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A Comparative Study on the Factors Affecting the Academic Transition at a Major Saudi Arabian and a Major North American University: Implications on Students' Academic Achievement

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ABSTRACT

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACADEMIC
TRANSITION AT A MAJOR SAUDI ARABIAN AND A MAJOR NORTH
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY: IMPLICATIONS ON STUDENTS'
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Committee Chair: Chike Akua, Ph.D.

Dissertation dated May 2019

Students in different educational institutions, especially on campus, face different challenges that make them not achieve their academic goals and objectives as per their expectations. Several studies have been performed, and various aspects have been found to contribute to the failure of several students not achieving their academic goals, and in the end, drops out of school. Some of the factors that have been found by other studies include student's involvement in extracurricular activities, peer groups, and lack of adequate resources to sustain them in school and achieve their desired goals. However, in this study, mixed research methodology that is both quantitative and qualitative research is used to collect data regarding the factors affecting student academic achievement.

Moreover, from this study or research, some of the findings include the size of the class affects the student academic achievement. The size of the class plays a significant role in the student's life because the smaller the size of the class the higher the engagement between the students and the teaching staff, therefore, active learning. The school curriculum also affects the academic achievement of the students. Besides, both the administrative and teaching staffs are supportive of academic success. Lastly, the learning culture affects the academic performance of students. All these factors affect the student's progress towards academic success.

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ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY
HUSSAIN SALEM ALDOSARI

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

An issue of concern in institutions of higher education across the world is the retention and achievement of their students in their studies. Students' withdrawals continue to be an increasing concern throughout the education system (Yorke & Longden, 2007; Tinto, 1975). This is a particularly pressing issue in the context of first-year students. Withdrawal, non-completion or attrition has implications for students and their families as well as the economy and society through the loss of potential skills and knowledge (Brunsden, Davies, Shevlin, & Bracken, 2000). There are also financial and reputational implications for institutions of higher education. While students who choose to withdraw from their course work may still benefit in areas such as skill development, in the current globalized and competitive market, the reputational fall-out of low student retention and high student attrition figures can be damaging for both institutions and individuals.

Over the years, the Saudi government has continuously acknowledged its need to develop its human capital by revamping its educational system. Education in Saudi Arabia continues to receive unprecedented attention. It is a trend driven by the government's decision to embrace integrated learning cultures and curricula with the ultimate objective of developing an internationally competitive, knowledge-based economic workforce (Ministry of Education, 2010). Despite its efforts, institutions of

higher learning continue to witness high levels of dropouts and produce less than capable graduates, adding to the ranks of unemployed Saudis. While society has good systems for letting people start an education, there is not a sufficient framework to ensure that students complete that education.

Move On When Ready

Some programs around the world allow the high school students to enroll in college- or university-level classes. The Move on When Ready program has assisted high school students as they advance higher in education. In the United States of America, programs such as Move On When Ready is the state of Georgia's dual enrolment program that allows high school students to earn college credit while working on their high school diploma.

The Summer Bridge

Summer Bridge is a program that is used to strengthen the high school transition to college. Many schools and districts throughout the entire nation are establishing plans to boost academic achievement, control the summer learning loss and improve learning preparations. The program is mainly designed to serve students who are on the verge of failing, dropping out or perhaps struggling academically in high school. Moreover, the teachers and instructors prepare the students emotionally and socially to assist the students to succeed in life.

The Early College Program

The Early College Program has been initiated in the high schools to assist and offer college credits to the students and intense academic support in the school environment and throughout their career. According to the research by the American Institute, students who attended the early college programs were more likely to graduate from high schools and college as compared to their peers in traditional high schools and were more likely to complete the college or university degree (Dayton Early College Academy). The primary objective of the program is to narrow the gap between the low income and middle-income students who succeed in college and the university to create successful lives and careers.

Statement of the Problem

Some colleges and universities have a significant issue with getting freshmen students to return to school after their first semester of attendance at the university. It is an issue for which universities across the world struggle to find a suitable solution. The first year of college continues to be the most critical or vulnerable period for student attrition at all types of higher education institutions, including highly selective colleges and universities. Summarizing the analysis brings us to conclude that student transition from high schools is confusing and challenging. The data show that retention is most challenging with first-year students.

As a result, substantial rates of first-year students drop out without acquiring basic skills. Limited opportunities, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient access to resources and under-qualified teachers frequently characterize brief schooling

experiences. Individuals of diverse abilities and ages are mixed in single classrooms without proper adaptation of learning curricula to induce school engagement. Such situations, combined with family and personal factors, jeopardize meaningful education to individuals. In addition to this, more stress comes from social adjustment, mainly adjusting to university life while separating one's self from family and friends.

Furthermore, tests, grades, time demands, professional class environment, and demands from the course work add onto the stress first-year students' experiences. Academic pressures combined with emotional factors prevail the most during the first year. Difficulties in the emotional and social sphere can undermine a students' academic achievement, thus addressing both these needs can enhance adjustment skills in college. Further, the consensus among scholars as to the effect of student attrition, universities and public schools must work together with students to reduce dropout rates.

Purpose of the Study

Education in Saudi Arabia continues to receive unprecedented attention. This increased attention is a trend that is in part driven by the government's decision to embrace integrated learning cultures and curricula with the ultimate objective of developing an internationally competitive, knowledge-based economic workforce (Ministry of Education, 2010). Regardless of its efforts, institutions of higher learning continue to witness high levels of dropouts and produce less than capable graduates, adding to the ranks of unemployed Saudis.

Few empirical studies have focused on retention of first-year students following the transition from high school in Saudi Arabia. A handful of studies have focused on the

impact of the social environment. Therefore, it is essential to study the factors affecting student retention based on the academic environment. Tinto's model of institutional departure highlighted that student retention is highly dependent on how the students perceive institutional experiences (Tinto, 1987). Ultimately, students who are satisfied with the culture and services of universities are likely not to drop out of school.

