

الملاحظة الأكاديمية كما يدركها الطلاب: الأسباب، ردود الفعل، وسبل العلاج

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الملخص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة لاستقصاء إدراك الطلبة في مراحل متقدمة من الملاحظة الأكاديمية في جامعة السلطان قابوس فيما يتصل بالصعوبات التي يواجهونها و ردود فعلهم وسبل علاج وضعهم الأكاديمي. تكونت عينة الدراسة من ٦١ طالباً (٤٨ منهم من الذكور و ١٣ من الإناث) ، وهي تمثل ٨٥% من جملة أفراد المجتمع المستهدف. وقد مثلت العينة كل كليات الجامعة. وتم إجراء مقابلة فردية مع كل طالب للحصول على أكبر قدر من المعلومات منه بحيث تكشف الصعوبات التي يواجهها وردود فعله نحو الملاحظة الأكاديمية وإدراكه لسبل العلاج. واعتمدت المقابلات على استبيان تكون من أسئلة مفتوحة وأخرى مغلقة. وتم استخدام الإحصاء الوصفي لتحليل البيانات. وأوضحت النتائج أن أكثر العوامل المتسببة في الملاحظة الأكاديمية كما يراها أفراد العينة تضمنت عدم قدرة الطلبة على التوافق مع مناخ الحرية السائد في الحياة الجامعية، والغياب، والعادات الدراسية غير الملائمة، وعدم القدرة على تنظيم الوقت. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك فإن الطلبة المعرضين للملاحظة الأكاديمية ينقصهم القدر الملائم من الشعور بالمسئولية. واستنتجت الدراسة أن هؤلاء الطلبة لم يتم تدريبهم في حياتهم الأسرية على الاستقلالية والاعتماد على الذات. كما أن الطلبة يرون أن الإشراف الأكاديمي لم يكن فعالاً. وخلصت الدراسة إلى ضرورة توفير التعريف المستمر لكل من الطلبة والمرشدين الأكاديميين.

THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND

In college education, many students experience some form of academic difficulty which might affect their performance adversely to the extent that university administration places them on academic probation, which serves as a warning to the student that he/she is not progressing adequately toward successful completion of degree requirements.

It was observed that 12% of the population of undergraduate students in Sultan Qaboos University SQU were placed in the status of academic probation. More than 25% of this group were on their second or final probation, and about 11% of all probation students were at that time on their final probation (The Deanship of Admissions and Registration of SQU, Fall 2002). The last figure (11%) meant that a considerable proportion were in a very critical academic situation.

In a previous study, Moosa and Ibrahim (1999) found that 16.5% of four cohorts (1995-1998) of (SQU) were placed on probation at least once. These observations are puzzling taking into consideration that students admitted into SQU are high-achievers in secondary education since selection procedures adopted by SQU are extremely competitive. Hence, Moosa and Ibrahim suggested that there was a need for delineating and understanding the causal factors underlying academic probation among SQU students from the perspective of the students on probation themselves. The student himself/herself is the best source of information regarding these factors. Moreover, a student on probation needs to gain as much information as possible about his/her individual situation (i.e. his/her problems, difficulties, and perceived corrective plans that would help him/her to return to normal academic standing). Without knowledge of the difficulties that resulted in unsatisfactory academic performance, a student on probation will not be able to remedy these difficulties.

Factors or difficulties which might lead to academic probation have been delineated (either theoretically or empirically) by a

in academic advising in two colleges in Ohio where 75% of faculty members responding felt they needed more knowledge training, and 53% of them were neutral or felt that faculty advising did not have a positive effect on retention. 49% of the students did not meet with their new faculty advisors, while 45% respondents said they did. 60% of the students were positive or neutral when asked whether the faculty advising experience had a positive effect on them.

Objectives of the study

This study is an empirical attempt to elicit quantitative as well as qualitative data from students who are in advanced stages of probation, regarding their own perceptions of probation causes, their reactions toward probation status, and perceived remedies to overcome the difficulties they were facing.

