

The Impact of Using Self-Reflection Approach and Academic Advising on Performance of Lower Achieving Students

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Abstract

This is an observational study that aims at identifying students' behavioral factors that influence their attitude towards learning and the methods used to motivate these students to perform better in their General Foundation Programme (GFP) offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Sultanate of Oman. Academic advising and self-reflection approaches were used to motivate students to improve the students' level. The study is conducted on 17 pre-elementary students. The researchers applied mixed methods approach for this study. The quantitative data includes students' data retrieved from the Student Information System (SIS) of the institution and a survey to uncover students' behavioral factors. The qualitative data is derived from a combination of academic advising sessions and a self-reflective approach in which students were encouraged to reflect on their areas of strengths and weaknesses related to their Writing and Speaking skills modules. The researchers have observed several negative behaviors that adversely affect students' attitudes towards learning which hindered their progression to the next level. The negative attitudes and factors that were noticed include unwillingness to study, coeducation system in HEIs, and poor attendance. The researchers adopted two interventions to help students perform better in their studies namely: academic advising and self-reflection approach. The academic advising sessions gave the researchers an opportunity to know more about the students, counsel, and motivate them towards learning. The self-reflection approach helped familiarize students with the learning outcomes and made them aware of what is required to achieve those learning outcomes. This study will hopefully provide some useful strategies for English Language teachers to motivate and encourage low performers in GFP.

Keywords: *Academic Advising, General Foundation Programme, Learning Outcomes, Self-reflection, Behavioral factors*

1. Introduction

The objective of GFP in HEIs is to improve learners English, Mathematical, Computing, and necessary study skills that will help them to cope with their higher education courses. Al-Mahrooqi (2012), The medium of instruction

in Omani government schools is Arabic, however, the tertiary level courses are taught in English. Most of the local student population receives education in government schools. Therefore, a large percentage of students entering higher education institutions need foundation English courses to cope with the requirements of tertiary level courses (Naqvi & Zehra, 2020).

If a teacher must deal with an extra ordinary batch of repeaters, the objective is not only to help students achieve the learning outcomes of pre-elementary level, but also to help these students overcome the obstacles that hinder them from achieving the learning outcomes. For the purpose of this study, it was important to understand the reasons for 17 students out of 20 in this batch to fail and repeat the pre-elementary level of GFP. It was important to understand the types of problems facing these students. Therefore, the researchers decided to adopt and use O'Banion model of academic advising to identify the reasons for their poor performance. Academic advising sessions according to Campbell & Nutt (2008), increase students' opportunities to learn and improve academically which leads to better retention and graduation rates. These academic advising sessions also help to eliminate fear and make students comfortable with their academic advisors. A study by Urquhart (2020) has shown a strong connection between academic advising and student identity development. According to Urquhart, students look at their academic advisors as trusted resources and agents of care. Korikana (2019) asserts when learning issues have been present for some time, the person diagnosed may find the diagnosis to be a relief. By identifying the problems facing these students, there will be a space for the teachers to decide on suitable ways to assist these students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. A study by Holland, Westwood, and Hanif (2020) concluded that there is a need for HEIs to invest in academic advising to help students reflect, review and be responsible for their own learning. Furthermore, Lew and Schmidt (2011) suggest using individual self-reflection to determine students' strengths and weaknesses and help them perform better in higher education. Hence, this study aims at exploring two things. First it identifies the main factors hindering our students from doing well in their studies and secondly exploring the effectiveness of using academic advising and self-reflection approaches to help the slower learners. To achieve these objectives, the researchers strive to find answers to the following research questions: a) What type

of behavioral factors affect students' learning? b) Does self-reflection approach help students improve their performance? This study is important because it allows researchers to identify the problems faced by students and directs the researchers to find solutions to these problems. It is hoped that this study will help in bridging the gap between high and low performing students. The paper is divided into five main sections; a review of the literature, the methods used in this study, findings and discussions, and a summary and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Impact of mobile phones and co-education on students