The goal of this study is to provide students, school administrators and teaching staff with a framework for the academic and personal success. Understanding the factors that contribute to a student's achievement can help institutions and students to navigate the educational environment better to accomplish higher completion rates for bachelor of science degrees. This study sought to investigate the extent to which first-year students in Saudi Arabia and America are satisfied or dissatisfied with education and how these factors contribute to them dropping out of school.

The primary purpose of this research study was to determine factors that affect student retention and achievement in education by comparing how students in Saudi Arabia and America navigate the transition from high school to college. The study shall be guided by Tinto's (1975) student integration theory with a focus on institutional aspects such as the curriculum and the learning culture. The learning culture in this case, involve discussions of issues related to the class sizes; university's learning curriculum, quality lecturers and provision of sufficient learning materials and resources. The dependent variable is academic transition. The independent variables include higher learning curriculum, study skills, and support system including career advisors, class sizes, quality lecturers, provision of sufficient learning materials and resources.

Significance of the Study

This study will contribute to the literature concerned with student retention although a large number of studies have examined factors affecting student retention in education; however, currently no study that has examined the conservation of Saudi Arabia's first-year students. Besides, most studies on retention conducted, are written from the perspective of educators and administrators. There are no studies examining factors affecting student retention in the language and voice of the students themselves. The voices of students as the primary consumers and recipients of higher education student voices are often not valued the way they should be in Saudi Arabia or America. This study seeks to give voice to the students and allow them to express their thoughts on factors that influence their retention and matriculation.

Most education systems around the globe have developed a social and emotional learning curriculum to improve retention of new students who join the universities every year. This not only enhances freshmen retention but also helps students face the challenges associated with the transition from a nonstudent life. The learning curriculum also helps the students improve their academic achievements while in the university. However, such steps have not been taken within the context of Saudi Arabia. The only action taken concerning this issue is in students providing feedback at the end of each program, level and semester. The findings in this study will thus help to design a retention program for the sample college that considers students' specific needs and suggests the best ways to meet them.

This study can be helpful to the Ministry of Education by providing evidence concerning admission criteria in predicting students' retention, especially concerning prerequisites that are to be met before one is initiated into the main learning curricula. This study can also improve fiscal accountability since improving retention increases revenue.

Tests and grading are essential factors in analyzing whether an individual will withdraw from a class. While some students are motivated to work harder, the same can be an object of discouragement. It should nonetheless be noted that Saudi Arabia changed its admission criterion to select students to higher education based mainly on results gained in high school. However, the General Reasoning Test had been introduced to the selection process. There is a limited exploration of the factors affecting freshmen retention. There are currently no studies, which have examined the predictive validity assessing student success as measured by retention (Shuttleworth, 2009). Predictive validity determines how well scores on a particular measure predicts some future outcome, such as retention or withdrawal.

This study may also benefit the sampled university analyzed as it may give them a clearer picture of the factors promoting student withdrawal and thus allow them to develop programs that aim to prevent students from dropping out. The study can also help potential students and their parents since it will provide evidence of the best predictors of student retention thus saving them time and money.

Primary and Secondary Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study.

- RQ1: How does the curriculum in the Saudi high school and the United States education system affect its ability to retain students in their freshman college year?
- RQ2: How do support systems including career advisors in the education system affect its ability to retain students and push them towards achievement?
- RQ3: How does study skills, influence their decision to stay or withdraw from courses?
- RQ4: How does a class size influence students' decision to stay or withdraw from school?
- RQ5: How does a quality teacher influence students' decision to stay or withdraw from school?
- RQ6: How does the learning culture in institutions of education influence students' decision to stay or withdraw from school?
- RQ7: How does provision of sufficient learning materials and resources influence students' decision to stay or withdraw from school?

Summary

An issue of concern in education institutions across the world is the retention and successful achievement of their students in their studies. Student withdrawals continue to be an increasing concern throughout the higher education system. This is a particularly pressing issue in the context of freshmen or first year students. It is high time the

universities consider determining the impacts of their learning curriculum that would enable them to retain more freshmen students. They should reflect on their performances as far as this particular issue. This study sought to look at steps that institutions should take to ensure that their freshmen students consider coming back to the respective institutions to continue with their education.

The purpose of this research study was to determine the issues that enable the students to make more academic and personal achievements in their respective higher learning institutions. Some of the issues this study sought to address include the ability of the higher learning institutions to help the students who want to complete their educational endeavors in their respective institutions following the end of the first semester and its capability to help the students experience transformation from their high school lives to higher learning education lives.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Education in Saudi Arabia

The Saudi government has a duty to provide education for its citizens while individual citizens are tasked with the duty of pursuing education, regardless of gender. However, the threshold for entering universities is still low and so are the numbers of dropouts (attrition). The average rates for graduations are low for tertiary, technical and HE institutions. A 2011 Economic Forum presented in Riyadh showed that the rate of student attrition for community and technical colleges stood at 53% and 43% respectively with a 65% average over the last seven years (Riyadh Economic Forum, 2011). Similarly, that of major universities in the country stood at an average rate of 60 (Bagazi, 2010).

In Saudi Arabia, the government spends a significant portion of its annual budget on education as well as human resource development programs. The national budget announced by the Saudi Ministry of Finance in November 2017 showed that 23% of the budget, the largest portion, was allocated towards educational and training programs. This is equal to the U.S. spending \$53billion which is a significant amount considering the institutions plus the number of students in the country (Ministry of Finance, 2017). Training and educational programs might vary from one country to the next but in today's business world the number of graduates is counted as a successful indicator of such programs. Moreover, governments seek to see outcomes on funds that are allocated

to educational programs in considering its provision of services to the public. From this light, it is logical to question the feasibility of spending on educational institutions that provide fewer than expected graduates do from the number of students admitted in their programs.

