull and colleagues (1991) reported that pregnancy is a frequently cited cause for leaving school, especially among female students. In addition, in their empirical research, Bull and colleagues found that pregnancy was among the top four reasons for dropping out. A reason given for such a problem is that a student's pregnancy is an embarrassing event for herself and her family. It is also claimed to break school rules (Bull et al., 1991). Another study by Jordan et al. (1994) seems to support this tendency as well, providing evidence that minority female students are more likely to cite pregnancy and young parenthood as a reason for dropping out than do their non-minority counterparts. This is also confirmed in a recent study in which Videnovic and Lazarevic (2017) found teenage marriage and pregnancy to be direct factors causing students to drop out of their studies. Videnovic and Lazarevic noted that these dropouts, however, expected to return to study once their babies grew older.

In summary, the existing literature has identified ten key aspects of family. These ten familial factors are applied as a conceptual framework for the present study, probing into which family-related factors are likely to play a role in Hmong minority dropout.

Methodology and Methods

This study employed an interview research method. Hmong minority students who had dropped out were contacted and invited to a semi-structured interview. The participants were asked to share their experiences of living on a university campus and the possible family-related reasons that had caused them to leave their studies before completing a degree. According to Boyce & Neale (2006), and Dawson (2002), the interview method is very commonly used in sociology

research and is useful when a researcher expects to obtain detailed information about an individual's thoughts, behaviors and reflections on a specific issue. The current paper employed a snowball sampling method to select 11 Hmong student participants (2 females) who had dropped out of a faculty program at a Laotian university. By using this method, the authors were assisted by people close to the leaver students, such as their home-class instructors, peers, and teachers who had previously taught them (Laerd Dissertation, 2012). Research on the dropout issue is considered a sensitive topic and the target sample related to this issue is difficult to reach. Snowball sampling is an appropriate technique to get access to such hard-to-reach cases (Laerd Dissertation, 2012).

Each acknowledged participant was scheduled for an interview, at the convenience of the participants. In this regard, out of the 11 cases in total, 2 were in a face-to-face interview, 1 through a WhatsApp voice message, and the other 8 were on WhatsApp calls. Lao was the language of the interviews and all the interviews were conducted by the same authors. The interview protocol was characterized by a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions. This interview instrument was checked for its content validity by an expert in a related field. Additionally, a trial interview was conducted with a participant to determine whether the questions were clear to him, and the results verified the clarity of the questions. Each interview lasted between 12-20 minutes. The data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim, including the interviewer's probes (Schreier, 2014). In this process, all the data processing and the analysis were conducted in Lao; the English translation was made for the purpose of publication.

Qualitative content analysis was employed in this current study; the data analysis was based on a deductive category assignment (Mayring, 2014). Qualitative content analysis refers to a systematic procedure for analyzing large amounts of interview data and it is useful for researchers to quantify categories of data systematically (Schreier, 2014). The transcribed data were analyzed with free software, the so-called "QCAmap," developed by Mayring (2014). In preparation for this, a categorization guide was established, in which there were category definitions, anchor examples, and coding rules. This coding guide is considered the most significant part of qualitative content analysis, as it functions as a conceptual framework for the analysis and interpretation (Schreier, 2014). The developed coding framework was tested by doing trial coding to ensure the high quality of the categories (Mayring, 2014), and some revisions were made in this conduct. The final categories included ten headings, namely, (1) family economic situation, (2) parental

education, (3) parental occupations, (4) first-generation, (5) family resources, (6) parental attitudes, (7) family size, (8) home life situations, (9) single-parent, and (10) marriage/early parenthood.

Findings

As stated earlier, the current paper aims to look into aspects of family that play a role in minority students dropping out. The paper, based on interview data obtained from 11 minority students who had dropped out, finds different family aspects that participants seem to consider as the most influential factors for their academic engagement and dropping out. When analyzing further in-depth, among a list of family aspects, this paper finds all the ten listed family aspects to be influential to minority students. Some aspects, such as family occupation, parental education, being a first-generation student to reach higher education, family size, lack of family resources, and single-parent families may be of significance but are less dominant. Nevertheless, four of these appear to be the most dominant aspects. These are family economic status, marriage and early parenthood, the family's attitudes to education, and home life situations. The details of such findings are outlined as follows.

Family economic situation

According to interview data, a family's financial weakness seems to be the most dominant aspect that caused student participants to leave their studies. Many of them come from poor families, so money is a huge barrier for them in obtaining an education. 10 out of 11 participants in total reported that they wanted to continue, but student life was very costly. Their parents could not afford to pay for their education. They also noticed how poor their families were, which made them feel distracted, so they eventually chose to abandon their studies. A sample statement is reflected in the following quote.

> I wanted to continue my studies but my mother said she
> had no money anymore. She kept informing me about the poverty
> and that made me upset, so I finally left, said Case 4.

Such financial restrictions caused a participant to try his best to get a part-time job while studying. By taking employment, he became less engaged in school work and started to skip classes more often, and finally dropped out. This tendency is revealed in the quote below.

Due to my parents being unable to support me in my studies,

I had to find a part-time job to get extra money to support

myself and my parents, said Case 1.

Also, due to poverty, two participants asked for help and/or received some support from other relatives. For instance, one participant got some reading materials from an uncle and another one got some financial support from a brother while studying. Although this assistance was helpful only for a period of time as their relatives were unable to continue to assist with their studies. A sample quote is provided below.

I had an uncle who was studying at a university at that time.

I was happy as he promised to offer me some help with my studies.

He, at first, bought some books for me. Later on, I was in a difficult time

due to my parents being unable to financially support me, he (the uncle) was

not able to do anything to help me, either, said Case 1.

Marriage and early parenthood

In the current study, marriage and young parenthood were also dominant factors, causing participants to drop out of school. According to 4 participants, having a spouse resulted in people having more difficulties and additional family responsibilities, such as pregnancy or intending to become a parent, lack of funds for a couple's life, the need to spend more time caring for a partner, the need to earn a living, and the need to start a family, etc. These participants also shared that due to such a busy life, they became less motivated to continue their studies and therefore dropped out. This situation is revealed in the following quote.

Because of many difficulties, such as the lack of money,

not being able to afford to pay the tuition fees, having a baby,

the need to take care of a spouse, and the need to leave

my parents' house to start our family life, I thought it was better

to leave schooling, said Case 8.

Family's attitudes to education

Family's perceived attitudes to education appear to be another influential aspect. In the interview data, it is indicated that 3 participants shared that some family members in their families exhibited little appreciation for education. They didn't seem to support their studies fully or expect them to continue. They did not even prevent their children from dropping out. This sort of negative attitude may be attributed to the current societal situation/trend. This is because parents fear their children's low chances of getting employed after graduation, their low socioeconomic background, and because of their low perception of education. They expect their children to be more involved in earning money than in their studies and therefore want them to return home and live with them. This tendency is reflected in the two quotes below.