Research Questions

This study aimed at providing answers to the following research questions:

- 1- What problems and difficulties do students on advanced stages of academic probation complain of?
- 2- How do these students react to probation status?
- 3- What are the possible remedies, as perceived by students on advanced stages of probation, that might lead them to resume normal academic status?

METHOD

Research method

The present study is essentially qualitative in nature since it has adopted the interview as instrument for data collection. The choice of this method was motivated by the current movement in educational research toward qualitative methods (such as ethnographic research). The researchers were convinced that interviewing students could provide a wealth of information and

critical academic situation. All interviews were conducted individually with each student by the first researcher in her office. Each student was probed to provide as much information as possible that would be useful in revealing the underlying difficulties he/she was encountering, his/her reactions toward probation and his/her perceptions of remedies. Each student was interviewed for about 45-60 minute, and all students were very cooperative and willing to discuss their problems. The major difficulty, however, which was encountered by the interviewer was scheduling of the interviews due to the different time-tables of the students. The interviews were guided by a questionnaire (a copy of which is attached in Appendix A) consisting of closed and open-ended items covering the following aspects:

- Factors determining choice of major
- Levels of interests and motivation
- Self-efficacy, self-confidence, worries and anxiety
- Essential study and test-taking skills
- Learning difficulties
- Work habits, and time management skills
- consultation with academic adviser and faculty members
- Relations and interactions with other students (social skills)
- Family relations, home conditions
- Other specific difficulties and obstacles as perceived by the students

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the interview data in order to extract quantitatively the most recurrent and frequent factors pertaining to inadequate academic performance which resulted in academic probation, reactions to probation (coping with the situation; and perceived ways to exit (or overcome) probation status.

Table (2)
Perceived problems leading to probation, arranged according to the percentage of students endorsing each of them

Rank	Problems	Percentage
1	College life is different	44.3%
2	Absenteeism and inadequate studying	42.6%
3	Personal/psychological/family problems	39.3%
4	Improper learning habits	39.3%
5	System of evaluation and exams	29.5%
6	Difficulty of study	29.5%
7	Language of instruction	24.6%
8	In-adequate preparation in secondary school	11.5%
9	Many homework assignments	8.2%
10	Difficulty of specialization	6.6%

The outstanding causal factor was that college life was different. When further probed to understand their perception of this difference, students indicated that they did not know how to handle their freedom away from home, or how to shoulder responsibility for their studies without being monitored by their family members. We recall here that many students (67%) came from relatively remote regions and had to live (for the first time) away from their families. Half of the students who live away from their families feel that their being away from home is one reason for their probation. Some students mentioned that the family pressure they experienced in high school was not there anymore. This might be referred to as "management of freedom problem". It seems that new students need intensive orientation regarding this problem.

Inadequate studying habits and absenteeism were endorsed as the second most important factor leading to probation. A

problems which led to academic probation. This finding is in conformity with what Lucas (1991) had found among probationary students in a Harper College in the USA in which 35% of the respondents cited poor study habits among the primary causes of low GPA. A number of items in the interview dealt with difficulties and problems related to study skills and habits. Table (2) shows five of these items together with the percentage of students endorsing each item.

Table (3)
Relative importance of probation factors related to problems in study skills and habits

Rank	Study skills or habits	% of students
1	Test-taking problems	65.6%
2	Concentration difficulties	63.9%
3	Rarely studying with others	54.1%
3	Inadequate understanding of lectures	50.8%
4	Not writing and answering question during study	36.7%
5	Inability to take useful notes	6.6%

