Understanding the role of academic advising in supporting social mobility among probation students in Oman: A bourdieusian perspective

Holi Ibrahim Holi[1*], Zulaikha Al Saadi[2]

[1,2]University of Technology & Applied Sciences (UTAS), Rustaq College of Education, Oman.

Corresponding author: Holi Ibrahim Holi (Email: holi.ibrahim@utas.edu.om)

Abstract

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Oman—indeed around the world—should take social mobility seriously. On this basis, the purpose of this qualitative case study examines the experiences of seven Omani English-major students from underprivileged backgrounds. The students are academically at-risk, being on probation and receiving academic advisory support. Regarding methodology, semi-structured interviews are used to elicit students' experiences, while the data are analyzed thematically and through a Bourdieusian lens. Bourdieu [1] social theory is used—namely, concepts of cultural field, habitus, the rules of the game and reflexivity—to explicate the impact of academic advice on these students and take into account the students' social backgrounds and their academic achievements. The findings of the study show that students on academic probation value the role played by their academic advisors in assisting them to overcome their situation and the educational barriers they encountered. The study implies that in order for on-probation students to adopt the academic habitus and to 'succeed' within the academic field, they also need to be able to articulate the relationship between their personal trajectory, their habitus and the rules and demands of the field. This study concludes by presenting practical and policy solutions, whilst also indicating the contribution to the growing body of literature related to academic probation and academic advisory support—particularly in narrowing social and economic gaps.

Keywords: Academic advising, Bourdieusian Perspective, EFL students, Social mobility.

1. Introduction

In the context of Oman's socio-economic transformation, the number of students who are interested in science and knowledge has increased remarkably. As a result, Omani Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have experienced an increase in the number of students who are enrolled in various specializations. This transformation has also pushed HEIs in Oman to increase their admission capacity to accommodate the increasing number of students. However, this transformation has been accompanied by a number of issues related to students' academic, social, economic and psychological lives [2]. The most important of these issues relates to academic advice, adaptation and integration into university and effective studies skills development, which together reflect students' success. These issues are attributed to a variety of reasons including the students themselves, their family and the students' socio-economic situation. Students' success and retention are important indicators of HEI effectiveness and academic accreditation [3-6]. HEIs in Oman now place a greater emphasis on identifying students' areas of weakness and swiftly addressing any challenges they may experience. Given the significance of academic probation and its impact on students, their parents, their institutions, and society at large, it is important to pay close attention to its primary causes. From the viewpoints of the students who are currently at academic risk at University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) –Rustaq, Oman, this study will illuminate and pinpoint the primary factors that contribute to students being placed on academic probation and the role of academic advice in helping them to overcome this situation. The study will reveal the causes of this problem, whether personal, social, economic, or academic, as well as the challenges that students may experience that contribute negatively to their academic progress and success.

This study is important because there has been a relative dearth of research focused on the factors that contribute to academic probation in the Arab world in general and Oman in particular [7]; thus, this study bridges the gap in the literature that often overlooks this issue Academic advising can be defined as "*a collaborative process between a student and an advisor that focuses on helping students achieve their educational and career goals. It involves exploring academic options, developing plans, and making informed decisions about coursework, programs, and future pathways*" [8]. However, whether this definition fully encompasses the needs of underprivileged undergraduate students in an Omani HEI, remains to be established. It is suggested that a Bourdieusian lens can facilitate understanding of how academic advising can be enacted in the specific context. Bourdieu [1] theory is related to cultural field, habitus, the rules of the game and reflexivity are utilized as a conceptual framework to describe, discuss and explain the topic of academic probation and its causes and consequences [9]. This will provide new insights and enhance our knowledge and understanding of students' perspectives of academic advising in the context.

The study pursues the following objectives through semi-structured interviews with seven students, analysing the data through a Bourdieusian lens:

1. To determine students' understanding of effective academic advice strategies that impact academic achievements and success.

2. To consider the extent to which students' previous experiences educationally, socially, culturally affect their strategies and academic success.

3. To ascertain how successful academic advice is in raising students' awareness about their study and helping them overcome their academic barriers.

4. To elicit suggestions that students have on improving academic advising interventions.

Literature relevant to the research objectives is now presented and reviewed.

2. Literature Review

The literature has pointed to numerous challenges which students, their parents and the institutions may face during students' transitions as learners in HEIs. Students in their first year of university may suffer in terms of mental health as a result of the struggles they have in attempting to strike a balance between their personal needs and the challenges that come with adjusting to a new environment at the university [10]. Students view university as a new experience that is distinct from their previous schooling in that there are many new challenges and experiences that require students to adjust by gaining a greater familiarity with the university structure and regulations [6].

2.1. English Language Skills and Ethical AI Use

In Al-Badwawi [11] research of first-year students' perceptions of their first year at college, she confirms that the transition from school to college is not an easy task. Students' inadequate English language skills, their limited writing experience and their individual traits are among the factors that were identified as contributing to making the transition more difficult. She found that the discrepancy between the school instruction and the needs of academic programs caused first-year students to struggle with their disciplinary demands. Furthermore, the participants in her study acknowledged that they lacked the essential research skills needed to succeed in their academic courses. Similar findings have also been reported by other researchers [4, 12, 13]. Al-Mahrouqia and Karadsheh [4] indicate that English language proficiency was the main factor affecting students' academic progression [4]. Likewise, He, et al. [14] note the importance of nurturing emotional health in English learning to foster intrinsic motivation, improve language skills and provide a conducive learning environment, whilst reducing emotional barriers such as language anxiety and disinterest. Alsaawi [15] and Syafei and Nuraeningsih [16] also highlight how artificial intelligence can accelerate English learning; however, they also cite challenges that students face with ethical use, such as avoiding plagiarism. It is likely that student advising in Oman will need to address challenges and benefits of AI with students.

