

Satisfaction of English Learning Students with Advice and Support Service During COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Student satisfaction with academic advice is a critical component of the educational process, contributing significantly to student success. This study aimed to assess the satisfaction of health sciences students with academic advice during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia, under IRB approval from King Abdullah International Medical Research Center (KAIMRC), to provide vital information for health education leaders. The students, encountering English as the medium of instruction for the first time, participated in the study. A questionnaire was electronically distributed to students across three campuses, involving both male and female participants. Statistical analysis was conducted using R and the Kruskal-Wallis test.

The overall student satisfaction with academic advice was found to be 3.4 out of 5.0. At the campus level, there were no statistically significant differences in satisfaction scores among the three campuses. Additionally, no significant differences were found between male and female students. This study indicates that there are no major differences in student satisfaction with academic advice among different colleges. However, further studies are recommended to examine the satisfaction level within the local context in more depth.

Keywords: College education; higher education; education quality; student perception; gender differences.

INTRODUCTION

Effective academic advising and mentoring student progress are an important part of the teaching and learning process. Academic advising by qualified staff help students successfully complete their academic goals. Face-to-face sessions are one of the effective components in the management of academic and career advising. With the strike of the Covid-19 pandemic, attending these sessions become difficult or impossible for students. Therefore, there was a need to use innovative solutions such as Internet video calling apps to avoid physical contact and reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. This study shall be one of the few Saudi studies which focused on the satisfaction of health science students

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with counselling and support services provided during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Student Satisfaction

The study is situated within the recent research literature on college students' satisfaction, which is a consequence of fulfilling their needs and expectations of a specific service, as well as their perception of the quality of that service. Student satisfaction has been linked to students' perceptions of the quality of education (van Deuren & Lhaden, 2017; Wong & Chapman, 2023). Student satisfaction could also be related to various services that the school provides; therefore, it can be defined based on different approaches and focus, but most importantly it should be examined from an educational perspective (Althewini, 2025; Al-Sheeb et al., 2018; van Deuren & Lhaden, 2017; Zeng & Wang, 2021). Student satisfaction especially among first year college students have been point of concern because majority of the students that drop out of colleges are from their first-year college program (Al-Sheeb et al., 2018). From a financial point of view, retaining students is also more cost efficient as compared to admitting new students. This is necessary for the institutes to provide quality education and improve student success and retention, therefore it is important to determine the factors that contribute to overall student satisfaction.

Student satisfaction is defined as a "short-term attitude resulting from an evaluation of a student's educational experience" (Elliott & Healy, 2001). For the purpose of this study, student satisfaction was defined as student happiness or contentment with their overall college experience. It is one of the most important criteria for the assessment of college experience. It is important to explore the factors that can influence the overall student satisfaction especially among first year college students. It has been found that a student's perceptions and experiences during their first college year lay the foundation for future success and graduation (Al-Sheeb et al., 2018).

It has been reported that students are satisfied when their actual educational experience and performance is met or exceed their initial experience (Al Shaikh et al., 2019). Since each student has a distinctive way of learning, understanding their weaknesses and strengths in this respect will help teachers devise appropriate teaching techniques for better student educational experience. Student evaluations of the social and academic aspects of the college community can provide institutions with important insights into the students' overall college experiences (Al Shaikh et al., 2019). Student satisfaction can be evaluated into two categories, with the first

being focused on classroom teaching and learning evaluation and the second being focused on the comprehensive student experience (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998).

Student satisfaction and academic performance has been a focus of both scholars and policymakers in the competitive studying environment (Van et al., 2020). Evaluation of student's perception is also considered the most common approach to improve the educational quality of colleges (Nurunnabi & Abdelhadi, 2018; Zeng & Wang, 2021). Thus, the factors such as curriculum of the education program, quality of academic faculty, college administration, facilities and infrastructure are all very important in shaping student satisfaction and their academic performance.

English as a Medium of Instruction

In many international educational contexts, there is a growing trend of adopting English as the medium of instruction, even when the majority of the population speaks a local language. This trend has led to a significant increase in the number of English-medium programs in European higher education institutions, with a 340-percent increase in bachelor and master courses compared to 2002, according to Wachter and Maiworm (2008) and Doiz et al., (2012).

However, despite the rapid spread of English-medium instruction (EMI), the implementation of EMI is not without challenges and difficulties. Amanzhol et al. (2024) conducted a study on medium-of-instruction policies in ten Asian countries and found that the implementation of EMI is fraught with challenges and difficulties. The findings of the study suggest that the implementation of EMI requires careful consideration of various factors such as cultural differences, teacher training, and language proficiency of both teachers and students.

Locally, Elyas & Al-Hoorie (2024) provides an in-depth analysis of the challenges and tensions associated with the implementation of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in Saudi Arabian education. The author highlights how the use of EMI in Saudi Arabia has led to tensions and challenges, such as resistance from some students, teachers, and parents who believe that it may undermine the importance of the Arabic language and culture.