> When discussing with my parents whether I should leave
> or continue my studies, my dad did not care for me to
> continue. Only my mom and my siblings did, though, said Case 7.

> My parents said if I wanted to discontinue my studies, I was
> allowed to do so because it is challenging to get recruited
> for a good job. They are now unhappy that one of my siblings
> is still unemployed after completing a degree, said Case 3.

Home life situations

In addition, home life situations, which relate to unexpected events or emergencies at home, appear to be a dominant aspect contributing to participants' dropout decisions. In this regard, as shared by 3 participants, they needed to withdraw from schooling because of some familial conditions, such as the head of the household being unable to earn money and/or a decrease in income, sickness of some family members, as well as having to take care of aging/old parents. Some statements below reflect this tendency.

> When I entered my fourth semester, I was informed by
> my parents that they had a lowered income at that moment,
> and asked if I wanted to continue my studies, said Case 6
> I dropped out when I was in my second semester because
> my sibling got sick, and that cost a lot of money, said Case 3

Discussion, Conclusion, and Practical Recommendation

Discussion

The following qualitative study found several interesting results that can be related to previous theoretical assumptions and empirical studies. The current study analyzed interview data obtained from 11 students who had dropped out of higher education. Four family aspects were identified as the most significant. In these items, participants were more likely to mention the lack of these factors as a reason for dropping out. These aspects include, firstly, family economic situation, in which many participants claimed that the family's financial problems were a huge barrier; their parents could not afford to pay their educational expenses, such as the rent for an apartment room, living costs, learning materials, and so on. This tendency seems to be consistent with other past works (Bidgood et al., 2006; Chen & DesJardins, 2010; Effiong & Edet, 2020; Farah & Upadhyay, 2017; Lofstrom, 2007; Phan & Vu, 2019; Rasmy et al., 2017; Rodgers, 2013; Rogers, 2009; Rumberger, 2001; Terenzini et al., 1995; Tidwell, 1989; Tinto, 1975; Williamson, 2001; Woodfield, 2017; York et al., 1993). Most participants also claimed that they could feel how poor their families were and this made them feel disappointed, worried, distracted, and negative about remaining in school. Some participants expressed a need for employment. They struggled to find a way to get a job to earn some money for themselves and their families (Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities, 1982; Tidwell, 1989), and some of them had to help their parents on the farm which was the only way they could earn income for the family (De Janvry et al., 2006; Yokozeki, 1996). In this study, two participants received support from relatives at the time of their studies, because their parents were deemed to lack money. According to Yokozeki (1996), most dropouts coming from poor families may receive financial support from different people, such as grandparents, uncles or aunts.

Marriage and early parenthood appears to be another influential factor. Participants claimed that after having a spouse they became busy and took on more responsibilities in their own families. This finding was also the same as other studies (Bull et al., 1994; Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; Chávez et al., 1991; Jordan et al., 1994; Tidwell, 1989; Vergidis & Panagiotakopoulos, 2002; Videnovic & Lazarevic, 2017). Among many difficulties, participants raised an issue regarding pregnancy (Bull et al., 1991; Jordan et al., 1994; Videnovic & Lazarevic, 2017). One participant explained that it was better for her to leave her studies because it was so problematic; she was afraid of getting low grades due to missing/skipping classes if she continued her studies

while she was pregnant. She thought that she would return later on after giving birth (Videnovic & Lazarevic, 2017). Thirdly, some participants' dropout decisions were influenced by parental attitudes to education. This is also the same finding as found in past literature (Csereklye, 2008; Effiong & Edet, 2020; Hammond et al., 2007; Rasmy et al., 2017; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tinto, 1975). According to participants, their family members exhibited little appreciation for education and were not even resistant to their children's dropping out. This condition causes participants to have lowered motivation and expectations to persist (Tran, 2013). According to some authors (Csereklye, 2008; Hammond et al., 2007; Rasmy et al., 2017), this factor is a key predictor; without parental support and parental value of children's education, it seems impossible for participants to succeed in their educational pursuit.

The fourth important aspect seems to count in home life situations. This current paper seems to support past authors, stating that Hmong students consider family as an important factor: if their parents offer full support, they are likely to engage in their studies (Xiong, 2020), on the other hand, they become distracted and unmotivated if they have problems/difficulties at home. This tendency may contribute to Meeuwisse et al. (2010), who saw that a family can positively and negatively impact minority students' educational engagement. The study finds that participants are likely to cite their need to take care of a sick family member as a reason why they dropped out (Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; De Janvry et al., 2006; Jordan et al., 1994), which also includes looking after aging/older parents. Participants reasoned that no one stayed at home with their parents because other siblings had moved out for their jobs. This problem may confirm what past authors have proposed, that there is a significant correlation between a family's residential move and dropout probability (Hammond et al., 2007; Phan & Vu, 2019; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). That probably means a moving out by a family member can also be a problem. An additional condition in this aspect also relates to the family's economic changes. Some participants had to leave their studies because of parents' lowered income. An option to address this emergency and/or for reducing high costs in the household is to take children out of schooling (De Janvry et al., 2006; Yokozeki, 1996).

As mentioned earlier, there are ten categories (aspects of the family), deductively developed, that are used as the conceptual framework for the present study. Through a qualitative content analysis, the findings suggest that all ten aspects play a role in minority students dropping out. When looking at the more and less significant aspects, however, these six aspects: family's

occupation, parental education, first-generation status, family size, lack of family resources, and single parent seem less prominent among participants. For instance, being the first-generation for one participant, she had to rely more on herself and did not get advice from her family about the educational process (Bull et al., 1994; Csereklye, 2008; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tidwell, 1989;). Likewise, in another case, one participant lived with his brother without his parents. He became less confident and less motivated to continue his studies as his family was pushing him more into farming than schoolwork. This case indicates a lack of emotional support from parents. Parental relationships are a strong predictor of children's learning success (Sax & Wartman, 2010; Tinto, 1975; Williamson, 2001). This current study, however, has found these six aspects played a weaker role in minority dropouts. Future inquiries may investigate this tendency further. Last but not least, the authors of the present paper have observed that there might be some relationship among all the aspects of family. A family's economic situation, the first and most dominant factor, probably has a profound effect on home life, parental attitudes, etc. That means, if poverty were been a big deal for the sampled minority leaver students, or if their families had been economically strong, other familial factors/aspects in turn may have played a very small or no role in students dropping out. As an example, it is apparent that parents' attitudes, beliefs, and values toward children's education may change after a family's economic crisis/changes. Most participants in this paper dropped out when they were in their 4th or 5th semesters, and they did not seem to have serious academic problems. This tendency, however, should be further studied in future works.

