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FACTORS AFFECTING THE INTENTION TO DROP OUT AMONG FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS: EVIDENCE FROM UiTM KEDAH

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Abstract:

This study investigates the factors influencing first-year students' dropout intentions at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kedah, an issue of growing concern in higher education both nationally and globally. High dropout rates, particularly among first-year students, are often attributed to financial difficulties, academic challenges, limited social integration, motivational issues, and socio-demographic disparities. In Malaysia, these concerns are amplified by socioeconomic inequalities, making the need for targeted interventions especially urgent. The objective of this research is to identify and assess the key factors influencing dropout intentions among UiTM Kedah's first-year students. The study focuses on five independent variables: motivation, academic factors, financial issues, social integration, and socio-demographic factors. Using a quantitative research design, structured questionnaires were distributed to a purposive sample of 260 students. Regression analysis was employed to examine the relationships between the variables and dropout intention. Findings from this study are expected to offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and university administrators. By highlighting the most influential factors, the research supports evidence-based strategies such as enhanced financial aid, academic mentoring, and social integration programs. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of fostering a supportive and inclusive higher

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education environment to reduce dropout rates and enhance student retention in Malaysia.

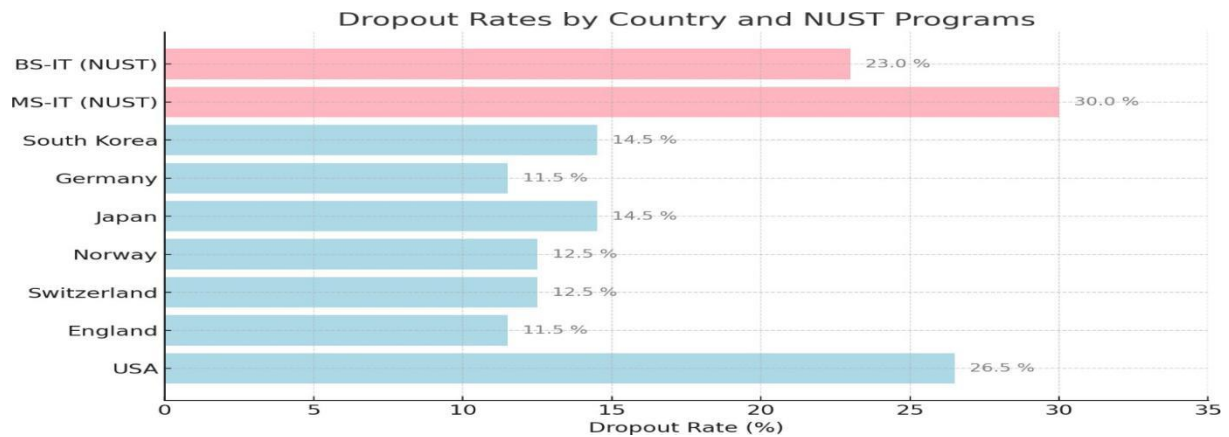
Keywords:

Academic Factors, Dropout Intention, Financial Issue, Motivation, Social Integration

Introduction

University dropout rates among first-year students represent a pressing global issue, posing serious challenges to educational institutions, governments, and students themselves. Globally, dropout rates vary dramatically due to factors such as financial stress, academic difficulties, and lack of motivation. In some OECD countries like the United States and Sweden, rates can reach up to 40%, whereas countries such as Japan and South Korea report rates below 15%, attributed to strong educational cultures and structured support systems (OECD, 2021). These disparities illustrate the significance of institutional and societal support in determining student persistence. In Malaysia, particularly among students from the B40 income group, dropout intentions are growing more common due to compounded financial, social, and academic challenges (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2022).

Figure 1.1 illustrates dropout rates across selected countries and academic programs at the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST). The MS-IT program at NUST records the highest dropout rate at 30.0%, followed by the BS-IT program at 23.0%. Comparatively, countries like the United States show a high dropout rate of 26.5%, while countries with robust educational support systems such as England and Germany exhibit lower dropout rates at 11.5%. Japan and South Korea, both reporting 14.5%, highlight the stabilizing role of cultural and academic expectations. These statistics offer context for understanding the global and program-level disparities in student retention and underscore the importance of identifying localized factors that contribute to student attrition. For institutions like UiTM Kedah, understanding these trends is essential to crafting targeted strategies to reduce first-year dropout intentions.

