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The study of relation between students support services and distance students' academic achievement

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between students support services and its component with academic achievement in distance education. The population of this study consisted of Tehran province Payame Noor University' students in 2008-9 academic years. The 1098 participants selected from print based population through cluster sampling and 172 participants selected from web based population through random sampling according the share of tow population. Formula for accounting the number of samples was Cochran's formula. Data accumulated by 52 scale questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.93$) from print based participants through fill up paper questionnaire and from web based participants through fill up electronically questionnaire. The method of research was correlation. Analyzing of gathered data via Pearson correlation showed that: relations between students support services and its components with academic achievement were statistically significant.
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Keywords: Distance education; students support services; Payame Noor University

1. Introduction

Distance Education has become an integral part of the education process over the past many decades and is growing as a popular medium in promoting education. It is one of the solutions of educational problems and deficiencies for low income group; Distance education is instructional delivery that does not compel the student to be physically present at the place of instruction. Distance education instruction requires that the student is able to study on his own. Most educators assume that their students know how to study but the technique of studying is a skill and like all skills it must be acquired through practice (Jumani, Zaidi, Chishti, Abbas, 2009).Distance education involves the provision of a support system by the institution to fulfill the possible range of needs presented by distance education learners and ensures the ready access to adequate learning resources and services that can stimulate the mind as well as encourage the total growth and development of the students (Sewart, 1993; Simpson, 2000; Tait 2000).

Student support services is an important issue associated with the planning and delivery of distance education programs. These services is a major component of the distance education system (Alias, 2005), as Zhang, and Venkaiah (2000) in their study of twenty nine distance education experts in India, reported 48.3% of the subjects

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carried out researching the area of student support services from 1995 to 2000 . Ukpo (2006) believed that student support services focus on providing learners with the assistance they need to achieve their desired outcomes in adistance education environment.

According to Rumble (2000), distance educators are now conscious of the importance of spending money and time on student support services, trying to going to avoid through what happened in the 1960s (correspondence distance education era) once again. They descript that the quality of correspondence education has been low in terms of course sessions, student support and student learning (Power, et al., 2000).

The importance of the support services in relation to the achievement among distance learners, especially female learners has been of considerable interest (Hipp, 1997; kirkup, von-prummer, 1990; Burge, Lenkgi, 1990; Tapling, Jegede, 2001).

The success of distance education system largely depends on the effectiveness of its student support services. These services beside their roles in students' successful are important from the emotional perspective. Traditional students have many physical clues of their attachment to the institution. Providing support services to thedistance education population is an important part of creating the feeling of belonging for students who do not have access to traditional clues (Usun, 2004).

Distance education involves the provision of a support system by the institution to fulfill the possible range of needs presented by distance education learners and ensures the ready access to adequate learning resources and services that can stimulate the mind as well as encourage the total growth and development of the students (Sewart, 1993 ; Simpson, 2000; Tait,2000).

The scope of student support services is vast and different authors have presented different definitions and models of students support services. Rashid (1998) described the term student support services as the way and means that provide additional help to distance learner. Simpson (2000) defined a student support services as all activities beyond the production and delivery of course materials that assist in the progress of students in their studies. These include the academic support which deals with supporting students with the cognitive, intellectual and knowledge issues of specific courses or sets of courses. There is also the support of students in the effective and organizational aspects of their studies.

Garrison (1989) observes that in distance education 'support is concerned with a range of human and non-human resources to guide and facilitate the educational transaction. He observes that these resources may be library facilities, various media and software programs, community leaders, or they could be various socio- economic variables such as students' financial, self- sufficiency and capacity to cope with their roles and responsibilities in the family and community. Also he determines that the most important from of support in an educational transaction is the teachers, who through guidance and direction can assist the students to achieve their goals and develop control of the educational process.

Lynch (2002) Stated that to building a web based learning environment, it is necessary to remember all of the student and faculty support components that comprise the education organization. Tait (2000) divides the Primary functions of student support services into three categories: 1. Cognitive: supporting and developing learning through mediation of the standard and Uniform elements of course materials; 2. Affective: providing an environment which support students, creates commitment, and enhances self steam; and 3. Systemic: establishing administrative processes and information management system which are effective, transparent and overall student- friendly (cited in lynch, 2002).

