



Strategies to Improve Probation Students' Academic Performance in an American Degree Transfer Program (ADP) in Malaysia

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Abstract

Students with poor academic performance for each academic semester were placed under academic probation program to monitor their progress. In previous studies, poor time management and the tendency to procrastinate were found to be the most significant factors that contributed to the student's poor academic results. Other factors also include difficulties faced by students to cope with fundamental pre-requisite subject like mathematics. Therefore, this paper will focus on strategies to improve the students' academic performance so that they will be out of the probation.

Keywords: American Degree Transfer Program; Academic Probation; Education

1. Introduction

Higher education institutes have identified student attrition as one of the problems that stands in the way of educational attainment. According to Renzulli (1), 50% of all students who begin college fail to complete their degrees, which then results in their talents, time and resources being wasted. In Malaysia, the Taylor's University American Degree Transfer Program (ADP), is a credit – transfer program for students to prepare for one or two years here and later continue their studies abroad, mainly to the U.S. A, experiences the same problem of attrition and academics have been actively involved in addressing this issue.

ADP is a program that is known for its' flexibility and holistic education system. Malaysian students are more familiar with exam based school system. As a result of this, some of these students have a difficult time to adapt and transition themselves and end up struggling with their studies. According to Wilcox, Winn (2), the problem to change and adapt to a different system from the beginning of freshmen year will cause them to feel demoralized, which leads to poor performance and eventually contributes to withdrawal. In addition to that, a study conducted by Fauzan, Vellasamy (3), several other factors were determined to be the cause of students performing poorly, which include poor time management, difficulty with a mathematic subject, lack of effort in meeting their academic advisors, lack of effort in studying as well as personal problems. In an effort to improve retention, universities adopt different types of academic probation programs to help students who are performing poorly. Currently in ADP, the approaches being taken include providing supportive activities such as consultation with academic advisors, monitored probation, counselling services, as well as tutoring programs like PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) and P2P (Peer to Peer). Therefore, this paper aims to determine the effectiveness of the current efforts as

well as to explore and identify other strategies and programs which will help with the problem of attrition.

2. The Study

2.1 Methods of Data Collection

The questionnaire were given to students who are under academic probation program. It was given to two different semesters which have different duration. The spring semester is the longer semester with 14 weeks and the summer semester is the shorter 9 weeks semester. There are 2 sections in the survey which are section A and B. The survey questions were prepared by modifying the questionnaire from Duffy (4).

2.2 Analysis of Data

The students under academic probation responded to the questions with the Likert-scale ranging from one (1) to four (4) with one (1) represent "strongly agree", two (2) "agree", three (3) "disagree" and four (4) "strongly disagree". SPSS v.21 software and descriptive method were used for analysis.

3. Results

The socio- demographics academic probation students are shown in Table 1. They are mainly male (88%), 15 to 20 years of age (86%), and local Malaysian students (69%).

Table 1: Socio-demographics of Students

Socio Demographic Characteristics	(no of respondents, n=36)
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	32
Female	4
<i>Age</i>	
Below 21 (15-20 years old)	31
Above 20	5
<i>Nationality</i>	
Malaysian	25
International students	11

3.1. Factors Contributing to Poor Academic Performance

From the survey, the mean score for each of the statements were obtained and the five statements with significant scores are shown below in Table 2.

Table 2: Top five factors

Factors	Mean score
1. "I managed my time poorly; I procrastinated, and then I didn't have time to finish things."	11.7
2. "I have a difficult time with math."	11.0
3. "I did not see my course lecturer for consultation."	10.7
4. "I didn't really study."	10.3
5. "I was experiencing personal problems that interfered with my ability to concentrate and complete my work/or study effectively."	10.3

As shown in Table 2, the expression "I managed my time poorly; I procrastinated, and then I didn't have time to finish things" is shown as the highest mean score, followed by the statement "I have a difficult time with math". "I did not see my course lecturer for consultation" has the third highest mean score. Finally, the statement "I didn't really study" and "I was experiencing personal problems that interfered with my ability to concentrate and complete my work/study effectively" shares the same mean score.

