

Satisfaction of Students at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences with the Performance of Their Advising Professors

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Article Type ABSTRACT

Research Paper

Background and Objective: One of the duties of university faculty members is to provide advice and guidance. The Ministry of Health has sought to facilitate this by approving the regulations for advising professors in the past two decades. The present study was conducted to investigate the satisfaction level of students at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences with the performance of advising professors. **Methods:** This cross-sectional study was conducted on all students in 2019 using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed with 27 questions in two sections, including personal information and questions related to students' satisfaction with their advising professors, in 5 areas (including academic guidance, identification of vulnerabilities, familiarity with regulations, supporting talented students, and overall satisfaction) based on a five-point Likert scale from very low to very high, and the opinions of 365 students were evaluated.

Findings: Students' satisfaction with their advising professors was at an average level. A significant difference was observed between the mean scores of the questionnaire and the variables of faculty, educational level, field, course continuity, marital status, and age ($p < 0.001$). However, there was no significant difference between gender ($p = 0.225$), course type ($p \geq 0.9$), being native or non-native ($p = 0.195$), place of residence ($p = 0.429$), GPA ($p = 0.120$), academic semester ($p = 0.128$), counseling semesters ($p \geq 0.9$), and academic probation record ($p = 0.648$). The highest satisfaction was reported in the school of Advanced Technologies in Medicine, Specialized Doctorate Degree, nanobiotechnology field, non-continuous course, and divorced students.

Conclusion: The results indicate average student satisfaction with advising professors. To increase this satisfaction, professors should be empowered in counseling and counseling centers should design joint educational programs.

Keywords: Satisfaction, Medical Students, Advising Professor, Mazandaran.

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Introduction

One of the duties of university faculty members is to provide advice and guidance. The Ministry of Health has sought to facilitate this by approving the Advising Regulations over the past two decades. Harden et al., a well-known figure in medical education, defines various roles for faculty members, including main roles such as information provider and facilitator, and secondary roles such as mentor and evaluator (1). In this regard, Iran's Ministry of Health also approved the Advising Regulations in 2003 with the aim of improving the educational level of students and then, with some changes in 2009 and 2018, notified them to universities under the title of "Academic Advising Regulations". The purpose of this regulation is to guide students in their studies and to try to prevent academic decline, promote their academic progress, and resolve their educational, research, personal, and social problems (2).

The regulation introduces the advising professor as a member of the faculty who is responsible for guiding and advising students in various fields. After about two decades of implementing this regulation, the question arises as to how satisfied students are with this plan and how they benefit from the capabilities of the advising professors. The present study intends to identify the existing challenges and provide appropriate solutions for improving this program by examining the satisfaction of students at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences with the performance of advising professors. Since no comprehensive study has been conducted in this field at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences so far, the present study was conducted to evaluate the performance of advising professors from the students' perspective by designing and distributing a satisfaction questionnaire.

Methods

After approval by the Ethics Committee of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences with the code IR.MAZUMS.REC.1398.6035, this cross-sectional study was conducted at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences in 2019. The statistical population included all students of this university and the sample size was determined as 365 people using the Morgan table. Sampling was carried out using a quota system, in a way that the number of students in each faculty was determined and then randomly selected from each field. The data collection tool was a researcher-made questionnaire that included two parts: personal information and questions related to students' satisfaction with their advising professors. These questions were arranged in five dimensions (academic guidance, identifying vulnerabilities, familiarity with regulations, supporting talented students, and overall satisfaction) based on a five-point Likert scale (from very low to very high).

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to determine the content validity of the questionnaire. In the qualitative method, the questionnaire was provided to 20 experts to give their opinions on grammar, wording, and item placement. Content validity ratio (CVR) index was used to examine quantitative validity. Experts were asked to evaluate each question based on a three-part spectrum (necessary, useful but unnecessary, unnecessary). The acceptable range of CVR was considered to be 0.40 and above, considering the number of experts (20 people) (3), and finally nine items were eliminated. In order to examine the face validity, the impact score (IS) index was calculated with a five-part Likert scale (very weak, weak, moderate, strong, and very strong), based on which all the used items had a score above 1.5 (3). The results of the face and content validity examination are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Validity indices and weighted mean of students' responses to each item of the questionnaire