2.2. Social Dimensions

Another strand of literature refers to students living in crowded accommodation and missing classes which both play a detrimental role on students' success. Students find themselves in a setting that is socially and culturally different from the school setting; an environment with its own unique system and rules and that requires specific skills, abilities and knowledge. The literature emphasizes that students might not have had sufficient preparation to cope with the requirements and demands of this new experience, which might negatively affect their academic progress [3-5]. As a result, some students might face academic probation, which has not only raised concerns for the students themselves but also their parents, their institutions and wider society. This may reflect different aspects including the students' poor academic and social situations and the institution's efficiency in dealing with this [4, 5]. In the worst-case scenario, when students on probation leave their institutions without qualification, the labor market may also be impacted since these students lack the necessary skills to enter the workplace. This can have detrimental effects on society by increasing the number of unemployed people [5]. Therefore, it appears that the transition from school to university requires a significant effort, not only from the students but also from their institution.

Self-efficacy is likely to be a key concern for at-risk students, particularly from underprivileged backgrounds, in developing their confidence to be more socially mobile. [17] elicits quantitative data from 214 master's students, showing that when students have a greater sense of self-efficacy, they are more engaged and have greater academic success. Wang and Ishak [18] and Fahdi, et al. [2] also highlight building resilience as a key tenet of academic advising as wellbeing intersects with academic success. From a family perspective in Oman, Ibrahim [10] notes that collective efforts with family, counsellors and academics, taking note of students' background is crucial. Ahn and Davis [19], surveying 380 students in the UK, found that a sense of belonging and social activities were crucial to academic success, yet socio-economic status could create barriers to this. For Omani students, the findings of studies around social factors are likely to resonate; however, it will be interesting to understand students' journeys through more qualitative data and their own voices.

2.3. Experiences with Academic Advising

Students' experiences of the academic advisory system have been investigated in a number of studies [13, 20-22]. Students' awareness of the academic advisory system and the role of academic advisors was investigated by using a mixed method approach in a private Lebanese University [22]. The study revealed that students had negative experience towards the current academic advisory system due to lack of awareness of the academic advisory processes. However, the participants acknowledged the significant role of academic advising on students in mentoring students academically. This dilemma could be because of the mismatch between the students' expectations of what academic advising entails with what they actually received from their advisors.

The majority of HEIs in Oman respond to this issue by emphasizing the importance of implementing effective academic advice systems that assist the students, at least academically to address and cope with their academic concerns and requirements [23]. Academic support is often regarded as crucial to students' academic performance and success in higher education [13]. However, there are a number of challenges that have been identified that are thought to holistically affect the process of academic advice. For example, students might overlook its significance. Also, academic advisory services are regarded, particularly by advisors, as an added responsibility. Due to the large numbers of advisees that are assigned to each advisor, advisors might not have sufficient time to meet with their advisees which might have an impact regarding quality and success. Students are frequently assigned to advisors who fail to fully understand their academic background, e.g., personal or academic problems. This might result in providing the students with guidance based on the facts presented, overlooking the personal or academic problems of their advisee [12, 24, 25]. Lack of effective academic advice might also push the students to seek unreliable information from their peers. Students might end up making the wrong academic decisions as a result of the absence of proper academic support and in the worst circumstances, they might be placed on academic probation [25].

The question remains as to what institutional features can be in place to enable effective academic advising which improves the student experience. Albert and Wozny [26] show overall increased average scores of 2,294 Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) students on academic probation after receiving academic advising, which builds a case for targeting resources. Mathew and Ibrahim [23] contend that roles and responsibilities need to be clearly defined and with appropriate recognition and status for advisors. They note that when advisors are caring and professionalized, there is greater student retention. Al-Alawi, et al. [27] have piloted data mining algorithms in Oman, collecting socio-economic and previous academic data so that at-risk students can be better identified to enable early intervention. Al-Anbari, et al. [28] propose that some features of academic advising can be automated to free resources for impactful face-to-face interventions. It is acknowledged that such changes may require technological upgrades as well as continuing professional development (CPD) for staff.

2.4. Bourdieusian Lenses

As noted, on-probation students may often be from underprivileged backgrounds, which necessitates a transformative lens through which to view academic advising as a driver of social mobility. It is argued that a Bourdieusian framework can be beneficial. In Oman, Al-Zadjali [29] uses the work of Bourdieu to examine English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher identity construction; however, for Omani students there is yet to be a study of this nature. In the UK, for instance, numerous studies incorporate notions of capitals and habitus to consider the widening participation agenda as students from diverse backgrounds enter HEIs. Recently, Schofield, et al. [30] examine the social anxiety of young students from lower

socio-economic groups and suggest building habitus, agency and capitals as a toolkit. Noting the importance of social class difference, McLaughlin [31] emphasizes habitus as a way to raise self-efficacy in a study of 13 mature female students to better understand how to widen participation. The paper will now proceed to examine these ideas of Bourdieu as part of the theoretical underpinnings of this study on underprivileged students receiving academic advising in Oman.

3. Theoretical Underpinnings

Bourdieu delineates three fundamental forms of capital: economic capital, which is readily convertible; social capital, which is comprised of 'social obligations' or 'connections'; and cultural capital or 'cultural competences', which can be embodied (internalized and intangible), objectified (cultural products), and institutionalized (officially accredited) [9]. The forms of capital are viewed as mutually constitutive in that economic capital affords the time and resources for investment in the development of student's cultural capital, which is associated with future educational and occupational success and, in turn, contributes to the accumulation of economic capital [9]. Socioeconomic success is also associated with greater social capital in that one's social network becomes broader, more influential, and more conducive to opportunity and further enhancement of one's other capital stocks.