Furthermore, the study finds out the need for teachers to develop new teaching approaches and strategies that are effective in an EMI environment. Another challenge is linked with how the implementation of EMI in Saudi Arabian education has led to challenges related to language proficiency, as many students and teachers are not fluent in English, especially when they graduate from school after 6 years of English education.

In sum, while English is increasingly being adopted as the medium of instruction in international educational contexts, the implementation of EMI is not a straightforward process and requires careful consideration of various factors to ensure its success.

Within this rich and complex context of recent literature on student satisfaction and EMI, the current research attempted to examine health sciences student satisfaction of their college advice and support. It analyzed rating scores which served as a representation or indicators of performance of different academic institutions for their services of advice and support. In the first step, it was tested whether the rating scores would be overall significantly different between male and female students, as well as between different campuses and academic groups. However, the main research question was whether such demographic characteristics as gender and belongingness to a specific campus or academic group would be able to serve as predictors of the rating scores in an ordinal logistic regression analysis.

METHODS

To conduct the study, a questionnaire was designed with two sections. The first section collected demographic information, including gender, campus, and college. The second section contained four statements about advice and support services during the COVID-19 pandemic, rated on a five-point scale (1: Strongly Disagree to 5: Strongly Agree). The statements were:

1. "It was easy to find information about the institution and its programs before I enrolled."
2. "The orientation program for new students was helpful."
3. "There is sufficient opportunity to obtain advice on my studies and future career."
4. "Procedures for enrolling in courses are simple and efficient."

Participants for this study were recruited using convenience sampling. The questionnaire was electronically distributed to health sciences students across three campuses of a Saudi university during the second semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. The invitation to participate was sent via university email and online learning platforms, ensuring broad reach to students from different colleges and varying academic years. This approach facilitated the collection of a diverse sample, encompassing 1,784 students from seven different colleges, with representation from both genders and all campuses. The use of electronic distribution was particularly effective given the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing for efficient and safe data collection.

There were 1,087 female and 700 male students from three campuses. The study received IRB approval from King Abdullah International Medical Research Center (KAIMRC) on September 8th (reference number: RYD-20-419812-108479), and informed written consent was obtained from all participants. Validity and reliability were ensured through several steps. Content validity was established through expert reviews and face validity via a pilot test. The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.75.

Statistical analysis was performed in R (version 4.0.3). We used Kruskal–Wallis tests to examine whether satisfaction scores depended on gender, college, and campus, conducting separate tests for each statement. Ordinal logistic regression was then used to predict rating scores while accounting for these variables, ensuring the parallel regression assumption was met using the 'brant()' function from the MASS package. Baseline levels for comparison were the College of Applied Medical Sciences, Al Ahsa campus, and females.

RESULTS

Overall ratings on all 4 statements were slightly above average (First statement mean = 3.477, median = 3, SE = 0.026; Second statement mean = 3.4758, median = 3, SE = 0.026; Third statement mean = 3.4736, median = 3, SE = 0.026; Fourth statement mean = 3.598, median = 4, SE = 0.0253).

Table 1: Overall ratings of statements in the questionnaire

Statements	Mean	Median	Standard Error
First	3.477	3.0	0.026
Second	3.475	3.0	0.026
Third	3.473	3.0	0.026
Fourth	3.598	4.0	0.025

Kruskal–Wallis tests

As a result, there was no significant differences between male and female students in first statement ($\chi^2 = 0.031$, $df = 1$, $p > 0.8$), second statement ($\chi^2 = 0.038$, $df = 1$, $p > 0.5$), third statement ($\chi^2 = 0.015$, $df = 1$, $p > 0.9$) and fourth statement ($\chi^2 = 1.13$, $df = 1$, $p > 0.2$).

Table 2: Kruskal–Wallis test results for differences between male and female students

Statement	Chi-Square (χ^2)	p-value
First	0.031	> 0.8
Second	0.038	> 0.5
Third	0.015	> 0.9
Fourth	1.13	> 0.2

Furthermore, no differences were found across the three campuses in first statement ($\chi^2 = 4.86$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.087$), second statement ($\chi^2 = 0.85$, $df = 2$, $p > 0.6$), third statement ($\chi^2 = 0.56$, $df = 2$, $p > 0.7$) and fourth statement ($\chi^2 = 2.87$, $df = 2$, $p > 0.23$). See Figure 2 for the corresponding averages.