Improving student support services can be archived through systematic and comprehensive services as: capacity building of students, independent learning, facilitation in the development of study groups, provision of online, face-to-face tutorial, and written tutorials, provision of web system for accessing learning materials, and improved intensity of academic services (Zuhairi, 2007). According to Lorenzi, MacKeogh, and Fox, (2004) It can be argued that the factor which most contributes to the success of online learning is the level of support offered to students.Four broad categories of support can be identified: 1) support as learner-centred instructional design; 2) support offered by tutor; 3) support offered by peers; 4) technical support.

Student support services are the provision of assistance to meet students' needs. It provides advice on study skills, career choice, accommodation, and Part time employment, personal and inters personal development, medical matters, scholarship, and financial difficulties among other things. The services exist to address needs or problems which students may have in order to allow them to concentrate more on their studies (Choudhry, Gujjar, and Haffez ;2008).

Choudhry, et al. (2008) studied student support services in Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) and United Kingdom Open University (UKOU) comparatively.

According to their study; component of student support services are: general services, regional office services, tutorial services, counseling services, media support services, and library services.

Recently, with the commonplace use of computer- mediated communication in distance education of all kinds, questions have arisen about differences and similarities in face-to-face and e-learning groups, in relation to various dimensions (Fahy, 2004; Schwier, Daniel, & Ross, 2005).

It is need to be mentioned that, In spite of student support services depend on structure of society, potential of people, and possibilities and demands of universities; there are common asepses of these services in many universities.

In the summary, students support services comprise of a cluster of facilities and activities that are intended to make the learning process easier and more interesting for the learner And because it is an important factor in academic achievement

According to report of western cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET) one of the more important and validness methods for evaluation of student support services is the students, satisfaction of S.S.S. (Dirr, 1999).

Payame Noor University (PNU) is grown up university among the higher education institutions of Iran and has an important component of distance education universities in the world. In this university he students is supported by a wide range of activities. This study was done to determine relation between student support services and its component with students' academic achievement in PNU.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The population of this study consisted of Tehran province Payame Noor University (Iranian distance education university) both print based and web based students. The 1098 participants selected from print based population through cluster sampling and 172 participants selected from web based population through random sampling according the size of tow population relatively. Formula for accounting the number of samples was Cochran's formula.

2.2. Materials

The instrument of this research is student support services questionnaire with 52 items with5-point Likhert scale scoring from 5 to 1 (completely agree = 5 to completely disagree = 1) in 6 categories. The categories are *General services, Official services, Tutoring services, Counseling services, Media services, and Library services.* The questionnaire is administered to 25 subjects in Payame Noor University. Results are analyzed to determine reliability using Cronbach's alpha method and obtained α= 0.93 showed that the questionnaire has acceptable substance.

2.3. Procedure

The Research method was correlation. Data accumulated from print based participants through fill up paper questionnaire and from web based participants through fill up electronically questionnaire. The collected data by using of Pearson correlation coefficient via SPSS software were analyzed.

3. Results

Table 1: correlation coefficient, mean and standard deviation

variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mean	Std. Deviation
General services	*1*							*3.08*	*1.18*
Official services	.345**	1						2.99	1.27
Tutoring services	.403**	.694*	1					3.34	1.2
Counseling services	.352**	.730**	.639**	1				2.76	1.38
Media services	.306**	.682**	.602**	.671**	1			3.09	1.30
Library services	.316**	.690**	.606**	.685**	.694**	1		3.06	1.32
Student support services	.426**	.888**	.828**	.867**	.843**	.845**	1	3.05	1.23
Academic achievement	.62**	.60**	.61**	.57**	.58**	.59**	.59**	-	-