The study draws on social theory, namely, Bourdieu [1] theory which underpins this study, and it elucidates key concepts of cultural field, habitus, the rules of the game and reflexivity—to explicate the impact of academic advice on these students and taking into account the students' social backgrounds and their academic achievements. Bourdieu [1] social theory is used as an overarching framework of reference to help to illuminate, conceptualise and understand probation students' experiences with academic advising.

3.1. Field

The notion of field was crystalized as a social space where individuals interact with each other. Bourdieu [1] notion of field helps us understand how academic advising is operating with the College through different phases, strategies and practices. For Bourdieu, "a field consists of a set of objective historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)" [32]. Additionally, the term field refers to the formal and informal norms governing a particular social sphere of activity (e.g. family, public school, higher education, art, politics, and economics). Fields are centered on specific forms of capital or combinations of capitals, which "are both the process within, and product, of a field" [33].

People's practices or actions including academic advising practices – their behavioral repertoire – are the consequences of their habitus and cultural capital interacting within the context of a given field. Fields overlap and exist at various levels, with smaller fields (e.g. family) nested in larger fields (e.g. educational field, economic field). All sub-fields including family, have greater impact in terms of advising students to succeed in their academic field. All fields fall within the overarching field of power (social sphere), which is structured by two competing principles of social hierarchy: the distribution of economic capital and the distribution of cultural capital.

3.2. Habitus

The notion of *"Habitus"* is seen by Bourdieu as the learned set of preferences or dispositions by which a person orients to the social world. It is a system of durable, transposable, cognitive "schemata or structures of perception, conception and action" [34]. Habitus is something deeply rooted in family upbringing (socialization within the family) and conditioned by one's position in the social structure. Bourdieu termed it 'socialized subjectivity' or subjectivity conditioned by structural circumstances. Habitus shapes the parameters of people's sense of agency and possibility; it entails perceptual schemes of which ends and means are reasonable given that individual's particular position in a stratified society. In the case of the academically at-risk students, their learning preferences, dispositions, cultural capital and levels of motivations are important in advising and helping them to navigate their academic problems and overcoming them through the help of both family and academic advisors. The congruence between the field and habitus is important for inevitable success.

Academically at-risk students who have the appropriate habitus and capital are likely to be aware of the rules if the game, namely, their academic context and its advising and academic regulations will be successful in their academic field. Students coming from families with appropriate capital may exhibit preferences and dispositions in congruence with the University standards and expectations are likely to be successful in their academic field, which will reinforce their University-positive habitus and the probability of completing their studies successfully. However, those students whose habitus are less in congruence with the University standards and expectations with ineffective academic advising are likely to attain lower levels of academic success. Alternately, students with initially misaligned habitus, but sufficient early experience of academic success may increasingly see university in a positive light and may come to regard the accumulation of cultural capital via schooling as a means of social mobility—helping to overcome the impediments to opportunity associated with their class position. Academic success is viewed as the rewards of increased cultural capital which positively alter the student's aspirations and orientation toward University (habitus), which in turn feeds back into their practices and performance. In this manner, habitus may be transformed "… by the effect of social trajectory leading to conditions of living different from initial ones" [35]. According to Heffernan [36], habitus relates to how one's past circumstances influence one's present and future:

> Being born into a wealthy family with a history of attending an elite school and university means there is a structure in place that suggests a child will attend those schools (or ones very similar to them) and go on to a career that is likely to be held by an individual with such structures behind them.

It is important to consider all social aspects of a student when advising them to overcome their academic problems and complete their studies successfully.

3.3. Rules of the Game and Reflexivity

Bourdieu used a range of terms and metaphors to refer to the rules of the game such as the principles of the games, 'the demands of the field' [37], and 'the immanent structures of a field' Bourdieu [1]. Both academic advisors and their student advisees cannot be good players in their field unless they know the rules and regulations of the academic advising and principles of their field that they operate in.

The rules of academic advising and the demands of the academic field are many and varied based on the students' academic status. Therefore, students who develop good transferrable skills, competencies and high levels of autonomy will demonstrate appropriate academic habitus. Academic advisors should play an important role in helping their student advisees to raise awareness on their habitus and encourage them to be reflexive.

Bourdieu and Wacquant [32] viewed reflexivity as something not confined to research, but it goes beyond academic research to involve "the inclusion of a theory of intellectual practice as an integral component and necessary conditions of a critical theory". Being reflexive helps you to understand and get down to the nitty gritty of the game and real life. In this case, reflexivity may include critical evaluation and reflection which leads to "reflexive habitus through the institutionalizing of a reflexive disposition in 'mechanisms of training, dialogue, and critical evaluation" [32, 38]. Being reflexive not only helps us become better researchers: it can also help us to navigate our lives, our path through the field(s) in which we find ourselves, more successfully [39].

Bourdieu and Wacquant [32] claim that reflexivity is an instrument that can help in many aspects including academic research and others:

> When you apply reflexive sociology to yourself, you open up the possibility of identifying true sites of freedom, and thus of building small-scale, modest, practical morals in keeping with the scope of human freedom which, in my opinion, is not that large. Social fields are universes where things continually move and are never completely predetermined. However,…I am often stunned by the degree to which things are determined…I personally suffer when I see somebody trapped by necessity, whether it be the necessity of the poor or that of the rich.