It is evident from Table (3) that a considerable number of students complain of difficulties in test-taking skills. When students were interviewed, a range of issues concerning test-taking were identified. The most persistent issue with students was that they lacked self-confidence which led to worry and anxiety during exams. Some students had difficulty understanding the questions due to the fact that these were in English. Some of the other students were not familiar with the terminology that was used in the questions. Others felt that the exams were administered only to test high achievers and did not test the whole range of abilities. Some students felt that they were not well-prepared and became absentminded during the exams, while others felt that the type of exam did not test their abilities, but was

63.9% of the students encountered (at least sometimes) problems of lack of concentration during lectures. 34% of these students attributed the problem of lack of concentration to the teacher in the sense that either the teacher was boring and badly versed in his/her subject, or his/her methods were not able to transmit the knowledge to the students. On the other hand, 22% attributed the problem to their limited abilities. They added reasons such as: They were not prepared for the class or they were exhausted from staying up the night before, or their minds were occupied by other issues (which were mainly emotional issues pertaining to the opposite sex).

14% of the students found the courses difficult, and consequently were not able to concentrate.

Interest in study and achievement motivation:

The interviewed students were provided with four questions regarding interest in major and motivation to study and achieve. The resulting responses are summarized in Table (3).

Table (4)
Relative importance of probation factors related to motivation

Rank	Interest and motivational factors	% of students
1	Not admitted into first choice	49.2%
2	Not always motivated to study and achieve	18.1%
3	Not interested in major	16.4%
4	First choice determined by others	13.1%

It is apparent that the most recurrent factor in the domain of motivational factors was "failure to be admitted into his/her first desired choice". In fact this percentage (49.2%) of students represented almost all students of the sample who were not admitted into their first choice (50.8%).

discussed their probation with their families, and 52.5% discussed it with others. Of those students who managed to get out of probation, 41.7% found that their discussion with others (especially other probationary students) was useful and 38.9% found that it was sometimes useful. A minority (11.1%) rarely found that discussion useful. Discussion of probation status with other students on probation is analogous to group advising for students on probation which Austin, Cherney, Crowner & Hill (1997) found useful with a group of freshmen and sophomores from Michigan State University. The program has helped students better understand the skills needed to maintain academic excellence.

Perceived responsibility of probation:

All students felt that they were partially responsible for their probation. Some even felt that they were fully responsible. When the students were asked to explain the extent of their responsibility, the most recurrent factor was that they did not take the matter seriously. They were not in the habit of studying regularly, so the work accumulated, and they could not handle it. Many of the students skipped some of their classes and lectures.

Relationship with academic adviser, teachers and classmates:

Mostly, the students met with their advisers during registration time to sign schedules. Some went to see their advisers to get advice on which classes to take. More often, however, students went to see their advisers if they were taking classes with them or if they were supervising their projects. Many students complained that they were not gaining any useful information from their advisers, and the advisers were not up to date with the study plans.

When the students were faced with difficulties in their studies, 81.7% would seek help from their classmates, 36.7% from their teachers, 5.1% from their advisers, and 5% from the Student Counseling Center of the University. These figures

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The results of the present study revealed that the most salient factors leading to academic probation were the inability of students to adjust to the freedom of college life, absenteeism and inadequate study habits. Probation-prone students lacked a sense of responsibility as well as motivation to study. It might be argued that those students were not adequately trained in their family life to be independent and self-reliant which are vital traits for college adjustment.

The study also demonstrated that improper study habits and skills as well as poor time management have significant consequences on academic achievement.

Academic advising, as perceived by students, was not effective, the majority of students resorted to instead to their classmates when they faced academic problems.

These results imply the importance of continuous orientation of students in colleges rather than confining such orientation to the first week of the first semester after admission. Orientation sessions should include programs in study habits, time management, and test-taking, as well as social skills. Furthermore, the advisory role of instructors should be activated. Academic advisors themselves need continuous orientation. Seminars on probation should be organized in which students who could exit the probation status present their experiences to other students on probation.

Hence, it is suggested that future research should study experimentally the effectiveness of specific counseling programs for helping students on probation to enhance their motivation, study habits and skills, and time management