Table 3: Kruskal–Wallis test results for differences across the three campuses

Statement	Chi-Square (χ^2)	p-value
First	4.86	0.087
Second	0.85	> 0.6
Third	0.56	> 0.7
Fourth	2.87	> 0.23

Finally, we analyzed rating scores across the colleges. As a result, there was a significant main effect of the colleges in first statement ($\chi^2 = 15.53$, $df = 5$, $p = 0.008$). Further Pairwise comparisons using Tukey and Kramer (Nemenyi) test with Tukey-Dist approximation for independent samples revealed that the significant difference was driven by a difference between the College of Applied Medical Sciences (CAMS) (mean rating score = 3.66) and College of Medicine (COM) (mean rating score = 3.59; $p = 0.031$). No other differences reached significance. Furthermore, we found no significant differences in second statement ($\chi^2 = 1.5$, $df = 5$, $p > 0.9$), third statement ($\chi^2 = 6.31$, $df = 5$, $p > 0.27$) and fourth statement ($\chi^2 = 6.88$, $df = 5$, $p > 0.22$).

Ordinal regression

In the prediction of the rating scores in first statement, we found that COM was a significant predictor (Estimate = -0.33, standard error = 0.115, z-value = -2.89, $p = 0.0027$, OR = 0.71). In other words, as the academic group moves from the CAMS baseline to the COM, the odds of observing category 1 of rating score vs. other 4 categories increase by 29%. No other predictors resulted in significant effects (all p 's > 0.1).

A similar pattern of results was observed in the ratings of third statement. COM was again a significant predictor (Estimate = -0.23, standard error = 0.11, z-value = -2.03, $p = 0.041$, OR = 0.79). Just as described above, when the academic group changed from the CAMS baseline to COM, the odds of observing category 1 of rating score vs. other 4 categories increase by 21%. No other predictors resulted in significant

effects (all p 's > 0.3). Finally, comparable analyses in second statement and fourth statement resulted in no significant effects across all predictors (all p 's > 0.1) (Table 4).

To summarize, the results of the current set of analyses revealed that male and female students, as well as different colleges and campuses had comparable experience and there were no significant differences among these variables. Moreover, it seems to be that students were more satisfied with at CAMS compared to COM, as revealed via Kruskal–Wallis.

DISCUSSION

Our study aims to examine health sciences student satisfaction with their college advice and support services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results showed above average satisfaction (Mean: 3.47) to their college advice and support.

The results of this study showed that, no significant differences between male and female at the university level in term of advice and support services. At the campus level had also no statistically significant differences. This result can be attributed to the fact that all campuses are required to follow the same institutional policies and regulations related to academic and career advising. Additionally, the implementation of these policies is monitored by a central administration.

Students in college of Applied of Medical Sciences were more satisfied than students in College of Medicine in term of having easy access to find information about the institution and their academic program (for the first statement). This difference was due to how each college present their program and how they communicate with their students.

The university accommodated the lockdown and restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic by utilizing the distance learning tools (Blackboard Collaborative Tool, and Microsoft Team). The advice and support were facilitated by utilizing technology and telecommunication.

In this English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) context, students expressed that they found it beneficial to use their native Arabic language to seek support and advice. This finding underscores the importance of considering linguistic and cultural backgrounds in EMI programs. For example, when students needed help with understanding course requirements or navigating administrative processes, they felt more comfortable and confident discussing these issues

Table 4: Ordinal regression for rating scores prediction

Statement	Predictor	Estimate	Standard Error	z-value	p-value	Odds Ratio
First	COM	-0.33	0.115	-2.89	0.0027	0.71
Third	COM	-0.23	0.11	-2.03	0.041	0.79

in Arabic rather than English. This comfort level likely stems from their greater fluency and ability to express nuanced concerns in their first language. Consequently, students who were able to receive support in Arabic reported higher levels of satisfaction with the advice and support services provided by the university. This indicates that accommodating students' language preferences can significantly enhance their overall educational experience and satisfaction.

This finding aligns with Elyas & Al-Hoorie (2024), Tang's (2020) and Sah & Karki's (2023) research, which indicates that students in complex EMI contexts prefer to use their native language when discussing their basic needs for advice and support. For example, a student might find it easier to explain their academic challenges or seek guidance on course selections in Arabic, as opposed to English. This preference arises because they may feel less fluent and confident using English outside of the classroom environment. As a result, these students might struggle to fully understand course materials or clearly communicate their questions and concerns to instructors when using English. This language barrier can hinder their academic performance and overall satisfaction with the educational support they receive. Therefore, allowing students to use their native language in these contexts can significantly improve their ability to access and benefit from academic advising and support services.

Furthermore, this finding supports Amanzhol et al.'s (2013) and Tang's (2020) assumption that language proficiency is a challenge in EMI programs. Students often struggle with the necessary fluency in English to communicate effectively outside the classroom. For instance, when discussing complex topics such as academic advising or career planning, students may find it difficult to fully articulate their thoughts and concerns in English. As a result, they tend to revert to their first language, Arabic, whenever possible, both inside and outside the classroom. This reliance on their native language helps them express themselves more clearly and reduces misunderstandings. Therefore, the use of Arabic for support services not only makes students feel more comfortable but also ensures they receive the help they need in a more effective manner.

