Examining the Factors Influencing Student Retention in Higher Education Institutions in Liberia

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are currently dealing with growing concerns of student retention, non-completion, drop-out, and inter-university movement as part of the quality assurance challenges that are affecting numerous universities throughout the world. The process of quality assurance includes improvements to higher education facilities, teaching and learning quality, diversity, infrastructure development, and learning environment diversity. While it has been demonstrated that students' retention and completion of studies at HEIs are based on financial and educational quality dimensions, there are other soft components and factors that are likely to influence students' intentions to stay at a specific university, drop out, and transfer to other universities. This research investigates the factors that influence student retention and their intentions to stay and study at selected Liberian universities rather than transfer to other universities outside the country. For this study, a quantitative cross-sectional research approach was used, using a self-structured online questionnaire delivered to a specific university platform. Multiple linear regression was conducted using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The data demonstrated that institutional, social, family, and financial factors all have a favorable and significant impact on student retention. Thus, higher education institutions and other stakeholders should devise strategies to support and promote the country's education sector.

Keywords: Student retention, non-completion, inter-university, quality assurance, cross-sectional research design, higher education, Liberia.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the higher education system is faced with the issues of student retention, non-completion, drop-out, and even inter-university migration. Quality assurance has a major role in higher educational institutions (HEI) to ensure improvement in higher education facilities, teaching and learning quality, diversity, infrastructural development, and diversity in the learning environment. It seems some causes are resulting in student drop-out and migrating to other universities. However, student retention can be defined as a measure of students who enroll, continue, and finish their academic studies in the same school. Parents, guardians, and policymakers look at student retention to assess the school. They want to find out the percentage of students graduating from a particular institution before sending their children to that institution. Student retention illustrates student success or completion from a higher institution. When students can be retained, they will not only remain but will also encourage their friends to stay. Cruise and Wade (2016) argued that "the ability of the university to retain students from one semester to another translates into funding the university" (p. 145).

In the same vein, Aljohani (2016) discusses student retention over the last four decades and came up with a better opinion of the phenomenon. He stated that the factors responsible for student withdrawal can be

categorized as the institutions, policies, and rules, the student college fits, the student's integration into the college's academic and social systems, the student's academic abilities and educational and occupational goals, and commitments. Wilkins, Balakrishnan, and Huisman (2011) sought to find out the external forces that are impacting a student's behavior or choice of wanting to study in an international branch campus. The authors point out that student has different sets of motivations for their choice of destination. They further reveal two key underlying dimensions of factors namely convenience and country-specific advantage.

In the same vein, Tieben (2019), assert that those who can graduate from higher education is as a result of the decision and part that is chosen by such individual which differentiates them from those who drop out, take transfer, and even do not complete their schooling. The authors reported high rates of dropout among students with pre-tertiary vocational training. The author further suggested that dropout decisions should be treated based on available options rather than the "stay or leave" decision. However, Pratt et al., (2017) explain that lack of finance was likely to force students to drop out, especially with first-generation college students. Another work by Tan (2014), pointed out that one of the significant reasons for people studying abroad is the value that is placed on foreign degrees and the opportunity of getting a better job than those who study locally on return. Notwithstanding, studies have revealed that when the interaction between the students and their faculties especially faculty advisers is frequent, student retention is increased (Seboe, p. 59, 2023).

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the factors influencing student retention in higher education institutions in Liberia. Several studies have been conducted in other areas of higher education institutions, such as academic advising, but not on student retention in Liberia. As a result, this study produced evidence that is useful to policymakers and higher education institutions in Liberia. This study applies a dropout process model (MDP) and a framework on student integration developed by Tinto (1975), and a quantitative cross-sectional research approach was used for analysis. As a result, it delves into the causes of student attrition in higher education institutions, the impact of student completion/non-completion of their studies on the institution, and factors influencing student retention in higher education institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes a theoretical model known as "the Model of the Dropout Process (MDP), and Tinto's model on student integration proposed in 1975", These were used to analyze the factors that affect student retention in HEI. This speaks to the issues that students face as undergraduates. Tinto's model states that students' commitment to an institution and its objectives can in the long run result in higher academic and social integration which will drastically reduce student dropout (Schmitt, Fini, Bailer, Fritsch, & Andrade (2020). Spady (1970) and Braxten *et al.* (2004) as cited in Schmitt *et al.,* (2020) are of the view that the more satisfied student is in an institution of learning the higher probability for them to stay within that school (p.543). in this study, the tendency for student retention in a particular institution is dependent on factors like; the financial status of both the student and their sponsor who could be their parents or guidance, the social status of the student that is the interaction with administration, staff or faculties and their fellow students, family influence of the students in term of wholistic support, and finally institutional factors like qualified faculty, provision of necessary academic resources and facilities.

