

# Enhance students' performance in weekday mode: A case study at University of Vocational Technology

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**Abstract:** University of Vocational Technology delivers Bachelor of Technology degrees to students with National Vocational Qualifications. National Vocational Qualification holders are different from traditional full-time university students, as they possess highly employable diploma level qualifications. The university offers courses as both, weekday programmes and weekend programmes. Average performance of students in weekday mode has shown to be weaker compared to students in weekend mode. This study attempted to identify factors that affect performance of students in weekday programmes. Tinto's model of student retention and drop out was used to conceptualise this descriptive survey study. Hard copies of a structured questionnaire were distributed among 97 participants, who have completed the degree in weekday mode. However, response rate was only 47.4 percent. The questionnaire addressed both, students' individual factors and institutional factors related to their academic performance. Positive responses were received for both, individual and institutional factors. However, findings show that there is a great scope for improvement of factors related to both academic integration and institutional-related social integration in order to increase the graduation rate. Recommendations are to reveal the marking scheme just after each semester end examination and early release of results together with revision of continuous assessments with appropriate frequent feedback etc. Social factors of students may be improved with establishment of extra-curricular activities, sports and social events in academic calendar and introduction of more group activities during subject module delivery. Facilitation with better health services and provision of special training for student advisors are also recommended.

**Key words:** Academic and social factors; Graduation; National vocational qualifications; University of Vocational Technology; Weekday programmes

## I. INTRODUCTION

University of Vocational Technology delivers Bachelor of Technology(B.Tech) degrees to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) holders, and degree courses are offered in two modes; as weekday and weekend programmes. National Vocational Qualification holders are different from traditional full-time university students, as they possess highly employable diploma level qualifications, they can be considered as unconventional students. University of Vocational Technology (UoVT) is the only university in Sri Lanka which offers degrees to NVQ holders.

## Problem statement

Average performance of students in weekday mode has shown to be weaker compared to students in weekend mode. Analysis of graduation rate in weekday programmes shows considerable differences compared to the enrolled number, Mainly due to, higher drop-out rates.

In this context, this issues was identified as a potential research area. Therefore, this study was aimed in identifying factors that facilitate successful degree completion by the students, in weekday programmes.

Based on above, following research questions were framed to guide the research study

- What individual factors caused the students to successfully complete the degree?
- What academic factors caused the students to successfully complete the degree?
- What institutional factors caused the students to successfully complete the degree?

## II. LITERATURE SURVEY

In student retention or dropout, Tinto (1975) has declared whether a student completes study programme or drops out from it could be predicted through the integration of academic factors and social factors, over a period of time. Integration of academic factors includes grade/mark, academic self-esteem, enjoying the subject/s, identification of one's role as a student etc. Integration of social factors includes, the number of friends student fit with, personal contacts with academics etc. (Tinto,1975).

The findings of another research (Şirin & Şahin, 2020) say, factors such as gender, the university, the choice of the department and father's education are found as important in students' academic success. Additionally, the factors such as counseling, support from the university staff and students' communication with academics have found to be considerably effective. Findings further say, guidance, support and communication skills of academics are effective contributors on students' success (Şirin & Şahin, 2020).

Memduhoğlu and Tanhan (2013) showed in their study that organisational factors, family, environment, group of friends, socioeconomic situation and motivation are among the main contributors for the academic achievement of university students.

According to Goddard (2013), the environment and the personal characteristics of students play an important role in their academic performance. The social assistance given by staff of the academic institution, family members and also the other community has a remarkable role for fulfilling the academic goals.

The study done by Hussain (2006) indicated that the guidance services have significant effect on the students' study, attitude, study habits and academic achievement.

In summary, students' academic performance depends on many factors, including students' own characteristics, academic institutional factors together with family and other social background.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### Sample

The total number of students enrolled from 2011 to 2016 for weekday degree programmes was the target population. All together of students of this batch 97 graduated. They followed degrees in the fields of Building Services, Mechatronics, Multimedia and Web, Network, Software and Education Technology. All 97 graduates of the respective batch were chosen as the sample. However, only 46 of them responded. Age wise, only one student was below 25 years; 24 were in between 25 -29 years; 11 were in between 30 – 34 years; remaining 10 were in between 35 – 50 years. 35 students were males while the remaining 11 were females.