A Study into the Behavior of Student Drop Out

Factors affecting student retention in institutions of higher learning have been the subject of an enormous amount of research over the decades. Several theories have been developed in an effort to analyze factors that affect student retention. Tinto's (1975) theory seems to be relevant in our topic of analysis. Tinto proposed a theory of school dropout, by emphasizing the role of integration, and separating social integration from academic integration. Tintos' theory is dynamic and longitudinal, viewing students' decision to remain in school largely as an interaction between the student and the academic as well as social systems of the institution (Tinto, 1975, 1993). The theory hypothesizes that students enter college with a set of specific background characteristics that include pre-college schooling, family background and individual attributes. In essence, these entry characteristics have a direct influence on a student's initial goal in entering college as well as the commitment to graduate from said university.

Studies within Saudi Arabia

Several researchers within the context of Arabic countries have proposed categories of dropout students based on different factors. Many studies on student's retention and attrition have been conducted within the context of higher education institutions in Arab countries and very few within Saudi Arabia. This being said, Al-

Dossary (2008) conducted his study within the Saudi Arabian context to address the problem of student attrition. From the study, the author noted the difficulties in analyzing student dropout rate primarily citing difficulties in accessing information. This is problematic, as decisions regarding low student retention in Saudi higher education institutions might be based on these statistics and rates rather than on in-depth investigations of the factors that cause the problem. For such reasons, some of the studies may be borrowed especially in the context of institutional factors.

Class Size and Student Retention

Typically, first year students find themselves in large lecture halls packed probably because of general courses or residual classes that are a prerequisite for later courses. Studies show that student achievement is higher in smaller classes. Generally, students have a better opinion of the course, teacher and the field of study. It makes sense that smaller classes develop a student on a holistic level especially concerning opportunities to participate in class conversations (Hakkinen, Kirjavainen, & Uusitalo, 2003). Studies show that class size has a positive effect on retention levels in higher institutions (Abuelma'atti, 2006). A mathematical model advanced by (Keil & Partell, 2003) revealed that a student with an average class size of 20 has a .97 probability of returning to the University, whereas a student with an average class size of 40 has a probability of returning of only .80. In essence, the impact of classroom sizes is more complex than a teacher managing the number of students present in a classroom. Unfortunately, there is no research in Saudi Arabia that specifically compares the effect of class size on retention and the impact on student achievement.

The Effect of Curriculum on Students Attrition

Mansour, Gemeay, Behilak, and Albarrak's (2016) study on factors affecting Attrition Rate among Nursing Students College of Health Sciences, Taibah University, Saudi Arabia reported that students who dropped out from the program were generally dissatisfied with the content of the curriculum. This is justifiable especially because students enroll in specific programs with certain expectations but are later in shock when the actual situation is far from the expectations. In this case, clear explanation of contents of the curriculum, the requirements, plus hours and even commitment of the programs should be mentioned at the beginning of the program to alleviate future stress and narrow the gap between the actual situations and the student's expectations.

On this note, Rintala, Andersson, and Kairamo's (2012) study on science and engineering students highlighted that science and engineering students find it quite challenging to transform their lives from that of high school students to university life as technical students. The learning curriculum adopted by several universities with respect to science and engineering studies does not cater to the emotional and social development aspects of their students. They fail to consider the role played by emotional management in the personal development of their students and thus are likely to drop from their studies before the completion time (Wang et al., 2012). The logic behind an integrative curriculum is that most freshmen are not adequately prepared for the college workloads. This compounded with lack of studying structures in college relative to those of home and school results in freshmen having difficulties in managing their time, study skills and even social relationships with friends and roommates (Wilhite & Silver, 2005).

It should be noted from this point that most institutions do not have learning curricula that can teach college students the necessity to balance studies and other commitments. Thus, there is culture shock and higher dropout rates for freshmen who realize that there's a faster way to get where they need to go, without spending years tethered to a university program. Among his colleagues at Widener University, Wang et al. (2012) conducted an exploratory study on the emotional and social learning curriculum impact on the freshmen students. They aimed at determining the academic performance and emotional and social competence that students gain as an outcome of impact of effective learning curriculum. In their research study, they determined that it is necessary for the universities and colleges to incorporate emotional and social elements in their learning curriculum with an aim of enhancing the mental achievement of their students.

The Effect of Quality of Teaching and Student Attrition

In another study that focused on student's retention, attrition, and graduation rates in Saudi Arabia's universities, Abuelma'atti (2006) found that the major causes of student attrition from Saudi tertiary engineering education programs could be classified under the personal and institutional factors where the institutional factors include the quality of teaching. To address the problem of freshmen early attrition in America, the National Institute of Education's report (1984) recommended improving quality of education offered to undergraduate freshmen, they recommended the "principle of front loading," which is a system of redistribution and reallocation of an institutions best educational resources to serve first year's crucial needs. In student retention, a minimal

investment should be put toward practical interventions and approaches. Studies show that even a moderate investment in these crucial entry-level areas can have a high payoff in regards to student retention (Savasci & Tomul, 2013).

Grade Retention and Student Attrition in Institutions of Higher learning

Saudi Arabia, like many other countries, has a grading system that is key to promoting students to the next classes. A prerequisite for continuation, students are at times required to repeat classes in order to master the academic contents and thus transition to the next stage. Studies show that the grade affects students from multiple dimensions including self-esteem and even an increased decision to drop from school (Hakkinen et al., 2003). Indeed a study conducted by Rintala & Kairamo (2012) on student retention found students' grades amongst other things in their work as some of the factors causing massive drop out by students taking science and engineering studies. In addition, some students especially those in technical programs are discouraged by the grading system and thus choose to drop out. Rintala & Kairamo (2012) argued that some institutions of higher learning allocate less time for technical studies hence the inability to properly understand the grading system yet there is a similar grading system for all its courses.

Support System and Student Attrition

For the most part, first-year college students realize that despite being accepted into college that many are still not ready for college. This readiness gap is larger in the first semester of study and a major culprit for high dropouts among freshmen courses

(Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). The first stage a college student experiences is separation.