3.2. Strategies to Improve Probation Students' Academic Performance

ADP takes the problem of attrition seriously and has been implementing strategies over the past few years. One of the services provided for all students, regardless of whether they are under probation or not, is that students are given the opportunity to interact with faculty (both academics and non-academics) to provide them with appropriate support. Lecturers take on the role of academic advisors and in addition to that, have consultation hours, each week, in order to be available for students. According to Harvey-Smith (5), when provided with the opportunity of interacting with the faculty at higher levels, students become more inclined to perform academically better. Harvey-Smith also stated that faculty-student interactions result in higher grade point averages (GPA), greater satisfaction with college, decreased feelings of alienation as well as an improvement in the performance in a students' major (6-9). This is in line with the study conducted on ADP students, as the third most significant factor for being in academic probation is that students did not see their course lecturer for consultation, despite the fact that it is offered.

In 2014, ADP developed a monitored program for probation students with the help of a group of lecturers called the Academic Success Mentors. In the first week of the semester, these students meet their academic success mentor, an academic agreement form is filled up and signed with conditions that need to be adhered to, and once a month, the student is required to meet up with their academic advisor and Academic Success Mentor in order to determine their progress and to determine how to improve it. Based on the statistics provided in Table 3, it can be seen that the introduction of the monitored program has shown a positive impact on retention (goes up and down but generally has decreased).

Table 3: ADP Completion and Attrition

Intake	Number of enrolment	Attrition	
		No. of students	Percentage
201401	181	79	44
201405	133	10	8
201408	122	61	50
201501	176	40	23
201505	134	24	18
201508	140	34	24
201601	135	23	17
201605	76	15	20
201608	143	17	12
201701	80	10	13
201705	41	1	2

The fifth factor of students being under academic probation is that they were undergoing personal problems, which can cause them to lose focus on their studies, resulting in poor academic performance. Taylor's University takes the well-being of their students seriously. They provide counselling services for students who are having difficulties emotionally, mentally and physically under Counselling and Psychological Services Centre (CPSC). Under CPSC, they provide support in terms of Emotional & Psychological Well Being, and also for student under special needs such as learning difficulties, dyslexia, dyspraxia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Another strategy taken by ADP is the availability of peer tutoring programs including Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) as well as Peer to Peer (P2P). PASS is a program in which a peer conducts additional classes for a group of students who require extra help for subjects such as mathematics. Whereas the P2P program takes on a more individual and one on one approach. Some of the advantages of peer tutoring include a more interactive and participative learning, opportunities to respond and to make errors and be corrected are increased, study skills are developed and improved, an increase in motivation and learning (10-12). These strategies implemented by ADP have been effective as shown in the decreasing percentage of attrition in Table 3, however as mentioned earlier, ADP is keen to explore and identify other strategies and programs that will help with the problem of attrition. One of these strategies is the implementation of Skill Courses. Renzulli (1) conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of Learning Skills Course (LSC) Intervention, which integrates learning strategies and the students' academic work. The students who were performing poorly attended this course twice a week for three weeks, and based on their results, they were reported to have been performing better as compared to pre-LSC. Based on the study, one of the benefits of poor performing students attending this course was that the amount of time spent studying had increased. With time being the main factor behind ADP students being on academic probation, this Learning Skills Course could be an effective strategy to be implemented.

These intervention strategies and programs developed by ADP and other universities could possibly help students improve their academic performance, however what it ultimately comes down to is that students have to be motivated enough to put in their own effort and come out of academic probation. According to Pintrich and Garcia (13) and Zimmerman (14), students who self-regulate and do manage their time and studies well have an upper hand over students who do not apply these self-regulation strategies as academic performance and self-regulated strategies is highly correlated. Zimmerman (14) also stated that these self-regulated strategies include:

- Self-evaluation in which students evaluate the quality of their work
- Organization and transformation whereby students control content in order to ameliorate their learning
- Goal setting which gets students to set goals and objectives, and means to achieve them
- Information seeking whereby students seek school related information from sources that are academic rather than social

4. Conclusion

This study was performed to determine the effectiveness of the current efforts taken by the American Degree Program (ADP) and in addition to that, to recognize and explore several other strategies that could possibly assist with the attrition problem currently at hand. To conclude, universities that provide these intervention programs and strategies definitely have a positive impact on students who are under academic probation, however, regardless of this fact, these students have to take it upon themselves to be able to come out of academic probation by fully utilizing the assistance that is provided to them as well as to be hard working and motivated.

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