PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION (2021) ISSN: 0033-3077 Volume: 58(4): Pages: 606 - 615
Article Received: 08th October, 2020; Article Revised: 15th February, 2021; Article Accepted: 20th March, 2021

The Academic Problems Facing Students of Al-Balqa Applied University during the Corona Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at investigating the academic problems facing undergraduate students at Al-Balqa Applied University. The sample of the study consisted of (12) male and female students. The study used the descriptive approach, and the researcher prepared an electronic questionnaire consisted of (30) items divided equally into three subscales. The results of the study revealed that the academic problems related to subscale 1 "academic problems related to the student" and subscale 2 "academic problems related to infrastructure and teachers" were high. However, the problems in the third subscale "academic problems related to the academic courses" were medium. Additionally, the results showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the responses of the participants toward academic problems due to the variables of gender and specialization.

Keywords
Academic problems, special education, psychological and educational counselling, Al-Balqa Applied University, Corona pandemic.

Introduction

The educational system in all countries of the world seeks to find a model citizen who serves his/her country and the humanity. Cargill & o connor (2009), Guiloubi (2011), Al-Azafi (2013), Al-Shammari and Al-Ayasrah (2014), Dhali and Al-Mikhlafi (2018), Erdem (2016) argued that higher education institutions were the best places for educating students, increasing their productivity, and developing their skills. Therefore, universities work hard to solve problems facing the student (Al-Qudah, 2012). Thus, it is important to know these problems and to analyze them scientifically. This study explores academic problems during Covid-19 pandemic. The increased number of Corna virus infections, the government's decisions onlockdownds, and the use of distance learning has increased these problems (Al-Banawali Al-Rai'i, 2006, Melhem, 2010, Abu Hassouna and Alibouni, 2012, and Al-Zoubi and Canaan, 2018, Falluh, 2019) Issa & sateh, 2019.

The review of the studies that dealt with one or more subscales of the study, the researcher found the following. Many studies investigated the first-subscale which is related to the problems of students. (Abu Hassouneh and Alabouni, 2011, Goodhozaid, 2012, Mazaki, 2012, Maashi, 2013, Al-Harbi and others, 2013, Mirza, 2015, Al-Dhali and Al-Mikhlafi, 2018). These problems involve poor technical skills, such as uploading files to the website, feeling upset about the large number of assignments and reports, fear of exams, the limitations of the internet coverage, the difficulty of understanding some concepts and terms explained by members of the faculty. The researcher added the following problems: lack of technological devices (Laptops, smart phones), suffering from isolation caused by the lack of face-to-face interaction, the distraction of students during distance learning, and the extra financial burdens.

The researcher also found that some studies investigated the second subscale which explored academic problems related to infrastructure and professors in universities. (Al-Banawali, 2006, Ibrahim, 2015, Al-Dhali and Al-Mikhlafi, 2018, Issa & saleh, 2019). These problems include the absence of communication with the professors outside the lecture, the difference between the faculty members with respect to the technological capabilities, the delay and absence of the professors in the lectures due to technical problems, and the use of lecturing method. The researcher added to this sub-scale the following problems: unavailability of Networks in all areas and times, the pressure on the infrastructure of the university and its servers, poor attendance of students in online classrooms compared to face-to-face teaching, lack of electronic resources in the library, lack of training on distance learning, and lack of demonstration tools and educational devices provided by the university in distance learning.

Other studies such as Al-Aqili and Abu Al-Hashem (2009), Al-Azmi (2013), Darwish and Al-Hariri (2013), Mazar, (2015) explored the third subscale of academic problems which is related to university courses. These problems included the increase of the number of scheduled topics, difficulty in understanding the topics of some courses, and instability of the professors for each course during the semester. The researcher added the following problems to the scale: assigning courses to non-specialists, focusing on one book as a primary source of the course, the absence of educational activities (such as field visits), the lack of objectivity in the evaluation procedures, and the difficulty of getting the course material through the university's website (Moodle).

The studies of Al-Matalqa (2010), Mazaki (2012), Al-Qaisi (2014) and Barzawi (2017) showed no statistically significant differences in academic problems due to the gender variable. The study of Fallouh (2019) found statistically significant differences in academic problems due to the variable of gender and in favor of females, while the studies of Al-Mutlaqah (2010) and Falluh (2019) did not find statistically significant differences due to the variable of specialization.

The current study is significant because it is considered one of the first studies investigating the academic problems facing Jordanian university students, especially students of Al-Balqa Applied University. To the best knowledge of the researcher, this is the only study that explored the academic problems of university students caused by distance learning during the Corona pandemic in Jordanian context.

The present study aims at answering the following questions:

1- What are the academic problems facing Al-Balqa Applied University students during the Corona pandemic?

2- Are there statistically significant differences in the academic problems due to the gender variable?