Conclusion and Practical Recommendation

The findings of the present paper indicate that four aspects of the family: family economic situation, parental attitudes, marriage and early parenthood, and home life situations, appear to play the most significant roles in minority dropouts. Based on empirical data, most leaver students came from poor families in which parents could not afford to pay their children's educational-related expenses, and this led to parents wanting their children to drop out. Family difficulties, such as illness, no one taking care of aging parents, helping family on a farm, and others, can also be influential. Moreover, marriage was found as a common trend for adult learners in different contexts. In this study, having a spouse and experiencing pregnancy were also legitimated as key factors causing the sampled minority students to abandon their studies. The findings of this study may be crucial for future quantitative research in testing the influence of family background and how family-related aspects play a role in minority dropouts. This study, however, suggests using

the findings with caution due to the nature of the qualitative-method analysis, in which the tendency emerged from a small number of participants. Furthermore, future works should also consider integrating the perspectives of other persons, such as peers, instructors, and family members (e.g., guardians) of leaver students, to understand more in-depth the minority dropout issue and the relationship between family background and student dropout.

An issue of underrepresentation and inequality in minorities is prevalent in different contexts. In this current case study, Hmong minority students are considered to have positive learning habits and comparable cognitive skills to their non-minority counterparts. They seem to have a close relationship with their family. For them, taking care of their parents, helping and giving support to family members, as well as having trust in the family are their responsibilities. This study also finds that reaching out to minority students who drop out is very difficult; they become stressed and very shy about sharing their experiences of failure. Regarding this dropout issue, universities and/or related units cannot address this problem directly and immediately; however, a few key actions here are suggested: 1) it is a worthwhile idea for universities to consider recruiting faculty members of a minority background, as a minority faculty member has potential to better understand minority students and their home life situations, and that it is useful when giving mental support and making the students feel a sense of belonging and commitment struggling to survive; 2) universities should also provide a help desk and psychological-social support; this service should be administered in a system in which there are regular staff working and/or in charge of the service; most importantly, this service unit must have close contact or be conveniently accessible; and 3) it would be extremely helpful if universities could manage to settle a fund to attract students coming from very low economic families: this funding will not only offer financial support for students but the grant should also introduce part-time job opportunities for students in need.

References

Aina, C.; Baici, E.; Casalone, G.; Pastore, F. (2018). The economics of university dropouts and delayed graduation: A survey, *IZA Discussion Paper No. 11421*, Institute of Labor Economics, http://ftp.iza.org/dp11421.pdf

Astin, H. S. & Cross, P. H. (1979). Student Financial Aid and Persistence in College. (Report).

Higher Education Research Inst., Inc., Los Angeles, Calif.
https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED221078&site=ehost-live

Behr, A., Giese, M., Tequim, H. D., and Theune, K. (2020). Dropping out from higher Education in Germany an empirical evaluation of determinants for bachelor students.*Open Education Studies*, 126-148. https://doi.org/10.1515/edu-2020-0104

Bidgood, P., Saebi, N. & May, S. (2006). Influences on Student Withdrawal from Further Education: A Case Study. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training,* 58(2), 223-236. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ741985&site=ehost-live

Bourdieu, P. (1986). *Chapter 1: The forms of capital, in Richardson, J., Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education (1986)*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, pp. 241–58

Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006). *Conducting in-depth interviews: A guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews for evaluation input*. Pathfinder International

Bull, K. S., Montgomery, D., Salyer, B. K., & Hyle, A. (1991). Minority dropouts: Do rural, urban, & suburban administrators perceive minority causes of dropping out as priority items. In *National Rural and Small School Consortium Conference, Nashville, Tennessee*.

Carvajal, R.A., & Cervantes, C. T. (2018). Approaches to college dropout in Chile. *Educ. Pesqui, 44*. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S1678-4634201708165743

Casanoval, J. R., Cervero, A., Núñez, J. C., Almeida1, L. S., & Bernardo, A. (2018). Factors that determine the persistence and dropout of university students. *Psicothema, 30*(4), 408-414. https://doi.org/10.7334/psicothema2018.155

Chávez, R. C., Belkin, L. D., Hornback, J. G., & Adams, K. (1991). Dropping out of school: Issues affecting culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct student groups. *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, *8*(1), 1-13.

Chen, R. & DesJardins, S. L. (2010). Investigating the Impact of Financial Aid on Student Dropout Risks: Racial and Ethnic Differences. *Journal of Higher Education,* 81(2), 179-208. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=48558482&site=ehost-live

Contini, D., & Zotti, R. (2022). Do financial conditions play a role in university dropout? New

evidence from administrative data. In *Teaching, Research and Academic Careers* (pp. 39-70). Springer, Cham

Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities. (1982). *Final Report of the Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities*. Higher Education Research Institute. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED214457&site=ehost-live

Csereklye, E. (2008). Reasons for school failure among ethnic minority students. *Practice and Theory in Systems of Education, 3*(3-4), 87-92.

Dawson, C. (2002). *Practical research method: A user-friendly guide to measuring research*. How To Books, UK.

De Janvry, A., Finan, F., Sadoulet, E., & Vakis, R. (2006). Can conditional cash transfer programs serve as safety nets in keeping children at school and from working when exposed to shocks?. *Journal of development economics*, *79*(2), 349-373.

Dennis, J. M., Phinney, J. S., & Chuateco, L.I. (2005). The role of motivation, parental support, and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(3), 223-236. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2005.0023

Effiong, O. J. I., & Edet, M. I. (2020). Influence of family background on students' drop out from secondary schools in Yakurr local government area. *Global Journal of Educational Research*, *19*(1).

Farah, N., & Upadhyay, M. P. (2017). How are school dropouts related to household characteristics? Analysis of survey data from Bangladesh. *Cogent Economics & Finance*, *5*(1), 1268746.

Gross, J. P. K., Torres, V., & Zerquera, D. (2013). Financial aid and attainment among students in a state with changing demographics. Research in Higher Education, 54(4), 383–406. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-012-9276-1

Grubb, W. N. (1989). Access, Achievement, Completion, and "Milling Around" in Postsecondary Vocational Education (Report). MPR Associates, Berkeley, CA. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED315548&site=ehost-live

Hammond, C., Linton, D., Smink, J., & Drew, S. (2007). Dropout risk factors and exemplary programs: A technical report. *National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N)*.

Jordan, W. J., Lara, J., McPartland, J. M. (1994). Exploring the complexity of early dropout causal structures. *Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)*, Report No. 48.