Mobarak, Alharthi, and Kees. (2000) conducted a field study in Umm Al-Qura University to analyze some of the factors that lead students to withdraw from their study programs. Statistical analysis of the respondents revealed that both the faculty members and students groups enlisted some social, personal and institutional factors as affecting their study programs and thus the decision to withdraw. The focus of the study is on student attrition, hence factors identified as leading students to drop from their program of study will be considered. Participating students attributed their decision to withdraw was based on lack of academic advising, difficulties in choosing the desired study majors as well as influences from friends and other life commitments. Faculty members and the students agreed concerning the inability to enroll in the desired major. They also pointed to financial constraints as well as social commitments affecting one's decision not to return to their programs.

Apart from the academic requirements, relations with faculty members plus pressures of time management are a source of stress for freshmen. More stress comes from social adjustment and academic adjustments like grades, time demands, concerns about the future and professional class environments. Academic pressures combined with emotional factors prevail during the first year. While freshmen are in most cases eligible to being enrolled in college, what no one tells them is that they need to be in class by eight in the morning or to take advantage of programs that they can seek help from. That is where the social-and-emotional-learning culture seems to work. Indeed research by

Pargett (2011) showed that there was a strong relationship between academic advising and student development. There was also a correlation between academic advising and student satisfaction with college and thus the probability of staying in school. Students who created a relationship with the assigned faculty advisor reported more satisfaction with their college experience and positively developed as a student.

A study by Rintala and Kairamo (2012) on Students' Attrition Rates found that students in Engineering and Science studies have significantly higher attrition rates indicating part-time jobs as a key causal factor. Fayed and Gasem (2012) investigated the relationship between adjustment with university life' factors and the probability of student dropout in major university in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia revealed that there is an inverse relationship between adjustment factors within the university and students probability of dropping out. This means that the higher a student adjusted to the university's culture the lower the probability of dropping out. These statistical relationships were however, only found on the academic and social level as is relevant to the current focus of study. In conclusion, the author noted that students who have a higher level of commitments plus adjustment to the academic life of the college had higher levels of goal commitment and were at a lower risk of dropping out from their program of study.

Educational Resources and Student Achievement

Studies investigating the relationship between educational resources of schools and academic achievement produce different results. Some show that an institution's educational resources do not have an effect on academic achievement of students

(Hakkinen et al., 2003), while others stand in contradiction (Hanushek, 2003). In essence, a resource is a broad term that incorporates the physical, financial and material resources. Hakkinen et al (2003) highlighted that there is a strong relationship between students' academic achievement and the physical, financial and material resources. However, human resources (faculty) are found not significantly related to students' academic performance (Mobarak et al. (2000). A study conducted by Savasci and Tomul, (2013) showed that the lack of physical resources has a negative effect on students, and it hinders learning of students.

In most countries, the relationship between the student-teacher ratio (class size), education level of teachers (which affects the quality of learning), and school facilities is more pronounced, but the same is relatively different in developed and developing countries (Hakkinen et al., 2003). Thus, studies generally differ within the context of resources to be included in analyzing student achievement. For the most part, aspects such as student-teacher ratio, educational materials, library size, and teacher education have been found to have an effect on student performance and achievement. The grade is in this case is a major factor of student decision to withdraw from school.

Learning Culture and Student Achievement

Educational theorists have long pointed to the need of paying attention to the learning culture. Studies show that a student's achievement is mediated through the culture and climate of the school (Vislocky, 2005). Indeed, Watson (2001) cautioned that an inhospitable learning culture suffocates student achievement and possibly contributes to the need to withdraw from institutions. However, schools that have strong learning

cultures have highly motivated lecturers who have greater success in impacting student performance and outcomes (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Interestingly, what would happen if part of school culture were devoted to real life preparation? Would such inclusion prevent students from dropping in their first year, particularly if they had time to understand the reason for going to college? Would it help if a learning culture assisted them in figuring out what the real life workloads in school looks like and thus allowing them to map out their expectations earlier? Almost certainly! What would help more is a system of higher education that integrates the real world and supports students into shaping their time in school.

It is for such reasons that Wang et al. (2012) argued that students with both social intelligence and competence are more likely to cope with all the challenges that come with academic life. They also cited the work conducted by Wilhite and Silver (2005) where the researchers argued that most higher learning institutions such as universities and colleges have made attempts of incorporating emotional and social concepts activities in their learning. Through emotional understanding, the students can develop high self-esteem hence the urge to complete their respective courses. Many educators across the globe, particularly in the United States, have begun to incorporate non-academic measure such as social and emotional skills in their school culture. Most proponents begin to recognize the importance of emotional and social learning, yet the term is still broad. Schools that have identified this trend identify essential components to include aptitudes like self-management, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness (Wilhite & Silver, 2005).

Summary

From the information above it is evident that both independent variables are some of the impacts of learning curriculum in most universities across the world. Although most Saudi higher education institutions experience low student retention rates, student attrition remains an under-researched phenomenon in the Saudi higher education context, as discussed above. Moreover, it appears that most Saudi institutions have no student retention plans or programs. From the literature sampled, there is no evidence that the administration of the college studied has a systematic plan to address this issue. While most research points to the need to integrate both social and emotional concepts in the curricula and learning culture, to date research within the context of Saudi Arabia has been minimal and none has quantitatively and qualitatively assessed freshmen dropouts. Moreover, though emotional and social curriculum and learning culture plays an important role in enhancing students' academic performance and achievement, little attention has been given to the development of such a curriculum in the context of students in HE programs. The above analysis of the conclusions of the Saudi student retention studies revealed major research gaps, which include covered and uncovered analyses as shown by the defects in research strategies. For these reasons, this study shall integrate a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative analysis to have a strong conceptual and theoretical background.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive research design. The main purpose of using this type of design is that it assessed the situation within the study area at the time of the study. This research design was used to evaluate the factors that influence freshmen attrition within Saudi Arabian universities. The objective of descriptive research is to gain an accurate profile of events, persons, or situations. In a descriptive design, the problem analyzed in both a quantitative and qualitative structure to define the relationship that exists between the independent and dependent variables. The advantage of this approach is the ability to answer a wider spectrum of research questions (Saunders et al., 2012). A combination of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches also provides better insight by understanding data that could have been missed under a single approach.