Area	Row	Item	CVR*	IS**	Weighted mean
Continuous guidance and supervision of students' academic progress	Q1	I have access to my advising professor throughout the week on a regular, pre-determined schedule.	0.8	4.25	56.2
	Q2	I receive guidance from my advising professor when taking and dropping credits.	0.8	4.5	59.7
	Q3	If I need to make educational decisions (change of field/transfer/being a guest student/leave of absence), I will have the guidance of my advising professor.	0.8	4.1	89.4
	Q4	My advising professor is aware of my past and current academic status and will follow up on it in the future.	0.7	4	61.1
	Q5	My advising professor encourages me to do educational work.	0.7	4	63.5
Identifying vulnerable areas and non-educational factors affecting students' educational status	Q6	My advising professor is aware of my mental and emotional state (issues such as depression, anxiety, etc.) and provides me with the necessary guidance.	0.7	4	54.9
	Q7	My advising professor provides me with guidance on issues related to ethics.	0.8	3.9	58.6
Familiarizing students with various college and university units, educational regulations and processes	Q8	My advising professor provides me with the necessary guidance regarding the conditions for using the university's student counseling center.	0.8	4.15	55.4
	Q9	My advising professor introduced me to the university's educational regulations and standards.	0.8	4.15	59.4
	Q10	My advising professor introduced me to the university's research regulations and standards.	0.4	4.1	61.2
	Q11	My advising professor introduced me to the university's student and disciplinary regulations.	0.8	4.35	57.5
	Q12	My advising professor provides me with the necessary guidance for accepting future career responsibilities.	0.6	4.4	61.6
Identifying and supporting talented and top students	Q13	My advising professor provides me with the necessary guidance regarding continuing my studies.	0.5	3.58	62.8
	Q14	My advising professor provides me with guidance on the correct study methods.	0.4	3.85	59.7

	Q15	My advising professor provides me with guidance on the rules and regulations related to talented students.	0.5	3.85	56.2
	Q16	My advising professor works to identify my talents and potentials and help them flourish.	0.4	3.85	56
	Q17	My advising professor provides me with the necessary guidance to make the right decision and strengthen my spirit of self-leadership.	0.6	3.5	54.9
Overall satisfaction	Q18	Overall, I am satisfied with my advising professor.	0.9	4.45	48.2

*CVR: Content Validity Ratio, **IS: Impact Score

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient after 41 students completed the questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha value was above 0.9, indicating very good reliability of the questionnaire. The overall satisfaction score was calculated by summing the scores of each option, and based on that, different levels of satisfaction (very low, low, medium, high, very high) were defined.

Questionnaires were distributed among students of different levels in nine faculties and campuses of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences and collected after completion. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS 21. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine the normality of quantitative variables, and considering the non-normality of data distribution, non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests were used to analyze data. In addition, correlation of variables was calculated using Spearman coefficient.

Results

365 students participated in this study. The percentage of students participating in the study by basic characteristics is given in Table 2. The median age of the students was 23 years and the students' mean GPA was 16.52 ± 1.38 (out of 20). Moreover, the mean number of semesters with an advising professor was four semesters. The weighted mean of the responses of the 365 students along with the face validity and content validity of each of the items are given in Table 1.

The satisfaction level of students with the advising professor in the dimension of continuous guidance and monitoring of students' academic progress was 66 (high satisfaction), in the dimension of identifying vulnerable areas and non-educational factors affecting students' educational status was 56.7 (medium satisfaction), familiarizing students with different departments of the faculty and university and educational regulations and processes was 59 (medium satisfaction), identifying and supporting talented and top students was 57.9 (medium satisfaction), and overall satisfaction with the advising professor was 48.2 (medium satisfaction). Regarding the mean value of the first four dimensions, the satisfaction level of students was 59.9 (medium satisfaction).

The mean score of the questionnaire is shown in Tables 3 and 4, broken down by basic characteristics and affiliated faculties. The results of the comparative analysis show that the difference in the mean score of the questionnaire was statistically significant between faculties ($p < 0.001$), at different levels of education ($p < 0.001$), between different fields of study ($p < 0.001$), in continuous courses compared to non-continuous ones ($p < 0.001$), and depending on the marital status of students ($p < 0.001$). However, being a scholarship

recipient or tuition-paying student ($p \geq 0.9$), being native or non-native ($p = 0.195$), having academic probation record ($p = 0.648$), and the place of residence like staying in a dormitory, etc. ($p = 0.429$). The highest level of satisfaction with the advising professor was evident among doctoral students and students in non-continuous courses in the school of Advanced Technologies in Medicine.