3- Are there statistically significant differences in academic problems due to the specialization variable?

The importance of the present study comes from the fact that the study deals with an important educational issue represented by the academic problems facing students in distance learning. Identifying these problems from the students 'point of view will assist policy makers to find solutions for students' problems. Solving student's problems may reflect positively on their attitudes towards the study, motivate them to learn, and reduce stress.

Methods

Study Approach

The study used the Descriptive and Analytical method (Al-Roqi, 2016), which is the appropriate method for the present study. It depends on the survey method to know the academic problems facing students of the special education and psychological and educational counseling at Al-Balqa Applied University/ Ajloun University College.

The sample of the study

The sample of the study consisted of 120 male and female students studying at Ajloun University College/ Al-Balqa Applied University in the first semester of the academic year 2020/2021. Seventy two male and female students specialized in psychological and educational counseling, and (58) students specialized in special education. Thirty seven students were males and ninety seven students were females.

Instrumentals

The Scale of academic problems

After reviewing different studies (Al-Binna'a and Al-Rabi`; 2006, Al-Roqi 2016; Al-Dhali, and Al-Mikhlafi 2018; Falouh, 2019; Issa & Saleh, 2019), the researcher prepared a scale/questionnaire consisting of (30) items divided equally into three dimensions: academic problems related to the student, academic problems related to university professors, and academic problems related to the academic courses.

Scale correction: The researcher used the triple ranking (high = 3points, medium = 2 points, and low =1 point).

The validity of the tool

The validity of the tool was verified in two ways:

A - Face validity

The researcher made sure of the validity of the study tool/questionnaire by sending the tool to a committee of 11 experts specialized in special education and school counseling. The comments and recommendations of the referees were taken in consideration in writing the final scale which consisted of 30 items.

B- Constructive Validity

To ensure the constructive validity of the scale, it was applied to a sample of 30 students outside the

study sample. The Pearson correlation coefficient between each item and the field to which it belongs was extracted using the statistical program (SPSS). This is used to show the consistency of the items with the field they belong to, as shown in the following tables:

Table (1): Correlation coefficients between each item and the total score of the subscales to which they belong (n = 30)

Academic problems related to the student		Academic problems related to infrastructure and teachers		Academic problems related to courses	
item	correlation coefficient	Item	correlation coefficient	correlation coefficient	item
1	.447(*)	1	.630(**)	.649(**)	1
2	.523 (**)	2	.574(**)	.588(**)	2
3	.557(**)	3	.594(**)	.412(*)	3
4	.496(**)	4	.447(*)	.588(**)	4
5	.661)**(	**5**	.484(**)	.613(**)	**5**
6	.672(**)	**6**	.496(**)	.598(**)	**6**
7	.587(**)	**7**	.412(*)	.622(**)	**7**
8	.701(**)	**8**	.470(**)	.650(**)	**8**
9	.567(**)	**9**	.462(*)	.614(**)	**9**
10	.667(**)	**10**	.439(*)	.636(**)	**10**

The correlation coefficient is statistically significant at (α = 0.01), * the correlation coefficient is statistically significant at (α = 0.05)

The results in Table (1) showed that the correlation coefficients between the items and the total degree of the subscale, in general, ranged between (0.412 - 0.701) and in statistical terms ranged between (0.01) and (0.05), which indicates that these item suit their subscales.

Table (2): Correlation coefficients between each subscale and the total degree of the tool/ scale (n = 30)

Academic problems	Correlation coefficient with the total score of the subscales
Academic problems related to the student	.723(**)
Academic problems related to infrastructure and teachers	.897(**)
Academic problems related to courses	.868(**)

*The correlation coefficient is statistically significant at (α = 0.01)

The results in Table (2) revealed that the values of the correlation coefficients between each subscale of the tool and the total degree of the tool ranged between (0.723 - 0.897) and it is statistically significant (0.01), which indicates the suitability of the tool.

Stability of the scale/tool

To make sure of the stability of the study tool (the questionnaire), the researcher asked 30 students from outside the study sample to answer the questionnaire. The reliability coefficient was calculated using the Alpha Cronbach coefficient, as shown in table 3:

Table (3) stability coefficients for the subscales of the study tool

	Items	stability coefficient
First subscale	10	0.70
Second subscale	10	0.69
Third subscale	10	0.79
total	30	0.84

Table (3) shows that the values of the stability coefficients for the subscales of the tool ranged between (0.69-0.84). These values prove the stability of the study tool.

Scale for interpreting data:

Table 4. The scale for interpreting data

High	medium	low
2.34-3.00	1.67-2.34	1.67 -1

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Results

Results

Results related to the first question: What are the academic problems facing the students during the Corona pandemic?