Definition of Variables and Other Terms

A number of defining variables describe why freshmen choose to drop out of school. Some of the variables have a direct or indirect influence in propagating attrition. Some of the variables affect attrition individually or in combination with other variables (McGrath & Braunstein, 1997). For the most part, retention theory divides attrition variables into three distinct categories, namely institutional variables, student related variables and social economic variables. Variables from one category can interact with

those from other categories and may differently influence retention. This study focuses on institutional and student variables. The terms in this study are used differently. Therefore, these terms are defined within the context of the study. The following are some few definitions of variables and terms used throughout the research.

Learning culture: The learning culture is perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, relationships and rules that shape and influence the functions of a school. Learning culture is in most cases a result of the conscious and unconscious perspectives, values, practices and interactions. It is also the level as to which schools embrace student needs and concrete issues related to faculty members.

Curriculum: The combination of lesson plans and academic content is taught in schools. Curriculum is supposed to impact skills and knowledge to students. It is also supposed to meet the learning objective. In this case, assignments, projects, books, presentations, videos as well as materials, tests and assessments count as part of a curriculum.

Study skills: Study skills are discrete strategies or techniques that individuals use to approach learning. They are crucial for one's success in school. There is a spectrum of study skills, which may tackle the process of organizing and taking in new information, retaining information, or dealing with assessments.

Quality lecturer: This term involves a combination of a wide range of teaching strategies that adapt to the needs of the students.

Class size: This is the number of students within a classroom or course. It also applies to the average number of students taught by one teacher or the number of students participating in learning.

Academic support: The availability of support resources is a major determinant of student retention. Resources such as career services, student organizations and recreational facilities are an important part of student experiences and affect student success and attrition.

Academic resources: There are a number of academic resources and programs in various locations at an institution of higher learning. This is designed to support student academic and intellectual engagement and to help them take full advantage of the curriculum.

Academic advising: This developmental process can help students to connect to their academic, career and related aspects of their lives.

Attrition: Attrition refers to voluntary withdrawal from classes. It may also be an involuntary process such as academic dismissal.

Drop out: Drop out, stop out or opt out, is used in this study to refer to students who do not complete their courses or register for a course but withdraw before the semester ends.

Retention: Retention is the ability of an institution of higher education to keep its students active and engaged until graduation. This study particularly focuses on the retention of first-year students.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework is a diagrammatic representation of the relationship that exists between two or more variables in a study. The conceptual framework for this study is shown in Figure 1.

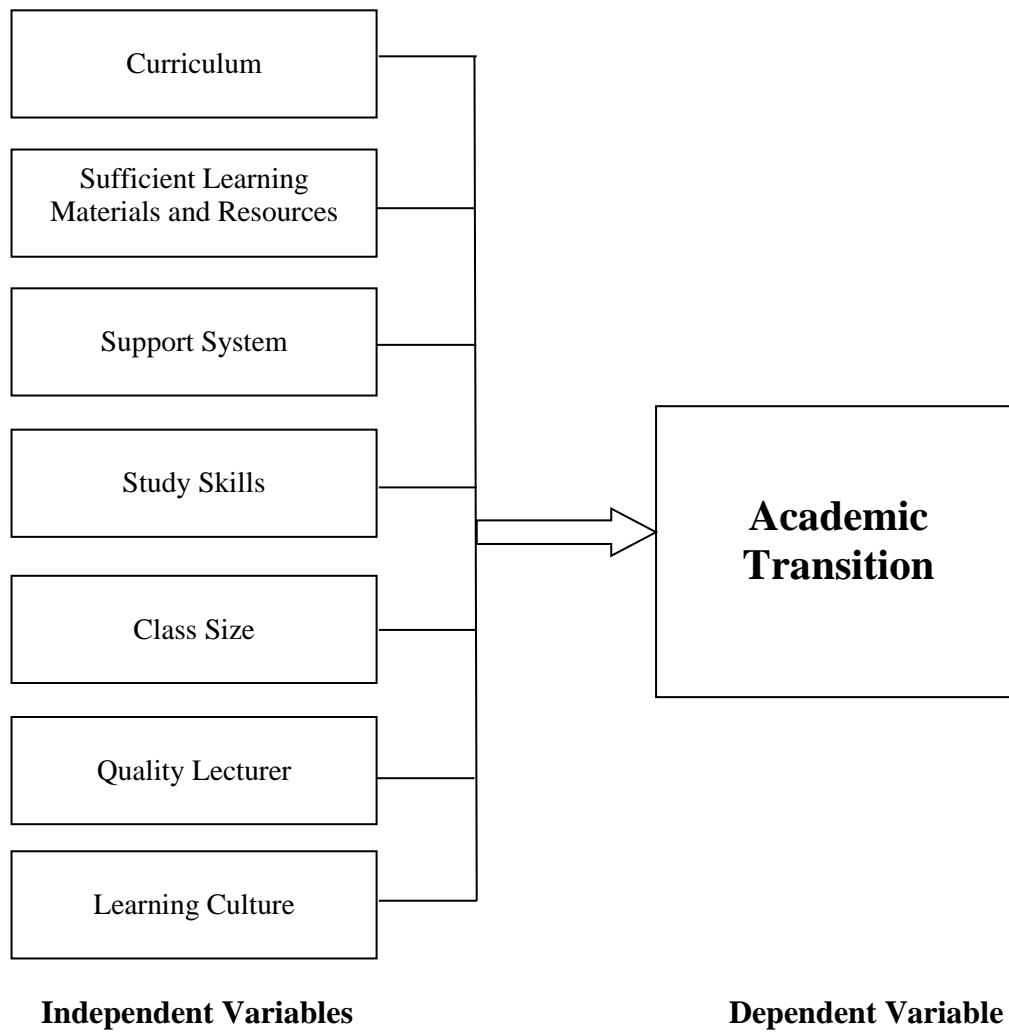


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

Factors affecting student achievement in institutions of higher learning have been the subject of an enormous amount of research over the decades. Several theories have been developed in an effort to analyze factors that affect student's retention. Looking at the theories, it becomes noticeable that attrition differs from one institution to the next. In essence, retention is specific to an institution; therefore, one theory of retention may not explain the full picture of students' attrition within another institution (Kalsbeek & Zucker, 2013). In that case, this theoretical review focused on theories that are most relevant to the institutional and individual related variables. The design of the current study is descriptive in nature, but the constructs and assumption of theoretical models shall provide a conceptual lens to help during the design of the study structure and data analysis. This review of the literature examines six of the most widely tested theories of student retention. These are Spady's (1970) student departure theory, Tinto's (1975, 1993) student integration theory, Pascarella's (1980) attrition theory, Astin's (1984) student involvement theory, Bean and Metzner's (1985) student attrition theory, and Cabrera's (1992) integrated retention model.

