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## Evaluation of Student - Academic Adviser Relationship in a Nigerian University

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### ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to evaluate the relationship between Pharmacy students and their Academic Advisers and to find out if an association existed between student-academic adviser relationship and student's academic performance. A cross-sectional survey was undertaken with 93 willing third, fourth and fifth year students, all assigned to Academic Advisers and 16 academic advisers in the University of Jos, Nigeria. Data obtained were entered into Graphpad prism version 5 and the Chi square test was used to determine the association between variables.

The results revealed that the mean Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of the students was  $3.3 \pm 0.7$  on a 5-point scale. About 41% of the students met once in a session with their advisers. Only 36% of the advisers were concerned over their students' academic progress. A significant association ( $P < 0.001$ ) was established between student/academic adviser relationship and student's academic performance. There was a significant association between student's attitude and academic performance. However, no association existed between gender and academic performance. Since there was a significant relationship between student/academic adviser relationship and student's academic performance, students were encouraged to relate with their academic advisers who in turn should monitor their academic progress to enable them make better grades and develop the necessary confidence and skills needed to practice pharmacy.

**KEYWORDS:** Students, Academic Adviser, Counseling, Academic performance.

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### INTRODUCTION

The minimum goal of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Jos, Nigeria, is: "To train students to become pharmacists with commitment and have a wide range of professional, scientific and managerial competence and versatility to best serve the needs of the community in a dynamic health care delivery system"[1]. One objective set to achieve this goal is the provision of counseling services by academic advisers who are academic staff to enable students adjust to the academic environment, encourage them to have good grades and in general, help them make well informed choices. This is because the need for counseling to students is on a sharp increase in our society today due to educational, economic, technological, social and ideological changes [2]. These changes particularly the ideological changes aim at the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen [3]. Therefore, all pharmacy undergraduates in the University of Jos are

assigned to an academic adviser from their first year of study.

Counseling is a form of personal help carried out mainly by means of interpersonal communication whereby the counselor helps the counselee in achieving adaptive attitudes, insights and behavior [4]. Academic advising probably originated from a general university teaching praxis whereby teachers intuitively advised students about their academic progress and vocational aspirations [5].

Cumulative Grade point Average (CGPA) is a commonly used indicator of academic performance. Many Colleges of pharmacy (including the University of Jos) set a minimum CGPA that should be maintained in order for a student to continue in the program. A high CGPA while in pharmacy school may not be the only factor associated with subsequent career success. Qualities such as empathy and social skills (communication skills, leadership, and cooperation) are important in the



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pharmacy practice environment [6]. Attitude is a hypothetical construct that represents an individual's like or dislike for an item. Attitudes are positive, negative or neutral or ambivalent views of an "attitude object"; i.e. a person, behavior or event [7].

Research on college students suggests that activities like advising could increase students' involvement in their college experiences [8]. Woodside also reported numerous researches that focus on the relationship between student-faculty interactions and outcome variables such as academic achievement and overall satisfaction of college students [9-12].

No known studies on the association between students' academic performance and student/academic adviser relationship have been reported in Nigeria. The objective of this study therefore was to evaluate the relationship between students and their academic advisers and to determine if an association exists between student/academic adviser relationship and student's academic performance.

## METHOD

### Study Setting

The study was carried out in the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Jos, Nigeria. The Faculty had about 270 students and about 35 academic advisers at the time of study.

### Study Design and Recruitment of Subjects

A cross sectional survey utilizing structured questionnaires previously constructed and validated was conducted in April 2008. The student's questionnaire was divided into three sections of general data, student's academic record and student/academic adviser relationship. The academic adviser's questionnaire was divided into two sections of general data and student/academic adviser relationship.

The study population consisted of 93 third, fourth and fifth year students and 16 academic advisers. They were selected by convenient sampling technique, where the questionnaire was distributed to respondents available at the time of study.

Inclusion criteria for the students was 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year because Cumulative Grade Point Averages are calculated from the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> year.

### Ethical Consideration

The study was approved by the ethics committee of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Jos, Nigeria. Verbal informed consent was sought from each participant before administering the questionnaire and participants were told that

participation in the study was voluntary and information obtained would be anonymous and confidential.

### Statistical Analysis

Data obtained were entered into Graphpad prism version 5 and the Chi-square test was used to determine association between variables.

