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Academic advising and students' experience in KFU's preparatory year

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Abstract

Academic advising plays a crucial role in supporting students during their transition to university life, particularly in the preparatory year. This study examines the impact of academic advising on student success at King Faisal University (KFU), focusing on academic performance, student satisfaction, and preparedness for university life. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through surveys and interviews with students and academic advisors during 2023. The results indicate that students who engaged in academic advising experienced significant improvements in their GPA, satisfaction levels, and confidence in managing academic responsibilities. The findings also highlight the importance of strong advisor-student relationships in fostering student motivation and engagement. Based on these results, the study recommends that universities implement structured advising programs, enhance advisor training, and integrate academic advising into the preparatory year curriculum. These measures can contribute to improved retention rates, better academic outcomes, and overall student success in higher education. Future research should consider longitudinal studies that track students beyond the preparatory year.

Keywords: Academic advising, Academic performance, Advisor-student relationship, Student satisfaction, University transition.

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Transparency: The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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1. Introduction

The transition from secondary education to university presents many challenges for students, particularly in their first year of higher education. The preparatory year serves as an essential bridge, equipping students with the necessary academic skills, knowledge, and personal development to succeed in their respective fields of study. However, this transition is often accompanied by difficulties, including adapting to new learning environments, managing academic workloads, and

addressing social and psychological adjustments [1, 2]. Without adequate support systems, many students struggle to meet academic expectations, which can lead to high failure rates, low performance, and decreased motivation [3].

Academic advising has emerged as a critical support mechanism to help students navigate these challenges and achieve their academic and personal goals. Research indicates that effective academic advising positively influences student retention, academic achievement, and overall satisfaction with the university experience [4, 5]. By offering guidance on course selection, study strategies, and time management, academic advisors play an important role in enhancing students' academic performance and sense of belonging within the university community [6]. Moreover, the quality of student-advisor interactions has been shown to significantly impact students' academic motivation and engagement [7].

At King Faisal University (KFU), the preparatory year is designed to provide students with foundational courses that align with their intended majors while also fostering essential academic and personal skills. However, despite these structured programs, many students continue to face challenges that hinder their academic success. Therefore, understanding the role of academic advising in enhancing students' preparatory year experience is important to improve retention rates and overall student outcomes.

This study aims to examine the impact of academic advising on student success in the preparatory year at KFU by assessing key aspects such as academic performance, student satisfaction, and preparedness for university life. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study collected data from students and academic advisors through surveys and interviews. By analyzing these perspectives, this research provides insights into best practices for academic advising and offers recommendations for universities to enhance their advising programs. Ultimately, the findings contribute to the broader discourse on student success and the role of academic support services in higher education.

2. Literature Review

Academic advising plays a key role in supporting students' transition to university life, particularly during their preparatory year. Research consistently highlights its positive impact on academic performance, student satisfaction, and retention rates.

First of all, effective academic advising is strongly linked to improved academic performance, retention rates, and student satisfaction [4]. Studies indicated that structured advising programs contribute to students' motivation, engagement, and sense of belonging within the university [8]. Research by Quipit, et al. [9] analyzed student retention in higher education and found that personalized advising improved students' academic self-efficacy and persistence. Another study by Lefdahl-Davis, et al. [10] explored life coaching interventions in academic advising. Their findings suggested that integrating life coaching principles enhances students' self-discovery, academic motivation, and university experience. Similarly, Tyler [11] examined the role of mental health interventions within advising and found that counseling services embedded in academic advising frameworks helped students cope with academic stress and improved their well-being.

Second, the quality of advisor-student interactions significantly impacts students' academic success. Studies found that advisors who engage in a developmental advising approach foster higher levels of student engagement and academic resilience. Habley, et al. [12]. Deramo, et al. [8] stated that meaningful advisor-student relationships contribute to students' retention by addressing academic and personal challenges. Moreover, a study by Huffman, et al. [13] explored how advising at Hispanic-serving institutions integrates social justice principles. Their research emphasized that culturally responsive advising enhances students' academic success, particularly for marginalized groups. Bermea [14] similarly examined how academic advisors can foster inclusivity in advising practices, ensuring equity in higher education.