A Study into the Behavior of Student Drop Out Evaluating the Tinto Model

Factors affecting student retention in institutions of higher learning have been the subject of an enormous amount of research over the decades. Several theories developed in an effort to analyze factors that affect student retention. Tinto's theory (1975) is relevant in my topic of analysis. Tinto proposed a theory of school dropout, by emphasizing the role of integration, and separating social integration from academic integration. Tintos' theory is dynamic and longitudinal viewing students' decision to

remain in school largely as an interaction between the student and the academic as well as social systems of the institution (Tinto, 1975, 1993). The theory hypothesizes that students enter college with a set of specific background characteristics that include pre-college schooling, family background and individual attributes and pre-college schooling. Pre-college schooling experiences include the characteristics of the student's high school academic achievement and academic course work. On the other hand, family background includes aspects such as family social status, parental formal educational level, and parental expectations. Finally, individual attributes include academic aptitude, race, age and gender. In essence, these entry characteristics have a direct influence on a student's initial goal in entering college as well as the commitment to graduate from said university.

Tinto's model revolves around two systems, namely the academic and social systems that are both concerned with commitment and their influence on dropout decisions. In most cases, the decision to quit schools is often based on a lengthy process: commitments to education, as well as participation are key factors in this process. It is uncommon for university students to drop out after a semester because of doubt in the education they have chosen (Tinto, 1993). Reasons given by most students include academic workload, family as well as the learning culture, which are generally the attributes hypothesized in Tinto's theory. Reasons for staying irrespective of the doubt are commitment and the desire and intent to fulfill stated goals. That said, both the structural and normative dimensions affect a student's decision to quit school, especially freshmen. Structural integration involves an individual's capability in meeting explicit

standards of the university, whereas normative integration relates to an individual's identification with the normative structure set by the academic system (Tinto, 1975).

Apart from the academic requirements, relations with faculty members plus pressures of time management are a source of stress for freshmen. More stress comes from social adjustment and academic adjustments like grades, time demands, concerns about the future and professional class environments. Academic pressures combined with emotional factors prevail during the first year. While freshmen are, in most cases, eligible for being enrolled in college, what no one tells them is that they need to be in class by 8 in the morning or that there are programs from which they can gain assistance. The research literature suggests that that's where the social-emotional learning culture seems to work best.

In essence, social integration is the degree of congruency between the university's social system and the individual student. According to Tinto, extracurricular activities, informal peer group as well as interactions with faculty and administrators are mechanisms of social integration (Tinto, 1975). Social and academic integration affect institutional commitment as well as students' later goals in life; all of these are affected by students' initial levels of commitments. In his final analysis, Tinto notes that the interplay between the individual's commitment to the goal of college completion and his commitment to the institution are key determinants to whether or not the individual decides to drop out from college (Tinto, 1975). These commitments do, however, change during a student's time at the university depending on the level of integration of the university's academic and social systems. Tinto applied Van Gennep's theory (rite of

passage) which is concerned with societal change over time and how individuals foster stability in terms of change to describe the complex process of student integration. Tinto referred to Van Gennep's work since it provides us with a way of thinking about longitudinal process of student persistence in colleges, as well as the extension of time dependent processes of student departure' (Tinto, 1988). Tinto suggested that students are likely not to return to colleges when their rites of passage are incomplete.

The first stage a college student experiences is separation. Students ordinarily have to disassociate themselves socially and physically in order to successfully integrate into the university norms and culture (Tinto, 1988). Nevertheless, student goals and institutional commitments, which in this case include culture and curricula, play an important role in this stage. A student is most likely to overcome stresses of transition if he is committed to the university goal of education (Tinto, 1988). The last stage is incorporation; this stage occurs when students have passed through the stages that occur early in students' experiences. Students are expected to be integrated in the university's community at this stage. However, unlike integration in traditional communities students are not in any way initiated into the system by ceremonies and rituals. In this light, it is important that universities should provide various formal and informal mechanisms to connect students to the university's community such as student organizations, enhanced learning culture, extracurricular programs, and faculty lecture (Tinto, 1993).

Pascarella's Attrition Theory

Pascarella's (1980) Attrition theory is based on Spady (1970), Astin (1970), and Tinto's (1975) theories. This theory emphasizes the informal interactions between the

faculty and students as being important in retention and students' academic achievement. Pascarella highlighted that institutional characteristics, students' characteristics, as well as three independent variables (educational outcomes, informal contact with faculty and college experiences) have a direct impact on student's retention decision. They all directly affect educational outcomes and indirectly affect the decision to withdraw.

Astin's Student Involvement Theory

Astin's (1984) theory postulated that student learn more by becoming involved. According to Astin, factors that are important for student development were equally important for student retention in terms of their involvement in the institution. According to Astin's theory, student involvement is the amount of psychological and physical time that a student devotes to the academic experience. Therefore, a student who is highly involved devotes a significant amount of time studying, participating in student activities and actively interacts with students and faculty.