Mobile phones have greatly become the most used device in the world. Apart from their popularity as modes of verbal communication tool, they are nowadays used for almost all aspects of human life. Mobile phones are used to access to internet and perform different tasks such as shopping, booking airline tickets, hotels and restaurants, switching on and off appliances at homes... etc. Mobile phones, on the other hand, might cause numerous obstacles to students learning. One of the effects of using mobile phones in college is that it reduces student concentration during class time (Hiscock, 2004; Selwyn, 2003). Moreover, use of cell phones for phoning, texting, and other purposes was found to have a negative impact on students' progression in their studies, (Jacobsen & Forste, 2011, cited in Hossain 2019). In a study by Jackson et al (2011) it was confirmed that playing video games has been linked to poorer Grade Point Average of university students. Low phone usage in universities has also been linked to better academic achievement (Chen & Peng, 2008). If the students spending most of their time on their phones, this will lead to a low interaction during the class time due to lack of focus.

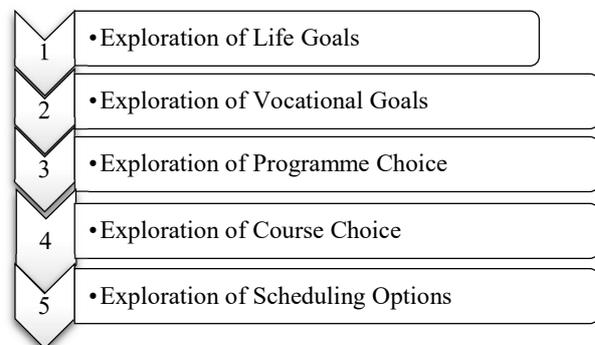
At early stages of general education, schools in Oman teach both genders together in the same classes. However, from grade five to grade twelve, boys are taught separately from girls. Most higher education institutions in Oman teach both genders together in same classes. This has led to certain cultural issues for some of the female students. According to Mahony (1985), co-education system is not helping female students to perform well socially and academically. When students join HEIs they find it difficult to adapt to the co-education system and as a result they find it difficult to progress academically.

2.2 Academic Advising

Academic advising is a process that assists students in their academic life where the academic advisor provides guidance to the students in different areas such as study, moral support, solutions to some problems to proceed in their education. Academic advising also assists the students to select their appropriate area of specialization in their higher education studies. Academic advising is

implemented in both GFP and undergraduate levels in which students find their academic advisors on the SIS, book meeting appointments with the advisors, discuss the issues, and records of the academic advising sessions are documented on SIS. Students ask for guidance from their advisors whenever an academic problem occurs, such as: progress in their studies, issues affecting their performance, medical conditions, attendance etc., (Middle East College [MEC], 2021). Subsequently, the students get back to their academic advisors for extended support. A study by Holland, Westwood and Hanif (2020) indicated that there is a close relationship between academic advising and students' attainment in their studies. O'Banion (2009) mentions in his 1972 model of academic advising consists of five dimensions; a) exploration of life goals, b) exploration of vocational goals, c) exploration of programme choice, d) exploration of course choice, and e) exploration of scheduling options.

Figure 1:
The Original O'Banion Model of Academic Advising



This model according to O'Banion (2009) has been influencing advisors in colleges and universities around the world. Academic advisors who use O'Banion's linear model start with getting students to recognize their life goals as a first stage. Then the advisors help their advisees to explore vocational goals. After recognizing the first two dimensions of O'Banion's model of academic advising, students move with their advisors to the third dimension which is exploration of programme choice. This dimensions links between the first two dimensions and what the students have learnt in order to find the right direction in choosing the study program. In the fourth dimension, academic advisors guide the students to explore the course choices through sharing course objective, content, duration, assessment...etc. Finally, the last dimension works through guiding advisees to create schedules such as study and revising schedules.