#### Researcher role:

Both researchers equally contributed in conducting the research. Main role of the researcher includes detect the problem, by referring to literature decide a detailed path to analyse the problem, and accordingly devote a study and collect data from the decided source/s, analyse data as predetermined, and recommend suitable corrective plans.

#### Research design

Study was conducted as a descriptive survey. Review of literature and structured interviews with few students were used as the basis for the development of the questionnaire. Hard copies of the developed questionnaire were distributed among the selected sample. Based on the levels of responses, possible implementations within the university were suggested.

#### Instrument

As standard practice used in descriptive survey type research studies, a questionnaire was used to gather primary data from the selected sample of students. It consisted of three sections to collect demographic data of the respondents and their responses on individual and institutional factors. Participants were asked to rate their responds on three point scale; highly agree, moderately agree and disagree. As per the objectives of the study, descriptive statistics were used in the data analysis.

### IV. RESULTS

Percentages of students' feedback for their individual factors and institutional factors are shown in the figures 1 and 2, respectively. However, certain students haven't replied for certain questions.

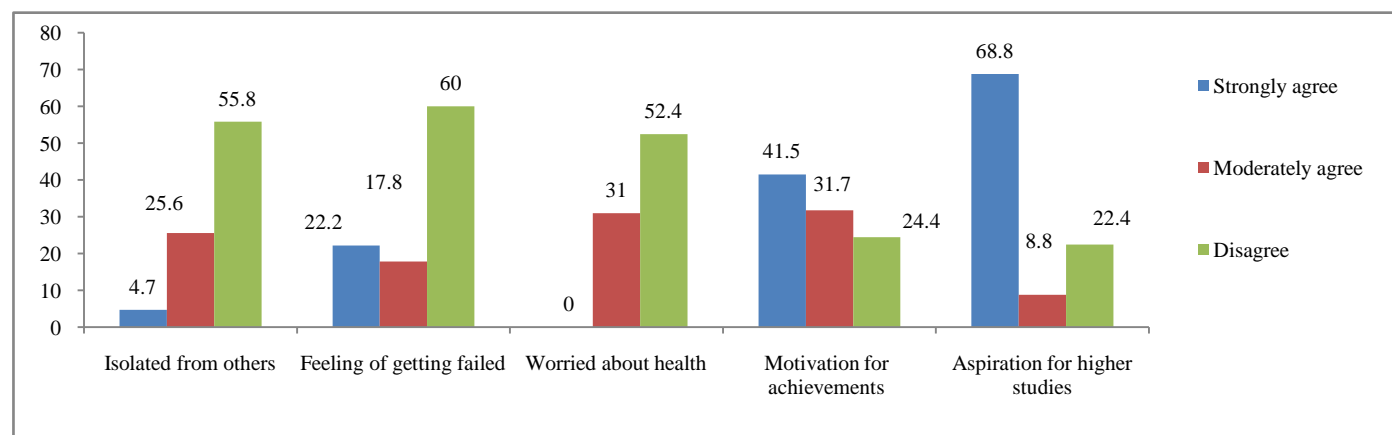


Figure1: Percentages of feedback for students' individual factors

Accordingly, 4.7% responses were strongly agree with being isolated from other students while 25.6 % responses were moderately agreed with it. 22.2% students were with strong feelings of getting failed while 17.8% of them were with moderate thoughts. 31% responses indicated students' worries with their health conditions.

Figure 2 shows percent of students' feedback for institutional factors. Majority of students were somewhat happy with the course delivery and module structure.