Bean and Metzner's Student Attrition Theory

Bean and Metzner's (1985) theory is based on attitude-behavior interaction theory and organizational turnover theory. It posits that the aspects that make an individual to leave the workplace are similar to those that push individuals to drop out of school. This theory was developed for nontraditional students (part time, commuter, 24 years or older). Unlike previous models, this theory does not rely heavily on social integration. Bean and Metzner posited that the following variables influence student retention: academic variables and students' intention to leave, which are influenced by psychological outcomes such as quality of the institution, educational goals, and high

school performance; environmental variables such as finances and employment hours also influence student retention and have an effect on a student's decision to drop out.

Cabrera's Integrated Retention Theory

Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, and Hengstler (1992) combined Bean and Metzner's (1985) and Pascarella's (1980) student attrition theory into the integrated retention model. The authors looked at what was common in the aforementioned theories. Regardless of some differences, both of these models view retention to be the result of a complex set of interactions. They both agreed that a match between students and the institution affect student retention and precollege characteristics affect students' attrition. Studies that have deployed the student integration model suggest that social integration, institutional commitment, academic integration as well as goal commitment have the strongest influence on students' retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983a). On the other hand, studies that have used student attrition theories suggest that a student's intentions, including the willingness to persist and the attitudes as well as the institutional factors play a great role in influencing student retention (Bean, 1982a; Bean and Vesper, 1990). Thus, Cabrera et al. (1992) sought to analyze the extent to which the theories converged. Analyzing data for a period using variables from the two theories, Cabrera et al. concluded that Tinto's model, as well as Bean and Metzner's theory (1985), should provide a better understanding of student attrition.

Primary and Secondary Research Questions

From the preceding part, the following research questions could be posed to guide the study.

- RQ1: How does curriculum in the Saudi and the United State of America education system affect its ability to retain students and push them towards achievement?
- RQ2: How does the Support System, including career advisors in the education system, affect its ability to retain students and push them towards achievement?
- RQ3: How does a study skill influence their decision to stay or withdraw from courses?
- RQ4: How does class size influence students' decision to stay or withdraw from school?
- RQ5: How does the quality of the lecturer influence student's decision to stay or withdraw from school?
- RQ6: How does the learning culture in institutions of education influence students' decision to stay or withdraw from school?
- RQ7: How does provision of sufficient learning materials and resources influence students' decision to stay or withdraw from school?

Limitations of the Study

An approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative analysis of data is time consuming as well as costly. This approach also requires that the researcher should be skilled in collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Summary

In summary, student retention with institutions of higher education has been a subject that has received considerable attention over the decades. This paper has looked at the theoretical framework as proposed by different scholars. Tinto's theory (1987) focused on the social and academic commitment and integration. Pascarella's theory (1980) emphasized the connection between the faculty and students. Astin's theory (1984) mainly highlighted the importance of student involvement while Bean and Metzner's theory (1985) focused on factors that were external to the institution. Lastly, Cabrera's theory (1992) combined both Bean and Metzner's and Tinto's theory. Clearly, these theories have intersections of similarity. However, most of these theories are complex and contain an array of factors that are explained in a causal pattern. On the other hand, these studies include student background characteristics that are crucial in determining student attrition.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed description of the research design and methodology that will be adapted for this study.

Research Design

This study used a survey. Check and Schutt (2012) defined surveys as “the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions” (p. 16). This approach to research incorporates a variety of methods for collecting data, recruiting participants and instrumentation. Survey research designs can be both qualitative and quantitative. They can be qualitative if they incorporate open-ended questionnaires or quantitative if the questionnaires are assigned numerical related values or a combination of both strategies (mixed).

Qualitative Research

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), qualitative research is a term that covers a number of interpretative techniques that aim to describe, translate, decode and develop concepts, the experiences, meaning and views of naturally occurring events in the social environment. Synonymously, constructivist, naturalistic, interpretive, field

research, case study approaches, and ethnography terms used interchangeably to define qualitative research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

The goal of qualitative research is to “develop concepts which help us to comprehend social phenomena naturally rather than in experimental settings, while placing emphasis on the experiences, meanings, and views of all the participants” (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Qualitative research has been used widely in a number of educational settings. Qualitative techniques vary from highly flexible people centered in participatory techniques to the highly structured systematic techniques. Different disciplines use qualitative methods in slightly different ways. However, the above can be categorized broadly under Participatory Research (PR) techniques, In-depth techniques, and Systematic techniques which incorporate methods such as interviews, free list, Cobweb diagrams, surveys, trend analysis, direct observation, and case studies.

The advantage of the qualitative approach is that it allows deeper insights into a phenomenon under study while also enhancing its richness. It also offers flexibility, since the researcher can adjust the research questions as he progresses in gathering data. Moreover, this approach which has a less formal statistical approach can attract more readers (Cohen et al., 2011). On the other hand, this approach commonly utilizes a small sample size, making it impossible to generalize findings of the study on a larger population. In addition, data collection is generally difficult and time consuming.

Quantitative Research

A quantitative approach “seeks an inquiry into social phenomena or human problems based on testing that involves variables that are measured with numbers and statistically analyzed to determine the truth in predicting the theory”(Creswell, 1994, p. 2). Primarily, it seeks to measure and test the hypothesis to predict as well as control some variables. This approach is in most cases useful when testing a theory or identifying factors that have an influence on results they include experiments, surveys and quasi-experiments. A plus for this method is that it can produce reliable and factual results that can be generalized to a larger population. A drawback of this approach is that it is too statistical and therefore provides little details on human motivation, attitudes and overall behavior (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). This study is quantitative because the questionnaire instrument assigned numerical values and later subjected to statistical analysis to draw statistical conclusions from the outcome and run across analysis to look for any interesting points of data.

Mixed-Method Approach

A mixed-method approach is a combination of the qualitative and quantitative approach. It primarily aims to remedy the shortcoming of one approach using the others thus eventually drawing on the strength of the two (Cohen et al., 2011). Besides, the mixed-method approach can answer a wide and complex range of research questions while also improving insights in understanding the data, something that the researcher would miss if one single approach was adopted. Even though, this approach is effective, it is also time consuming and calls for thorough familiarization with data collection.