The correlation analysis between the quantitative variables of the study and the questionnaire scores is presented in Table 5. The results of the correlation analysis show that the direct correlation between the students' GPA and the level of satisfaction with the advising professor and the inverse correlation between the number of semesters with an advising professor and the level of satisfaction with the advising professor were not statistically significant.

Table 2. Percentage of students participating in the study by basic characteristics

Characteristics	Number(%)
Gender	
Female	144(39.5)
Male	221(60.5)
Type of course	
Scholarship recipient	287(78.6)
Tuition-paying	78(21.4)
Course continuity	
Continuous	313(86)
Non-continuous	52(14)
Being native	
Native	210(57.5)
Non-native	55(42.5)
Probation record	
Yes	26(7.1)
No	339(92.9)
Marital status	
Single	292(80)
Married	67(18.4)
Divorced	6(1.6)
Educational level	
Associate degree	4(1.1)
Bachelor's degree	151(41.6)
Master's degree	45(12.3)
General Doctorate	154(41.6)
Professional Doctorate	11(3.3)
Place of residence	
With parents	145(40)
Dormitory	132(35.9)
Boarding house	56(15.6)
Living with wife	32(8.5)

Table 3. Comparison of mean questionnaire scores based on basic characteristics

Basic characteristics	Questionnaire score		p-value
	Median	Interquartile range	
Gender			
Male	47	31.75	0.225
Female	42	31	
Field of study			
Nursing	52.5	26	<0.001
Midwifery	47	17	
Consultation in midwifery	53	20.5	
Specialized nursing	59	56.25	
Psychiatric nursing	27	3	
Emergency nursing	44	19.75	
Geriatric nursing	47	9	
Medical biotechnology	74	0	
Medical nanotechnology	75	4	
Tissue engineering	77	0	
Medicinal Chemistry	49.5	26.5	
Toxicology	54	29	
Clinical Pharmacy	41.5	33.75	
Pharmaceuticals	36	4	
Dentistry	37.5	31.25	
Environmental Health	19	12	
Public Health	18	4	
Health Services Management	48	26.5	
Occupational Health	40	7	
Operating Room	49.5	23.25	
Parasitology	66	0	
Entomology	56	0	
Anesthesiology	57	34.5	
Occupational Therapy	48	17	
Laboratory Sciences	72	17	
Radiology	38	21.5	
Health Information Technology	32	27	
Medicine	38	36	
Mycology	49	0	
Immunology	65	26	
Biostatistics	31	0	
Pharmaceutical compounds	52	0	
Educational level			
Associate degree	38.5	19.25	<0.001
Bachelor's degree	42	33	
Master's degree	52	29	
General Doctorate	39	34	
Professional Doctorate	55	40	

Type of course			
Scholarship recipient	43	31	≥0.9
Tuition-paying	48.5	38.25	
Course continuity			
Continuous	41	31	<0.001
Non-continuous	53	35.75	
Place of residence			
With parents	40	19	0.429
Dormitory	45.5	33.5	
Boarding house	43	37.25	
Living with wife	52	42.25	
Being native			
Native	39.5	33	0.195
Non-native	48	30	
Marital status			
Single	41.5	30	<0.001
Married	53	39	
Divorced	56.5	42	
Probation record			
Yes	44.5	35.5	0.850
No	43	32	

Table 4. Comparison of mean questionnaire scores in affiliated faculties

Faculty	Questionnaire score		p-value
	Median	Interquartile range	
Nursing and Midwifery in Sari	49	22.5	<0.001
Advanced technologies	76.5	4.75	<0.001
Nursing in Behshahr	52	27	<0.001
Pharmacy	42	31	<0.001
Dentistry	37.5	31.25	<0.001
Health	20	11.5	<0.001
Paramedic	48	33	<0.001
Medicine	44	34.5	<0.001
Ramsar Campus	39	36	<0.001

