

The Importance of Online Academic Counseling Meetings during The Global Covid -19 Pandemic to Improve Student Confidence And Academic Performance: A Review Of Outcomes

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Abstract:

Introduction. The coronavirus pandemic has had a worldwide impact on the population, global economy and health care systems and required to implement immediate changes in the method of the material delivery to undergraduate and graduate students. During this time of uncertainty, the role of Academic Counseling is a very important in the educational field.

Purpose: to estimate the importance of online Academic Counseling sessions on academic performance and confidence of students at Trinity Medical Sciences University during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Materials and methods: The subjects were 77 medical students of Trinity Biomedical Sciences University (male =33 and female =44), mean age =24.7 years, SD =2.3. Who experienced academic difficulties and failed one or more midterm exams in Summer 2020.

Results: Amount of students who attended the Academic Counseling Team (ACT) sessions was greater among the Term 1&2 students in comparison with Term 3&4 students. Term 1&2 students improved their academic performances greatly by implementing the changes in their study strategies. A dramatic improvement in the academic performance of Term 3&4 students was not found and these students were not very enthusiastic about online ACT sessions, as they were already familiar with the peculiarities of medical education at TMSU and had friends among their classmates supporting each other.

Conclusion. Online ACT session is an effective structured service for term 1 & 2 students who were transitioning from undergraduate to the medical program during Covid -19 pandemic. This service helped students to increase their confidence and academic performance and provided a necessary support to reduce a stress level of an "online medical education. The online session was productive for term 3 & 4 students only to help them manage their academic workload.

Key words: Online Academic Counseling, academic performance, Covid -19 pandemic

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I. Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has had a worldwide impact on the population, global economy and health care systems [1] and required to implement immediate changes in the method of the material delivery to undergraduate and graduate students [2]. The transition to distance E-learning needs some time for adaptation and development of a new approach, especially among medical students, as study of medicine demands the covering of many disciplines "in person" in clinical placements. All those rapid changes have increased the stress level among students and effected their routine study schedule. A lot of students have become financially vulnerable and are worried that they will no longer be able to afford college after the pandemic [3]. Therefore, during this time of uncertainty, the role of Academic Counseling is a very important in the educational field. The Academic Counseling Team (ACT) of Trinity Medical Sciences University is a counselling service that is committed to identifying strategies for students who need learning assistance. Counsellors support students directly in their academic life to foster, promote, and increase interpersonal competencies and academic achievement. The goal of this study to estimate the importance of online Academic Counseling sessions on academic performance and confidence of students at Trinity Medical Sciences University during the Covid-19 pandemic.

II. Materials and methods

Ethical clearance:

Obtained from the research ethical committee of TMSU, Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Type of Study: Comparative study

Sample selection: The subjects were 77 medical students of Trinity Biomedical Sciences University (male =33 and female =44), mean age =24.7 years, SD =2.3. Who experienced academic difficulties and failed one or more midterm exams in Summer 2020.

Data collection: These students were invited to attend personal online Academic Counseling session. The students were divided into four groups according to their academic term.

The ACT was comprised of three faculty members, who had a structured discussion about the student's study plan and made recommendations to improve their outcomes.

Academic performances were analyzed before and after the ACT session for each student along with the end of semester summary report submitted by the academic advisor.

III. Results

Analysis of students' academic performance after the midterm exams identified four groups of students who were invited to attend the ACT sessions. The Figure 1 shows the percent distribution of students in each term.

