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A STUDY ON THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DECLINING INTEREST IN HIGHER EDUCATION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

The development of people's knowledge, abilities, and professional prospects is greatly aided by higher education. Instead of going to college, a growing number of young adults are choosing to work, start their own businesses, and receive skill-based training. This study looks at the sociocultural, psychological, and economic aspects of young adults' waning interest in higher education. A structured questionnaire and convenience sampling were used to gather primary data from 105 respondents. Chi-square tests, mean, standard deviation, and frequency analysis were used to examine the data. The results show that young adults' educational choices are heavily influenced by academic stress, financial limitations, a preference for practical skills and work experience, few job opportunities after graduation, and the need for immediate income. The study also emphasizes how important family is in influencing decisions about higher education.

Keywords: Higher Education, Young Adults, Declining Interest, Psychological Factors, Economic Factors, Socio-Cultural Factors, Career Choice, Employability.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education contributes to social and economic advancement while improving knowledge, skills, employability, and career opportunities, all of which are vital to an individual's overall development. However, there has been a noticeable decline in the interest of young adults in pursuing higher education, with many choosing immediate employment, entrepreneurship, or skill-based alternatives instead. This change is impacted by a number of factors, including socio-cultural influences like family support, social expectations, and cultural beliefs; psychological aspects like academic stress and lack of motivation; and

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economic challenges like growing educational costs and financial constraints. Addressing the falling enrollment in higher education requires an understanding of these factors. Higher Policymakers and educational institutions are expected to gain valuable insights from the findings, which will help them develop strategies for promoting greater participation in higher education, such as affordable education, career guidance, industry-oriented curricula, and financial support.

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By shedding light on the issues influencing decisions about higher education, the study's conclusions should be helpful to educational institutions, legislators, researchers, parents, and students. Additionally, the study makes suggestions for boosting industry-relevant curricula, expanding internship and placement opportunities, strengthening career counseling, increasing financial support, and raising the overall value of higher education. Educational institutions can better prepare young adults for future career opportunities and lifelong learning by addressing these issues and promoting increased participation in higher education.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gallup and the Lumina Foundation reports (2025) show that even though many young adults believe higher education is important for a better future, several challenges stop them from enrolling or continuing their studies. High tuition fees, expensive living costs, and other college-related expenses make education feel unaffordable, especially for students from low- and middle-income families. This financial pressure causes constant stress about loans, repayments, and whether a degree will actually lead to a stable job. Along with money worries, emotional stress and mental health issues such as anxiety and burnout make it harder for students to stay motivated and complete their education.

Athina G. Mitsopoulou et al (2024) examined prognostic factors influencing secondary school students' inclination toward higher education using social cognitive career theory.

Outcomes strongly supported the theory, highlighting family background including parents' education levels, students' perceptions of family finances, and financial support—as key shapers of intent, with secure parent-child attachment fostering positive interest while low-income backgrounds led to hesitancy. Positive relationships emerged between outcome expectations, social support, and interest development, whereas gender, age, and siblings in higher education showed minimal influence

José Carlos Véliz Palomino and Ana Maria Ortega (2023) examined dropout intentions in higher education. Their study revealed that academic dissatisfaction, psychological stress, financial insecurity, and lack of career clarity significantly influenced students' decisions to

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discontinue higher studies. The authors stressed the importance of counseling and career guidance programs.

Yueshan Zhong (2022) examined intrinsic motivation, grit, and growth mindset among students. The study found that low intrinsic motivation and lack of academic confidence negatively affected educational achievement and long-term educational interest. Students with weak motivational characteristics were more likely to disengage from higher educational goals.

Thanh-Thuy Nguyen, and Sachithra Lokuge (2021) studied Generation Z learning characteristics in higher education. The researchers found that modern students prefer flexible, technology-based, and interactive learning methods. Traditional teaching approaches reduced student engagement and contributed to declining interest in higher education among young adults.

Lakmal Meegahapola and Daniel Gatica-Perez (2020) reviewed smartphone usage and the well-being of young adults. The study identified that excessive smartphone dependence and digital distractions negatively influenced concentration, academic performance, and interest in formal higher education. Mental stress and reduced attention span were also linked with declining educational involvement.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Higher education has changed dramatically in recent years, and young adults' interest in it has noticeably decreased. Their decisions to pursue higher education are thot to be greatly influenced by a number of factors, including cultural influences, economic limitations, and psychological attitudes. However, little is known about how these elements work together to influence the waning desire for higher education. The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors influencing young adults' declining interest in higher education. It focuses on examining the cultural barriers that prevent them from pursuing higher education, analyzing the psychological elements influencing their motivation and attitude toward education, and comprehending the connection between their decision-making process and economic circumstances. The study aims to shed light on the fundamental causes of this trend and contribute to its understanding through this analysis.