Table 1: Insight of Student Dropout Rates in Different Countries vs. Selected Student Group

Source: Article Utilizing Machine Learning Models to Predict Student Performance from LMS Activity Logs

While access to higher education has expanded, student attrition especially during the first year remains a persistent issue. In countries like Chile, up to 39% of students drop out within the first two semesters (González-Campos et al., 2020), and in Malaysia, completion rates are also falling short of expectations, with up to 60% failing to complete their degrees due to weak entry qualifications and insufficient family support (Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). Despite Malaysia's educational expansion, localized research on dropout intentions is limited. Most existing studies come from Western contexts (Palomino & Ortega, 2023), which may not accurately reflect the unique sociocultural and economic challenges faced by Malaysian students. Hence, there is a need to explore factors affecting dropout intentions in Malaysia's own educational institutions, such as UiTM Kedah.

Extensive past research has explored why university students consider dropping out, highlighting issues such as poor academic performance, low self-efficacy, financial hardship, and inadequate social support (Toyon, 2023; Nemtcian et al., 2020; Mostert et al., 2024). Motivation, adaptation, and peer relationships have also emerged as significant predictors of dropout (Stamelos & Adamopoulou, 2022). Studies emphasize that when students lack integration into the university community or face barriers like poor time management and personal health issues, their dropout risks increase. Financial instability has also been consistently cited as a major factor (Hartl et al., 2022), particularly in economically vulnerable populations.

Although previous research has addressed numerous dropout-related variables, important gaps remain. Few studies consider more significance personal traits like communication skills, self-confidence, or resilience factors that may provide early indicators of dropout risk (De La Cruz-Campos et al., 2023). Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive models integrating financial and socio-demographic factors alongside academic and motivational aspects. Given that most prior studies have been conducted in European or American contexts, this research aims to fill the gap by applying a more holistic model to a Malaysian setting, incorporating five dimensions: motivation, academic factors, financial issues, social integration, and socio-demographic background (López-Angulo et al., 2023).

From a theoretical perspective, this study draws on Tinto's Student Integration Model (1975), Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), and Achievement Emotions Theory (Pekrun, 2006) to understand the multifaceted nature of dropout intentions. Practically, the study is significant for institutional stakeholders, as it will inform the development of targeted interventions such as mentoring programs, academic counseling, financial aid, and social integration activities. On a broader scale, the findings can assist the Ministry of Higher Education in formulating policies that address systemic challenges faced by first-year students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the key factors influencing the intention to drop out among first-year students at UiTM Kedah. The specific objectives are to assess the impact of motivation, academic challenges, financial difficulties, social integration, and socio-demographic variables on students' dropout intentions. By identifying the most significant factors, the study aims to offer actionable recommendations that can help institutions design better support mechanisms for students at risk of dropping out.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature on student dropout intentions and theoretical models. Section 3 outlines the research methodology, including sampling, data collection, and analytical techniques. Section 4 presents the findings, while Section 5 discusses the results in light of existing literature. Finally, Section 6 concludes the study by summarizing key insights, offering recommendations, and suggesting avenues for future research.

Literature Review

This literature review critically examines the existing empirical studies and theoretical perspectives related to the factors influencing first-year students' intentions to drop out of higher education. It is structured around five key independent variables—social integration, financial issues, academic factors, motivation, and socio-demographic characteristics—and their relationship with the dependent variable, dropout intention. Each subsection synthesizes findings from recent and relevant scholarly literature to establish the empirical foundation of this research. Additionally, the section concludes with the theoretical framework underpinning the study, drawing on Tinto's Theory of Student Integration and other complementary theories. This review not only identifies significant patterns and insights but also highlights gaps and inconsistencies in existing literature, thereby justifying the present study's relevance and scope within the Malaysian higher education context.

Relationship Between Social Integration and Dropout Intention

The relationship between social integration and dropout intention is multifaceted and context-dependent. Franz and Paetsch (2023) highlight the crucial role of peer interaction in mitigating dropout intention, particularly in collaborative learning environments such as teacher education programs, where peer bonding fosters a strong sense of belonging. However, their study found that faculty relationships had a comparatively limited effect in such contexts. Nemtcan et al. (2020) extended this perspective, suggesting that social integration is most impactful when coupled with academic self-efficacy. Their findings propose that a socially supportive academic environment is more effective when students also possess confidence in their academic abilities.