Kyophilavong, P., Ogawa, K., Kim, B., & Nouansavanh, K. (2018). Does education promote economic growth in Lao PDR? Evidence from cointegration and granger causality approaches. *The Journal of Developing Areas, 52(2),* 1–11.

Laerd Dissertation (2012) Snowball sampling.
https://dissertation.laerd.com/snowball- sampling.php

Lofstrom, M. (2007). Why are Hispanic and African-American dropout rates so high? *Discussion Paper No. 3265.*

Meeuwisse, M. Severiens, S. E. & Born, M. P. (2010). Reasons for withdrawal from higher vocational education. A comparison of ethnic minority and majority non-completers. *Studies in Higher Education,* 35(1), 93-111. DOI: 10.1080/03075070902906780

Mayring, P. (2014). *Qualitative content analysis: theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solutions*. http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-395173

O'Keeffe, P. (2013). A Sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal,* 47(4), 605-613.
https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=93813989&site=ehost-live

Phan, T. T. H., & Vũ, T. T. T. (2019). Studying the dropout status of ethnic minority students: The case of Vietnam. *International Journal of Management Sciences and Business Research, 8*(4). 108-112

Radunzel, J. (2017). Using Incoming Student Information to Identify Students At-Risk of Not Returning to Their Initial Institution in Year Two. (Report) ACT Research Report Series 2017-10. ACT, Inc.
https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED583556&site=ehost-live

Rasmy, M. I., Selvadurai, S., & Sulehan, J. (2017). Social environmental determinants of student dropout in the plantation settlement. *Malaysian Journal of Society and Space 13*(2), 54-64.

Reisel, L. & Brekke, I. (2010). Minority Dropout in Higher Education: A Comparison of the United

States and Norway Using Competing Risk Event History Analysis. *European Sociological Review,* 26(6), 691-712. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=55534709&site=ehost-live

Rodgers, T. (2013). Should high non-completion rates amongst ethnic minority students be seen as an ethnicity issue? Evidence from a case study of a student cohort from a British University. Vol. 66. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=91528680&site=ehost-live

Rogers, R. N. (2009). "No One Helped Out. It Was Like, "Get on with It. You're an Adult Now. It's up to You". You Don't ... It's Not like You Reach 17 and Suddenly You Don't Need Any Help Anymore": A Study into Post-16 Pastoral Support for "Aimhigher Students" *Pastoral Care in Education,* 27(2), 109-118. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ856100&site=ehost-live

Rumberger, R. W. (2001). *Why students drop out of school and what can be done*. A paper prepared for the conference, "Dropouts in America: How severe is the problem? What do we know about intervention and prevention" Harvard University, January 13, 2001.

Rumberger. R. W., & Lim, S. A. (2008). Why Students Drop Out of School: A review of 25 years of research. *California Dropout Research Project* Report #15.

Samora, J. (1963). The educational status of a minority. *Theory into Practice,* 2(3), Intergroup-Relation Education, 144-150. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED002635&site=ehost-live

Sax, L. J., & Wartman, K. L. (2010). Studying the impact of parental involvement on college student development: A review and agenda for research. *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*, 219-255.

Schreier, M. (2014). *Qualitative content analysis*. In the Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis, edited by Uwe Flick. SAGE.

Sohn, H. (2018). *The relationship between family factors and academic achievement levels among Hispanic immigrant students in the US*. (Master thesis, St. Cloud State University).

Sosu, E. M., & Pheunpha, P. (2019, February). Trajectory of university dropout: Investigating the cumulative effect of academic vulnerability and proximity to family support. In *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 4, p. 6). Frontiers Media SA.

Sütő, Z. (2020). The Influencing Factors of Dropout and Persistence of Central European Hungarian Minorities in Higher Educational Institutions. *Central European Journal of Educational Research*, *2*(3), 90-98.

Terenzini, P. T., Springer, L., Yaeger, P. M., Pascarella, E. T., & Nora, A. (1995). First-generation college students: Characteristics, experiences, and cognitive development. *Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)*. Paper presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research.

Tidwell, R. (1989). Academic success and the school dropout: A minority perspective. *Black students: Psychosocial issues and academic achievement*, 153-170.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research, 45*(1), 89-125.

Tran, N. T. (2013). Factors associated with low educational motivation among ethnic minority students in Vietnam. *Ritsumeikan Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, *32*, 124-136.

Tsolou, O., & Babalis, T. (2020). The contribution of family factors to dropping out of school in Greece. *Creative Education*, *11*(08), 1375-1401.

UNESCO, U. (2015). Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action Towards Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All. *UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education. https://iite. unesco.org/publications/ education-2030-incheon-declaration-framework-action-towards inclusive-equitable-quality-education-lifelong-learning*.

Vergidis, D., & Panagiotakopoulos, C. (2002). Student Dropout at the Hellenic Open University: Evaluation of the Graduate Program," Studies in Education". *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *3*(2).

Videnović, M., & Lazarević, L. B. (2017). Familial and individual reasons for student dropout: Schools' perception. *Psihološka istraživanja*, *20*(1), 71-88.

Williams, M. T. (2019). Adverse racial climates in academia: Conceptualization, interventions, and call to action. *New Ideas in Psychology,* 55, 58-67. DOI: 10.1016/j.newideapsych.2019.05.002

Williamson, R. J. (2001). *Minority Dropout and Prevention*. (Master thesis, University of Northern Iowa).

Wong, S. & Wong, J. (1980). Representation of racial minority students in selected Canadian university schools of nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing (Wiley-Blackwell),* 5(1), 83-90. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=14358147&site=ehost-live

Woodfield, R. (2017). Undergraduate students who are required to withdraw from university: The role of ethnicity. *British Educational Research Journal,* 43(2), 230-252. DOI: 10.1002/berj.3259

Xiong, K. (2020). Factors Influencing Hmong College Students' Persistence and Retention in Laos: A Case Study (Thesis, Concordia University, St. Paul). Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup_commons_grad_edd/463

Yokozeki, Y. (1996). *The causes, processes, and consequences of student drop-out from Junior Secondary School (JSS) in Ghana: the case of Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem (KEEA) district* (Doctoral dissertation, Institute of Education, University of London).

York, C. M. & Association (1993). Causes of College Retention: A Systems Perspective. (Paper presented at the Convention of the American Psychological Association, 101st, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August 20-24, 1993). https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED369027&site=ehost-live

5. Reflections

Building upon the findings from the author's three previous studies on minority dropout rates, several key insights are proposed, summarized under the following themes:

5.1 The multidimensional nature of minority dropout

Student dropout remains a pervasive issue warranting attention from all stakeholders. High dropout rates often signify underlying inequalities within society and can adversely affect institutional development and broader systemic functioning. According to the United Nations (2015), member states are committed to advancing Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10, which aims to reduce inequalities. Discrimination and inequalities are inextricably linked, as discriminatory practices exacerbate inequities, leading to disparate opportunities for different groups of students (Botticello & West, 2021; Marmot, 2018).