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RESEARCH GAP

According to literature review, a more thorough understanding of the causes of young adults' waning interest in higher education is required, as the literature review indicates that prior research has examined a variety of factors influencing higher education. Research that is currently available frequently looks at specific elements like financial challenges, psychological issues, or cultural barriers in isolation, with little attention paid to how these elements work together to affect young adults' decisions to continue or drop out of college. In order to close this gap, this study looks at the cultural, psychological, and economic aspects of young adults' waning interest in higher education.

OBJECTIVES

- To Analyze Psychological Factors Influencing Higher Education among Young Adults.
- To study the relationship between economic factors and the decision-making of young adults.
- To examine the cultural barriers that hinders young adults in higher education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive research design to investigate the variables affecting young adults' waning interest in higher education. Over the course of six months, 105 respondents who were chosen using the convenience sampling method provided primary data via a structured questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed using frequency analysis to summarize the responses, mean and standard deviation to measure the average and variability of the data, and the Chi-square test to examine the association between variables. Because convenience sampling was used, the study's results might not be representative of the whole population. Due to time constraints, the sample size was limited to 105 responders. The accuracy of the results depends on the honesty and understanding of the respondents while answering the questionnaire. As a result, the results are limited to the information gathered throughout the study period.

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CONCEPTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Higher Education and Its Concept Higher education is defined as post-secondary education provided by universities, colleges, and other accredited institutions. It seeks to give people advanced knowledge, specialized skills, and professional competencies that improve their employability and set them up for career success. Higher education fosters critical thinking, creativity, innovation, communication skills, ethical values, and lifelong learning in addition to academic knowledge, which helps people adjust to the shifting needs of society and the global economy.

By generating a skilled labor force, fostering innovation and research, assisting entrepreneurship, and advancing social mobility, higher education also significantly contributes to national development. By building human capital and equipping people to handle technological, social, and environmental challenges, it promotes economic growth. In order to enhance students' career readiness and satisfy changing labor market demands, educational institutions are placing an increasing emphasis on hands-on learning, industry collaboration, internships, and skill-based education.

Young adults' interest in higher education has decreased recently, despite its significance. Students' educational choices have been impacted by rising educational costs, financial limitations, academic stress, graduate unemployment, career uncertainty, and the availability of alternative learning pathways like online certifications, entrepreneurship, and vocational education. Additionally, their decision to pursue higher education is heavily influenced by sociocultural, psychological, and economic factors. Therefore, it is crucial for educational institutions and policymakers to comprehend the factors causing the decline in interest in higher education. Determining these obstacles can aid in the creation of accessible, affordable, and industry-focused educational policies and initiatives that support increased enrollment in higher education while satisfying the evolving needs of young adults.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

FREQUENCY ANALYSIS ON DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Table: Frequency Table Representing Demographic Data

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FEATURES	FACTORS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
AGE	17-19	46	43.8
	20-22	42	40
	23-25	9	8.6
	26-30	8	7.6
GENDER	Male	83	79
	Female	22	21
EDUCATION	Higher Education	20	19
	Diploma	1	1
	Undergraduate	82	78.1
	Postgraduate	2	1.9
MARITAL STATUS	Single	97	92.4
	Married	8	7.6
MONTHLY INCOME	Below 20000	38	36.2
	20000 to 50000	25	23.8
	50000 to 100000	28	26.7
	Above 100000	14	13.3

INFERENCE:

According to the demographic profile, most respondents were between the ages of 17 and 22, and the largest percentage of respondents were men (79%). The majority of responders (78.1%) were undergraduates, and 92.4% were single. The largest percentage of respondents (36.2%) fell into the income category below ₹20,000 per month. In general, young, single undergraduate students from lower- to middle-class homes make up the majority of the study's participants.

FEATURES	FACTORS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
ALTERNATIVE CAREER PATHS	Entrepreneurship	63	60
	vocational jobs	25	23.8

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	IT through self-learning	17	16.2
ALTERNATIVES TO HIGHER EDUCATION	Desire for immediate income	29	27.6
	Interest in entrepreneurship	31	29.5
	skill-based training	34	32.4
	Belief in self-learning through online platforms	11	10.5
INFLUENCES ON HIGHER EDUCATION	Parents or close family members	48	45.7
	Community leaders or elders	12	11.4
	Successful entrepreneurs without degrees	18	17.1
	Professional with higher education degrees	27	25.7
PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES DUE TO ECONOMIC REASONS	Taking up a job immediately	61	58.1
	Vocation/technical training	23	21.9
	Online courses	21	20

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AFTER HIGHER EDUCATION	Low starting salaries	29	27.6
	Too much competition	34	32.4
	Few opportunities in chosen field	31	29.5

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	Uncertainty of stable employment	11	10.5
FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO RECONSIDER HIGHER EDUCATION	Full scholarships	23	21.9
	Affordable students loans	23	21.9
	Government subsidies for tuition	23	21.9
	Paid internships during study	36	34.3
REASONS FOR STARTING TO EARN EARLY	To support family	40	38.1
	To gain independence	31	29.5
	To avoid student debt	13	12.4
	To build career experience	21	20
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INFLUENCES ON	Strong encouragement to start working instead of continuing studies	40	38.1
	Expectations to marry at an early age	22	21.0