Véliz Palomino and Ortega (2023) further emphasize the importance of social integration in the early stages of university education, underscoring its interaction with psychological constructs such as motivation and self-regulation. Their study reveals that students with higher levels of intrinsic motivation derive greater benefit from social integration, while less motivated individuals are less influenced. Despite the consensus on its significance, divergence exists regarding faculty relationships. Franz and Paetsch (2023) downplay their influence, while Nemtcan et al. (2020) suggest their importance may rise in tandem with academic self-efficacy. This discrepancy points to a need for further exploration across disciplines and demographics. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed to guide this investigation:

H1: There is a significant relationship between social integration and dropout intention.

Relationship Between Financial Issues and Dropout Intention

The influence of financial issues on students' dropout intentions is consistently affirmed across multiple studies. De La Cruz-Campos et al. (2023) reported that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to experience stress and diminished motivation, both of which significantly elevate the risk of dropping out. Similarly, Lorenzo-Quiles et al. (2023) observed that students who are financially independent often engage in part-time or full-time work, which leads to heightened stress levels and reduced academic engagement.

Supporting these findings, Nurmalitasari et al. (2023) identified personal financial challenges as a leading cause of dropout in Central Java, where students frequently prioritize employment to meet financial needs, resulting in academic disengagement and eventual attrition. Nevertheless, financial strain is not the sole contributing factor. Lorenzo-Quiles et al. (2023) also highlight the impact of poor instructional quality and weak classroom relationships as additional drivers of dropout. Collectively, these studies affirm that financial stress remains a significant and recurring determinant of dropout intention in higher education. Accordingly, this study puts forward the following hypothesis to direct the course of the research.

H2: There is a significant relationship between financial issues and dropout intention.

Relationship Between Academic Factors and Dropout Intention

Academic-related challenges, such as poor time management, inadequate study skills, and limited access to learning resources, are widely associated with increased dropout risks. Nemtcan et al. (2020) identified deficiencies in these areas as contributing to weak academic performance, ultimately influencing students to consider leaving their studies. Franz and Paetsch (2023) further noted that a student's capacity to adapt to academic life is a critical determinant of persistence.

However, Sosu and Pheunpha (2019) challenge the notion that academic skills alone determine retention, arguing instead that external variables—like financial support and social networks—often outweigh academic competencies in influencing persistence. This suggests a multifactorial landscape where academic shortcomings may interact with other issues to exacerbate dropout intentions. This study, therefore, examines academic challenges in conjunction with other variables to better understand their cumulative effect. In light of these findings, the subsequent hypothesis is formulated to frame this study's analysis. Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypothesis is advanced to inform the research inquiry.

H3: There is a significant relationship between academic factors and dropout intention.

Relationship Between Motivation and Dropout Intention

Student motivation has been strongly linked to academic persistence in the literature. Motivation arising from intrinsic interest, perceived competence, and the educational value of studies has been shown to reduce attrition risk significantly. Students with high motivation exhibit greater academic engagement, resilience, and a lower likelihood of dropping out (Mujica et al., 2019; Tayebi et al., 2021).

However, motivation alone is not always sufficient. Behr et al. (2021) and Mostert et al. (2024) found that students driven solely by external pressures often lack the internal fulfillment necessary to endure academic challenges. Nemtcen et al. (2020) further demonstrated that poor integration—social or academic—can override even high motivation levels, leading students to withdraw due to feelings of isolation. Lorenzo-Quiles et al. (2023) reinforced this by revealing that financial hardship can force even motivated students to abandon their education. Stamelos and Adamopoulou (2022) added that professional uncertainty and challenging curricula could also discourage highly committed students. This study explores both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational dimensions to assess their relationship with dropout intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed to guide this investigation:

H4: There is a significant relationship between motivation and dropout intention.

Relationship Between Socio-Demographic Factors and Dropout Intention

Socio-demographic factors such as socioeconomic status, age, gender, and family background have been repeatedly identified as key influencers in students' decisions to persist or withdraw from university. Students from low-income families often lack access to financial resources and study time, leading to elevated dropout risk (Mostert et al., 2023; Núñez Hernández & Buele, 2023). Additional pressures from work and familial responsibilities are particularly pronounced in non-traditional or distance-learning contexts (Szabó & Nemes, 2023).