To answer this question, the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the responses of the participants were calculated as shown in table (5):

Table 5. The arithmetic means and standard deviations of students' responses on each subscale of the tool (n = 30).

	mean	Standard deviation	degree
First subscale: Academic problems related to the student	2.34	.36	high
Second subscale: Academic problems related to infrastructure and teachers	2.34	.39	high
Third subscale: Academic problems related to courses	2.18	.42	medium
Academic problems in general	2.29	.33	medium

Table (5) showed that the level of academic problems facing students during the Corona pandemic in general was medium (the mean was 2.29 and standard deviation was 0.33.

The first subscale: academic problems related to the student

Table 6: Means and standard deviations of the participants' responses on the first subscale "academic problems related to the students"

No. of item	Item	degree	Standard deviation	mean
7	I feel upset and uncomfortable because of the large number of assignments in distance learning	high	.62	2.57
3	Distraction was more during distance learning than face to face learning	high	.61	2.53
6	I bear additional financial burdens (charging Internet cards and buying electronic devices).	high	.66	2.49
9	I am afraid of the exams because they came in one form (multiple choice)	high	.71	2.49
8	I am worried about the way assignments will be corrected in distance learning	high	.62	2.45

q2	I suffered from isolation because of distance learning	high	.73	2.38
1	The lack of technological devices (laptops, smartphones) has a negative impact on following my courses.	medium	.72	2.24
4	Limited networks where do I live	medium	.75	2.21
10	Difficulty in understanding some concepts and terms explained by some professors.	medium	.68	2.14
5	I have poor technical skills such as uploading files to the website	medium	.83	1.91
	Total	high	0.39	2.34

The results of Table (6) showed that the degree of academic problems related to the student was high, with a general arithmetic mean of (2.34) and with a standard deviation of (0.39). The average response on the items ranged between high and medium (1.91-2.57).

The data in table 6 showed that students suffered a lot from problems related to their feeling of unease because of large number of assignments, their feeling of distraction during learning distance and problems related to financial burdens caused by distance learning. The table also showed that student affected to a medium level with problems related to understanding some concepts and terms explained by some professors, and the students' poor technical skills (see item 10 and 5). This result is consistent with the results of the studies of Abu Hassouna and Alibouni (2011), Jawdah and Zayed (2012), Zaki (2012), Maashi (2013), Al-Harb et al (2013), Mirza (2013) Al-Dhali and Al-Mikhlafi (2018). Because of the Corona pandemic, students exposed to many pressures, such as the large number of assignments, the problems in the evaluation procedure, and the additional financial burdens. Students also suffered from psychological pressures resulted from isolation caused by the distance learning and lockdowns.

The second sub-scale: Academic problems related to infrastructure and professors

Table 7: The arithmetic means and standard deviations of the responses of the participants in the second subscale: Academic problems related to infrastructure and professors.

No. of items	Items	degree	Standard deviation	mean
2	Networks are not available in all areas and times.	high	.55	2.59
1	The infrastructure of the university and servers face great pressure	high	.67	2.52
9	The professors still teach directly and gives lectures via the Internet	high	.67	2.48
3	The library lacks electronic resources	high	.63	2.42
6	The university did not train me on e-learning	high	.71	2.37
4	Lack of demonstration tools and educational devices provided by the university in distance learning	high	.68	2.35
8	Attendance is poor among students in online classes	mid	.73	2.28

	compared to face-to-face teaching			
7	Professors vary in their technological capacities.	mid	.62	2.21
5	The absence of communication with the teacher outside the lecture, due to the absence of office hours in distance learning	mid	.70	2.16
10	Delay and absence of the teacher in lectures due to technical problems in the e-learning system	mid	.68	2.04
	Total	high	.55	2.59

The results of Table (7) showed that the degree of academic problems related to infrastructure and professors was high, with an arithmetic mean of (2.34) and with a standard deviation of (0.36). The results of the study showed that the problems stated in item 2, 1, 9, 3, 6, 4 was high, while problems stated in item 10,5, and 8 was medium. These results are consistent with the results of Al-Banna and Al-Rabei (2006), Ibrahim (2015), Al-Dhali and Al-Mikhlafi (2018), Issa & Saleh (2019) which suggested that the universities had poor technological services, such as servers, library's electronic resources, or the technological skills of the professors. Additionally, Communication networks are weak, especially in rural areas, which represents a problem for a large number of participants since they live in rural areas.