The Causes of Attrition of Students in HEI

There are numerous reasons why students drop out or leave school. According to Pratt et al. (2017), a survey of first-generation college students (FGCS) and non-first-year generation college students was undertaken during the 2014 fall semester. According to the findings, several critical factors influence retention, ranging

from financial insecurity to a lack of confidence in their academic and social lives (p.107). These students are concerned about affording their education and are obliged to work to make ends meet while dealing with financial difficulties. Students lose confidence in their academic abilities, making it difficult for them to develop relationships with their peers on campus (Nieuwoudt & Pedler, 2021). In other words, such students are more likely to leave or drop out of school before completing their program.

Student retention is typically determined by their academic and social integration, and if this is not handled strategically, students may find it difficult to remain in a given institution. The pull factor does, in fact, influence not only student selections of host nation but also institution selection (Lee, 2017). During information collection, the pull element is a host country's attractive socioeconomic factors, whereas the push factor is the unhappiness that students have with their home nations' educational opportunities (p.174).

The Impact of Student Completion/Non-completion of their Studies on the Institution

Non-completion was defined by Heublein (2014, p. 503) as the outcome of "prolonged decision making and [a] consideration process in which the different influencing factors accumulate in a constellation of problems that makes leaving the higher education institution seem inevitable." Kirk (2018) asserted that the overall completion rate in 2010 for students who graduated in Australia was 45.1%. In the same year, it was claimed that 79.8% of those who started in 2006 graduated or completed their studies within nine years (2006-2013).

Student attrition harms the university in a variety of ways, including revenue and investment in higher education (p. 774). A few causes for student retention listed by the author include good career choices, competent academic staff, adequate support, a very good retention plan at both the institution and faculty levels, academic preparedness, motivation, and student participation (Kirk, 2018, Schmitt et al., 2020). As a result, learners will remain in a specific institution if they have a feeling of belonging.

Factors Influencing Student Retention in Higher Educational Institutions

Institutional influence

Student retention is a critical concern for higher education institutions worldwide. Retaining students not only impacts the reputation and financial stability of institutions but also contributes to student success and academic outcomes. While individual factors such as academic preparedness and personal circumstances play a role in student retention, institutional factors also significantly influence students' decisions to persist or withdraw from their academic programs. This essay delves into the institutional factors that impact student retention in higher education institutions, examining various aspects ranging from academic support services to campus environment and administrative policies.

1. **Academic Support Services**: One of the primary institutional factors affecting student retention is the availability and effectiveness of academic support services. Institutions that offer comprehensive academic support services such as tutoring, academic advising, writing centers, and mentoring programs tend to have higher retention rates. These services provide students with the necessary resources and guidance to navigate academic challenges, improve their learning outcomes, and stay on track toward graduation. Effective academic advising, in particular, assists students in selecting appropriate courses, creating academic plans, and making informed decisions about their educational goals, thereby enhancing their likelihood of persisting in their studies.
2. **Financial Aid and Scholarships:** Financial considerations play a significant role in students' decisions to continue their education or withdraw from their programs. Institutions that provide adequate financial aid and scholarship opportunities help alleviate the financial burden on students, reducing the likelihood of attrition due to financial constraints. Access to need-based and merit-based

scholarships, grants, work-study programs, and tuition assistance programs enables students to afford their education and focus on their academic pursuits without the added stress of financial worries. Moreover, transparent and accessible information about financial aid options and assistance with the application process can further support students in securing the financial resources they need to persist in their studies.