Nevertheless, the literature reflects some debate. While Sosu and Pheunpha (2019) argue that strong family support can reduce dropout intentions, Sauve et al. (2022) note that family obligations may also increase stress and time constraints. Furthermore, Casanova et al. (2023) suggest that in STEM disciplines, academic performance may be a stronger predictor of dropout than socio-demographic background. This study seeks to clarify these mixed findings by analyzing how various socio-demographic variables correlate with dropout intentions among first-year students at UiTM Kedah. Thus, the hypothesis below is presented to direct the focus of this study.

H5: There is a significant relationship between socio-demographic factors and dropout intention.

Underpinning Theory

The theoretical foundation of this study is built upon Tinto's (1975) Theory of Student Integration, which asserts that students are more likely to persist in higher education when they are both academically and socially integrated. Academic integration involves active engagement with coursework and intellectual development, while social integration

encompasses meaningful interactions with peers and faculty. A lack of integration in either domain increases the likelihood of withdrawal.

This framework continues to be widely used in retention research. Behr et al. (2021) affirm that alignment between student expectations and academic experiences is crucial for sustained engagement. Similarly, Olmedo-Cifuentes and Martínez-León (2022) emphasize that peer bonding significantly enhances students' sense of belonging and reduces dropout likelihood. Sosu and Pheunpha (2019) further suggest that social environments—along with family support—can act as protective factors against attrition.

In applying Tinto's model, this study explores how social integration, motivation, academic preparedness, financial conditions, and socio-demographic factors collectively influence dropout intentions among first-year students at UiTM Kedah. By examining these variables through the lens of student integration, the research aims to provide a holistic understanding of the factors contributing to early attrition in higher education.

Conceptual Framework

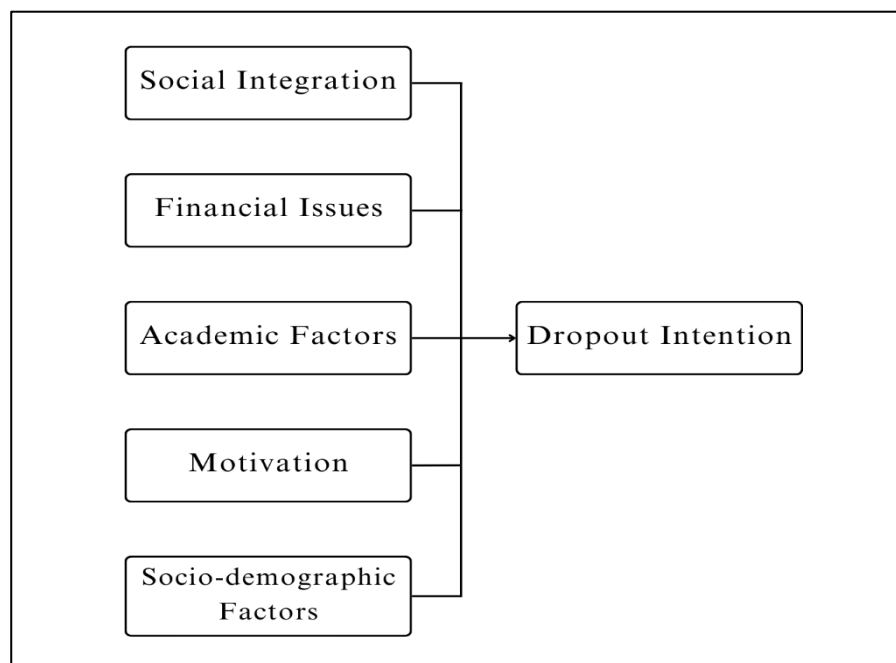


Figure 2: Proposed conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this study is designed to explore the key factors influencing first-year students' intention to drop out of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kedah. It identifies five core independent variables—motivation, academic factors, financial issues, social integration, and socio-demographic characteristics—which are posited to influence the dependent variable, dropout intention. These variables were selected based on consistent patterns found in empirical research, theoretical models, and recent findings in the context of higher education retention (Tinto, 1975; Becker, 1964; Pekrun, 2006; Bandura, 1986). Collectively, they represent the most frequently cited and interrelated determinants of student attrition, as discussed across multiple international and local studies (Franz & Paetsch, 2023;

Mostert et al., 2023; Lorenzo-Quiles et al., 2023; Stamelos & Adamopoulou, 2022; Núñez Hernández & Buele, 2023; De La Cruz-Campos et al., 2023).