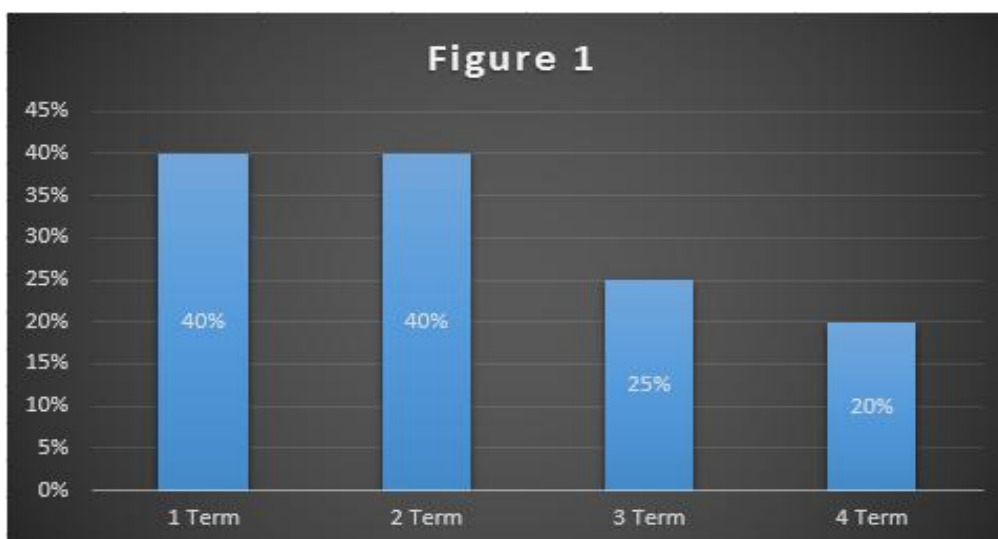


Figure 1. Percent distribution of students in each term

The Figure 1 reflects that amount of students who attended the ACT sessions was greater among the Term 1 and 2 students in comparison with Term 3 and 4 students.

Also we did analysis of students' scores 3 weeks later after the ACT sessions. Figure 2 represents the percent of student's showing academic improvement in each term. Term 1 and 2 students improved their academic performances greatly by implementing the changes in their study strategies, but Term 3 and 4 showed less evidence of improvement in academic performance after online Academic Counseling meetings.

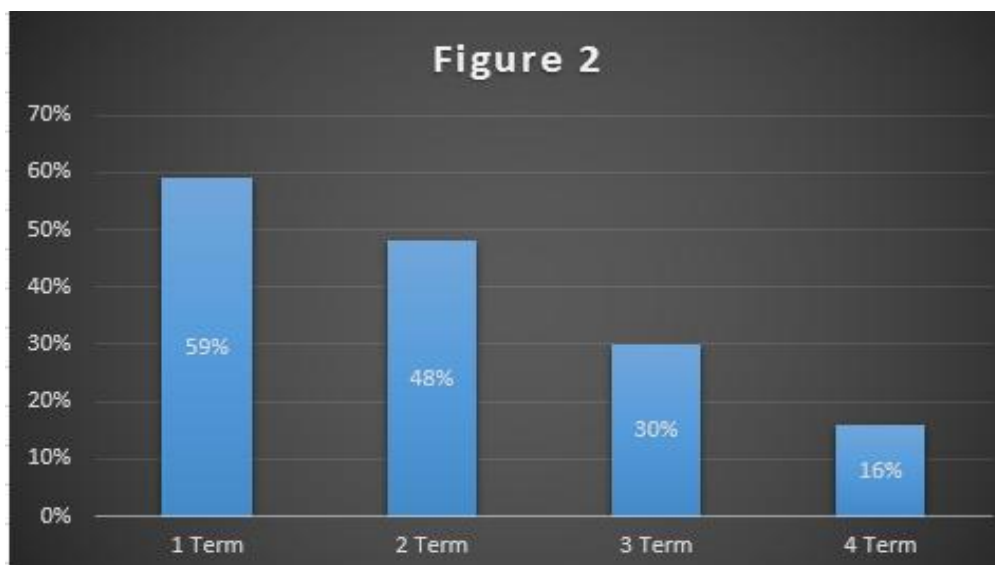


Figure 2. Percent of student's showing academic improvement in each term

The End of semester summary report from academic advisors revealed the following data (Figure 3): 80% of Term 1 and 2 students sent a feedback that online academic counselling played a big role in academic support at the beginning of academic path during Covid -19 pandemic and was a necessary part of the academic success, which helped students to create individual study plan, organize time management, prioritize things in order of importance, identify mistakes of academic underachievement and to decrease stress level and gain confidence. Also these students found the sessions were non-threatening and they noticed a positive interaction with faculty.

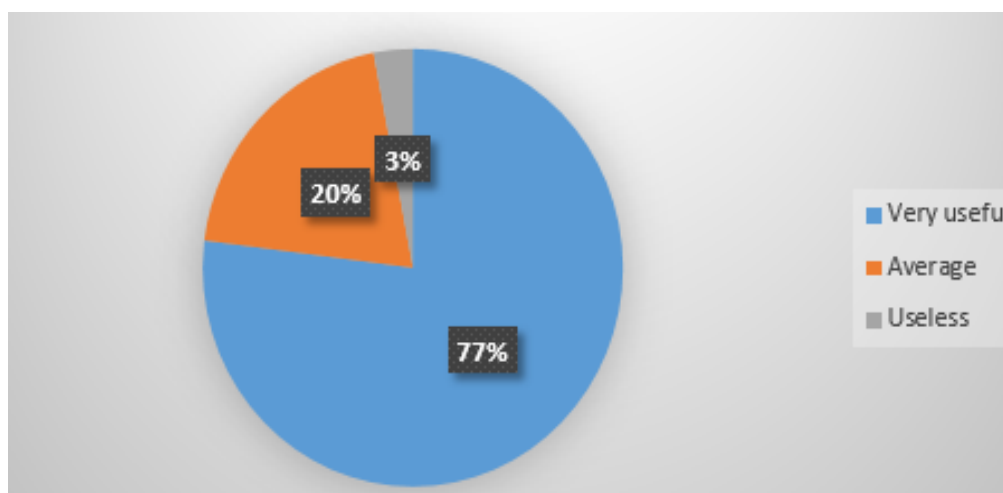


Figure 3. Rate of usefulness of ACT sessions (term1-2 students' perceptions)

The term 3 and 4 students were not very enthusiastic about online ACT sessions (Figure 4). They showed less evidence of improvement in academic performance and only expressed a need for guidance on implementing changes to their workload and not a need for a study plan.