3. **Campus Environment and Resources:** The physical and social environment of a campus also plays a crucial role in student retention. Institutions that offer a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive campus environment tend to foster a sense of belonging and connectedness among students, which contributes to their retention. Modern facilities, well-maintained infrastructure, comfortable study spaces, recreational amenities, and vibrant campus life enhance students' overall college experience and satisfaction. Moreover, access to resources such as libraries, laboratories, computer centers, and research facilities enriches students' academic experiences and promotes engagement with their studies and the broader campus community and faculty

4. **Engagement and Support:** The quality of interactions between faculty and students significantly influences student retention. Engaged and supportive faculty members who demonstrate enthusiasm for teaching, mentorship, and student success can positively impact students' academic motivation, performance, and persistence. Institutions that prioritize faculty-student interaction, offer small class sizes, encourage collaborative learning, and provide opportunities for undergraduate research and experiential learning enhance students' sense of academic engagement and connection with their professors. Additionally, faculty advisors who are accessible, knowledgeable, and responsive to students' academic and personal needs can provide valuable guidance and support, contributing to higher retention rates.

5. **Retention Programs and Interventions:** Institutions implement various retention programs and interventions to identify and support students who may be at risk of attrition. Early alert systems, first-year experience programs, orientation sessions, academic success workshops, and peer mentoring initiatives are examples of interventions aimed at addressing students academic, social, and emotional needs. These programs help students acclimate to the academic rigors of college life, develop essential skills for success, build supportive relationships with peers and faculty, and overcome challenges that may impede their progress. By providing targeted support and resources to at-risk students, institutions can mitigate the factors contributing to attrition and enhance student retention rates.

6. **Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives:** Creating a diverse and inclusive campus environment essential for promoting student retention and success. Institutions that prioritize diversity and equity initiatives, implement inclusive policies and practices, and foster a culture of belonging attract and retain a diverse student body. By valuing and celebrating diversity in all its forms, institutions create an environment where students from different backgrounds feel welcomed, respected, and supported. Additionally, diversity and inclusion initiatives contribute to the development of cultural competence, empathy, and understanding among students, preparing them to thrive in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

7. **Administrative Support and Policies**: Efficient and responsive administrative support is essential for student retention. Clear and transparent administrative policies and procedures, timely communication, and accessible support services facilitate students' academic progression and reduce barriers to their success. Institutions that streamline administrative processes, provide adequate support for registration, enrollment, and financial aid, and offer responsive assistance with inquiries and concerns demonstrate a commitment to student success and satisfaction. Additionally, proactive interventions to address administrative challenges such as course scheduling conflicts, credit transfer issues, and graduation requirements can prevent unnecessary obstacles to students' progress and retention.

8. **Technology Integration:** Incorporating technology into academic and administrative processes can enhance efficiency, accessibility, and convenience for students. Online learning platforms, digital

course materials, virtual advising services, and mobile applications enable students to access resources, communicate with faculty and peers, and complete coursework more flexibly and conveniently. Institutions that leverage technology to support student learning, engagement, and communication contribute to a positive student experience and retention. Moreover, data analytics and predictive modeling tools can help identify students who may be at risk of attrition, allowing institutions to intervene proactively and provide targeted support to improve retention outcomes.

Family influence

While higher education institutions play a crucial role in student retention, family factors also significantly impact students' decisions to persist or withdraw from their academic programs. Family support, socioeconomic status, parental involvement, and familial expectations are among the key factors that influence student retention in higher education institutions. Understanding the complex interplay between family dynamics and academic success is essential for institutions to develop targeted support strategies and interventions to enhance student retention rates.

1. **Family Support:** Family support is a critical determinant of student retention in higher education. Students who receive encouragement, guidance, and emotional support from their families are more likely to persist in their academic pursuits despite challenges or obstacles. Supportive families provide a safety net for students, offering financial assistance, moral support, and practical help when needed. Moreover, familial encouragement and belief in the value of education instill a sense of motivationand resilience in students, empowering them to overcome difficulties and stay committed to their educational goals.