Method

This study adopts a quantitative research design to investigate the factors influencing first-year students' intentions to drop out of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kedah. The research specifically examines the relationships between five independent variables—social integration, financial issues, academic factors, motivation, and socio-demographic characteristics—and the dependent variable, dropout intention. A causal research approach was selected to explore how these variables directly affect students' decisions to remain in or leave university. Data was collected through a structured, self-administered online questionnaire using Google Forms, ensuring minimal researcher interference and reducing bias. The instrument was carefully designed to align with students' daily routines, allowing for authentic and reliable responses.

The study was conducted in the natural campus setting of UiTM Kedah, offering a real-world context for analyzing the students' academic and personal experiences. By capturing data from students within their regular learning environment, the research preserves ecological validity and provides insights into actual determinants of dropout intention. Following the guidance of prior exploratory studies (Behr et al., 2021; Díaz Mujica et al., 2019), this approach helps identify how intrinsic and extrinsic variables interact to influence students' persistence. The unit of analysis is the individual student, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how personal experiences shape dropout intentions, and supporting detailed examination of differences based on demographic and psychosocial factors.

A cross-sectional time horizon was employed, meaning that data was collected at a single point in time—specifically, over a two-week period from 9 November to 22 November 2024. This design enables the efficient gathering of data from a large number of participants, without the time and complexity required by longitudinal studies. The data was obtained via an online survey distributed to eligible students, giving them ample time to respond while minimizing disruption. The approach enables researchers to assess relationships among variables as they exist at the moment of data collection, contributing to a clearer understanding of first-year students' dropout tendencies within a specific academic term.

The study focused on a target population of approximately 4,000 first-year diploma and degree students out of a total of 8,187 students enrolled at UiTM Kedah. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select 300 participants, in accordance with Roscoe's (1975) recommendation for adequate sample size in behavioral research. This non-probability method allowed for deliberate selection of first-year students, as they are most likely to face transitional difficulties related to integration, finances, academics, motivation, and background. The sample size was chosen to balance statistical relevance and feasibility within the study's resource limitations.

The questionnaire employed both nominal and interval scales to capture demographic information and measure perceptions. Nominal scales were used to categorize gender, age, and academic level, while interval scales assessed agreement levels with statements related to the five main variables using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). These measurements allow for comprehensive data analysis and variable comparison. Data collection was conducted in accordance with ethical standards, ensuring voluntary participation

and confidentiality. The information gathered is intended to inform future student retention strategies, providing policymakers and administrators with data-driven recommendations to enhance student support at UiTM Kedah.

Results and Analysis

Demographic Profile

The frequency and percentage of demographic characteristics of respondents in UiTM Kedah are found below. The demographic characteristics details consist of gender, age, and education attainment.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of Gender, Age, and Education Attainment

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	89	34.2
Female	171	65.8
Age		
18-20	177	68.1
21-23	64	24.6
24-26	9	3.5
27 and above	10	3.8
Education Attainment		
Diploma	127	48.8
Degree	133	51.2

The demographic profile of the respondents offers a comprehensive understanding of the sample's composition in terms of gender, age, and educational background. The analysis revealed that 34.2% of respondents were male, while 65.8% were female, indicating a notable gender imbalance that may reflect the actual gender distribution within the target population. In terms of age, the majority of participants (68.1%) were between 18 and 20 years old, followed by those aged 21 to 23 (24.6%). Only a small proportion of respondents were aged 24 to 26 (3.5%) and 27 and above (3.8%), suggesting that most respondents were at the beginning stages of their academic journey. Regarding educational attainment, the sample was nearly evenly divided between diploma students (48.8%) and degree students (51.2%), ensuring balanced representation across educational levels. This demographic breakdown is essential for contextualizing subsequent findings, as it reflects the diverse yet predominantly young composition of the study population.

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis provides a detailed summary of each variable, including its average (mean), variation in responses (standard deviation), as well as the highest (maximum) and lowest (minimum) recorded values.