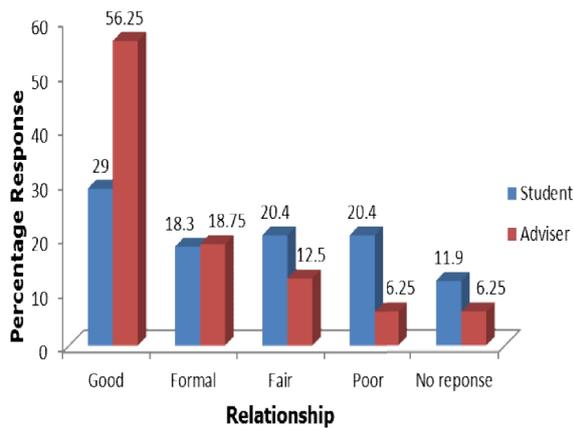
## RESULTS

The mean cumulative CGPA reported by the students was  $3.3 \pm 0.7$  on a 5-point scale. The academic advisers had an average of seven students being assigned to them per session. About 50% of them had PhD with an average of seventeen years teaching experience in the faculty. About 37.5% had Masters while 2% had Bachelor of Pharmacy degree. The overall mean age of the students was twenty four (24) years while the mean age of the academic advisers was forty seven (47) years.

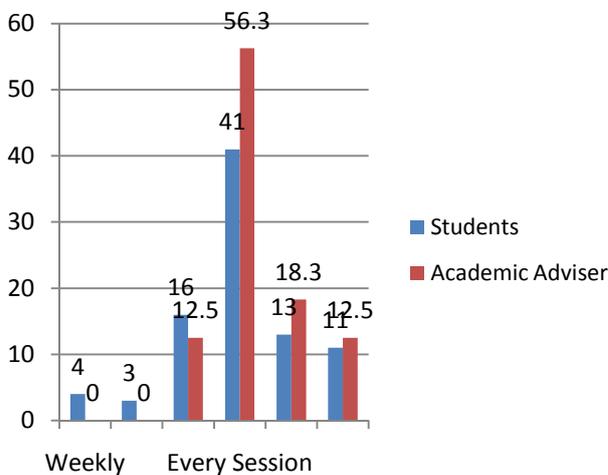
About 29% of students and 56.25% of academic advisers reported that a good relationship existed between them (figure 1) and most respondents reported meeting once every session (figure 2). The results also showed that 90% of the students and all the academic advisers (100%) want the relationship that exists between them to continue. There was no significant difference ( $P = 0.1046$  at 95% Confidence Interval level) between the responses from the students and their academic adviser on the description of the relationship.

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics of respondents

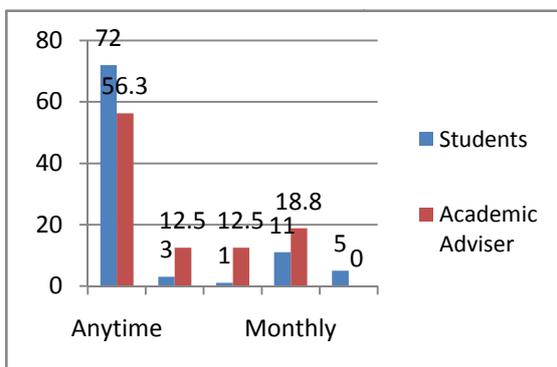
VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
<b>STUDENTS</b>		
<b>Age</b>		
51-19	2	2.2
20-24	51	54.8
25-29	40	43.0
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	55	59.1
Female	38	40.9
<b>CGPA</b>		
4.50-5.00	1	1.1
3.50-4.49	33	35.5
2.40-3.49	35	37.6
1.50-2.39	5	5.4
1.00-1.49	1	1.1
<b>ACADEMIC ADVISER</b>		
<b>Age</b>		
25-29	2	12.50
30-34	0	0.00
35-39	1	6.25
40-44	1	6.25
45-49	3	18.75
50-54	6	37.50
55-59	3	18.75
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	14	87.5
Female	2	12.5



**Fig. 1: Percentage distribution of responses showing the relationship that exists between students and their academic advisers**



**Fig. 2: Percentage distribution of the frequency of meeting between students and their academic advisers.**



**Fig. 3: Percentage response of students and their academic advisers showing how frequent they want to meet.**

A significant association ( $P < 0.001$ ) was established between student/academic adviser relationship and student's academic performance. There was a significant association between student's attitude and academic performance. However, no association existed between gender and academic performance (table 2).

**DISCUSSION**

The academic performance of the students in table 1 followed a normal distribution pattern- a symmetrical bell shaped curve [13], where majority of the students' academic performance clustered around the mean CGPA (3.3) while few were distributed at the two extremes of performance (very high and very low performance).

The results obtained from both students and their academic advisers in figure 1 described the relationship between them as good. This could mean that the students who met and communicated well with their advisers got the help they needed and were the better for it. This good relationship is essential for building the confidence and morale of the students to enable them make better grades and eventually practice their profession better and more confidently. There was no significant difference between the responses from students and their academic advisers indicating a consistency of response.

The frequency of meeting distribution from figure 2 showed that majority of the students met with their academic advisers once a session, most likely when the students wanted to sign their course registration forms. This may be due to a lack of awareness by the students of the role their advisers are to play during their period of study so they fail to take advantage of the opportunity. It may also be due to the lack of the adviser not creating time to meet the students because some of the students recorded that their advisers were almost never around. One of the Academic Advising relationship principle is 'being accessible, and a gateway to other resources; making sure advisees know how to reach you during office hours and by email' [14].