Table 5. Correlation analysis of quantitative variables

Quantitative variables	Correlation with questionnaire score	
	Rho	p-value
Age	0.231	<0.001
GPA	0.057	0.120
Number of academic semesters	-0.052	0.128
Number of academic semesters with counseling	-0.001	≥ 0.9

Discussion

In the present study, the satisfaction of students at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences with the performance of advising professors was estimated to be average. In other words, advising professors were moderately successful in performing their assigned tasks. The highest satisfaction was in the areas of continuous guidance and supervision of students' academic progress, familiarizing students with different departments of the faculty and university, educational regulations and processes, identifying and supporting talented and top students, and identifying vulnerable areas and non-educational factors affecting students' educational status. This study also demonstrated that the average score of the questionnaire could differ significantly between faculties, at different levels of education, between different fields of study, in continuous courses compared to non-continuous ones, and depending on the marital status of students.

In a study conducted by Mousavi et al., the results showed that the mean satisfaction level of students with their academic status at the end of each semester and the evaluation and follow-up of their academic performance by the advising professor was relatively favorable. Furthermore, the satisfaction level of students with planning and supervision of the advising professor on choosing course units was relatively favorable (4), which is in line with the findings of this study.

In another study by Davoodabadi et al., it was concluded that the mean performance score of the advising professors was 78.53 ± 22.54 , which is considered average. The performance of the advising professors in different fields showed significant differences. There was no significant difference between the mean performance scores according to student gender (5), which is in line with the results of the present study.

In a study by Ebrahimipour et al., the results showed that the performance of advising professors has not achieved a satisfactory status among students (6), which is consistent with the findings of this study.

In a study by Delaram, the results showed that the implementation of the advising professor program has not been able to provide a satisfactory status among students (7), which is consistent with the results of the present study. In a study conducted by Esmaeilpour et al., the results showed that 76.1% of students are satisfied with the performance of advising professors (8), which is inconsistent with the results of this study, which reported an average level of satisfaction.

In a study by Seyedmajidi et al., the findings showed that 37.2% of students did not have sufficient knowledge about how to get help from their advising professor, about half (50.3%) of the students reported the presence of the advising professor at the announced time, and 57% reported the regularity of the advising professor program as bad or very bad (9), which was not consistent with the results of this study.

In a study conducted by Sum et al., the findings showed that 71.7% of students had few visits to their advising professor. Only 13.4% of them had a good knowledge of how advising professors work at the university. The level of satisfaction of most students with the performance of advising professors at the university was unsatisfactory (10), which is not consistent with the results of this study.

In a study conducted by Moulana et al., their findings showed that 50% of students were aware of the various fields of activities of advising professors. The most frequent visits to advising professors were associated with obtaining scientific and educational resources or academic problems, which were 49.3% and 47.6%, respectively. Moreover, only 32.2% of students were satisfied with the activities of the advising professors. They concluded that although one-third of students were highly satisfied with the activities of the advising professors, their study showed that there is a gap in achieving the desired goals in regard with the role of advising professors. There is a need for further research in this regard and a need for providing various facilities to provide better advisory services (11). Considering that the researchers of this study used percentages and frequencies in their report and the scoring criteria were not the same as the scoring criteria of the present article, the results of the two studies are not comparable.

The strengths of the present study included the design and psychometric testing of a valid and reliable questionnaire based on the latest regulations, a large sample size, good cooperation between faculties, and appropriate classification of findings. In addition, one of the most important weaknesses of the study was the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic in the final stages of the study, which prevented optimal use of the study results.

After nearly two decades since the announcement of the Academic Advising Regulation and its repeated revisions by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, it seems that this program has not yet been able to satisfy students. According to the results of the present study, it is expected that professors are fully aware of the educational regulations and regulations related to students and fully familiarize their students with them. It is also necessary for professors to actively identify the talents of their students and take steps to guide these talents in the right direction. It is also necessary for advising professors to be familiar with vulnerable areas and non-educational factors affecting students' educational status and take timely action to resolve them. Therefore, it is essential for professors to be empowered in various aspects of counseling and to provide appropriate counseling to students. Given that all universities have a counseling center and a Medical Education Studies and Development Center (EDC), it is suggested that these two centers jointly prepare and implement regular programs to empower all professors who work as advising professors.

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