Table 2: Items Total Mean and Standard Deviation

Variable	Dropout Intention	Social Integration	Financial Issues	Academic Factors	Motivation	Socio-demographic Factors
Mean	19.13	24.71	15.89	22.98	22.20	18.42
Standard Deviation	5.69	3.07	5.62	3.62	3.10	4.85
Minimum	8	17	8	10	16	8
Maximum	32	40	31	34	34	32

The respondents' perceptions across the variables revealed varying degrees of agreement and diversity. The Dropout Intention variable recorded a mean score of 19.13 with a standard deviation of 5.69, indicating moderate variation in respondents' intentions, with scores ranging from 8 to 32. Social Integration emerged with the highest mean score of 24.71 and a relatively low standard deviation of 3.07, suggesting a strong and consistent positive perception, supported by a score range of 17 to 40. In contrast, Financial Issues had the lowest mean score of 15.89 and a high standard deviation of 5.62, reflecting diverse experiences and a broad distribution of financial concerns, with responses spanning from 8 to 31. The Academic Factors variable showed a mean of 22.98 and a standard deviation of 3.62, indicating substantial variation in perceptions of academic challenges, with scores ranging from 10 to 34. Motivation demonstrated relatively consistent responses, with a mean score of 22.20 and a standard deviation of 3.10, suggesting generally high motivation among students (scores between 16 and 34). Lastly, Socio-demographic Factors recorded a mean of 18.42 and a standard deviation of 4.85, pointing to a moderate range of opinions, with responses from 8 to 32. Overall, while Social Integration and Motivation exhibited strong consensus, variables like Dropout Intention and Financial Issues reflected greater variability, highlighting the diverse challenges faced by first-year students.

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression is a statistical method that examines the relationship between a dependent variable and two or more independent variables. It helps identify how well a set of variables can predict an outcome and assesses the contribution of each variable in the model. Multiple regression gives an overview of the overall effectiveness of the model and the unique contribution of each predictor. The standard regression models that one might mention include standard or simultaneous, hierarchical, and stepwise regression-all differing in the ways that the variables are entered and analyzed. This is a widely used method in research for the assessment of several factors on a particular outcome.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.973 ^a	.947	.946	4.32895

a. Predictors: (Constant), com_SF1, com_SII, com_M1, com_AF1, com_FI1

b. Dependent Variable: com_ALL

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	84564.601	5	16912.920	902.515	<.001 ^b
Residual	4759.903	254	18.740		
Total	89324.504	259			

a. Dependent Variable: com_ALL

b. Predictors: (Constant), com_SF1, com_SII, com_M1, com_AF1, com_FI1

Table 4.6 shows all the independent variables (com_SI1, com_FI1, com_AF1, com_M1, and com_SF1) together explain 94.7% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.947$) in the dropout intention among first-year students in UiTM Kedah. This is highly significant, and the model is fit as the F-statistic is 902.515 ($F > 1$) with a p-value of < 0.001 . Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the regression model is significant. This indicates a relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Table 5: Summary of Coefficients for Multiple Regression Model

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-3.087	2.827		-1.092	.276
com_SI1	.988	.090	.163	10.933	<.001
com_FI1	1.276	.062	.386	20.640	<.001
¹ com_AF1	1.176	.091	.229	12.873	<.001
com_M1	1.394	.099	.232	14.079	<.001
com_SF1	1.291	.074	.337	17.427	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: com_ALL

To determine which predictors (independent variables) contributed significantly to predicting the dependent variable, we examined the standardized coefficients (Beta) under the Standardized Coefficients column. These values allow comparisons between variables, as they are converted to the same scale.

Based on the table 4.8 the largest Beta coefficient is 0.386 for com_FI1 ($p < 0.001$). This shows that com_FI1 makes the strongest unique contribution to explaining the dependent variable when controlling for all other variables in the model. This is followed by com_SF1 ($B = 0.337$, $p < 0.001$), com_M1 ($B = 0.232$, $p < 0.001$), com_AF1 ($B = 0.229$, $p < 0.001$), and com_SI1 ($B = 0.163$, $p < 0.001$). All independent variables make a statistically significant and unique contribution to predicting the dependent variable since their p-values are less than 0.05.