The underrepresentation of minority students in higher education presents a significant challenge globally. The complexity of educational failure and dropout among these students is multifaceted, and scholars often struggle to fully comprehend the scope of the issue. Theoretical perspectives can provide insights into the general tendencies behind minority student dropout but may fall short in addressing specific regional or contextual factors. To gain a comprehensive understanding of dropout decisions within particular settings, empirical research tailored to these contexts is essential (Buenaño et al., 2023; Kehm et al., 2019). The term "dropout" itself requires clarification to facilitate better understanding and application by educators and researchers. Chen (2008) delineated three categories of dropout: "stopout," referring to students who temporarily leave their studies with the intention of returning; "institutional dropout," which pertains to students who transfer to another institution; and "system dropout," which describes students who permanently withdraw from their education (as cited in Chen & DesJardins, 2010). Additionally, dropout decisions can be classified as voluntary or involuntary, where voluntary dropouts are those who choose to leave, and involuntary dropouts are those compelled to exit due to institutional regulations (Wong & Wong, 1980). In summary, understanding and addressing the various forms of dropout, whether voluntary or involuntary, temporary or permanent, is crucial. Such evaluations are integral to refining institutional policies and planning, ultimately aiming to mitigate inequities and improve educational outcomes.

5.2   Unique characteristics of minority students and their dropout decisions

Students from minority backgrounds often experience differential treatment compared to their non-minority peers. Noden and colleagues (2014) highlight that minority students are frequently underrepresented in prestigious educational institutions while being disproportionately represented in less esteemed ones. This disparity can be attributed to limited opportunities and fewer offers extended to these students, potentially contributing to their presence on higher-status campuses. The findings from a case study of Hmong minority student-leavers underscore that these students share common challenges with other minority groups, including feelings of isolation and lower levels of academic and social engagement. Eimers and Pike (1997) observe that minority students often experience loneliness within educational settings, a factor that significantly contributes to their dropout decisions (Eimers & Pike, 1997; Seidman, 2005). This phenomenon is partially explained by their perception of themselves as outsiders, which diminishes their comfort in interacting with peers and engaging in academic discussions. These students may perceive their social status as inferior and struggle with lower self-esteem (Luong & Nieke, 2013). Additionally, the psychological distress associated with being a minority, such as fears of ridicule or bullying, further exacerbates these challenges. Luong and Nieke (2013) find that Hmong students, in particular, express significant concerns about being perceived as foolish by others. The difficulties faced by minority students in both academic and social realms reflect broader struggles to adapt to new environments. Other scholars (Michalski et al., 2017; Williamson, 2001; Xiong, 2022) support this view, noting that minority students often require comprehensive support to navigate their educational journeys. According to Xiong (2022), effective adaptation for these students necessitates assistance from various sources, including peers, faculty, counselors, and other institutional supports.

Recent research suggests that, while various factors contribute to minority students dropping out of college, academic performance surprisingly has little to no impact on their decisions to leave. This conclusion is supported by empirical studies, such as those by Luong and Nieke (2013). Notably, in the current author's previous work, weak academic performance was cited as a reason for dropping out by only one participant. Additionally, the findings do not indicate that minority students drop out involuntarily or are forced to leave their education due to inadequate learning conditions. Focusing on the Hmong minority, the students who participated in the study were noted for their attentiveness to learning and consistent class attendance. In class, they exhibited a quiet

demeanor and good disciplinary behavior. Overall, they were recognized for their academic proficiency, particularly in mathematics. An examination of their academic records reveals that Hmong student-leavers perform comparably well to their peers, suggesting that they do not leave higher education due to limited academic ability. This tendency seems to align with other studies that have found no significant relationship between academic performance and dropout decisions. For instance, minority students are inclined to withdraw from schooling due to challenges, such as limited skills of time management (Xiong & Lee, 2011) and individuals' unclear career plans (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). This is to point out that individual-related dimensions may play a significant role. In addition, the present author's empirical evidence also reveals that frequently cited reasons for leaving college among Hmong minority students include family-related factors, such as financial constraints, challenging home environments, and a lack of familial support. It is worth noting that Hmong minority students often maintain strong relationships with family members, particularly parents, who exert a major influence on their higher educational experiences. Students may struggle to complete their degrees if parents closely monitor, advise, and involve themselves in their education (Hammond et al., 2007; Sax & Wartman, 2010; Xiong & Lam, 2013).

Another significant factor involves social interaction and the inability of individuals to adapt socially. It is a serious issue that minority students often compare themselves with others and notice major differences in social and economic status between themselves and their peers. As a result, they experience low self-esteem and lack confidence, which leads to fewer opportunities and a feeling of discomfort on campus, where they are perceived as outsiders. Another key factor relates to institutional support. while some institutions may have successfully implemented inclusive practices, others are still striving to create a welcoming environment for all students. It is crucial to ensure that students from different backgrounds and social classes feel included, are treated equally and fairly, and are encouraged to actively participate in all social activities. More importantly, culturally responsive programs for minorities are encouraged (Thao, 2015). In addition, these programs should not be limited to students; faculty members should also participate in professional development activities to enhance their understanding of diverse campuses (Arday et al., 2022; Carter, 2006; Kumar, 2023). In conclusion, these factors, family-related issues, social interaction, individual adaptation, and the presence of institutional support, appear to be

significantly associated with minority students' decisions about whether to withdraw from or remain in higher education.

5.3 Reaching out to minority groups for research

In this section, the author reflects on the research methods used to reach out to the sampled ethnic minority informants and discusses the difficulties encountered and solutions devised for obtaining access to them. This study employed a qualitative research approach to investigate why Hmong ethnic minority students drop out of higher education. The first reason for choosing this method is the author's desire to understand the students' higher education experiences through their verbal descriptions of why they decided to quit their studies. Secondly, this approach allows the researcher to explore phenomena and related hidden variables from the participants' perspectives. Finally, this research design enables the author to seek clarification and delve deeper into the participants' responses. Qualitative methods allow the investigator to ask various questions and probe further based on the informants' replies (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is appropriate for investigations where the variables are not well understood or when there is little evidence on the topic. Such a research design should be selected when the investigator needs to explore reality more thoroughly. Several scholars agree that qualitative research procedures are flexible, allowing the investigator to adapt the methods to the studied context or target population (Creswell; 2012; Keyzer et al., 2005; Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Similarly, Ellard-Gray and colleagues (2015) mention that this research design is particularly suited for collecting data from hidden and hard-to-reach populations.

