

A survey of students to identify measures against dropouts from a health profession college

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Abstract

As the population of 18-year-olds declines year by year, higher education institutions such as colleges and universities have taken various measures to reduce the number of dropouts. In the present study, we surveyed the dropout rates at a health profession college and the perception of current students toward dropping out of school. The results of the survey revealed that the number of students who were considering dropping out of college gradually increased after entering school. Although this number decreased in the second year, it increased again after the mandatory practicum period started. Our results also demonstrated that the students considered interpersonal relationships with friends, who were the most common source of advice, as being important. To address these challenges, we reviewed the measures taken by various health professions colleges to prevent students from dropping out of school. Tottori J. Clin. Res. 14(1, 2), 1-7, 2025

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1. Problem statement and aim of the study

In 2023, the percentage of students entering higher education institutions, including students in universities, junior colleges, vocational colleges, and in the 4th year of specialized vocational high schools, reached a record high of 84.0%, and the number of students entering universities is increasing every year¹⁾. However, the number of high school graduates continues to decline. With the number of universities reaching a record high of 810 by 2023¹⁾, competition for these schools to gain students is expected to become even more intense. In addition, with the introduction of various entrance examination systems, universities are concerned about whether they will be able to maintain a consistent level of academic achievement among their incoming students. In addition to this, there is a concern about the increasing number of students who drop out of school.

According to the survey conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), 57,875 students dropped out of universities in FY2021, representing 1.95% of the total number of students. The most common reasons for dropping out was transfer to another school (16.3%), followed by maladjustment to student life/lack of motivation to study (15.7%), employment/entrepreneurship (17.0%), and financial reasons (13.5%)²⁾. However, even when referring to transfer, there are multiple possible causes such as incompatibility with the chosen academic discipline or insufficient motivation.

The overall dropout rate for all universities is 7.1%. Among these, the dropout rate for private universities in health sciences is above average at 8.0%³⁾. This may be attributed to the fact that, even though students in health sciences typically have clear goals of obtaining specific qualifications, they are required to take national examinations and more mandatory courses than in other undergraduate programs. In addition, according to the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare's Study Group on Curriculum Improvement for Physical Therapist and Occupational Therapist Training Institutions (2017), the dropout rates at institutions training physical therapists and occupational therapists (including universities and vocational schools) were high at 17.3% and 17.5%, respectively⁴⁾.

Reasons for dropping out of schools included psychological reasons (9.2%), financial reasons (8.8%), physical reasons (3.3%), and other (55.2%) for students in physical therapy, and psychological reasons (15.1%), financial reasons (7.8%), physical reasons (3.6%), and other (52.1%) for occupational therapy students, highlighting that the majority of students had 'other' reasons⁴⁾. The results will likely be different if there were more detailed options such as study and interpersonal relationships, since the only options included in the survey were financial reasons, physical reasons, psychological reasons, for repeating a year, and other reasons. The finding that the majority of students responded 'other' suggests that there are various factors other than those listed in the survey that affect the decision to drop out. Kitamura (2019) also surveyed the causes of dropping out of medical/ health science schools and found that while academic distrust was the most common cause that was reported when the students notified the schools about their decision to drop out, many students reported that