2. **Socioeconomic Status**: Socioeconomic status (SES) significantly influences students' access to educational resources and opportunities, which in turn affects their retention in higher education institutions. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may face financial constraints, limited access to academic support services, and greater pressures to contribute to family income orcaregiving responsibilities, all of which can hinder their ability to persist in their studies. Conversely,students from higher SES backgrounds may have greater access to resources such as private tutoring, extracurricular activities, and enrichment programs, which can enhance their academic performance and retention.

3. **Parental Involvement:** Parental involvement plays a crucial role in shaping students' educational outcomes and retention. Parents who are actively involved in their children's education, providing academic guidance, monitoring their progress, and advocating for their needs, contribute to higher levels of student engagement and retention. Effective communication between parents and educators facilitates early intervention and support for students experiencing academic or personal challenges, reducing the likelihood of attrition. Additionally, parental support networks and role modeling of educational attainment can influence students' aspirations and persistence in higher education.

4. **Familial Expectations**: Family expectations and cultural beliefs regarding education can impact students' retention in higher education institutions. Students whose families place a high value on academic achievement and view higher education as a pathway to success are more likely to persist in their studies despite obstacles. Conversely, students facing conflicting expectations or pressure to prioritize familial obligations over their educational pursuits may struggle to maintain their academic commitments and may be at greater risk of attrition. Institutions that recognize and respect diverse familial expectations and cultural backgrounds can better support students in navigating these challenges and fostering a sense of belonging and academic success.

5. **Family Dynamics and Support Networks:** The quality of family relationships and support networks also influences students' retention in higher education. Students who experience positive family dynamics characterized by open communication, emotional support, and encouragement are better equipped to cope with the academic and personal challenges associated with college life. Strong

familial bonds provide students with a sense of belonging and security, mitigating feelings of isolation or homesickness that may contribute to attrition. Additionally, access to familial support networks, including extended family members, mentors, and community resources, can provide students with additional sources of support and guidance throughout their educational journey.

Social influence

In addition to academic and family factors, social factors play a significant role in influencing student retention in higher education institutions. Social relationships, peer interactions, campus culture, and community engagement all contribute to students' sense of belonging, motivation, and academic success. Understanding these social factors is essential for institutions to create supportive environments that promote student retention and success.

1. **Peer Interactions and Social Support:** Peer interactions and social support networks play a crucial role in students' retention in higher education. Positive relationships with peers provide students with

   emotional support, friendship, and a sense of belonging, which can buffer against feelings of isolation or homesickness. Peer mentoring programs, study groups, and campus organizations offer opportunities for students to connect with their peers, share experiences, and navigate academic and personal challenges together. Strong social bonds fostered through these interactions contribute to students' overall satisfaction and retention.

2. **Campus Culture and Climate:** The campus culture and climate significantly impact students' sense of belonging and retention. Institutions that cultivate inclusive, welcoming, and supportive environments foster a sense of community among students from diverse backgrounds. A vibrant campus culture characterized by opportunities for social and cultural enrichment, extracurricular activities, and student engagement events enhances students' overall college experience and promotes retention. Moreover, institutions that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives create spaces where all students feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed academically.

3. **Residential Life and Student Housing**: Residential life and student housing arrangements can influence students' social experiences and retention. On-campus housing provides students with opportunities to form social connections, participate in community-building activities, and engage in campus life. Living-learning communities, themed housing options, and resident assistant programs facilitate peer interaction and support academic success. Additionally, institutions that prioritize safe, comfortable, and inclusive living environments contribute to students' overall well-being and retention by addressing their basic needs and fostering a sense of belonging.

4. **Student Engagement and Involvement:** Active involvement in campus activities and student organizations promotes students' retention and success in higher education. Extracurricular involvement provides students with opportunities to develop leadership skills, explore their interests, and build social networks outside of the classroom. Institutions that offer a diverse array of student-led clubs, organizations, and volunteer opportunities encourage students to engage with their peers, faculty, and the broader community, enhancing their sense of connection to the institution and increasing their likelihood of retention.