In his data collection process, the author conducted telephone interviews with the sample, which consisted of Hmong students who had completely withdrawn from their studies and left the campus. Some students returned home after leaving, while others traveled far due to employment opportunities. As a result, it was challenging for the author to conduct in-person or face-to-face interviews. Of the eleven informants, two were available for in-person meetings and participated in face-to-face interviews. with the author and participated in a face-to-face interview. When participants are geographically dispersed and unable to come to an interview site, conducting telephone interviews is recommended (Creswell, 2012). As mentioned, most interviews were conducted remotely using WhatsApp calls. The author endeavored not to force participants to adhere to a specific interview schedule redetermined by himself. Instead, the scheduling was entirely based on the participants' availability and convenience. A practical strategy for recruiting

participants is to remain flexible with the timing, dates, and locations of interviews and to follow up and confirm details with the sample in advance of the interview (Keyzer et al., 2005). Moreover, in accordance with Creswell's suggestions (2012), the author requested permission from the participants to record the conversations by using a voice recorder during the interviews, ensuring all data was accurately captured. As a result of conducting interviews remotely, the informants expressed satisfaction with the process and participated fully in the interviews as planned.

One observation was that the interviewees felt safe and comfortable while sharing their stories and the reasons for dropping out of the educational system. The author's preparation of additional questions and probes on key topics/themes proved effective, as many participants tended to speak little and provide brief responses. For instance, they often gave short answers to particular questions. By asking more follow-up questions and probes, the author was able to clarify and elaborate on some of the participants' initially unclear responses (Creswell, 2012). Probes can serve as a means of exploring points in greater depth and explaining things in more detail. The tendency of participants to give short answers might be linked to characteristics previously described about the Hmong ethnicity; as a minority group, they are often perceived as shy, quiet, and hesitant to disclose personal experiences or situations to strangers, (Luong & Nieke, 2013; Vang, 2003), particularly concerning their higher educational experiences.

Obtaining contacts and access to minority students poses significant challenges, especially when trying to reach those who have already dropped out. Reflecting on the author's past experiences investigating Hmong minority dropouts, it was evident that the author could only attempt to contact them using the mobile numbers recorded at the student division of the faculty. The issue was that many of them could no longer reached through these registered numbers. In this situation, the author attempted to search for participants on Facebook and sent them a friend request. However, this approach proved ineffective because many of the individuals were reluctant to accept friend requests or respond to messages from strangers. While a few did initially accept the requests, they subsequently refused to engage further upon learning the purpose of the contact initiated by the author. One significant difficulty was the language barrier, as the author does not speak Hmong. Effective communication with the participants would likely have been facilitated by using their native language (Waheed et al., 2015). One reason for this tendency would be that they do not trust the researcher and have a negative attitude toward the research process. According to scholars, it is natural for hidden groups to feel mistrustful and uncomfortable participating in

interviews. This mistrust often stems from previous experiences in which they felt exploited or had their privacy violated by investigators (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015; Waheed et al., 2015).

Some scholars have raised another issue: potential participants may be reluctant to engage in research if they do not perceive its relevance or usefulness to themselves or their communities (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015; Redwood et al., 2013). However, introducing the research purpose, along with the investigator's authority or title, may lead to hesitancy in accepting invitations from the investigator. Accordingly, past literature suggests that an investigator's use of personal influence may result in unclear responses from participants due to fear and authority (Botticello & West, 2021). Another challenge was the author's language use in conversations and interviews. It seemed as if the participants did not clearly understand the questions and probes in the interview protocol, necessitating the investigator to simplify terms and provide examples, demonstrations, and explanations where necessary. Some interview questions were too broad in the sense, causing confusion and leaving participants without clear ideas for sharing their experiences. Using too many open-ended questions is not always effective; the investigator needs to incorporate some close-ended probes to elicit initial responses and then encourage participants to elaborate further. To address the barriers to recruiting minority students for research, the author suggests several considerations for future studies:

1) *Understanding the sample characteristics:* Familiarizing oneself with the ethnicity and cultural background of the sample may help the investigator gain access to participants more effectively (Keyzer et al., 2005). If the investigator is familiar with the sample, they may better understand the participants' cultural unique characteristics, which can aid in determining appropriate approaches and methods for engagement. By attempting to understand the sample, the author can learn about it from people related to the target group, such as peers, teachers, and community members. This approach proved effective in the author's past research with Hmong ethnic minority students. The author approached class leaders and close friends of the sample to gather information about the participants' academic and social interactions. Understanding this basic information can help the investigator establish a rapport and facilitate more effective communication with the sample.

2) *Developing rapport with the sample:* When developing rapport with participants, it is advisable for the investigator not to immediately delve into the main topic or pose interview questions. Instead, the investigator should begin with general ice-breaking topics to better

understand the potential participants. This approach can help alleviate any anxiety or distress they may feel. It is also important to avoid creating a tense atmosphere by being overly formal or official, as such formality might lead participants to hesitate or share less information. Several authors, such as Waheed and colleagues (2015), have proposed that a significant challenge in approaching hidden populations is their general mistrust of the research process. Making participants feel comfortable and at ease with the investigator can reduce this mistrust (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Additionally, displaying respect and sensitivity can enhance the recruitment of hidden populations and minority participants. According to Redwood and colleagues (2013), if the investigator approaches minority cases with sensitivity, participants are more likely to be willing to engage in the research.

3) *Introducing the purpose of the research:* It is essential to introduce potential participants from minority backgrounds to the purpose and process of the research in a concise manner, explaining how their data will be used. Ethnic minority groups are more likely to participate in research if the process is clearly explained and they can see the necessity and relevance of the research to themselves and their communities (Redwood et al., 2013).

4) *Ensuring the confidentiality of the data:* The investigator must ensure that the data obtained does not negatively affect participants or compromise their privacy. It is beneficial to grant participants the autonomy to refrain from answering any questions they find embarrassing; they should feel free to pause or discontinue the interview at any time (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015).

5) *Using an assistant:* Given the challenges associated with approaching minority groups, often considered hidden and vulnerable populations, the investigator should consider employing an assistant from the same minority group as the sample to aid in participation recruitment. According to Burlew and colleagues (2019), recruiters who share the same cultural background and traditions as potential minority participants can enhance participation rates. Likewise, having a facilitator from the participants' community can help make participants feel protected (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). For future research involving minority groups, it is recommended to include research team members from multiethnic backgrounds who are culturally competent. These team members play key roles in engaging with the target population, earning their respect, trust, and attention (Mier et al., 2006; Otado et al., 2015). This approach is significant in improving communication with the sample. This procedure was employed in the author's past research, wherein a Hmong colleague was used to establish initial contact with participants, which proved

effective. The assistant successfully conveyed the research process to the sample, ensuring they felt welcomed and willing to participate in interviews.