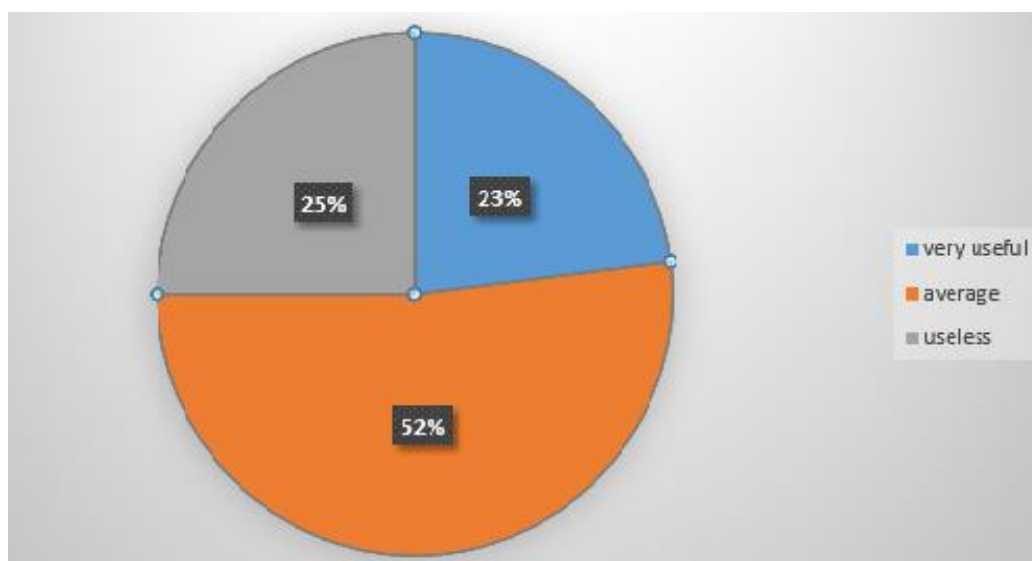


Figure 4. Rate of usefulness of ACT sessions (term3-4 students' perceptions)

IV. Discussion

This study aimed to estimate the importance of online Academic Counseling sessions on academic performance and confidence of students at Trinity Medical Sciences University during the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the literature review, a recent study found that one-quarter of the student participants exhibited anxiety symptoms under Covid-19 in China [4].

Due to Covid-19, 13% of students delayed graduation, 40% lost a job, internship, or offer, and 29% expected to earn less at 35 [5]. Also lower-income students are 55% more likely than their higher-income peers to have delayed graduation due to a global pandemic [5].

Online counseling has become one of the very few possible ways to engage and intervene with students who are facing emotional and mental well-being challenges [6]. However, the studies which were conducted before Covid-19 pandemic reported that only 25% of the youth participants were willing to be approached online by helping professionals [7,8]. The reported challenges to online medical education during the COVID-19 pandemic included issues related to communication (59%), student assessment (57.5%), use of technology tools (56.5%), online experience (55%), pandemic-related anxiety or stress (48%), time management (35%), and technophobia (17%) [8-10].

In this research we found that the ACT sessions had a positive effect on academic performance of 80% of Term 1&2 students, because these students were transitioning from undergraduate to the medical program and faced challenges related to the medical school workload, E-learning/assessment and lack of communication. Students received the personal recommendations based on their academic weaknesses and study plans. A dramatic improvement in the academic performance of Term 3&4 students was not found and these students were not very enthusiastic about online ACT sessions, as they were already familiar with the peculiarities of medical education at TMSU and had friends among their classmates supporting each other.

V. Conclusion.

Online ACT session is an effective structured service for term 1 & 2 students who were transitioning from undergraduate to the medical program during Covid-19 pandemic. This service helped students to increase their confidence and academic performance and provided a necessary support to reduce a stress level of an "online medical education" during this difficult time of uncertainty.

The online session was productive for term 3 & 4 students only to help them manage their academic workload. Overall the students felt that online ACT sessions encouraged them to reach their educational goals and it was a good way to meet with professors and receive the words of support.

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