5. **Support Services and Campus Resources:** Access to support services and campus resources is essential for addressing students' social and emotional needs and promoting retention. Counseling services, health and wellness programs, career development resources, and academic support services provide students with the tools and support they need to navigate personal and academic challenges successfully. Institutions that invest in comprehensive support services and make them readily accessible to students demonstrate a commitment to their well-being and academic success, ultimately contributing to higher retention rates.

6. **Community Engagement and Partnerships:** Engagement with the broader community can enrich

students' educational experiences and promote retention. Collaborative partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and community leaders provide students with opportunities for service learning, internships, and experiential learning experiences. By connecting classroom learning with real-world applications and community needs, institutions foster a sense of purpose and relevance among students, increasing their motivation to persist in their studies and contribute positively to society.

Financial influence

Financial factors play a crucial role in determining whether students can persist in their higher education journey or face challenges that lead to attrition. From tuition costs to living expenses, financial considerations can significantly impact students' ability to afford college and continue their studies. This essay explores various financial factors that influence student retention in higher education institutions and examines how institutions can address these challenges to support student success.

1. **Tuition and Fees**: The cost of tuition and fees is one of the most significant financial barriers to higher education retention. As tuition rates continue to rise, many students struggle to afford the cost of attending college, especially those from low-income backgrounds. High tuition costs can deter students from enrolling or force them to take on substantial student loan debt, which may impact their ability to persist in their studies. Institutions that prioritize affordability through tuition freezes, scholarship programs, and financial aid packages can help alleviate this burden and support student retention.

2. **Financial Aid and Scholarships:** Access to financial aid and scholarships is essential for many students to afford college and remain enrolled. Federal, state, and institutional financial aid programs provide students with grants, loans, and work-study opportunities to help cover the cost of tuition, fees, and living expenses. Additionally, merit-based and need-based scholarships offer students financial assistance based on academic achievement, financial need, or other criteria. Institutions that offer generous financial aid packages and actively promote scholarship opportunities can reduce financial barriers to retention and support students in achieving their educational goals.

3. **Cost of Living:** The cost of living, including housing, food, transportation, and other expenses, can impact students' ability to remain enrolled in higher education institutions. Students who struggle to afford necessities may face challenges balancing their academic responsibilities with part-time work or other financial obligations. Institutions located in high-cost areas may face additional retention challenges, as students may be priced out of housing options or struggle to afford the cost of living. Providing affordable housing options, meal plans, and transportation services can help alleviate these financial pressures and support student retention.

4. **Work and Employment:** Many students work part-time or full-time jobs to support themselves financially while attending college. Balancing work and academic responsibilities can be challenging, especially for students who work long hours or have demanding jobs. Students who work excessive hours may struggle to keep up with coursework, participate in extracurricular activities, or engage in campus life, which can impact their retention. Institutions that offer flexible work-study programs, on-campus employment opportunities, and support services for working students can help students manage their work and academic responsibilities more effectively, increasing their likelihood of retention.

5. **Student Debt:** The burden of student loan debt can also influence students' decisions to persist in their studies or withdraw from college. Students who accumulate significant debt may face financial stress, loan repayment obligations, and concerns about their future finances.

Research Questions

Three research questions will guide the study

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between institutional, financial, family, and social influence on student retention in higher education in Liberia?
2. To what extent do institutional and family influences have on student retention in higher education in Liberia?
3. What are the major predictors of student retention in higher education in Liberia?

Hypotheses

H_{01} – There is no statistically significant relationship between institutional, financial, family, and social influence on student retention in higher education in Liberia.

H_{02} – Institution and family do not significantly influence student retention in higher education in Liberia.