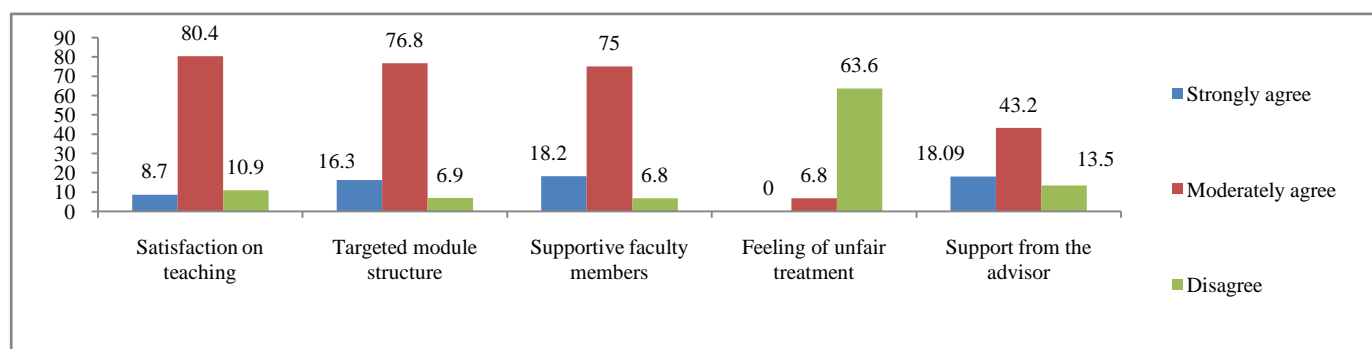


Figure 2: Percentages of feedback for institutional factors

## V. DISCUSSION

As illustrated in Figure -1, 41.5% students were with strong motivation for achievements and only 24.4% responses showed students' inertness. All these show potential areas for improvement. However, 68.8% students, with vast aspirations for higher studies are a positive point to note which university can capitalize.

According to Figure 2, Only 10.9% and 6.9% students weren't satisfied with teaching quality and course module structure, respectively. Services rendered from the faculty are also in a moderate condition, whereas 6.8% students felt faculty services as not supportive. Majority of students didn't believe staff's treatment as unfair. However, 6.8% students' responses implied treatments as not fair, which is a matter to be studied and take appropriate actions. Supports taken from the advisor are also in a moderate level, whereas 13.5% students' responses indicated advisory services as useless. This also requires proper attention.

Although most responses are not strongly positive, there is a requirement and possibility to improve the academic and institutional related social factors with the establishment of new delivery and assessment methods and, entering extra social activities in the academic calendar.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

### *Implications for practice*

According to the findings of the study, students in general are happy with the services and facilities provided by the university. However, there is a scope for improvements as described under recommendations.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The university can facilitate students by changing the academic and university-related social background factors.

Isolated students will become social by including more social and extra-curricular activities in the academic calendar. Providing more sport facilities is another suggestion. Revising course delivery methods to include more group activities is also recommended. Organising social events to interact the university staff and the students and, regularising the face to face and online services requested by the students, through the

faculty office will minimise adverse effects due to students' individual factors too.

Individual and frequent feedback for continuous assessments, release results of semester performance within a shorter period, leaving sufficient time for students to be ready for repeat attempts will improve students' satisfaction on the delivery methods and assessments. Such modifications will minimise students' fear of failure and improve confidence of their performance as well.

Students' health situation may be improved by providing sufficient health facilities and proper directives through the university medical centre. Making the all students aware of the confidential services provided by the university counseling unit may be recommended, aiming mental health of the needy students.

Students' aspiration for higher studies can be enhanced by establishing post graduate courses within the university. Making the students aware of the applicable post graduate courses and the relevant institutions will also be effective. These will influence the students to motivate for degree level achievements also.

Revealing the marking scheme with full answers just after each semester end examination, making all students aware of the rescrutinising procedure together with individual comments on continuous assessments will minimise students' feeling on unfair treatments. .

Since research findings showed the potential to improve advisory services, training of the student advisors is suggested, specifically to suit this non-conventional group of NVQ students.

### *Disseminate findings*

Findings were shared among the concerned individuals to take necessary actions, within their capacity. In personal capacity, actions were taken to allocate a time slot in the personal time table for students to come and discuss matters related to them personally.

To increase the transparency of continuous assessments and to reduce the students' opinion about unfair treatment, actions

were taken to prepare assessment rubrics and share that with students when providing individual feedback.

#### *Lessons learnt*

The students may have improved their ability to quantify their feelings and opinions. What we have specifically learnt was the use of sampling technique to suit the objectives.

Looking at the problem from other person's perspective is the main personal change that would bring to our future practice.

#### *Future researches*

It is recommended to re-conduct this study to assess the effectiveness of the actions suggested.

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