HIGHER EDUCATION DECISIONS			
	Continue the family business	15	14.3
	Limited importance given to higher education compared to other responsibilities	28	26.7
SUGGESTED CHANGES TO ATTRACT MORE	Offer more practical skill-based courses	37	35.2

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YOUNG ADULTS	Reduce tution fees and other costs	28	26.7
	Provide strong job placement support	28	26.7
	Introduce flexible schedules and online options	12	11.4

INFERENCE:

It is inferred that entrepreneurship (60%) is the most preferred alternative career path, while skill-based training (32.4%) is the leading alternative to higher education. Parents or close family members (45.7%) have the greatest influence on higher education decisions. Economic reasons also play a major role, with 58.1% preferring to take up a job immediately. The main concern after higher education is high competition (32.4%), while paid internships (34.3%) are the most preferred financial support. Supporting the family (38.1%) is the major reason for earning early. Overall, respondents prefer practical, skill-based, affordable, and employment-oriented education with better career opportunities.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

FEATURES	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING INTEREST IN HIGHER EDUCATION	Work experience is more valuable than academic qualifications.	4.26	0.809	I
	Online courses offer better value than traditional degrees.	3.67	1.016	III
	Academic stress reduces my interest in continuing my education.	3.71	1.007	II
ECONOMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING DECISIONS ON HIGHER EDUCATION	High tuition fees make higher education unaffordable.	3.95	0.0859	I
	Poor graduate job prospects reduce my interest in higher education.	3.92	0.927	II
	Family financial pressures discourage higher education.	3.71	0.958	III

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	I need to start earning instead of pursuing higher education.	3.84	9.952	IV
	I cannot afford full-time student living costs.	3.87	1.048	V

INFERENCE

The findings show that work experience being more valuable than academic qualifications has the highest psychological influence, with a mean score of 4.26. This is followed by academic stress reducing interest in education (3.71) and the perceived value of online courses (3.67). Among economic factors, high tuition fees have the greatest influence (3.95), followed by poor job prospects (3.92) and the need to start earning (3.84). Overall, the results indicate that both practical career value and financial difficulties strongly influence young adults' decisions about higher education.

INFERENTIAL ANALYSIS CHI SQUARE TEST

	Factors	**Lack of interest in academics**	**Preference for practical skills over theory**	**Stress and pressure of studies**	**Parents/ Relatives / Friends**	**Total**	**Chi-square**	**P-Value**
AGE	17-19	8	22	11	5	46	12.852	0.169
	20-22	14	13	11	4	42		
	23-25	1	6	1	1	9		
	26-30	2	1	2	3	8		
GENDER	Male	20	34	18	11	83	1.099	0.777
	Female	5	8	7	2	22		
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	Higher Education	7	8	3	2	20	12.258	0.199
	Diploma	0	0	1	0	1		
	Undergraduate	16	34	21	11	82		
	Postgraduate	2	0	0	0	2		
MARITAL STATUS	Single	25	40	22	10	97	7.644	0.054
	Married	0	2	3	3	8		

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MONTHLY	Below 20000	9	18	7	4	38	12.258	0.199
INCOME	20000 to 50000	5	9	7	4	25		
	50000 to 100000	6	11	8	3	28		
	Above 100000	5	4	3	2	14		

FINDINGS

- The majority of the respondents were young adults, female, postgraduate students who primarily used Instagram and followed influencers for entertainment.
- Respondents demonstrated a good level of awareness in identifying misleading influencer promotions and were cautious while evaluating influencer-endorsed products.
- Educational qualification showed a significant relationship with feeling misled by influencer promotional content, whereas time spent on social media, preferred platform, and reason for following influencers showed no significant relationship.
- Reliability of the influencer was ranked as the most important factor influencing consumer trust in influencer promotions.

SUGGESTIONS

- Higher education institutions should focus on offering more practical and skill-based courses so that students can better connect their education with future career opportunities.
- The Government and educational institutions should provide more scholarships, affordable education loans, fee concessions, and paid internship opportunities to make higher education more accessible to students from different financial backgrounds .

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- Schools and colleges should organize regular career guidance and counselling programmes to help students understand the benefits of higher education and make informed career choices.
- Policymakers should take steps to reduce financial and social barriers so that every student has an equal opportunity to pursue higher education.
- Educational institutions should maintain strong connections with employers to improve job placement opportunities, increasing students' confidence in the career benefits of higher education.

CONCLUSION

The study comes to the conclusion that young adults' decisions to pursue higher education are heavily influenced by personal interests, career opportunities, family influence, and financial challenges. Due to the high cost of education and the desire for financial independence, many students favor employment, entrepreneurship, or vocational training. Interest in further education is also diminished by worries about a lack of employment prospects following graduation.

According to the findings, more students may choose to pursue higher education if they have access to affordable education, financial aid, paid internships, industry-focused courses, and improved placement assistance. In general, increasing the practicality, accessibility, and career focus of higher education will boost its worth and encourage more young adults to pursue higher education.