H_{03} – Student retention does not have major predictors in higher education in Liberia.
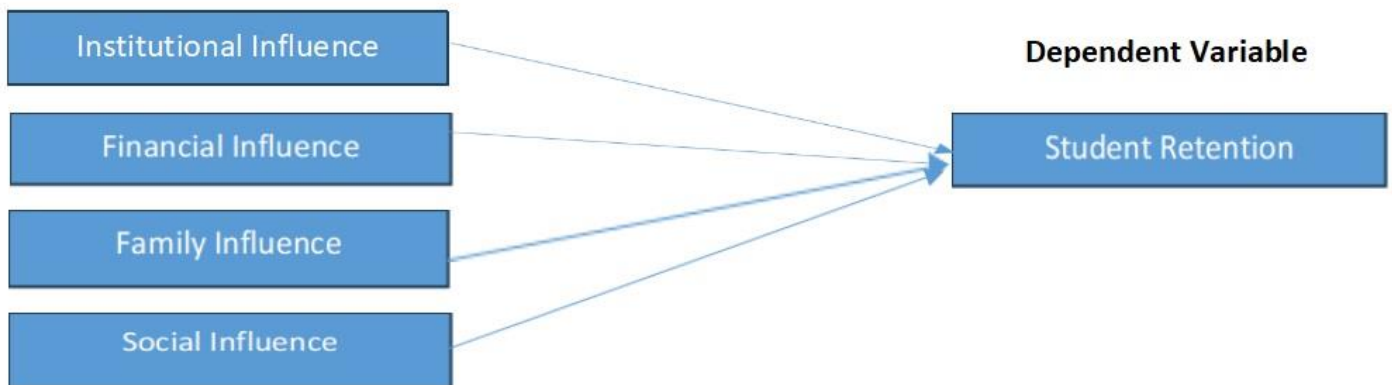

Figure 1

The conceptual framework explains the relationship between institutional, financial, family, and social influences, each of which has a direct impact on student retention and has been verified and used to predict student retention.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative cross-sectional research approach based on the positivist paradigm. Thus, multiple linear regression analysis was utilized. Regression analysis was used to explain the relationship between variables and to confirm or reject hypotheses in this investigation.

Target population

This study's population consisted of students at a certain higher education institution. As a result, a non-probability sampling technique was used, with convenience sampling used to establish the sample size for this investigation. May while, a sample size of two hundred seventy-eight (278) was chosen from a population of five hundred (500).

Data Collection and Instrument

For the data collection instrument, a well-structured self-administered online questionnaire was provided via a Google form. The instrument uses the Likert scale measurements (Creswell, 2014) to provide five options for respondents' opinions, indicating strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The instrument consisted of six sections which cover the dependent and the independent variables. The first section focuses on the demographic data of the respondent which consists of seven questions, sections twoto four focus on the factors that influence student retention comprising twenty-one questions, and questionson student retention comprising of seven questions making a total of thirty-five items in all.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

For instrument validity, questionnaires were assessed by academicians, and a pilot test was conducted to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaires on 25 students to determine the reliability of the scale Cronbach Alpha. The results show a reliability between .66 which is approximately .70 to .83. Hence, the questionnaires were adjusted for those with the lower coefficient to give a clearer understanding to respondents. Therefore, the instrument became suitable and consistent enough for implementation.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This study utilizes the Google form in the collection of data. Out of the total of 300 links that were sent to individual students in four different colleges of the institution, 141 responses were received which constituted a response rate of 51% of the total respondent needed for this study. After these responses were transported to SPSS where data screening was done, and analyses were conducted. Firstly, data were observed through reliability checking, next, data cleaning was carryout to ensure the accuracy of the data, then Likert scale items were grouped to allow easier access, and thereafter, multiple regressions were conducted to test the hypothesis.

To explore the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable a multiple linear regression was conducted.

Therefore, to answers each of the hypothesis multiple regression was utilized and the results are presented below:

H_{01} _ There is no statistically significant relationship between institutional, financial, family, and social influence on student retention in higher education in Liberia.

Table 1: Regression result showing the relationship between factors influencing student retention

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
					Change Statistics				
1	.844[a]	.713	.704	.34575	.713	84.416	4	136	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), SOCIAL_INFLUENCE, FINANCIAL_INFLUENCE, FAMILY_INFLUENCE, INSTITUTIONALIF

b. Dependent Variable: STUDENT_RETENTION

Table 2: Anova table showing the result of the Regression analysis						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	40.366	4	10.091	84.416	.000^b
	Residual	16.258	136	.120		
	Total	56.624	140			
a. Dependent Variable: STUDENT_RETENTION						
b. Predictors: (Constant), SOCIAL_INFLUENCE, FINANCIAL_INFLUENCE, FAMILY_INFLUENCE, INSTITUTIONALIF						

Table 1& 2 explores the regression analysis of hypothesis 1 and the result reveals that social, financial, family, and institutional influence have a statistically significant impact on student retention with a $p < .001$ therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis of affirming the relationships and effects. Furthermore, a significant model emerged from these variables that were entered into the criterion variable: $F(4,136) = 84.42$, $p < .001$. The model explains 70.4% of the variance in student retention (adjusted $R^2 = .704$). In addition, unstandardized and standardized regression coefficient variables entered into the model, which is social, financial, family, and institutional influence were significant predictors of student retention.