The third subscale: Academic problems related to the courses

Table 8: Arithmetic means and standard deviations of participants' responses on the third sub-scale: Academic problems related to the courses

No. of item	Items	degree	Standard deviation	mean
3	The absence of educational activities, such as field visits.	high	.74	2.49
4	Difficulty understanding some topics in some courses because of distance learning	high	.74	2.35
5	The Increase of number of topics covered in the distance learning	high	.69	2.34
2	Focusing on one book as a primary source of course in the distance learning.	mid	.69	2.31
10	Not all courses are available in distance learning compared to face-to-face Learning	mid	.74	2.23
9	I find difficulties in finding the materials of the courses on the Moodle.	mid	.70	2.22
7	The Lack of	mid	.70	2.15

	objectivity in the evaluation process of the courses.			
1	Some courses were taught by non-specialist	mid	.72	2.07
8	Instability of the teacher for the course taught during the semester.	mid	.77	1.84
6	Contradiction in time between some courses in the distance learning	mid	.84	1.82
	Total	mid	0.42	2.18

Table (8) showed that the academic problems related to the courses taught at the university came with a medium degree, with an arithmetic mean (2.18) and with a standard deviation of (0.42). The average response to this sub-scale ranged between medium and high, with an arithmetic mean ranging between 1.82 and 2.49.

The results of the study found out that the students suffered most from "The absence of educational activities, such as field visits", followed by "Difficulty understanding some topics in some courses because of distance learning" and "The Increase of number of topics covered in the distance learning". These results agree with the results of other studies, such as Al-Aqili and Abu Al-Hashem (2009), Al-Azmi (2013), Darwish and Al-Harbi (2013), and Mirza (2015).

Results related to the second question "Are there statistically significant differences in the academic problems due to the gender variable?"

To identify the impact of gender on the academic problems, the researcher used Independent Samples. Consider the following table:

Table 9: Results of the Independent Sample Test

Dependent variable	Gender	number	mean	Standard deviation	T value	P-value
Academic problems related to the student	Female	37	2.2216	.42826	2.260	.026
	Male	93	2.3882	.35809		
Academic problems related to infrastructure and professors	female	37	2.3108	.31339	.620	.536
	male	93	2.3538	.37171		
Academic problems related to the courses	female	37	2.1405	.42391	.727	.469
	male	93	2.2000	.41963		
All types of difficulties	female	37	2.2243	.33588	1.399	.164
	male	93	2.3140	.32728		

Table 9 shows that:

There are statistically significant differences between the responses of the participants on the first subscale "academic problems related to students" due to gender variable and in favors of females (the mean of females (2.39) are larger than that of males (2.22). These results are in line with the result of Fallouh (2019) which suggested that males and females differ in their appreciation of the academic problems they face.

There are no statistically significant differences between the responses of the participants on the second and third subscale due to gender variable. The value of "T" of the second subscale was (0.62) and the level of significance was (0.536), which is greater than the level of significance (0.05). Similarly, the value of "T" of the third subscale was (0.727) and the level of significance was (0.469), which is greater than the level of significance (0.05). This result is consistent with the results of Mazaki (2012) and Falluh (2019) which revealed that there are no statistically significant differences due to the gender variable. This indicated that male and female students

suffered from the same academic problems caused by the Corona pandemic.

Results related to the third question: Are there statistically significant differences in academic problems due to the specialization variable?

To identify the impact of specialization with respect to the academic problems, the researcher used Independent Samples. Consider the following table:

Table 10: Results of the Independent Sample Test

Dependent variable	specialization	number	mean	Standard deviation	T value	P-value
Academic problems related to the student	Psychological and educational counseling	72	2.3208	.36073	.656	.513
	Special education	58	2.3655	.41530		
Academic problems related to infrastructure and professors	Psychological and educational counseling	72	2.3278	.38096	.490	.625
	Special education	58	2.3586	.32338		
Academic problems related to the courses	Psychological and educational counseling	72	2.2417	.44175	1.787	.076
	Special education	58	2.1103	.38283		
All types of problems	Psychological and educational counseling	72	2.2968	.33930	.317	.751
	Special education	58	2.2782	.32291		

Table (10) shows that there are no statistically significant differences between the average responses of the participants on the subscales due to the variable of specialization. The significance level was (0.513), which is greater than the significance level (0.05). These results indicated that specialization does not affect the responses of students regarding the academic problems. This result is in line with the results of Al-Roqi (2016), and Foulouh (2019) which revealed that there are no statistically significant differences attributable to the variable of specialization. This result can be explained because of the similarity of environmental, economic, and academic conditions between students in both majors.

Conclusion

The results of this study showed that students suffered from academic problems as a result of the corona pandemic. These problems are related to the huge number of assignment, distraction, financial burdens, difficulties in evaluation, a sense of isolation, poor communication networks, and problems in the university's electronic infrastructure, failure to provide the necessary training for students and faculty members, absence of activities, and the increase of topics covered during the semester.

The researcher believes that these academic problems were new in universities; thus, students, professors and universities were not prepared for distance learning. In addition to that government did not provide logistical plans, such as home internet, laptops, taps or mobile phones for everyone to improve distance learning. The researcher recommends policy maker to get benefit from the results of the study, to pay attention to these learning obstacles, and to work on solving them.

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