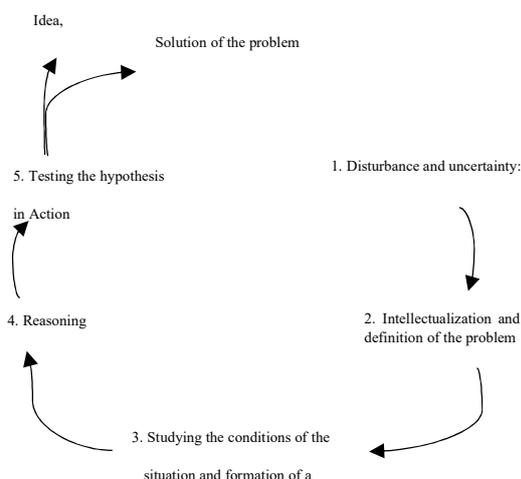
2.3 Self-Reflection

In most of our classes, we direct our focus on teaching the course content only. However, with this group of learners, we attempted to use the self-reflection approach to help them overcome their learning obstacles. Self-reflection according to Dewey (1991:9) is a metacognitive process that includes perplexity, elaboration, generating

hypothesis, comparing hypothesis, and taking notes as shown in figure 2 below.

In the perplexity stage, the learner feels disturbed and uncertain about his learning. Then the learner realizes and defines the problem. In the next level the learner studies the conditions of the situation and forms a working hypothesis before moving to comparing the hypothesis and finding reasons. Finally, the learner tests the hypothesis in action. This leads to generating ideas or finding possible solutions and controlling the actions. Learners who follow this process find it easy to solve the learning problems they are facing.

Figure 2:
Dewey's Model of Reflection



Dewey (1991) believes that our experience is what makes us successful learners and successful learning happens when reflecting is part of learning. Self-reflection is seen by Lew and Schmidt (2011) as a process that a student goes through to look back at his past learning experience and the effort s/he made to make the successful learning occur. Self-reflection is also a tool to inform students about the learning outcomes of their courses especially when they are not aware of the learning outcomes of the courses. Self-reflection helps indicates whether students have achieved the intended learning outcomes of the course or not. Furthermore, it gives students opportunities to learn in their preferred way. Race (2002) mentions some of the benefits of reflection among them are: it deepens learning, helps to make sense of what has been learned, and it is equally useful when learning has been unsuccessful. In such cases, reflection can often give us insights into what may have gone wrong with our students' learning, and how in our students' future learning they might avoid now-known pitfalls, and finally, it is an important transferable skill in life in general.

3. Research Design and Methodology

This research aims to examine the effectiveness of academic advising and self-reflection approaches that were used to improve lower achieving students' level.

This research was conducted on 17 pre-elementary students studying GFP at an Omani HEI. The researchers applied mixed methods for this study. The quantitative data includes students' data retrieved from the SIS and 2 survey questionnaires. The first questionnaire aimed to uncover students' behavioral factors. It consisted of 12 questions. A five-point Likert scale of agreement was used to find out the factors/ behaviors that affect students' learning. The questionnaire was given to students at the beginning of Summer 2022 semester. The qualitative data is derived from a combination of one-on-one academic advising sessions with the students and a self-reflection sheet. In the self-reflection sheet, students were encouraged to reflect on their areas of strengths and weaknesses related to their Writing and Speaking modules. Another survey was given to students to know their perceptions of using self-reflection approach. This questionnaire consisted of 6 questions. The research was conducted during the first six weeks of Summer 2022 semester. The researchers also compared students' results of Spring 2022 with Summer 2022.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Research question 1

What type of behavioral factors affect students' learning?

The data collected through the online questionnaire and the one-on-one academic advising sessions revealed a number of behavioral factors that affect students' learning. Table 1 below shows those types of behavior that were collected through the online questionnaire.

The results in Table 1 below shows the factors and behavioral issues that affect students' learning as per their answers in the questionnaire.