It is quite evident that reflexivity is associated with becoming a competent member of an academic cultural field; this means acquiring a competent grasp of the field, its rules, regulations, practices, logics and dispositions. Therefore, training student advisees to be reflexive and equipping those with reflexive tools is of utmost importance to help students override their academic problems and succeed in their field. Students who can think reflexively about their studies and academic barriers are better able to understand and cope with the challenges inherited in the disjunction between their current habitus and the habitus that they are expected to acquire [40]. This reflexivity paves the way for us to understand the limitations and the constraints of a given situation. Therefore, it is important for probation students to develop reflexivity because it enables them to consider the rules of the game that they have acquired in their cultural trajectory [40], and then relate them to the rules of the game in the academic field in their major.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodology with a case study approach to study on-probation English-medium students. Open questions were created based on the research questions (see 4.3), which were reviewed and piloted to ensure relevance, clarity, conciseness and avoidance of leading questions [41]. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis with seven English-major students to help in-depth understanding of their views and experience [41, 42] with academic advising. To corroborate data, member checking was used, whereby students could view and reflect on their transcripts [41]. They had the opportunity to annotate them with further comments if their views had changed since making their original comments. This is the first study in Oman which looks from a Bourdieusian lens whilst conducting a case study on academic advising.

4.1. Participants

This study utilized a purposive sampling method to fulfill the objectives of this particular study. It enabled the researchers to collect rich data about various aspects related to on-probation students' experiences with academic advising provisions. All participants were male students with similar linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and were then translated into English. The original English version of the interview questions were carefully prepared in English, translated into Arabic by a professional translator, and translated back into English by the researchers. Then the two versions were compared to disambiguate them. The English translation was checked by a professional English-Arabic translator in order to validate sustain the translation accuracy. Semi-structured interviews were used as they enabled us to prompt the interviewees and ask for more detailed information and equally it gave the participants the opportunity to ask questions for clarification where necessary [43]. The participants' involvement was entirely voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point of time without expressing any reasons. Table 1 below offers a profile of the seven voluntary participants.

Table 1.
On-probation student participants' profile.

Student participant	Gender	Nationality	Specialty/ Major	Level
S1	M	Omani	B.Ed. English	Year 1
S2	M	Omani	B.Ed. English	Year 2
S3	M	Omani	B.Ed. English	Year 1
S4	M	Omani	B.Ed. English	Year 2
S5	M	Omani	B.Ed. English	Year 2
S6	M	Omani	B.Ed. English	Year 1
S7	M	Omani	B.Ed. English	Year 2

4.2. Analytical Procedures

The analytical procedure employed in this study was thematic analysis. This study utilized thematic analysis model [44] to transform and analyze the data by using the six steps, namely, familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report. The first four phases were carried out interchangeably by repeated reference to the study aims and research questions. This helped me to select the salient themes and then identify the codes. As noted, the theoretical lens of Bourdieu has been influential to analysis and subsequent discussion of the findings. Trustworthiness was established through various strategies and techniques including researchers' early familiarity with the culture of participants and the context before the first data collection takes place [45]. This helps in establishing credibility in both data collection and analysis. The researchers were in contact with the study participants throughout the study and maintained positive relationships with them before and during the interviews. Within the purposive sample, the selection of participants was conducted randomly which minimized any potential bias. Moreover, the interview questions were piloted, scrutinized and checked alongside colleagues and were then modified based on the feedback received.

4.3. Research Questions

The following four research questions are addressed in the study:

1. What is students' understanding of effective academic advice strategies that impact academic achievements and success?

2. To what extent do students' previous experiences educationally, socially, culturally affect their strategies and academic success?

3. How influential is academic advice in raising students' awareness about their study and helping them overcome their academic barriers?

4. What suggestions do students have to improve the academic advising interventions?

5. Findings

The main aim of the study is to examine on-probation students' understanding of effective academic advising systems and what factors affect the success of the system. It also explored the barriers and challenges students encountered in relation to academic advising, particularly in overcoming academic probation. The findings are organized around two main themes and a number of codes generated as the following section will illustrate.

The following section will present the main emerging themes:

5.1. Theme One: Students' Perceptions on Academic Advising
5.1.1. Code one: Participants' understanding of effective academic advising system

RQ1.What is students' understanding of effective academic advice strategies that impact academic achievements and success?

A recurring theme-generated in the data is the perceived importance of academic advisory services as a guiding system to support students throughout their academic journey at the university. Participants unanimously agree that an effective academic advising system could facilitate their academic success by providing personalized guidance and assistance with course selection. Student 1 notes, "Academic advising is like the help I need when I don't understand something in college. If I wanted to have a plan for graduation, I go to my advisor". Student 2 sees the academic advisor as "one person giving you help or assistance in your academic years and choosing your subjects and courses". Student 3 refers to specific instances in which advisors can provide support: "[They] help students and give them enough advice on registration or how to deal with marks or with doctors or how to deal with courses".

Participants emphasized the need for persistent follow-up and personalized instruction in effective academic advising. They perceived advisors who actively monitor students' progress and offer consistent assistance to their advisees as beneficial in fostering academic success. Some emphasized the significance of academic advisors in delivering appropriate guidance during challenging periods, such as aiding students in navigating and planning their course selections as mentioned by one participant: "Follow the student and look after them by seeing their marks or asking them about percentage and registration because sometimes maybe the student has no idea what courses he should take this semester".

Consistent communication between advisors and advisees, particularly those who are on probation, was identified as a key factor for effective academic advising. This form of communication helps students to understand their current situation, recognize their limitations and catalyze improvements to succeed. Some participants stressed that their advisors' prompt

assistance was crucial for better courses selection, management and in prioritizing their efforts to obtain higher marks as illustrated in the following quote by Student 1: "She invited me to her office several times to check on my progress, and that made a big difference in overcoming my academic challenges and feeling more confident with study and English".

5.2. Theme Two: Factors Affecting Academic Advising
5.2.1. Code One: The Role of Participants' Socio-Cultural and Educational Backgrounds

RQ 2. To what extent do their previous experiences educationally, socially, culturally affect their strategies and academic success?