6) *Paying substantial costs:* It is essential for the investigator to consider the necessity of offering reimbursement to minority participants for their transportation and time when participating in research projects. Providing such reimbursements can serve as a motivation for participation and may alleviate the financial burden on participants, who might otherwise have to cover small expenses such as transportation or mobile phone credits. Several scholars, including Keyzer and colleagues (2005), have consistently confirmed the importance of allocating a budget for participant expenses. Waheed and colleagues (2015) also acknowledge the difficulties of engaging minority participants in research, noting that barriers often include practical and process-related issues such as financial constraints and limited motivation for participation. For instance, in his previous telephone interview research, the author of the current paper covered participants' internet expenses (e.g., refilling mobile credits to access the internet), which proved effective given that the sample comprised Hmong minority students who had dropped out of school. The author strongly believes that participants should be compensated for any expenses incurred as a result of their participation, as they may require mobile credits to receive calls. Creswell (2012) notes that investigators conducting telephone interviews should account for such costs.

7) *Using multiple approaches and maintaining flexibility in the research process:* Given the potential for unexpected conditions when engaging with participants, researchers should avoid relying solely on single method of data collection. Utilizing multiple strategies cab be beneficial, as Waheed and colleagues (2015) suggest, emphasizing the importance of preparing various approaches to address potential challenges. This strategy was found to be effective in one of the current author's research projects involving Hmong ethnic minority students. In this study, participants were offered the choice of different interview formats, including in-person, telephone, and voice message interviews, based on their preferences. This flexibility in the interview method ensured that participants did not feel pressured or coerced into participation, thereby fostering a more comfortable and voluntary research environment.

6.   References

Andersen, S., Rod, M. H., Holmberg, T., Ingholt, L., Ersbøll, A. K., & Tolstrup, J. S. (2018). Effectiveness of the settings-based intervention Shaping the Social on preventing dropout from vocational education: a Danish non-randomized controlled trial. *BMC psychology*, *6*, 1-11.

Arday, J., Branchu, C., & Boliver, V. (2022). What do we know about Black and minority ethnic (BAME) participation in UK higher education?. *Social Policy and Society*, *21*(1), 12-25.

Astin, H. S., & Cross, P. H. (1979). *Student financial aid and persistence in college* [Research report]. Higher Education Research Institute.

Baltà-Salvador, R., Olmedo-Torre, N., & Peña, M. (2022). Perceived discrimination and dropout intentions of underrepresented minority students in engineering degrees. *IEEE Transactions on Education*, *65*(3), 267-276.

Botticello, J., & West, T. O. (2021). Ethnic minority students in the UK: Addressing inequalities in access, support, and wellbeing in higher education. *Effective elimination of structural racism*.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). *Chapter 1: The forms of capital, in Richardson, J., Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education (1986)*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, pp. 241–58.

Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006). *Conducting in-depth interviews: A guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews for evaluation input*. Pathfinder international

Buenaño, E., Beletanga, M. J., & Mancheno, M. (2023). What Factors are Relevant to Understanding Dropout? Analysis at a Co-Financed University in Ecuador and Policy Implications, Using Survival Cox Models. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 1-16.

Bull, K. S., Montgomery, D., Salyer, B. K., & Hyle, A. (1991). Minority dropouts: Do rural, urban, & suburban administrators perceive minority causes of dropping out as priority items. In *National Rural and Small School Consortium Conference, Nashville, Tennessee*.

Burlew, A. K., Peteet, B. J., McCuistian, C., & Miller-Roenigk, B. D. (2019). Best practices for researching diverse groups. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *89*(3), 354.

Carter, D. F. (2006). Key issues in the persistence of underrepresented minority students.

Carvajal, R.A., & Cervantes, C. T. (2018). Approaches to college dropout in Chile. *Educ. Pesqui, 44*.

Chávez, R. C., Belkin, L. D., Hornback, J. G., & Adams, K. (1991). Dropping out of school: Issues affecting culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct student groups. *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, *8*(1), 1-13.

Chen, R., & DesJardins, S. L. (2010). Investigating the impact of financial aid on student dropout risks: Racial and ethnic differences. *Journal of Higher Education, 81*(2), 179–208.

Csereklye, E. (2008). Reasons for school failure among ethnic minority students. *Practice and Theory in Systems of Education, 3*(3-4), 87-92.

De Janvry, A., Finan, F., Sadoulet, E., & Vakis, R. (2006). Can conditional cash transfer programs serve as safety nets in keeping children at school and from working when exposed to shocks?. *Journal of development economics*, *79*(2), 349-373.

Eimers, M. T., & Pike, G. R. (1997). Minority and nonminority adjustment to college: Differences or similarities?. *Research in Higher Education*, *38*, 77-97.

Ellard-Gray, A., Jeffrey, N. K., Choubak, M., & Crann, S. E. (2015). Finding the hidden participant: Solutions for recruiting hidden, hard-to-reach, and vulnerable populations. *International journal of qualitative methods*, *14*(5), 1609406915621420.

Espinoza, O. (2007). Solving the equity–equality conceptual dilemma: A new model for analysis of the educational process. *Educational research*, *49*(4), 343-363.

Farah, N., & Upadhyay, M. P. (2017). How are school dropouts related to household characteristics? Analysis of survey data from Bangladesh. *Cogent Economics & Finance*, *5*(1), 1268746.

Grubb, W. N. (1989). *Access, achievement, completion, and "milling around" in postsecondary vocational education*. MPR Associates.

Hammond, C., Linton, D., Smink, J., & Drew, S. (2007). Dropout risk factors and exemplary programs: A technical report. *National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N)*.

Hang, A., & Walsh, N. (2021). Environmental factors for motivation of first-generation Hmong American college students in academic attainment. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, *4*(3).

Heublein, U. (2014). Student drop-out from German higher education institutions. *European Journal of Education*, *49*(4), 497-513.

Hoffman, J. L. (2002). The impact of student cocurricular involvement on student success: Racial and religious differences. *Journal of College Student Development, 43*(5), 712–739.

Kehm, B. M., Larsen, M. R., & Sommersel, H. B. (2019). Student dropout from universities in Europe: A review of empirical literature. *Hungarian Educational Research Journal*, *9*(2), 147-164.

Keyzer, J. F., Melnikow, J., Kuppermann, M., Birch, S., Kuenneth, C., Nuovo, J., ... & Rooney, M. (2005). Recruitment Strategies for Minority Participation. *Ethnicity & disease*, *15*(3), 395-406.