Table 1: Summary of results of questionnaire 1 (Behaviors Affecting Students' Learning)

Behaviours affecting student learning	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1 Negligence of online learning classes	31.3	62.5	0	6.3	0
2 Overuse of mobile phone	6.7	13.3	46.7	20	13.3
3 Not opening the online sources provided	12.5	75	6.3	0	6.3
4 Not paying attention to teachers during classes	6.3	56.3	31.3	6.3	0
5 Parents not following the students	0	31.3	37.5	18.8	12.5
6 Mixed classes (Coeducation)	6.3	31.3	18.8	25	6.3
7 Poor time management	12.5	81.3	6.3	0	0

8	Not knowing the learning outcomes	6.3	81.3	6.3	6.3	0
9	Skipping on campus classes	25	68.8	6.3	0	0
10	Preferring to work than to study	6.3	37.5	25	12.5	18.8
11	Assessment types especially presentations	18.8	37.5	12.5	31.3	0
12	Inability to adapt to college environment	12.5	75	0	6.3	6.3

Students believed that not attending both type of classes (online and on campus) was the main factor affecting their learning according to their answers in the questionnaire. This was evident in the study of Rovai, Ponton, Wighting & Baker's study (2007) which revealed that attending classes virtually showed a significant decrease as compared to face-to face classes. In a similar vein, Rovai, Ponton, Wighting & Baker's study (2007) showed that individuals who attend classes virtually are motivated and have the interest to learn. Another main factor that affects student learning is poor time management which was mentioned by 93.8% of the participants. Not knowing the specific learning outcomes was also a problem that faced 87.6% of the students who were involved in the research as shows in Table 1 below. Among the main factors that affects students' learning was inability to adapt with college environment. 87.5% of the participants believed that moving from school to college environment was a factor that affected their learning and led to their failure. Moreover, as discussed in Mahony (1985) failure to adapt to co-education environment was another factor affecting students' learning. It was observed that a number of students, especially girls showed limited participation in their class. Moreover, it was noticed that these learners tended to skip their classes to avoid facing the other gender. Subsequently, nine students skipped the presentation assessments in Spring 2022 semester as seen in Table 3, and the number of failures increased due to this practice. However, a study by Rovai et al (2007) revealed that co-education has no influence on students' academic performance. During the academic advising session, the students, especially girls revealed that they tended to miss their continuous assessments, such as presentations because they felt shy and hesitant to speak in front of the students of other gender. Surprisingly, 20.5% only of the students thought that overuse of mobile phones both in and out of classes and 31.3% of students thought that parents' follow up of students had no influence on their performance.

Based on these results, students were called to meet their academic advisors to identify the problems faced by each individual student and to recognize their life and career goals. Students met their academic advisors more than 4 times. At first, students were reluctant to talk about their life and career goals, but later after several meetings, they started realizing the importance of having specific life and career goals to pursue the HE studies. These academic advising sessions, as mentioned in Urquhart (2020) in his research, were very important sessions towards helping

students feel confident and talk about their problems that hinder their learning. Students were also guided to recognize the aim of GFP and the different courses offered in the programme. The is aligned with the third dimension of O'Banion's model of academic advising. The students were also guided to realize the different learning outcomes of both Writing and Speaking skills in their pre-elementary courses. They were also counselled and advised to use the Self-Reflection Sheet that was designed by the researchers to help them overcome their learning problems. The self-reflection sheet contained timeline which all students had to follow during their work on the sheet. Data collected from SIS has shown that students' attendance has improved from Spring 2022 to the first half of Summer 2022. The total attendance of these 17 students in Spring 2022 semester was 76.83, whereas their attendance in Summer 2022 was more than 85%.

4.2 Research question 2

Does self-reflection approach help students improve their academic performance?

The results indicated the effectiveness of both academic advising and self-reflection. This was evident from the analysis of the two types of data collected: interviews and the second questionnaire.