mean is based on 5 scale   * p< .05   ** p < .01

The Results of Table 1 show that there is a positive and significant relation between components of student support services (p, .05). Among the components of student support services, general services has the highest and counseling services has the least relation with academic achievement. Finally the relation between student support services and academic achievement is positive and significance (r= .59, p < .01). In other words can be Can be concluded that 35 % variation of academic achievement be explained via student support services.
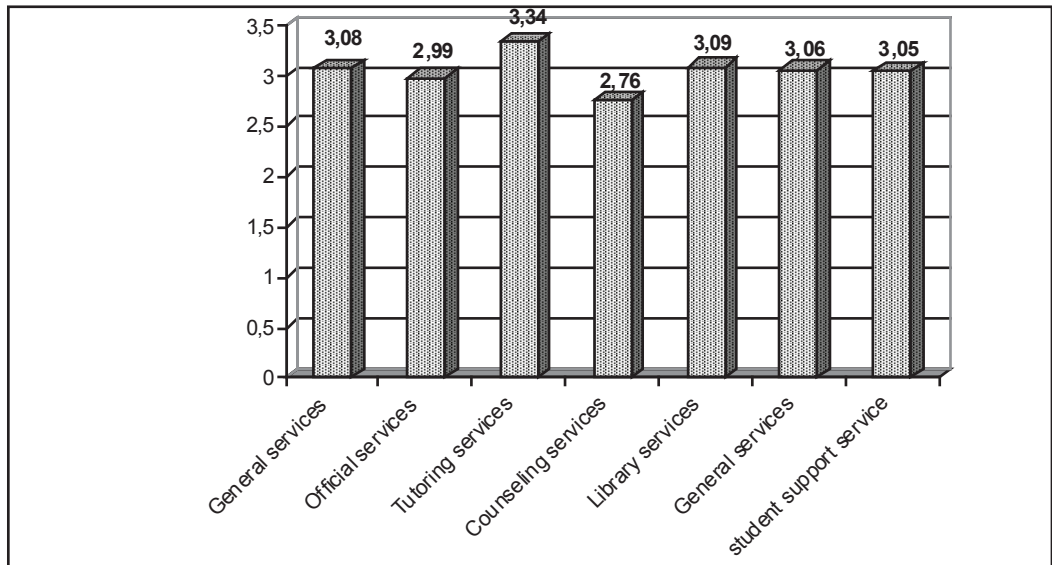

Figure1. Mean scores of student support services

According to Figure 1, mean score of tutoring services is the highest and mean score of counseling services is the least in comparison with other components of student support services.

4. Conclusion

Findings of present study showed that there is positive and significant relations between students support services and academic achievement in distance education. In other words Students who benefit from services are more, their successes are higher. These results are in compliance with the findings of Alias (2005), Choudhry , and et al. (2008), Fahy (2004), Garrison (1989), Hipp (1997), Jumani, Zaidi, Chishti, and Abbas, 2009, kirkup, von-prummer (1990),   Lynch (2002), Power, et al. (2000),Rashid (1998), Rumble (2000),Schwier, and et.al.(2005), Simpson

(2000), Tait (2000), Tait (2000), Tapling, Jegede (2001), Usun (2004), Zhang, and venkaiah (2000), Zuhairi (2007), that had emphasized upon necessary of student support service in distance education system.

The highest correlation coefficients belongs the next variables respectively: general services, official services, tutoring services, media services, media services, counseling services.

In explaining the findings can be said that the Payame Noor University has established to provide part time educational facilities through print based courses, tutorials, laboratories, television and radio broadcast and other mass communication media to achieve these objectives: providing the basis for the promoting of higher education; providing the basis for the education of those classes of the society who are not able to continue their studies at conventional universities.

This University has recently developed a lot of. One of the main dimensions of development in PNU is accepting too many students and the same time transferring traditional system to electronic system.

In addition numerous researchers support the importance of understanding a culture and ways of learning on students' learning models (Usun, 2004). Iranian's roots in an oral tradition, along with its emphasis on rote memorization and the sacredness of text, makes independent textbook learning less suitable. Ong (1982, as cited in Usun, 2004) suggests that "those who live in cultures with strong oral roots are [more] likely to express themselves in terms of practical situations rather [than] in abstract terms". These types of learners are doomed to failure in unstructured environments.

Traditionally, the Iranian sociocultural context has been characterized by close interpersonal relationships. The individual has a network of close ties, including the nuclear family, relatives, and close neighbors and Presence in class is important for them. Iranian's roots in an oral tradition and patronage system along with its emphasis on rote memorization and the sacredness of text, make independent textbook learning less suitable.

Based on said can be concluded that Importance of the general services, official services, tutoring services in academic achievement is quite reasonable.

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