Table 6: Hypothesis Results

HYPOTHESIS	RESULTS
There is a relationship between social integration and dropout intention among first-year students.	Supported
There is a relationship between financial issues and dropout intention among first-year students.	Supported
There is a relationship between academic factors and dropout intention among first-year students.	Supported
There is a relationship between motivation and dropout intention among first-year students.	Supported
There is a relationship between socio-demographic factors and dropout intention among first-year students.	Supported

Table 6 presents the summary of hypothesis testing outcomes for the study. All five proposed hypotheses were supported, indicating statistically significant relationships between each of the independent variables and the dependent variable, dropout intention among first-year students at UiTM Kedah. Specifically, the findings confirm that social integration, financial issues, academic factors, motivation, and socio-demographic characteristics all have significant associations with students' intentions to leave university. The consistent support across all hypotheses reinforces the robustness of the study's conceptual framework and highlights the multidimensional nature of dropout intention. These results suggest that interventions aimed at improving social engagement, reducing financial burden, enhancing academic support, boosting motivation, and understanding student backgrounds may collectively contribute to reducing early attrition rates.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study in relation to the five research objectives and hypotheses developed to investigate the factors influencing dropout intentions among first-year students at UiTM Kedah. Each variable social integration, financial issues, academic factors, motivation, and socio-demographic characteristics was examined through statistical analysis to determine its significance in predicting students' likelihood to drop out. The discussion interprets the strength and direction of these relationships, comparing them with previous studies to identify similarities, contradictions, and new insights. By doing so, the study aims to deepen the understanding of how these factors operate in the local context and provide implications for student retention strategies. The results are presented and discussed sequentially according to each research objective and hypothesis.

RO1: To investigate the effect of social integration on dropout intention among first-year students at UiTM Kedah

For RO1, social integration ($B = 0.988$, $\text{Beta} = 0.163$, $t = 10.933$, $p < .001$) was found to have a statistically significant yet relatively moderate effect on dropout intention, indicating that students who experience challenges in integrating socially are more likely to consider leaving their studies. Although this finding affirms a relationship, the small effect size suggests that social integration alone plays a limited role compared to other factors. This outcome is

noteworthy, as social integration is typically regarded as a protective factor against attrition. However, the result suggests that the quality and context of social interactions may shape this dynamic. Peer influence, for example, might lead students to explore alternative opportunities or shift priorities an observation consistent with Franz and Paetsch (2023). Furthermore, Nemtcan et al. (2020) argue that the benefits of social integration are most pronounced when coupled with strong academic self-efficacy. Olmedo-Cifuentes and Martínez-León (2022) also emphasized how institutional social support may at times conflict with academic priorities. These findings collectively suggest that while social connections matter, they must be aligned with academic engagement to support retention among first-year students.

RO2: To investigate the effect of financial issues on dropout intention among first-year students at UiTM Kedah

In relation to RO2, financial issues emerged as the strongest predictor ($B = 1.276$, $\text{Beta} = 0.386$, $t = 20.640$, $p < .001$), emphasizing that students struggling financially are at the highest risk of dropping out. This result aligns with the findings of Lorenzo-Quiles et al. (2023), who highlighted how costs related to tuition, study materials, and transportation can critically impact student retention. Similarly, De La Cruz-Campos et al. (2023) emphasized that students from financially unstable households are especially vulnerable to dropout risks during periods of economic hardship. Financial strain not only induces stress and frustration but also forces many students to juggle part-time employment, compromising their academic focus and well-being. The lack of adequate financial support mechanisms such as scholarships, grants, or emergency funding further exacerbates this issue. Given these insights, it is clear that universities must prioritize financial aid policies, establish robust support systems, and introduce financial literacy programs to help students manage their educational expenses and reduce dropout risks.

RO3: To investigate the effect of academic factors on dropout intention among first-year students at UiTM Kedah

RO3, which focused on academic factors, also showed a significant relationship ($B = 1.176$, $\text{Beta} = 0.229$, $t = 12.873$, $p < .001$), suggesting that academic difficulties moderately contribute to dropout intentions indicating that students who face academic challenges such as difficulty adjusting to university-level coursework, poor time management, and inadequate study strategies are more likely to consider withdrawing. This finding aligns with prior research by Franz and Paetsch (2023) and Nemtcan et al. (2020), who found that weak academic skills contribute significantly to dropout risks, especially during the first year of study. Academic stress is often compounded by a lack of institutional support, including limited access to academic counseling, resources, and mentoring. These gaps can create a cycle of poor performance, low motivation, and disengagement. Therefore, addressing academic-related challenges through early interventions, study skill workshops, and personalized academic support is essential to enhance student performance and foster long-term retention.