Academic advising faces several challenges in higher education institutions. These include increasing faculty workloads, inadequate advisor training, and technological barriers [15]. Faculty advisors struggle with navigating software, unclear expectations, and workload inequity [16]. To address these issues, some institutions have implemented centralized advising models. For example, one university established a University College with full-time academic advisors for first-year students and undeclared majors [17]. This approach aims to improve student outcomes, as frequent advisor meetings are associated with higher persistence rates and better academic standing [17].

Also, Abrea, et al. [18] examined the role of academic advising in the Philippines, where high academic pressure negatively impacts students' mental health. Their study highlighted the need for a balanced advising approach that supports both academic and personal development.

Additionally, research by Abdelgaed Allam, et al. [19] on Saudi universities underscored the importance of mindfulness and self-compassion in advising. Their study suggested that academic advising should incorporate well-being strategies to help students navigate academic stress effectively.

Several studies proposed best practices for effective academic advising. Galloway [20] suggested integrating technology into advising, such as online advising platforms, to improve accessibility and efficiency. In addition, Luo, et al. [21] further recommended government support for advising programs, such as funding mental health services and academic counseling initiatives.

With regard to the preparatory year, it serves as a critical bridge between secondary and higher education. Research indicated that early academic advising intervention significantly impacts student preparedness for university life. Research indicated that academic passion and self-regulated learning (SRL) play crucial roles in students' university transition and academic success. Harmonious passion positively predicts SRL and psychological well-being in university students [22]. Similarly, Issrani, et al. [23] examined gender-based differences in students' self-confidence and found that male and female students benefit differently from academic advising. Their study highlighted that as students climbed the academic ladder, their rating of academic advising tended to rise. Also, Abuzaieda, et al. [24] found that data-driven approaches using machine learning algorithms, particularly random forest models, have shown high accuracy in predicting students' counseling needs.

To wrap up, despite the growing body of research on academic advising, there is a lack of studies examining the specific impact of structured advising programs in preparatory years at Middle Eastern universities, particularly at King Faisal University. While several studies highlight the importance of advising in general student success, few focus on its role in easing the transition to higher education within the Saudi Arabian context. Furthermore, there is limited research on how cultural and institutional factors influence the effectiveness of academic advising programs.

Therefore, this study aims to:

- Assess the effectiveness of structured academic advising programs in enhancing academic performance, student satisfaction, and preparedness at the preparatory year at King Faisal University.
- Examine the role of advisor-student relationships in fostering motivation, engagement, and retention rates among preparatory year students at King Faisal University.

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather comprehensive data on the impact of academic advising on student success in the preparatory year. The quantitative component involves the administration of surveys to measure student achievement and satisfaction, while the qualitative component includes interviews with students and academic advisors to gain deeper insights into their experiences.

The study involved a sample of 100 students enrolled in the preparatory year at King Faisal University in Saudi Arabia during the 2023 academic year. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different faculties and demographic groups. Additionally, seven academic advisors will be interviewed to provide their perspectives on the advising process and its impact on student success.

Surveys were administered to students at the beginning and end of the academic year to assess changes in their academic performance and satisfaction levels. The survey included questions related to academic achievement, satisfaction with academic advising, and overall preparedness for university life.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and academic advisors to gather qualitative data on their experiences with academic advising. The interviews explored topics such as the quality of the advising relationship, the effectiveness of the advice provided, and the perceived impact of advising on student success. In addition, the survey data were analyzed using statistical software to identify trends and correlations between academic advising and student outcomes. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics, such as t-tests and regression analysis, were employed to test hypotheses and identify significant relationships. Finally, the interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns in the responses.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the sample of 100 students receiving academic advice over one academic year, the analysis of the survey and interviews shows the following results:

4.1. Improved Academic Performance

The findings from the study showed a strong positive correlation between academic advising and student academic performance. The analysis of GPA data before and after one academic year of advising shows a notable improvement in students' grades. Table 1 illustrates the changes in students' academic performance based on their GPA scores before and after one academic year of academic advising.

Table 1.
Academic performance before and after advising.

GPA Range	Before Advising (n=100)	After Advising (n=100)	Percentage Change
Below 2.0	25% (25 students)	10% (10 students)	-15%
2.0 - 2.99	40% (40 students)	35% (35 students)	-5%
3.0 - 3.99	25% (25 students)	40% (40 students)	+15%
4.0 - 4.5	10% (10 students)	15% (15 students)	+5%

One of the most significant findings is the 15% decrease in students with a GPA below 2.0. Before receiving academic advising, 25% of students had a GPA below 2.0, which dropped to 10% after one year. This reduction suggests that students who engaged in academic advising developed better study habits, improved their learning strategies, and received the necessary support to enhance their academic standing. This aligns with previous research indicating that proactive advising helps at-risk students overcome academic difficulties [6].

