

**Attributed Reasons and Suggested Remedies for Academic Failure: An Initial  
Exploration among Young Adults in Malappuram District**

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# **Attributed Reasons and Suggested Remedies for Academic Failure: An Initial Exploration among Young Adults in Malappuram District**

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## **Abstract**

Higher education equips people to inculcate the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in today's world. In India, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 focuses on key reforms in higher education that make ready the next generation to flourish and succeed in the new digital age. So the higher education system should ensure the quality meets the same. In this regard, the system needs to instil in students the hope for their success. Despite this, some students are lacking it because of the prevailing educational practices. The pass percentage of undergraduate students is not so high. This means that higher education is lacking something. The present paper reports on a qualitative exploration study using sequential semi-structured interviews on the perceptions and attributions of academically failed undergraduate students from the Malappuram District of Kerala (N=10). Reasons for their academic failure attributed to the Teacher, Curricular, Transactional, Learner and Institutional related practices in their undergraduate programme were identified and suggestions there for improvement of higher education practices were derived. The recommendations by the young learners can be implemented to make the higher education system more learner-friendly and the findings here will help to enhance the curricular reforms and improve the excellence of higher education.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Undergraduate, Pass-Fail, student-failure, Attributions

## Context of the study

*“Hope is the companion of power, the mother of success” -Samuel Smiles*

Higher education plays a vital role in the development of our country as well as the world. It equips people to inculcate the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in today's world and also assists the people in the workforce. It supports both directly and indirectly the wealth of our nation. Therefore, the country's future depends on a massive expansion of education particularly at the higher education level. With this realization, NEP 2020 focuses on key reforms in higher education that make ready the next generation to flourish and succeed in the new digital age. It also aims to increase the gross enrollment ratio (GER) in Higher Education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035.

With the higher education system across the globe, and more so in countries like India with a growing young population, the highest policy priority is to enhance GER. Students are enrolled in a diverse category of higher education institutions, but mostly in different colleges such as Government, Aided, and Unaided. Because of many systemic and random reasons, students may fail at the graduation level itself. For example, if the case of Calicut University, the largest higher education institution in Kerala both by student size and geographic jurisdiction is considered, for the year 2022, the pass percentage of students in the arts stream is 82.67% and 80.89 % in the science stream. Hence, this study attempts to an initial exploration of attributed reasons and suggested remedies for academic failure among young adults in the Malappuram district of Kerala.

Surely, labelling students by pass-fail category is obsolete, especially in an education system that encourages inclusive norms, and practices. It is also true that failing to pass an academic programme cannot be considered the final nail in anybody's life prospects. However, when an individual does not successfully carry out the task, whether in academics or any other socially desired field of endeavour, the adjective still often used is failed. Academic failure to pass the study programmes is painful and costly for students, teachers and higher education institutions.

Recent studies show several factors contribute to student failure to pass undergraduate programmes. They include personal factors such as self-confidence, study habits and attitudes; life circumstances such as health, employment and family responsibilities; and institutional factors such as policies, procedures and the curriculum. Failing a subject is not just the students' fault. Despite being common, academic failure to pass undergraduate programmes is rarely discussed in

universities and it's often attributed to students' laziness and not caring enough. We didn't notice or hear about the students who failed the higher-level exams. So this study raises the question 'Why did you fail? And Who could have helped you to escape the failure and how?' to a few young adults who have failed to pass their undergraduate programme, purposefully sampled as per convenience and representing arts, science and technical streams. The answers are summarized to see the implications for qualitative improvement of curricular and institutional practices in higher education.

## **Rationale for the Study**

In the broadest sense, failure is the gap between an expected or desired result and what one ultimately experiences (Cannon & Edmondson, 2005). More exclusively, failure is the lack of ability to meet the needs of an achievement context and not achieve a specific goal. As the primary stakeholders and benefactors of higher education, students have the say to suggest some recommendations for improving the current practices in the field. If the prevailing educational practices were capable of igniting students' hopes and revamping their potential, it would have been a greater advantage for them to reach their ambitions and taste success.

Hope is an emotion that guides individuals to attain their target. It also provides a sense of motivation so they can work towards it. It is not only the aspiration for something good but a firm determination to achieve better even if we have to overcome many challenges along the way. The student's engagement and hope are the best indicators of future success (Calderon and Jones, 2018). The students who enthusiastically involve in academic activities and efforts are more hopeful for the future and have better academic performance than their disengaged peers. Therefore imbining hope in students is very important. The education system can play a vital role to instill hope in students. So if the higher education system is capable of doing the same it will be a great contribution to the individuals and the nation also. So this study probed the perceptions and attributions of failed undergraduate students regarding the Teacher, Curricular, Transactional, Learner and Institutional related practices in their undergraduate programmes and derived suggestions therefrom for improvement of higher education practices. The findings here will help to enhance the curricular reforms and improve the quality of higher education.

## **The objective of this Study**

To explore the perceptions and attributions of academically failed undergraduate students regarding the Teacher, Curricular, Transactional, Learner and Institutional practices in their undergraduate programmes and to derive suggestions therefrom for improvement of higher education practices.