A study of graduate students in 2003 found that a number of students were unsatisfied with their advising relationships. In that study, many of the unsatisfied students believed that their advisers were too "businesslike" and "superficial." These students felt that their advisers discussed only their classes and did not seem interested in them as people [15].

VARIABLE	CGPA>3.0	CGPA<3.0	$\chi^2$	df	P-value	INF	CI
<b>Relationship</b>							
Good	24	3	18.6	2	0.000	HS	99%
Fair	20	16					
Poor	5	14					
<b>Free Com with AA</b>							
Yes	69	35	Fisher's	1	<0.0001	HS	99%
No	6	47					
<b>Attitude</b>							
Positive	40(81.6%)	14(66.7%)	<b>9.903</b>	2	<b>0.007</b>	HS	99%
Negative	0(0%)	4(19%)					
Neutral	9(18.4%)	3(14.3%)					
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	30	15	Fisher's	1	<b>0.615</b>	NS	95%
Female	22	8					

**Key:**

Com= Communication; AA= Academic Adviser; df = Degree of freedom; HS= Highly Significant; NS= Not Significant; INF= Inference; CI=Confidence Interval

Figure 3 showed majority of both students and their academic advisers (72% and 56% respectively) wanting to meet anytime especially when there is need, thereby achieving the aims of counseling as stated by Oladele [2].

Majority of the students and all the academic advisers want the relationship to continue. This may be due to what they stand to benefit as stated by Bandura [16], that learning occurs more by observation and imitation. So, students would likely enjoy listening to their lecturers and understand what has been taught better if they are free with their advisers and see them as models. Most certainly also, is the lecturers' or academic advisers' joy watching their students perform excellently academically and character wise and are confident practicing their profession. Research also indicates that frequent and meaningful contact with students, especially contact focusing on intellectual or career-related issues, seems to increase students' involvement and motivation [12, 17]. Yarbrough concurs with this finding by stating that "the brief exchanges between adviser and advisee may have the greatest impact on the student's sense of self-efficacy in completing his or her degree requirements" [18].

A few of the students (5.4%) who did not want the relationship to continue may never have interacted with their academic advisers or may have never benefited from the relationship or do not know the aim of the relationship – necessitating the need for counseling. It is therefore recommended that seminars and /or workshops on human relations should be organized for academic advisers to

enhance their human relational, communication and counseling skills.

The statistical analysis in table 2 showed a significant association between how free the students communicated with their academic advisers and their academic performance. That is; the freer the communication, the better the academic performance.

In table 2, 81.6% of the students whose CGPA was above 3.0 had a positive attitude to their course of study which may explain one of the reasons for their good academic performance. 66.7% of the students whose CGPA was below 3.0 still had a positive attitude-hopeful. This was similar to Hong's study of "students' attitude toward the use of internet for learning" where 77 out of 88 students with high scores were those who had a positive attitude [19]. About 18% of CGPA>3.0 were neutral, 4.75% and 19.05% of CGPA<3.0 were negative and afraid of their course of study – indicating again the need for counseling.

The attitude of students to their course of study was also significantly associated with their academic performance. Therefore the more the students developed a positive attitude to their course of study, the better their academic performance. There was no significant difference between gender and academic performance implying that the females did not do better than the males or vice versa.

There was a significant association between student/academic adviser relationship and students' academic performance. This may be because as earlier stated by Bandura that learning and recalling occurs more easily by observation and imitation than by only theory. Therefore, academic advisers (lecturers) have an enormous role to play in

enhancing students' academic performance. Though social learning begins in early childhood, it continues throughout an individual's life [16]. So, it can be applied on the influence the academic advisers have on their students.

In addition to cognitive learning, students can, through a good relationship with their advisers learn by observation; correct pharmaceutical attitudes, skills and techniques. So the adviser who treats his/her students well and shows enthusiasm is not presenting an ignored example!

It was therefore suggested that apart from the general orientation given to freshmen, each student should also be assigned specifically to an academic adviser who should be available to guide/counsel the student in the course of his/her study to encourage better grades to be produced during and at the end of his/her study.

Models of academic advising can also be applied to address the complex nature of student retention and attrition, such as the research done by Henning which incorporated an educational model as its primary investigative lens, namely Hirsch's (2001) multiple intervention model [20].

#### **Limitation of the study**

Access to students' academic record was not possible therefore student reported CGPA was used.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Since the academic advisers had great influence on their student's academic performance, it was suggested that all the pharmacy students be assigned to an academic adviser who would interact with the students and monitor their academic progress to enable them make better grades.

The need for counseling pharmacy students especially by their academic advisers is inevitable as it is likely to produce well informed, confident and competent individuals who will be more useful to the society.

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