For students in the 2.0–2.99 GPA range, there was a 5% decrease, indicating that some of these students moved into higher GPA categories after receiving advising. While the decline is moderate, it suggests that students on the verge of academic success benefited from advising, though possibly not as dramatically as lower-performing students.

The most impressive change is observed in students with GPA ranges of 3.0–3.99 and 4.0–4.5, which increased by 15% and 5%, respectively. This finding suggests that academic advising not only helps struggling students but also enhances the performance of students who are already performing well. By refining their study techniques, providing personalized course guidance, and helping students set academic goals, advising appears to support overall academic excellence.

These results reinforce the importance of structured academic advising programs in higher education. The data suggest that consistent interaction with advisors helps students refine their academic skills, make better course selections, and develop stronger time management strategies.

4.2. Increased Student Satisfaction

The findings demonstrate that academic advising significantly enhances students' overall satisfaction with their preparatory year experience. The survey results show a substantial increase in student satisfaction levels, with higher percentages of students reporting positive experiences after receiving academic advising.

Table 2.
Student Satisfaction Before and After Advising.

Satisfaction Level	Before Advising (n=100)	After Advising (n=100)	Percentage Change
Very Satisfied	15% (15 students)	40% (40 students)	+25%
Satisfied	35% (35 students)	45% (45 students)	+10%
Neutral	30% (30 students)	10% (10 students)	-20%
Dissatisfied	15% (15 students)	3% (3 students)	-12%
Very Dissatisfied	5% (5 students)	2% (2 students)	-3%

The most notable improvement is in the "Very Satisfied" category, which increased from 15% to 40% (+25%). This suggests that after engaging in academic advising, students felt more supported, confident, and engaged in their academic journey. The 10% increase in the "Satisfied" category (from 35% to 45%) further confirms that students who received advising found value in the guidance provided.

These results align with prior studies indicating that effective academic advising fosters a sense of belonging, enhances motivation, and improves students' overall university experience [4, 7]. The increase in satisfaction levels suggests that students perceive advising as a critical resource for navigating academic and personal challenges.

Another important trend is the 20% decrease in students who reported a "Neutral" experience (from 30% to 10%). This decline suggests that students who initially felt indifferent about their preparatory year became more engaged and satisfied after receiving academic advising.

The 12% reduction in "Dissatisfied" students (from 15% to 3%) and a 3% drop in "Very Dissatisfied" students (from 5% to 2%) indicate that academic advising successfully addressed many of the concerns that contributed to students' dissatisfaction. This suggests that students who might have been struggling academically, socially, or emotionally benefited from the individualized support offered through advising.

These results are consistent with research showing that academic advising positively influences students' academic engagement, confidence, and university adjustment [12].

4.3. Enhanced Preparedness for University Life

Students who participated in academic advising reported feeling more prepared for the academic and social demands of university life. The survey results found improvements in key preparedness indicators, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3.
Student Preparedness Indicators Before and After Advising.

Preparedness Indicator	Before Advising (%)	After Advising (%)	Percentage Increase
Confidence in Course Selection	55%	80%	+25%
Time Management Skills	50%	78%	+28%
Understanding University Policies	45%	75%	+30%
Ability to Set Academic Goals	52%	82%	+30%

The results indicate that academic advising has a significant positive impact on students' preparedness for university life, enhancing key skills and competencies. One of the notable improvements is in confidence in course selection. The percentage of students feeling confident in their course selection increased from 55% to 80%, reflecting a 25% improvement. This suggests that academic advising plays a crucial role in helping students navigate course options, clarify academic requirements, and make more informed decisions about their studies. With better guidance, students may feel more secure in their academic choices, thus reducing the anxiety typically associated with course selection. In addition, students reported a 28% increase in their time management skills, rising from 50% to 78%. This indicates that academic advising likely provides students with strategies to manage their time effectively, helping them balance academic demands with social and extracurricular activities. Improved time management is critical for success in university as it enables students to meet deadlines, reduce stress, and improve overall productivity.