There were three reasons for using self-reflection sheet in this research. The first reason is to get students to know their academic advisors and peer tutors. Secondly, self-reflection approach helped the students to know the learning outcomes of Writing and Speaking modules. Students had to ensure that learning outcomes were achieved through using the self-reflection sheet. Finally, self-reflection sheet gave students options to find better ways to achieve the learning outcomes in case they were not confident enough about the learning outcomes.

With regards to the first reason, all the participants of the study had at least three academic advising sessions with their advisors to discuss their learning related matters. They also referred to the peer tutors to clarify the learning outcome that was unclear. This information was recorded on the SIS by the academic advisor the self-reflection sheet was signed by the peer tutor.

The second reason of using the self-reflection sheet is to familiarize students with the learning outcomes of the modules, students were asked to reflect upon the learning outcomes on weekly basis. They had to record their reflections by ticking on their reflection sheet and state whether they can perform the assigned tasks or not. If they were able to perform the task, they should provide evidence to the academic advisor or their peer tutor. If they were not sure about the learning outcome, they should mention what they should do to achieve that learning outcome.

As per the third reason of using the self-reflection sheet, students were requested either to refer on their academic advisor or to their peer tutor to make sure that learning outcomes are achieved. Evidence recorded on the students' self-reflection sheets has shown that students have referred to their peer tutors and have requested

assistance to be able to perform the required tasks. Other students have approached their academic advisors and requested clarifications of the required tasks. Data collected from SIS has shown that students' performance in Writing and Speaking modules has improved noticeably after the use of self-reflection sheets as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Comparison of students' Speaking (S) and Writing (W) results in Spring (Sp) 2022 and Summer (Su) 2022

Student Initial	A F	A H	A M	B B	E E	F S	H H	H N	H M	M H	M J	Q Z	R F	S M	S R	S M		
S	Sp	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	9	4	0	6	7	5	5	4	0	
	Su	8	6	9	9	9	0	8	9	8	0	4	6	8	7	7	7	
W	Sp	1	1	0	4	0	4	0	1	6	1	1	0	3	3	6	9	1
	Su	4	5	7	7	5	7	3	5	6	5	0	1	5	7	3	4	5

Table 3 below shows the results of students' opinion about self-reflection that was used in this research. In general, most of the students agree that self-reflection activity was useful and it helped them know about their modules, academic advisors, peer tutors and learning outcomes. About 80% of the participants knew their peer tutors, academic advisors and identified the learning outcomes of their modules by using the self-reflection sheet. This finding indicates that application of the self-reflection activity was useful. Moreover, 80% of the participants were able to decide which learning outcomes were achieved and which ones were not achieved. As a result, they could find better ways to achieve those learning outcomes.

Table 3: Summary of results of questionnaire 2 (Students' opinion about Self-Reflection)

Students' opinion about Self-reflection	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1 Self-reflection helped learn about modules and my academic advisors	10	70	20	0	0
2 Self-reflection helped me know my peer tutors	10	70	20	0	0
3 Self-reflection made me aware of LOs of writing and speaking	30	50	10	0	10
4 Self-reflection helped me to identify which LOs were met and which were not	30	50	20	0	0
5 Self-reflection guided me to achieve the LOs	10	50	30	0	10
6 Self-reflection is useful and I will use it in my future studies	20	30	40	10	0

5. Summary and Recommendations

In conclusion, the study has revealed that issues like not attending classes, poor time management and not knowing the learning outcomes were the main factors affecting students' academic performance. Self-reflection

approach proved to be useful with lower achievers as it helped them overcome their learning problems. The researchers find it crucial to identify the individual problems of each student before going further in the course. This study was conducted on students who are at risk and at high risk. However, for greater benefit, the researchers recommend policy makers the inclusion and implementation of the self-reflection approach for all students in all HEIs programmes. Comparative research studies can be conducted to measure students' performance before and after implementation of this approach. Self-reflection can be used at the end of each unit in all modules to help both teachers and students monitor the achievement of learning outcomes. To reduce some of the factors affecting students' performance, it is recommended to conduct awareness sessions for all students to alert them about these factors.

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