

F-20: Pre-enrolment factors and academic performance of first-year engineering degree students in Sri Lanka

Dhanapali Kottahachchi

(University Grants Commission, Colombo 7)

The engineering degree course is available only at Peradeniya and Moratuwa. The regional cut off marks required for admission is much higher than those required for selection to a physical science course.

In spite of this highly competitive admission procedure, past data have revealed a very high failure rate in the faculty. The average failure rate at Moratuwa was 36% during the last 10 years while that at Peradeniya was 61%.

Hence the study was aimed at determining the causes for (a) high failure rate of engineering students in the University and (b) the variation in the failure rate of the 2 faculties.

Pre-enrolment factors such as aggregate marks at the GCE AL examination, district, attempt, educational level of the Father/Mother, English language skill, were considered to ascertain their impact on the academic performance.

The major findings of the study were: (1) Many students were not competent in English, their medium of instruction in the University. Only 31.6% of the students in the Academic Year 1990/91 had a 'D' pass in English. (2) The inability of the students to cope with the increased volume of teaching material since the selection depends only on the aggregate marks. (3) More than half the students came from families where Father/Mother has not studied beyond GCE/OL. Hence the inability of parents to prepare them in advance for University Education. (4) Peradeniya had less students (55%) coming from relatively urban districts than Moratuwa (79%). This may have contributed to the high failure rate at Peradeniya.