## **Methodology**

The study used a qualitative exploratory design with an inductive approach and aims to provide insight into relevant learner and institutional factors that leads to academic failure among undergraduate students based on student's own perception which in turn will turn initial steps for developing a conceptual framework of factors related to academic success-failure among late adolescents and young adults in institutional and socio-political contexts where the focus is on higher enrollment than own student-learning and success. The sample is 10 undergraduate students who have failed in their graduate programme in one or more courses by using a purposive sampling technique. The students belonged to 5 higher education institutions in the Malappuram district and were affiliated with more than one university, as they belong to technical, arts and science streams. The telephonic interview was conducted using a semi-structured technique. They were enquired about their perceived reasons for failure to pass the undergraduate programme and were further followed up for the suggestions they recommended to avoid academic failure caused by the reasons they perceived. The sequential interviews after a lapse of 1-2 days, to further probe the perceived causes and the possible solution, therefore, helped elicit more information than one-time single interview methods.

## **Results**

By analyzing the interview reports, perceptions of the cause of failure were identified first. Thereafter, the suggestions for improvement were identified under five major areas namely, Learner related, Curriculum, Transaction, Institution and Teacher related.

## **The perceived reasons for academic failure among undergraduate students**

The reasons for academic failure among undergraduate students, as expected, are varied and complex. The perceived reasons for failure among undergraduate students in the area namely Learner related, Curriculum, Transaction, Institution and Teacher related are as follows.

- Perceived Learner related reasons for failure among undergraduates

The failed graduate students attributed their failure to pass undergraduate programmes to their reasons like lack of previous knowledge. Lack of previous knowledge causes them difficulty in developing more advanced concepts. They also shared their worries like lack of career awareness, future job opportunities and hence low motivation to complete the programme. During the programme, such students fail to realize the consequences of failure in their studies and hence class bunking was a routine for them.

- Perceived Curriculum related reasons for failure among undergraduates

Some curricular-related factors also were the reasons for students' failure in their undergraduate programme. All the students interviewed observed that the syllabus was outdated and that their syllabi fails to motivate them to study. They shared that the content difficulty is also a problem for them.

- Perceived Transaction related reasons for failure among undergraduates

The students gave their explanations about the curriculum transactional approaches for why they failed to succeed in their undergraduate programme. These include poorly scheduled classes and their timing. Many of their portions are completed in a limited time making it difficult to understand the concepts well. They observed that visual media is not used in the teaching-learning process. During the process, the teachers treated all the students equally such that the classes were uninteresting and uninspiring impeding their motivation to attend the classes further.

- Perceived Institution related reasons for failure among undergraduates

The students felt that their failure to pass undergraduate programmes was connected to several institution-related problems also. Lack of proper mentoring and lack of strict rules and regulations are the major oversights of the higher education institution they were attending.

- Perceived Teacher related reasons for failure among undergraduates

The students felt that their teachers too contributed to their failure to pass their undergraduate programme causing issues in respect of many factors. Teachers, these students felt, were not equipped to meet their doubts and they were weak in using technology in teaching-learning. Many teachers were committed to the teaching process only to get an experience from them. There was no proper mentoring or individual attention. Teachers, according to the academically failed students, did not give an orientation on required attendance levels for successful completion of their respective courses, leading students to bunk their classes.

Students who failed to pass undergraduate programmes attribute many reasons for their failure to pass and recommend some suggestions for improvement as summarized in Figure 1. The students felt that all these attributed reasons can be minimized by the remedies suggested by them. It includes a lot of recommendations to teachers, curriculum, transactions and institutions. The suggestions therefrom to improve the higher education practices. The findings here will help to enhance the curricular reforms and improve the quality of higher education.

### **The student suggested remedies for failure among undergraduate students**

The student-suggested remedies for preventing the reasons for their failure to learn, curriculum content, curricular transaction, and institutional and teacher sources among undergraduates are as follows.

- Suggested remedies for academic failure sourcing from learner factors among undergraduates

By having the college offer any bridge courses that encourage students to lessen the content's challenges. They can ensure the quality of teaching. Students are more motivated to complete the course within the allotted time due to the introduction of the campus placement cell for educating them about future chances. Proper mentoring also can be done as part of the institution.

- Suggested curriculum-related remedies for academic failure among undergraduates

The students recommended changing the curriculum and making sure the syllabus is skill-oriented.

- Suggested transaction-related remedies for failure among undergraduates

The use of visual aids and rigidly planned sessions increases the learner's motivation to pay attention in class. Relational pedagogy is also an important factor in the transaction process which means a deliberate interaction between caring teachers and students to create and maintain healthy relationships that promote their students' cognitive and emotional development throughout their journeys.

- Suggested institution-related remedies for academic failure among undergraduates

The institution has the authority to enact effective attendance policies and regular parent meetings.