Overall, the finding that students prefer using their first language to communicate their academic needs in EMI programs highlights the critical importance of considering students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds when implementing these programs. For example, students may find it easier to explain complex academic issues or seek help for personal challenges in their native language, which can lead to more effective and meaningful communication.

Additionally, providing training for teachers on how to support bilingual students can ensure that educators are equipped to understand and address the unique needs of these students. This dual-language support approach can help students feel more supported, reduce language-related stress, and ultimately contribute to their academic success. For instance, a student who is struggling with a scientific concept might benefit from discussing it in Arabic first to grasp the fundamental ideas before tackling it in English, thereby enhancing their overall comprehension and performance.

Future studies should examine a range of demographic characteristics, such as age, socio-economic status, parental education, and the presence of siblings. Understanding these factors is crucial because the relationship between socio-economic status and academic satisfaction can vary significantly. For example, Gurria (2016) notes that this relationship ranges from very strong to moderate. An illustrative case comes from Australia, where research by Thomson et al. (2017) found that students from the highest socio-economic quartile report satisfaction levels equivalent to having a three-year advantage over their peers from the lowest socio-economic quartile. This stark difference highlights the impact of socio-economic background on students' educational experiences. Therefore, it is vital to consider socio-economic characteristics when predicting and enhancing academic satisfaction, as these factors can significantly influence students' perceptions and outcomes.

Additionally, psychological characteristics such as levels of depression, anxiety, and stress can significantly influence students' perception of the university. For instance, Eisenberg et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal study demonstrating that depression and anxiety consistently have a negative impact on college students' GPA. Based on these findings, the authors suggested that universities should introduce prevention and treatment programs for mental health issues. Supporting this, a more recent study by King et al. (2020) examined over 3,000 first-year university students and found that 28% reported a lifetime mental disorder, 30% exhibited significant anxiety symptoms, 28% showed depressive symptoms, and 18% experienced sleep problems. These statistics highlight the high prevalence of mental health problems among university students. For example, a student struggling with anxiety may find it difficult to concentrate in class or participate in group discussions, leading to a poorer academic experience and lower satisfaction with university services. Given this, it is crucial for future research to consider the impact of mental health on student satisfaction and to advocate for comprehensive mental health support services within universities.

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to examine the satisfaction of health science students with their college advice during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on a quantitative analysis, we found no significant differences in satisfaction between the three campuses or between male and female students. However, the study did reveal slight variations in satisfaction levels among different colleges. This suggests that while overall satisfaction is consistent across locations and genders, specific colleges may have unique strengths or areas for improvement in their advising services.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of student satisfaction, regular assessments should be conducted to monitor changes over time. It is important to note that this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have influenced students' perceptions of counseling services. Therefore, further research is needed to compare these findings with studies conducted under normal conditions, without the disruptions caused by the pandemic. Such comparisons will help identify whether the pandemic-specific context had a significant impact on student satisfaction with academic advice.

The findings of this study have significant implications for decision-makers in higher education, particularly those responsible for student support services and academic advising. First and foremost, the uniform satisfaction across campuses and genders suggests that institutional policies are being implemented consistently, which is commendable. However, the slight variations in satisfaction among different colleges indicate that tailored approaches may be necessary to address specific needs and improve student experiences further. Decision-makers should consider conducting detailed, college-specific evaluations to identify particular strengths and weaknesses in advising services.

Moreover, the increased satisfaction reported by students when they could seek advice in their native Arabic language highlights the critical role of linguistic and cultural considerations in EMI programs. Institutions should explore ways to integrate language support into their advising services, such as hiring bilingual advisors, providing multilingual resources, and training staff to be sensitive to cultural and linguistic diversity. This approach can enhance communication, make students feel more comfortable, and ultimately improve their overall satisfaction.

Additionally, the study underscores the importance of continuous monitoring and assessment of student satisfaction with advising services. Decision-makers should establish regular feedback mechanisms, such as annual surveys or focus groups, to track satisfaction levels and identify areas needing improvement.

This is particularly important in adapting to changing circumstances, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may require flexible and responsive support strategies.

Lastly, the study's context highlights the need for comparative research to understand the impact of events like the pandemic on student satisfaction. Decision-makers should support and fund further studies that compare satisfaction levels during normal conditions and crises. Such research can provide valuable insights into how to maintain and enhance student support services in various contexts, ensuring that students receive consistent and effective guidance regardless of external challenges.

Ethics approval & Funding:

The research was approved by IRB Committee from King Abdullah International Medical Research Center (KAIMRC), with reference number: RYD-20-419812-108479.

Data availability:

Data is available upon request.

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