Another theme relates to the effects of the participants' socio-cultural and educational background on their academic journey. Some participants mentioned that their parents' educational experience helped them to overcome some of the academic obstacles. Student 4 highlights, "They [My parents] provide me with a good atmosphere to study. They also offered me money to cover my expenses such as accommodation". On the other hand, other participants' socio-cultural and educational backgrounds had limited influence on other participants as indicated by Student 1: "My mom tries to help me, but her English isn't strong. Still, she always checks on me and provides support. Sometimes I feel anxious about academic issues, but I am not always confident to talk about this in academic advising."

The findings of the study largely suggested that the sociocultural and educational backgrounds of the participants had an impact on both their academic progress, success and confidence as well as their engagement with the academic advising system. Educated parents were perceived as being supportive in motivating their children to persist in their studies, even if they could not provide academic assistant directly. For example, it was mentioned by the participants that students who came from families with higher levels of education received both emotional and financial support, which had a positive influence on their academic progress and achievements: "My father is a police officer, and though he doesn't understand much about my study, both my parents provide strong emotional and financial support to me. They believe that I will be a great teacher" (Student 5).

5.2.2. Code Two: Students' Responsibility and Efforts Towards Their Academic Success

RQ 3. How influential is the academic advice in raising their awareness about their study and helping them overcome their academic barriers?

A significant theme which participants raised related to the role of personal responsibility and shared roles between advisor and advisee. Participants stressed that academic success depends largely on their efforts and work regardless of the time or quality of academic advising offered. The participants reflected on their own shortcomings (such as missing classes and deadlines) that led to academic failures. Some participants admitted that ineffective study habits (such as last-minute exam preparation and submission) and a lack of self-discipline were key factors that contribute to their academic failure as illustrated by Student 1: "If I don't attend or study, it's my responsibility, not my advisors. They can only guide me; the rest is up to me". They also highlighted the importance of individual responsibility in overcoming these shortcomings as this participant explained by the following quotes:

> "Actually, I don't think that my advisor is responsible because you are responsible about yourself. Advisors have 30% of the responsibility and the rest of it like 70% depends on you and how you perform."   (S6)

> "I created a daily plan to track my progress, and this self-assessment really helped me overcome academic probation." (S5)

The findings indicate that while advisors might offer guidance and support to their advisees, it is the students' responsibility to take advantage of them. However, they pointed out that continuous follow-up from their advisors might contribute to improve their academic situation and overcome some of the academic challenges they had as explained by Student 6: "My academic advisor didn't follow up with me regularly. There was no communication, and this made it difficult to have good guidance."

5.3. Theme 3: Challenges and Opportunities
5.3.1. Code One: Barriers and Challenges to Effective Academic Advising

RQ3 also raised the theme of barriers and challenges around academic advising. Despite acknowledging the significance of the academic advising system in improving students' academic success and progress, participants identified a number of obstacles such as lack of frequent and effective communication with their advisors, an ineffective follow-up strategy, unclear procedures of providing academic advising, and unresponsive advisors as demonstrated by the participants quotes below:

> "I know my friends, when they are sent to their academic advisors, they do not respond to them, they don't sit with them." (S5)
> "There should more follow-up, like weekly or monthly meetings, to ensure students stay on track." (S7)

Lack of communication between advisors and their advisees was a key concern shared by almost all of the participants forcing them to seek guidance and advice from others, even sometimes untrusted sources as expressed by Student 5: "Actually, what is missing with some academic advisors, is the connection or let's say the meeting between the student and the academic advisor. They can meet us in different activities and events so this can help us students feel part of the university".

Another key issue raised by the students is the absence of workshops and resources geared at enhancing their academic situation. Some participants indicated that they rarely received further advice from their advisors beyond courses selection. Student 4 expressed lack of knowledge as follows: "I don't think they care enough about academic advising. I haven't seen any workshops or clear communication on how to improve." Student 3 concurred and added more detail on specific agenda that would be useful: "Some of the students, they don't understand the system, the college is not supporting us. We also need more support with matters such as how we can use AI better and how to manage our wellbeing".

5.3.2. Code Two: Suggestions to Improve Academic Advising Practices

RQ4. What suggestions do students have to improve the academic advising intervention?

Data show students voiced several ideas on how to shape the future of academic advising. Four out of seven Participants recommended that more workshops should be conducted to raise students' and advisors' awareness about effective academic advising as highlighted by Student 3: "I think we need more workshop about academic advising for all students, for graduating students or for new students and advisors". Participants identified several strategies that might greatly enhance academic advising practices including:

1. Organize regular academic advisory meetings to discuss students' academic progress and suggest solutions for their academic challenges and raise their awareness about the possible consequences of their current academic situation.

"There should be more structured follow-up, like weekly or monthly meetings, to ensure students stay on track." (S6)

2. Provide more workshops and training on effective study habits, navigating the academic system and coping with academic probation.

"We need more workshops and online meetings to engage students, especially during the weekends or study days." (S4)

3. Establishing a mentorship program in which first-year students or those on probation are connected with senior students to provide some peer assistance. Student 1 notes:

When you have a mentor (a senior student), you can talk freely, but with the teacher, with the advisor, you may be shy, you can't talk freely about your problems and needs, especially the personal ones. (S1)

4. Improve the communication between advisors and their advisees through regular meetings and discussions.

Student 3 highlights this point as follows: "Institution can help on probation students by giving them extra classes, and counselling sessions." Student 1 concurs:

Some of the students said that they don't understand the system, so I think by having classes, not every week, but you know, communicating with the students and extra class to give them academic [help]. The support can mean the difference between pass and fail. (S1).

