

Factors affecting the learning of Allied Health Sciences Students, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

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Abstract: Students' academic performance in the university is affected by several factors, among them most of the factors can be modified to provide optimal conducive environment for learning. Unit of Allied Health Sciences (UAHS), Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna was conducting three degree programs B.Sc. in nursing, B.Sc. in Medical laboratory sciences and B.Pharm. A cross sectional descriptive study was conducted to assess the factors influencing the learning in the UAHS. Students' academic performance is not significantly associated with gender, nationality, native place, living arrangement and study programme. Students' academic performance showed statistically significant increasing trend with year of study. Students who chose the course with the interest to follow university studies and the students who following the course with the hope of moving to post graduate study showed statistically significant higher academic performances. Usages of Library and computer laboratory among the students were in a satisfactory level. Students inter personal relationship with fellow students, and seniors seemed good, but students suffered with lack of coping with their workload. It was recommended that conducting the exam and lecture as scheduled, providing ways for coping with workload will enhance the teaching learning environment in the UAHS and improve the academic achievement of the students.

Keywords – Academic performance, learning environment, Allied Health Sciences.

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I. Background and objectives

Teaching is considered as a planned systematic support for learning, Learning capacity of the University students is greatly influenced by several factors. Except some personnel factors most of the factors can be modified to facilitate learning^[1]. Conducive environment is a key element in teaching- learning process^[2]. Perception about the learning environment has shown to make statistically significant impact on academic performance, overall behavior and the sense of well-being^[3]. Various researchers have identified personal characteristics, influence of peers, family support, characteristics of education institutions as common reasons for the students problem^[4,5]. It was documented that psychological, economic and social issues also found to be problem to Sri Lankan university students^[6]. Allied Health Sciences Unit (UAHS), Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna is conducting the bachelors' degree in Medical Laboratory Sciences, Nursing and Pharmacy since 2006. Even though several batch of students have completed their studies no research has been undertaken to assess the Teaching-learning environment in UAHS. Present study was conducted to assess the influencing factors on student's learning in the Unit of Allied Health Sciences (UAHS).

II. Research Design And Method

Institution based Cross sectional descriptive study was conducted among all the (144) students who were studying in UAHS in 2015. Ethical approval was obtained from Ethical review committee of Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna. Self-administered questionnaire was developed which contained five sections; personal profile, career perspectives, academic self-perception, perception on learning environment and available facilities in the UAHS. Approval from Dean, Faculty of medicine and Head, UAHS were obtained. Questionnaire was administered to collect data following pilot study among 15 students in College of Nursing Jaffna. Data was analyzed by SPSS 16.0 and descriptive analysis was done with frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. One way anova was used to test the statistical significance and $p < 0.05$ was considered as significance.

III. Result and discussion

Table I shows the association between the selected personal attributes of the students and their previous semester Grade Point Average (GPA). Majority of the students were females (65.3%), mean age of the students was 23.2. Jaffna peninsula was their native place for 36% of students. Only 36.8 % Students were living with their family, rest of them were living in private boarding place or in university hostel. Distance of students' residence to faculty was 3.06km. Majority of the students were Tamils (61.8%). Gender, native place, nationality, living arrangement and the course of study did not showed statistical significant association in one way anova. Final year students reported higher academic performance (GPA 2.72± 0.35) followed by third year (2.40±0.66) second year (2.08±0.51) and it was statistically significant (P= 0.021).

TABLE: I selected personal attributes of the students and academic performance

Characteristics	No. of students	%	Last semester GPA (mean)
Gender			
Males	50	34.7	2.39 ± 0.50
Females	94	65.3	2.31 ± 0.62
Native place			
Jaffna peninsula	37	25.7	2.40 ± 0.50
Other	107	74.3	2.31 ± 0.61
Nationality			
Tamil	89	61.8	2.49 ± 0.62
Sinhala	39	27.1	2.25 ± 0.25
Muslim	16	11.1	1.95 ± 0.77
Living arrangement			
Living with family	53	36.8	2.17 ± 0.70
Not loving with family	90	62.5	2.41 ± 0.53
Study Programe			
MLS	55	38.2	2.43 ± 0.60
B.Sc. in Nursing	52	36.1	2.76 ± 0.15
B.Pharm.	37	25.7	2.19 ± 0.58
Year of study			
First year	48	33.3	-
Second year	51	36.1	2.08 ± 0.51
Third year	29	20.1	2.40 ± 0.66
Final year	16	11.1	2.72 ± 0.35

Table: II Perception about their current course and the academic performance. Only 16 % of students selected their current course as their first preferred career at the time of admission, for 52.8 % of the students it was not within the three best choices. Among the students 48.6 % chose their current course with personal interest, rest of the students chose the course by various other reasons and others influences. Nearly half of the students (50.7 %) stated that they were following the course with the motivation to become a professional in the field, 22.9 % with the hope of obtaining a degree, 14.6 % to obtain a foreign employment and 8.3 % to move to a post graduate study. The image of their current course was improved after enrolment for 56.9% of the students and reduced for 14.6 % of them. reason for choosing the course (p=0.034) and purpose of following the course (p= 0.049) were showed statistical significant association in one way anova test.