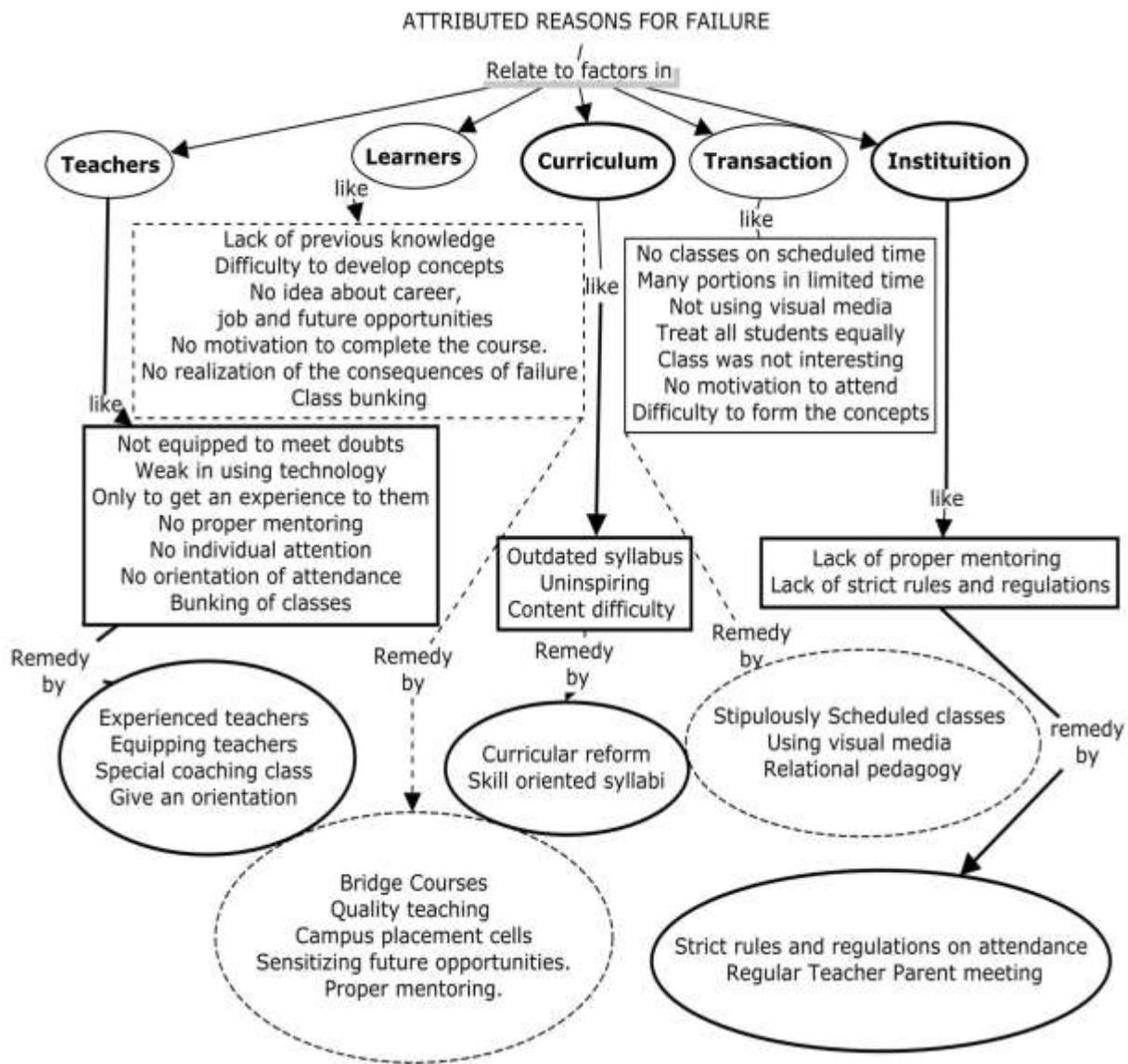
- Suggested teacher-related remedies for academic failure among undergraduates

The teachers must have the repertoire to expertly instruct the students on their subject matter. There should be some programmes for equipping the teachers with the tools they need to effectively employ visual aids in their lessons. They can set up special coaching sessions to provide people who require it with individual attention. An introduction to attendance might be provided by the teachers.

Figure 1 attempts a summary of the perceived problems of undergraduate students for their academic failure and suggestions for improvement.



**Figure 1.** The Summary of Students' Perceived Reasons for Undergraduate Academic Failure and Their Suggested Remedies.



## Conclusion

The students are deeply distressed in many instances. Helping students to mobilize their resilience strategies through seeking social and academic support. Teachers, Curriculum, Transaction and Institution can help the students to unpack the factors that impact their performance and make interventions to improve their study habits, navigate the system, develop social networks and adapt their career pathways. Only through proper mentoring from the teachers,

curricular reformation, effective transaction, enhancement of the learner-related factors and great backup from the institution can they retain their hope for their future. However, it is to be borne in mind that the findings from exploratory studies are not generally useful for decision-making by themselves. However, the observed reasons and suggested remedies identified from among academically failed young adults who had undergone undergraduate programmes provide significant insights into the barriers in curricular practices, student-teacher relationships, and institutional and organizational factors to effective and quality higher education, especially in comparable socio-educational contexts. This was a very preliminary effort to throw light upon as to the "why", and "how" of academic failure among undergraduates in the context of enhancing HER despite stagnating investments in higher education.

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