Kumar, R. (2023). Challenges and Strategies for Improving Minority Education Access and Success. *Sage Science Review of Educational Technology*, *6*(1), 48-58.

Kyophilavong, P., Ogawa, K., Kim, B., & Nouansavanh, K. (2018). Does education promote economic growth in Lao PDR? Evidence from cointegration and granger causality approaches. *The Journal of Developing Areas, 52(2),* 1–11.

Lee, M. S., & Walsh, N. (2020). Academically Achieving Hmong American Students in Higher Education. *Global Research in Higher Education, 3*(4), 58-78.

Liu, X. (2023). Ethnic minority students' access, participation and outcomes in preparatory classes in China: a case study of a School of Minzu Education. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *43*(1), 173-188.

Lofstrom, M. (2007). Why are Hispanic and African-American dropout rates so high? *Discussion Paper No. 3265*.

Luong, M. P., & Nieke, W. (2013). Minority status and schooling of the Hmong in Vietnam. *Hmong Studies Journal*, *14*.

Marmot, M. (2018). Inclusion health: addressing the causes of the causes. *The Lancet*, *391*(10117), 186-188.

Mayring, P. (2014). *Qualitative content analysis: theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution*.

Michalski, J. H., Cunningham, T., & Henry, J. (2017). The diversity challenge for higher education in Canada: The prospects and challenges of increased access and student success. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, *39*, 66-89.

Mier, N., Medina, A. A., Bocanegra-Alonso, A., Castillo-Ruiz, O., Acosta-Gonzalez, R. I., & Ramirez, J. A. (2006). Finding Respondents from Minority Groups. *Journal of Research Practice*, *2*(2), D2.

MoES (2015). National vision to 2023, the strategic plan to 2025, and Educational and sports development 5-year plan VIII for 2016-2020. Ministry of Education and Sports of Laos.

Museus, S. D., Griffin, K. A., & Quaye, S. J. (2019). Engaging students of color. In *Student engagement in higher education*(pp. 17-35). Routledge.

Nagasawa, R., & Wong, P. (1999). A theory of minority students' survival in college. *Sociological Inquiry, 69*(1), 76–90.

Newman, M., & Gough, D. (2020). Systematic reviews in educational research: Methodology, perspectives and application. In O. Zawacki-Richter, M. Kerres, S. Bedenlier, M. Bond, & K. Buntins (Eds.), *Systematic Reviews in Educational Research* (pp. 3–22).

Noden, P., Shiner, M., & Madood, T. (2014). Black and minority ethnic access to higher education: A reassessment.

Ntiri, D. W. (2001). Access to higher education for nontraditional students and minorities in a technology-focused society. *Urban Education*, *36*(1), 129-144.

Otado, J., Kwagyan, J., Edwards, D., Ukaegbu, A., Rockcliffe, F., & Osafo, N. (2015). Culturally competent strategies for recruitment and retention of African American populations into clinical trials. *Clinical and translational science*, *8*(5), 460-466.

Rasmy, M. I., Selvadurai, S., & Sulehan, J. (2017). Social environmental determinants of student dropout in the plantation settlement. *Malaysian Journal of Society and Space 13*(2), 54-64.

Redd, L. A. (2018). *Institutional Barriers Affecting the Academic and Social Development of Underrepresented College Students: Perspectives of Administrators*. University of Pittsburgh.

Redwood, S., & Gill, P. S. (2013). Under-representation of minority ethnic groups in research—call for action. *British Journal of General Practice*, *63*(612), 342-343.

Rubin, A., & Babbie, E. R. (2007). *Research methods for social work (7th ed.)*. Independence, KY: Brooks/Cole.

Rumberger, R. W. (2001). *Why students drop out of school and what can be done*. A paper prepared for the conference, "Dropouts in America: How severe is the problem? What do we know about intervention and prevention" Harvard University, January 13, 2001.

Rumberger. R. W., & Lim, S. A. (2008). Why Students Drop Out of School: A review of 25 years of research. *California Dropout Research Project* Report #15.

Samora, J. (1963). The educational status of a minority. *Theory into Practice, 2*(3), 144–150.

Schreier, M. (2014). *Qualitative content analysis*. In the Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis, edited by Uwe Flick. SAGE.

Seidman, A. (2005). Minority student retention: Resources for practitioners. *New directions for institutional research*, *2005*(125), 7-24.

Sengsouliya, S., & Vannasy, V. (2023). The pattern of reasons why minority students drop out: An empirical study of the Hmong minority in Laos. *Hmong Studies Journal*, *25*, 1-31.

Stewart, D. M. (1988). Overcoming the barriers to successful participation by minorities. *The Review of Higher Education*, *11*(4), 329-336.

Supple, A.J., McCoy, S.Z., & Wang, Y.C. (2010). Parental influences on Hmong University Students' Success. Hmong Studies Journal, 11, 1-37.

Thao, P. (2015). *Hmong students' life experiences that affect educational attainment* (Doctoral dissertation).

Tidwell, R. (1989). *Academic success and the school dropout: A minority perspective*. In the Sage Book of Black Students: Psychological issues and academic achievement, edited by Gordon LaVern Berry and Joy Keiko Asamen. SAGE Publication, Inc.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research, 45*(1), 89-125.

UNESCO, U. (2015). Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action Towards Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All. *UNESCO*

Vang, C. T. (2003). Learning more about Hmong students (a learning material for Multicultural Education). California State University.

Videnović, M., & Lazarević, L. B. (2017). Familial and individual reasons for student dropout: Schools' perception. *Psihološka istraživanja*, *20*(1), 71-88.

Waheed, W., Hughes-Morley, A., Woodham, A., Allen, G., & Bower, P. (2015). Overcoming barriers to recruiting ethnic minorities to mental health research: a typology of recruitment strategies. *BMC psychiatry*, *15*, 1-11.

Williamson, R. J. (2001). Minority dropout and prevention. Graduate Research Papers. 1742.

Whittemore, R., & Knafl, K. (2005). The integrative review: Updated methodology. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 52*(5), 546–553.

Wong, S., & Wong, J. (1980). Representation of racial minority students in selected Canadian university schools of nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 5*(1), 83–90.

Xiong, S. Y. (2022). *Cultural and Gender Shifts: Trends and Factors Hmong Male Students Face in Pursuit of Higher Education* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Pacific).

Xiong, S., & Lam, S. K. (2013). Factors affecting the success of Hmong college students in America. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, *41*(2), 132-144.

Xiong, S., & Lee, S. E. (2011). Hmong Students in Higher Education and Academic Support Programs. *Hmong Studies Journal*, *12*.

Yang, K. (2023). *AHMong students in academia: Understanding Hmong stop-out students at universities in California* (Doctoral dissertation, Doctoral dissertation, San Francisco State University).