Table: II Perception about their current course and the academic performance

Perceptions on current course	No. of students	%	Last semester GPA	P-Value
Preference of the course on admission				
First	23	16	2.49 ± 0.36	0.257
Second	10	6.9	2.64 ± 0.23	
Third	34	23.6	2.05 ± 0.80	
More than third choice	76	52.8	2.32 ± 0.59	
Reason for choosing				
Personal interest	70	48.6	2.17 ± 0.58	0.034

Parents wish	11	7.6	2.31 ± 0.84	
Peer motivation	3	2.1	2.31 ± 0.61	
Interest on University study	32	22.2	2.71 ± 0.28	
Not accepted for other courses	23	16	2.55 ± 0.49	
Purpose of following				
To become a professional	73	50.7	2.30 ± 0.63	0.049
To obtain a degree	33	22.9	2.01 ± 0.78	
To get post graduate study	12	8.3	2.61 ± 0.25	
Hope of foreign employment	21	14.6	2.34 ± 0.49	
Change in image of the course				
Improved	82	56.9	2.20 ± 0.59	0.368
Not changed	39	27.1	2.45 ± 0.47	
Reduced	21	14.6	2.51 ± 0.79	

More than half of the students (52.1 %) indicated the language (English) is a barrier for their learning. Most of the students stated their writing skill in English as manageable (64.6%), while 27.8% as good and 8% as poor. Students indicated that around half of their teachers (54 %) are role model for them and 43% (mean) of senior students are role model for them. Also students stated that 64 % of their teachers adequately prepare for the teaching session.

Majority of students (98%) were utilizing resources in library and nearly 63% were using e-resources from computer laboratory. Nearly three fourth (74%) of the students were accessing internet, most of them (82%) were utilizing their own internet facilities. Most of the students have email addresses (90%), even though only 40% of them checked emails at least once in a week.

Students perception on teaching- learning environment in UAHS was assessed with 24 questions (Table III). Responses for each question were obtained in five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Items were scored as 0 for strongly agree, 1 for agree, 2 for neutral, 3 for disagree and 4 for strongly disagree. Mean scores were shown in Table III. Positive statements which scored mean score more than 3 (Disagree) can be considered as needing for interventions. According to their perception, Students unable to enjoy studying, had disappointment with UAHS administration, exam and lecture schedules are not followed by the administration, and students lacked coping ways for their work load, also not confident to inform to the UAHS administration on the event of injustice. On the other hand students reported that they didn't felt lonely as they had good relationship with fellow students, and with senior students.

Table III Perception on Teaching- learning environment

Characteristics of Teaching- learning environment	Mean	S.D
I am obtaining adequate academic support	2.52	.780
I can apply the theory taught in the class in the practical training	2.35	.918
I am getting adequate support in my clinical areas	2.78	.954
Subject content is relevant to my profession	2.18	.721
All the subject contents covered according to the study guide/syllabus	2.50	.833
Exams reflect the fair distribution of contents of the subject	2.45	.782
I feel Teachers as good role models in my profession	2.62	.946
Learning environment is conducive to my learning	2.77	1.095
I am happy to move with my class mates	1.77	.829
I am enjoying studying here	3.05	1.185
I do not have any disappointment with the AHS administration	3.04	1.278
Lectures and Exams are conducted as scheduled early	3.14	1.215
Teaching environment is stress full	2.35	1.043
I am able to cope with my workload	3.04	1.023
Bullying by senior student is affect my learning	3.76	.989
Bullying by my batch mates is affect my learning	3.91	1.025
I am confident to address any injustice happened to me to the superiors	3.11	1.073
I have good friends in my class	1.66	.771
My batch mates supportive to my learning	1.91	.798

I feel seniors support is useful soon after enrolment	2.11	.900
I feel stress to continue my studies	2.39	1.017
I do not feel lonely at all	2.30	1.087
There are sufficient way to reduce stress in AHS	3.56	1.142
I feel comfortable in maintaining relationship with my batch mates	2.19	.850

IV. Conclusion and recommendation

Overall Academic performance of UAHS students seem inadequate (mean GPA 2.34 ± 0.58). Their academic performance is influenced by their perception on their current course and the motivation of following the course. It is recommended that students should be motivated to study and UAHS administration should provide ways to cope with their workload. Implementing the exam and lecture schedules as planned and arranging portals to listen student's problems may make the learning environment conducive.

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