RO4: To investigate the effect of motivation on dropout intention among first-year students at UiTM Kedah

For RO4, motivation ($B = 1.394$, $\text{Beta} = 0.232$, $t = 14.079$, $p < .001$) was shown to be a significant factor, where lower levels of student motivation were associated with an increased likelihood of considering dropout. Students with low levels of intrinsic motivation—characterized by unclear academic goals and a lack of personal interest—were more likely to report dropout intentions. This is consistent with findings by Mujica et al. (2019) and Tayebi

et al. (2021), who noted that intrinsic motivation is a key driver of persistence and resilience. Students driven solely by extrinsic factors such as societal expectations or external rewards were more prone to disengagement and stress. Conversely, those with strong internal motivation exhibited greater commitment to academic goals. These results underline the importance of fostering both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation through institutional initiatives, such as personalized academic counseling, goal-setting workshops, and mentorship programs. Behr et al. (2021) also advocate for structured mentorship as a way to enhance motivation and academic clarity, which in turn supports student retention.

RO5: To investigate the effect of socio-demographic factors on dropout intention among first-year students at UiTM Kedah

For RO5, socio-demographic factors ($B = 1.291$, $\text{Beta} = 0.337$, $t = 17.427$, $p < .001$) were found to have a significant and substantial positive influence on dropout intention among first-year students at UiTM Kedah. Factors such as age, gender, parental education, household income, and geographic background play critical roles in shaping students' university experiences. Students from low-income families often face financial hardship and limited access to academic resources, while those with family responsibilities or from remote regions may struggle to balance academic and personal demands. Sauve et al. (2022) and Núñez Hernández and Buele (2023) highlight how these intersecting challenges can compound dropout risks. The findings suggest that institutions must adopt targeted strategies to address these disparities, such as need-based financial aid, inclusive academic advising, and mentorship programs tailored to underrepresented or disadvantaged students. As Mostert et al. (2023) and Casanova et al. (2023) argue, inclusive policies and equitable resource allocation are essential to promoting persistence and success across diverse student populations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined the key factors influencing dropout intentions among first-year students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kedah, focusing on five variables: social integration, financial issues, academic factors, motivation, and socio-demographic characteristics. The findings revealed statistically significant relationships between all five variables and students' intention to drop out, with financial issues and socio-demographic factors showing the strongest correlations. These results highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of student attrition, particularly during the transition into higher education.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to existing literature by reinforcing and extending Tinto's Student Integration Model (1975) and integrating elements from Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) and Achievement Emotions Theory (Pekrun, 2006). It supports the notion that student retention is influenced not only by academic integration but also by psychological motivation and socio-environmental factors. By incorporating socio-demographic variables and motivation into the model, the study offers a more comprehensive framework that is contextually relevant to Malaysian higher education, particularly for first-year students in public institutions like UiTM.

On a practical level, the findings provide actionable insights for university administrators, policymakers, and educators. Institutions should enhance student retention efforts by implementing targeted financial aid programs, academic support services, and motivation-building interventions such as goal-setting workshops and mentorship programs. The combination of traditional mentorship with digital tools—like virtual counseling, online peer

support networks, and academic monitoring platforms—can create a more responsive and flexible support system tailored to diverse student needs. These strategies, when deployed early, especially in the first year, can help mitigate dropout risks and improve long-term academic success.

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. First, the use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality over time, as data was collected at a single point rather than longitudinally. Second, the purposive sampling method, while effective in targeting first-year students, may introduce bias and limit the generalizability of the findings beyond the UiTM Kedah context. Third, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be affected by social desirability bias or misinterpretation of survey items. Future research should consider adopting longitudinal designs, expanding to multiple institutions, and incorporating qualitative methods to gain deeper insights into student experiences and dropout trajectories.

In summary, the study emphasizes the need for a multidimensional approach to reducing dropout intentions among first-year students. By addressing financial, academic, motivational, and demographic challenges—through both theoretical understanding and practical intervention—universities can better support students in their educational journey. Future research should continue exploring these variables and the evolving role of digital support systems to further strengthen student success in Malaysian higher education.

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