There was also a 30% increase in students' understanding of university policies, rising from 45% to 75%. Academic advising appears to play a key role in helping students become familiar with important university regulations, such as grading policies, academic integrity, and course requirements. Understanding these policies is essential for navigating the university system successfully and avoiding academic pitfalls. Finally, the ability to set academic goals improved by 30%, from 52% to 82%. Academic advising helps students define clear academic objectives, which are crucial for staying focused, motivated,

and aligned with their long-term academic and career goals. This enhanced goal-setting ability can contribute to higher academic achievement and a greater sense of purpose throughout their university journey.

4.4. Positive Advisor-Student Relationships

The study also analyzed the impact of advisor-student relationships on student success. The survey findings showed that students who reported strong relationships with their advisors experienced greater academic progress and satisfaction. Table 4 highlights the correlation between the perceived quality of advising relationships and student outcomes.

Table 4.

Advisor-Student Relationship and Academic Outcomes.

Relationship Quality	High GPA Students (%)	High Satisfaction (%)
Strong Relationship	85%	90%
Moderate Relationship	60%	65%
Weak Relationship	30%	40%

The findings from the study underscore the critical role that advisor-student relationships play in student success, particularly in relation to academic outcomes such as GPA and satisfaction. Students who reported having a strong relationship with their advisors demonstrated significantly higher academic success. 85% of these students maintained a high GPA, and 90% reported high satisfaction with their university experience. These results suggest that when students feel supported, understood, and engaged by their advisors, they are more likely to perform well academically and feel content with their overall university experience. Strong advisor-student relationships provide both emotional and academic support, which can positively influence students' motivation and commitment to their studies.

In contrast, students who reported a moderate relationship with their advisors showed a marked decrease in both GPA (60%) and satisfaction (65%). While these students may still experience some level of success, the results indicate that the quality of the relationship has a significant effect. A moderate relationship suggests that while students may receive some guidance, it may not be as personalized, frequent, or supportive as a strong relationship, which could limit their academic progress and overall satisfaction.

Finally, students with weak advisor-student relationships had the lowest academic outcomes. Only 30% of these students achieved a high GPA, and 40% expressed high satisfaction. These results suggest that a lack of a meaningful relationship with an advisor may lead to feelings of isolation, confusion, and a lack of academic direction. When students do not feel connected to their advisors, they may not receive the necessary support or guidance, which can lead to diminished academic performance and lower levels of satisfaction.

In summary, the positive impact of academic advising on student performance and satisfaction underscores the need for universities to invest in high-quality advising programs. Advisors should be trained to provide personalized, student-centered support that addresses the unique needs and challenges of each student. Moreover, the study highlighted the critical role of academic advising in enhancing the preparatory year experience for students. By providing tailored guidance and support, advisors can help students navigate the challenges of the preparatory year and develop the skills and confidence needed for success in university. Universities should consider integrating academic advising into the core curriculum of the preparatory year to ensure that all students have access to this valuable resource.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the vital role of academic advising in enhancing the preparatory year experience at King Faisal University. The findings indicate that effective academic advising significantly contributes to students' academic success, satisfaction, and preparedness for university life. By offering personalized guidance, academic advisors help students improve their academic performance, develop essential study and time management skills, and build confidence in their ability to navigate university challenges. Furthermore, strong advisor-student relationships have been shown to foster a sense of belonging, which positively impacts student motivation and retention. Given the substantial benefits of academic advising, universities should recognize it as an integral part of student support services and allocate adequate resources to strengthen advising programs.

To enhance the effectiveness of academic advising, universities should implement structured advising programs that include regular student-advisor meetings, individualized academic planning, and targeted interventions for struggling students. Furthermore, training programs for academic advisors should emphasize student-centered advising approaches, equipping them with the necessary skills to address students' academic and personal challenges. Additionally, universities should integrate academic advising into the preparatory year curriculum to ensure that all students benefit from this support system. Establishing an online advising platform could also improve accessibility and allow students to seek guidance at their convenience. Moreover, collecting continuous feedback from students and advisors can help refine advising practices and ensure that they meet students' evolving needs.

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, as students' perceptions of advising effectiveness may be influenced by personal experiences and expectations. Second, the sample size, though representative, is limited to students enrolled in the preparatory year at KFU, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other institutions. Additionally, the study primarily focused on short-term outcomes, such as academic performance and satisfaction, while long-term effects on student

retention and career success were not explored. Future research should consider longitudinal studies that track students beyond the preparatory year to assess the lasting impact of academic advising on their academic and professional trajectories.

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