The findings demonstrated that effective academic advising could have a considerable impact on students' academic performance, particularly for students at risk of academic probation. Nevertheless, the findings also suggested that there are a number of factors that might contribute negatively on its effectiveness including inadequate communication and insufficient follow-up strategies. Furthermore, the findings suggested that students' socio-cultural and educational background, together with their personal efforts significantly influence their academic progress and their engagement with the academic advising system. Enhancing the academic advising process through regular meetings with advisees, structured workshops and seminars, improved communication may significantly enhance the overall academic experience particularly for students on probation.

6. Discussion

The primary objective of this study is to explore on probation students' perceptions of effective academic advising system and the aspects that contribute to its effectiveness from their viewpoints. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify the obstacles and challenges that hinder the implementation of effective academic advising and how students might overcome these challenges. This section will address these objectives by interpreting the findings in relation to the existing literature. Implications for students and institutions, along with recommendations for improving the system will be discussed.

The study's findings confirm the significant role of academic advising in assisting students in coping with their academic journey and promoting their academic performance, particularly among those who are on probation. In line with previous research, participants in this study indicated that effective academic advising entails more than simply course selection; it requires ongoing guidance and support, frequent follow-up to guarantee academic progress and success. This is consistent with the findings reported by Johnson, et al. [21] that persistent, proactive engagement between advisors and their advisees is a significant indicator of academic performance success. The study also resonates with Zhang [17] regarding the need to build learners' self-efficacy and Ahn and Davis [19] regarding a sense of belonging.

Students' cultural capital and levels of motivation are important in advising and helping them to navigate their academic problems and overcome them through the help of both family and academic advisors. The congruence between the field and habitus is important for inevitable success. These cultural capitals socio-economic and parents' education backgrounds may have significant impact on the success of these students on academic probation.

Academically at-risk students who have the appropriate habitus and capital are likely to be aware of the rules of the game, namely, their academic context and its advising and academic regulations will be successful in their academic field. Students coming from families with appropriate capital are likely to exhibit preferences and dispositions in congruence with university standards and expectations. They are likely to be successful in their academic field which will reinforce

their university-positive habitus and the probability of completing their studies successfully. Conversely, those students whose habitus are less in congruence with university standards and expectations and receive ineffective academic advising are likely to attain lower levels of academic success. Alternatively, students who with lower habitus, but sufficient early experience of academic success may increasingly see university in a positive light and may come to regard the accumulation of cultural capital via schooling as a means of social mobility, as a means to help overcome the impediments to opportunity associated with their class position. Academic success is viewed as the rewards of increased cultural capital positively alter the student's aspirations and orientation toward university (habitus), which in turn feeds back into their practices and performance. These findings corroborate other previous findings [40]. The issue of anxiety and the need to build confidence in students, considering their need for culture capital, agency and habitus was also raised in UK HEI studies [14, 30, 31], demonstrating that many of these issues are experienced across the globe.

Although recognizing the importance of academic advising, participants stated that the success of the system and their own success depends mainly on their efforts and commitments. The study revealed that participants admitted that their academic failures are largely attributed to their lack of discipline and inappropriate study habits. This study emphasized that the success of the system is in fact a joint responsibility between students and their advisors. Thus, students need to take a more active role in their academic journey. Similar conclusions were highlighted by previous research [13, 20].

Despite recognizing the role of academic advisors in their academic lives, the participants identified several challenges that they experience such as the absence of systematic communication and limited follow-up from their advisors. Similar barriers were reported and discussed in previous research [12, 20, 23]. Participants reported that the absence of regular meetings with their advisors and relying on emails as a means of communication is not very effective practice, particularly for on-probation students. Advisors' failure to follow- up their advisees regularly and the lack of regular meetings with students might be due to high advisor-to-student ratios or inadequate communication channels, which may hinder effective advising. Furthermore, the lack of institutional assistance in improving academic advisory practices for both students and advisors is a key factor that might impede successful academic advising. Addressing these gaps requires a more structured advising system, including workshops on study skills, time management, and academic system navigation, which have been found to enhance student academic performance. Mentions of needing support with areas such as AI use and wellbeing also chime with recent literature on academic advising and student support more generally, indicating an increasingly complex landscape and intersection with other university support services [2, 10, 16, 20].

7. Conclusion

The findings have indicated that students have a strong awareness of numerous effective academic advising strategies which can be utilized to help them overcome their academic challenges. Students also offered many credible suggestions to enhance the academic advisory process on a practical level. However, students' voices have indicated that previous experiences educationally, socially, culturally can both positively and negatively affect their strategies, academic success and consequently their opportunities for social mobility. It is recommended for the Omani context that academic advising which supports students in being reflexive, understanding the rules of the game and encouraging constructive parental involvement can constitute a beneficial intervention.

The findings of this study have important implications for our knowledge of how to improve students' chances retention and enhancing students' perseverance and attainment in higher education. In order to promote underprivileged students' academic, personal and motivational development, this study therefore recommends implementing a more comprehensive approach to assist and support these students by considering their specific needs and challenges. The study implies that academic advising for underprivileged students might not only entail academic support only but also individual coaching to address their personal, psychological and motivational profiles. For students, the study implies a need to comprehend and communicate the links between their personal journey, their habitus (improving learning routines) and the rules and challenges to overcome of the field.

From a policy perspective, it will be important to ensure that institutions invest in and develop secure AI-assisted systems which support the identification of students needing academic advising, as well as automated information systems as a first port of call for basic enquiries [27]. Strengthening and professionalizing human resources, i.e., academic advisors, is also a precursor to facilitating positive student outcomes [23].