H_{02} – Institution and family do not significantly influence student retention in higher education in Liberia.

Table 3: Regression Analysis of Institution and Family influence on Student Retention									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.792^a	.628	.622	.39092	.628	116.267	2	138	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), FAMILY_INFLUENCE, INSTITUTIONALIF									
b. Dependent Variable: STUDENT_RETENTION									

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	35.535	2	17.767	116.267	.000^b
	Residual	21.089	138	.153		
	Total	56.624	140			
a. Dependent Variable: STUDENT_RETENTION						
b. Predictors: (Constant), FAMILY_INFLUENCE,INSTITUTIONALIF						

Tables 3 & 4 explored the regression analysis of hypothesis 2 and the result reveals that the family and institutional have a significantly strong effect on student retention with a $p < .001$ therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that says that institutional and family do not significantly influence student retention in higher education in Liberia. Furthermore, a significant model emerged from these variables that were entered into the criterion variable: $F(2,138) = 116.27$, $p < .001$. The model explains 62.2% of the variance in student retention (adjusted $R^2 = .622$).

H_{03} _ Student retention does not have major predictors in higher education in Liberia.

For student retention predictors the result shows that institutional influence has a positive effect on student retention ($\beta = 0.48$, t = 7.60, $p < .001$). The analysis shows that social influence has a positive effect on student retention ($\beta = 0.42$, t = 6.29, $p < .001$). the result equally shows that family influence has a moderate effect on student retention ($\beta = 0.50$, t = 0.89, $p < .005$). The analysis shows also that financial influence has some effect on student retention ($\beta = -0.42$, t = -.0.84, $p < .005$). Furthermore, the result of the value inflation factors (VIF) shows no evidence of multicollinearity. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis of affirming the relationships and effects. that states that student retention have major predictors in higher education in Liberia. In excess, two of the variables are major predictors of student retention (institutional and social influence).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Student retention is a very crucial discussion in higher education institutions. With lower enrollment rates and increased competition for applicants, there is a need to focus on effective student retention strategies. As such focus has been placed on this study to explore why students enter into an institution, stay for a few semesters, and later decide to drop. Thus, this study explores the factors that influence student retention. Based on the findings from the study conducted, we can conclude that student retention is statistically significantly influenced by institutional, social, family, and financial influences in higher education institutions. The study further identified the institution and social influence as the main predictors of student retention.

This implies that factors like this should be considered, and better strategies should be employed to enhance retention. Hence, this study can be supported by other studies that say that factors such as institutional, financial, and student integration into college academic and campus life have a positive influence on their retention (Aljohani, 2016, Pratt et al. (2017, Dalangin, 2018). Therefore, higher education institutions and other stakeholders should pay serious attention to these factors being discussed and discover means to handle these areas to reduce attrition.

Furthermore, the issue of retention is critical to the institution's sustainability in terms of operations and organizational image, higher education institutions should implement the appropriate mechanisms that support and foster a better learning environment, hence encouraging students to stay. This is supported by Kirk (2018) (as cited by Schmitt et al., 2020), who proposed a very good retention plan at both the institutional and instructor levels, as well as academic preparedness, motivation, and student participation.

In terms of limitations, the studies concentrated on faith-based institution, which is similar to private universities. As a result, future research should focus on public universities, and a comparative analysis can be undertaken. Other factors influencing retention could be investigated as well.

Furthermore, these studies help to uncover the factors that influence student dropout, and all of these factors affect not just the students but the institution as a whole. This study is significant for both scholars and the administration of higher education institutions in Liberia.

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