One limitation of this study is that it excludes the perspectives of academic advisors and other professionals who operate and support students in this particular college. Future research could also incorporate the perspectives of academic advisors who can play a critical role in helping students navigate and overcome these academic challenges and barriers. However, this study has potential impact on future academic advice practices of practitioners working in the EFL context in question where academic advisory issues and barriers are prevalent. The Bourdieusian theoretical underpinning provides a novel contribution of interest within the context and potentially beyond. To conclude, the study suggests that if students can develop a deeper understanding of their academic field and context, including the rules of the game and realizing the potential of their inchoate social capital, this could be transformational in their academic success and futures.

References

[1]   P. Bourdieu, *Practical reason*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univeristy Press, 1998.

[2]   A. R. A. Fahdi, M. Alharrasi, K. Al-abri, S. A. Nabhani, M. A. Shajabi, and S. A. Hinai, "Exploring the experiences of academic advisors and psychological counsellors supporting students with mental illnesses: A qualitative study at a public university in Oman," *Asian Journal of Psychiatry,* vol. 109, p. 104544, 2025. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2025.104544

[3]   S. Al-Lawati, "The impact of the student counseling center at sultan qaboos university on the development of the counseling profession in Oman," *International Journal of Psychological Studies,* vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 16-25, 2019.

[4]   R. Al-Mahrouqia and M. A. Karadsheh, "The reasons for Sultan Qaboos University students falling under probation," *Studies in Social Sciences and Humanities,* vol. 43, no. 3, pp. 2343–2360, 2016.

[5]   D. L. Heisserer and P. Parette, "Advising at-risk students in college and university settings," *College Student Journal,* vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 69-84, 2002.

[6]   M. Said, "The need for academic counseling for the 1st year students at the University of Batna, Algeria," *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities,* vol. 10, no. 28, p. 183-200, 2017.

[7]   C. Holland, C. Westwood, and N. Hanif, "Underestimating the relationship between academic advising and attainment: A case study in practice," *Frontiers in Education,* vol. Volume 5 - 2020, 2020. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.00145

[8]   University of Arizona, "What does an academic advisor do," University of Arizona Online, 2022. https://online.arizona.edu/news/what-does-academic-advisor-do

[9]   P. Bourdieu, *The forms of capital. In A. H. Halsey, H. Lauder, P. Brown, & A. S. Wells (Eds.), Education: Culture, economy, society*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997.

[10]   A. T. H. Ibrahim, "The family environment as predictors of academic probation for Sultan Qaboos University students: Implications for Family Social Work Practice," *Egyptian Journal of Social Work,* vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 17-38, 2023. https://doi.org/10.21608/ejsw.2023.213793.1181

[11]   H. S. Q. Al-Badwawi, *The perceptions and practices of first-year students' academic writing at the Colleges of Applied Sciences in Oman*. Leeds, United Kingdom: School of Education, University of Leeds, 2011.

[12]   T. S. A. Amer, "The effectiveness of some practices of the academic supervision program in achieving satisfaction among college of education students at Sultan Qaboos University," *International Journal of Educational & Psychological Studies (EPS),* vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 305–314, 2020. https://doi.org/10.31559/EPS2021.9.1.19

[13]   R. Y. Yagoub, H. Y. Eledum, and A. A. Yassin, "Factors affecting the academic tripping at university of tabuk using logistic regression," *SAGE Open,* vol. 13, no. 1, p. 21582440221145118, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221145118

[14]   P. He, A. H. A. Hamid, and M. Y. M. Nor, "Investigating affective learning within teaching strategies for ESL college students: A systematic review," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research,* vol. 24, no. 5, 2025. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.5.27

[15]   A. Alsaawi, "Challenges and opportunities associated with AI chatbots in language learning from the perspective of users in Saudi Arabia," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research,* vol. 24, no. 5, pp. 400–415, 2025. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.5.21

[16]   M. Syafei and N. Nuraeningsih, "Leveraging artificial intelligence in writing: ELT students' perspectives and experiences," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research,* vol. 24, no. 5, 2025. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.5.22

[17]   Y. Zhang, "Exploring the impacts of academic self-efficacy on learning engagement and academic success among Chinese master's students," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research,* vol. 24, no. 4, 2025. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.4.1

[18]   D. Wang and Z. Ishak, "Unveiling the implementation of social-emotional learning among college students: A systematic literature review," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research,* vol. 24, no. 5, 2025. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.5.20

[19]   M. Y. Ahn and H. H. Davis, "Students' sense of belonging and their socio-economic status in higher education: A quantitative approach," *Teaching in Higher Education,* vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 136-149, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1778664

[20]   R. H. Ghanem and S. G. Rao, "Academic advising overview in higher education," *International Journal of Advanced Academic Studies,* vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 120-128, 2021. https://doi.org/10.33545/27068919.2021.v3.i1b.477

[21]   R. M. Johnson, T. L. Strayhorn, and C. S. Travers, "Examining the academic advising experiences of Black males at an urban university: An exploratory case study," *Urban Education,* vol. 58, no. 5, pp. 774-800, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1177/00420859198894048

[22]   R. N. Nasser, B. Khoury, and K. Abouchedid, "University students' knowledge of services and programs in relation to satisfaction: A case study of a private university in Lebanon," *Quality Assurance in Education,* vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 80-97, 2008. https://doi.org/10.1108/09684880810848422

[23]   B. J. Mathew and O. A. Ibrahim, "Effective advising: How does academic advising influence student learning outcomes in higher education institutions in Oman?," *Cogent Education,* vol. 10, no. 1, p. 2197663, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2197663

[24]   G. W. Tiroyabone and F. Strydom, "The development of academic advising to enable student success in South Africa," *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa,* vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 1-16, 2021.

[25]   A. A. Abdelhamid and S. R. Alotaibi, "Adaptive multi-agent smart academic advising framework," *IET Software,* vol. 15, no. 5, pp. 293-307, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1049/sfw2.12021

[26]   A. Albert and N. Wozny, "The Impact of Academic Probation: Do Intensive Interventions Help?," *Journal of Human Resources,* vol. 59, no. 3, pp. 852-878, 2024. https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.0520-10877R2

[27]   L. Al-Alawi, J. Al Shaqsi, A. Tarhini, and A. S. Al-Busaidi, "Using machine learning to predict factors affecting academic performance: The case of college students on academic probation," *Education and Information Technologies,* vol. 28, no. 10, pp. 12407-12432, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-11700-0

[28]   Y. K. Al-Anbari *et al.*, "A conceptual framework for determinants of the student advisory system at the University Of Nizwa Oman," in *2024 IEEE 1st Karachi Section Humanitarian Technology Conference (KHI-HTC)*, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1109/KHI-HTC60760.2024.10482234

[29]   N. Al-Zadjali, *ESL teacher identity construction in Omani higher education: An ethnographic case study*. Brighton, United Kingdo: University of Sussex, 2023.

[30]   L. M. Schofield, R. Takriti, and S. Atkinson, "Higher education, social mobility and social class: Importance of habitus and capitals when analysing student choice and transitions," *International Journal of Educational and Life Transitions,* vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 1-14, 2023. https://doi.org/10.5334/ijelt.45

[31]   S. McLaughlin, "Using bourdieu's concept of habitus to explore higher education decision-making for working class women on an access to higher education course," *Studies in the Education of Adults,* pp. 1-19, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2024.2374617

[32]   P. Bourdieu and L. Wacquant, *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Oxford, England: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

[33]   P. Thompson, *Field in m grenfell pierre bourdieu: Key concepts*. Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2008.

[34]   P. Bourdieu, *Habitus, In J. Hillier & E. Rooksby (eds.), Habitus: A sense of place (Urban and Regional Planning and Development Series)*, 2nd ed. ed. New York: Routledge, 2005.

[35]   P. Bourdieu, *In other words*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990.

[36]   T. Heffernan, *Bourdieu and higher education*. New York: Springer, 2022.

[37]   P. Bourdieu, *The logic of practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.

[38]   T. Schirato and J. Webb, "Bourdieu's notion of reflexive knowledge," *Social Semiotics,* vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 255-268, 2002. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330216373

[39]   J. D. Edgerton and L. W. Roberts, "Cultural capital or habitus? Bourdieu and beyond in the explanation of enduring educational inequality," *Theory and Research in Education,* vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 193-220, 2014.

[40]   M. Roberts and K. Reid, "Using bourdieu to think about the tertiary learning advice consultation," *Journal of Academic Language and Learning,* vol. 8, no. 1, pp. A70-A82, 2014.

[41]   N. K. Denzin, "The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In. NK Denzin & YS Lincoln," *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* vol. 1, p. 42, 2005.

[42]   M. Q. Patton, *Qualitative research evaluation methods*, 4th ed. ed. London: Sage Publications, 2014.

[43]   J. W. Creswell, *Research design: Qualitative and mixed-method approaches*, 6th ed. ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2023.

[44]   V. Braun and V. Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A practical guide*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2021.

[45]   A. K. Shenton, "Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects," *Education for Information,* vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 63-75, 2004.

Appendix A.

Interview Schedule for on probation Students

The interviews will be conducted with seven English-major students who are currently under probation. The purpose of the interviews is to elaborate on their experiences of academic advising and their impact on helping them to overcome their academic and study challenges. Below are the main interview questions; however, many probes and follow-up questions were also asked. The sequence of questions is informed by the study research questions.

1. Perception of academic advising
a. What does academic advising mean to you?
b. What is your understanding of effective academic advising strategies that impact academic achievements and success?
c. How would you see this kind of support in relation to your academic barriers?
d.   In your opinion, in what ways do you think academic advising impacts academic success and achievements?
2. Previous experience
a. Can you describe the challenges and problems you would experience when trying to get out of academic probation?
b. Can you tell us more about any strategies you or your colleagues have been employed to get out of the academic probation?
c. How does your academic advisor address your academic challenges? Has it been effective?
3. Impact of academic advising
a. How influential is academic advising in raising your awareness about your study and helping you handle your academic barriers?
b. What is the influence of your socio-cultural and educational backgrounds on your academic achievements and success?
4. Suggestions for improving academic advising practices
a. If you were asked to suggest some strategies and techniques for helping under probation students, what would you suggest and why?
b. In your view, what could be done to help under probation students in Omani higher education institutions?
5. A closing open question
a. Would you like to add any final comment to what we've already talked about in this interview?

Appendix B.

Participant Consent Form

Title: Advising Experience of Academically At-Risk English-Major Students

Researchers: UTAS - Rustaq
                                                                UTAS - Rustaq

Contact address:

What is the purpose of the study? The study intends to examine the experiences of Omani English-major students English-major students who are under academic probation and received academic advising and identifies the implications of academic advising in helping them to override their academic challenges.

Why have I been chosen? Because your voices as the advisees and experiences can provide valuable insights and contribute to improving academic advising in Oman and beyond.

Do I have to take part? No. Your participation is entirely your decision. You may also withdraw from the research at any time, without having to give a reason for it, by sending an email to us.

Will my name be revealed? No, it will not. Your responses will be regarded as confidential and will be used only for research purposes.

What will happen with the results of the research paper? The results of this study will be used for publishing about academic advising in Oman. If you wish that a summary of the results, be emailed to you later on, please check this box (☐).

Who do I contact if I have questions, concerns, or complaints?

Please contact us through the emails below if you have any questions about the research. Additionally, you may ask questions, voice concerns or complaints to the researchers.

Contact address:

Name:		Signature:	
Email:		Date:	