The Setting

The study was conducted at a major university in Saudi Arabia and major school in the United State of America; the school in Atlanta, Georgia, and the university in Saudi Arabia one of the oldest non-profit public higher education institutions based in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. According to the unit rank, the enrollment range between 35,000-39,999 students. As at 2017, the enrollment stood at approximately 40,000 students out of which 7% were international students. The university offers courses and programs leading to officially recognized higher education degrees such as bachelor's degrees, master degrees, and doctorate degrees in several areas of study. Permission to conduct the study was sent to the university in Saudi Arabia and the school in the United State of America with the assistance of the General Department of Education in both countries.

Quantitative Approach

The Model and Research Questions

This study sought to identify factors that affect student academic transition achievement. This study was guided by Tinto's (1975) model of student integration. Tinto's theory is relevant in my topic of analysis, since it integrated individual, institutional and social factors in its analysis. Tinto proposed a theory of school dropout, by emphasizing the role of integration, and separating social integration from academic achievement. Tinto's theory is dynamic and longitudinal, viewing students' decision to remain in school largely as an interaction between the student and the academic as well as social systems of the institution (Tinto, 1975, 1993). According to this study, an

institutional curriculum, class size, available resources, quality of lecturers, learning culture, support system plus an individual's study skills affect achievement, which, in turn, affects their decision to stay or drop out of school. Following the connection, this study conducted a correlational analysis to find the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

Target Participants

Target participants refer to a population of interest where study sample size items were studied for researchers picked Cohen et al. (2011). Creswell (2002) emphasizes that it is important to select participants who “might provide useful information” and who “might help people learn about the phenomenon, and 45 who might give voice to silenced people” (p. 193). For this study, the population of interest will be freshmen from the university in Saudi Arabia in the 2017-2018 academic years. Freshmen students were selected since attrition theories have shown that freshmen are more likely to drop out of school than their counterparts are. A unique advantage in selecting this sample is the ease in access from the student population especially because the researcher and participants share in the same language and culture (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The study targets 30 participants, from Saudi Arabia and the United States of America.

Data Collection Instruments

Primary and secondary data was used in the study. The study used scholarly and non-scholarly literatures to conduct an integrative review of the relevant literature. Secondary data and information were sourced from the institution's website and other relevant materials from the internet and library sources relating to student academic

transition achievement. Content analysis was deployed to analyze content of the text to derive similar themes. This was done on a qualitative as well as quantitative scale after which data was categorized and coded into specific themes (Krippendorff, 2004).

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire that contains both open-ended and close-ended questions.

Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaires were structured into sections that covered the basic information and all the research questions to the specific objectives to the study. It was administered to the first year freshmen students with the help of the staff. The questionnaire was designed to collect information about the student as well as the institution. The questionnaire followed Likert-like scale questions organized into Personal, Engagement of the faculty and services of the university. The research includes all of the three scales to accomplish the objective of the study. Pascarella and Terenzini's (1980) institutional integration scale was used to measure the variables of study. This scale was integrated in the study not only because it measures constructs in the Tinto model, but also because the validity and reliability has been well tested. The questionnaire was administered to first year students in each with the help of staff from the university and the school. Letters were written to each staff member to request time off to allow me to administer the questionnaire.

Each interview lasted for approximately 10 to 15 minutes. Telephone interviews or (the questionnaire may be emailed) were conducted with students who did not persist (freshmen who had withdrawn in the year 2016-2017) because their experiences could

bring considerable insight to the study. I acquired their numbers from the admissions office or freshmen group in social media sites. A semi-structured interview was incorporated into the study. It consisted of multiple questions that focus on specific issues but also gave room to the interviewer to diverge to pursue ideas in detail (Eisner, 1991). This approach was the best and is more flexible. Moreover, interviews are appropriate where much is unknown and detailed insights are needed for each individual participant (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Participants were asked to participate voluntarily in the study and the need for admission numbers were eliminated to assure participant of confidentiality. According to Creswell (2002), researchers should at all-times protect the participants involved in research by formally receiving a consent that ensures that privacy is withheld.

Pilot Test

A pilot study was considered before the main study. There were three respondents, an ongoing student, faculty member as well as administrators, using the questionnaires, which will be tested with respondents. The piloting ensured clarity of the final instruments for the actual data collection as well as to identify relevant weaknesses in the instruments of the study (Cohen et al., 2017). Apart from this, the pilot study will also help to determine the length of time it would take to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was translated in Arabic in the General Department of Education in the Riyadh Region, and the university used a member from the Language and Translation College at the university so as to ensure the accuracy of the questionnaire.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Stratified random sampling was adopted in this study. According to Joy (2007), this approach involves dividing a population into sub-groups are homogeneous and then randomly selecting a sample out of the sub-group. This approach may be effectively used in the study since the population under study consists of students, admission as well as faculty members (concentration is more on students). In this way, we were able to represent subgroups in the population as well as the overall population (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Therefore, the sample was drawn from each stratum from which respondents were selected (see Table 1). The target was to sample at least 30 of the target population.

Table 1

Sample Size

Unit	Target Population	Sample Size
Students	10	10
Administrators	10	10
Teaching Faculty	10	10
Total	30	30

Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis involved collecting, editing and modeling data. Using a qualitative data analysis procedure, such as computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software it is possible to organize data in a graphical appearance. With the help of common programs such as ATLAS and NVivo, data was analyzed into discrete categories according to the

property and dimensions that occurred within the data itself. Inductive analysis produced rich description about elements under study as perceived by the participants. The description is the basis of interpretation, which can be presented using graphs, networks and matrices (Cohen et al., 2011). Quantitatively, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was deployed to analyze the data. Descriptive analysis was conducted to find the patterns and percentages through mean comparison of factors affecting student academic transition achievement and thereby attrition in the university and the school. In addition, descriptive analysis was conducted to find the percentages and the qualitative data based on inferences and observations. The results were presented in form charts and tables, measures to ensure trustworthiness.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability refers to the assurance that different researchers will achieve similar findings when they investigate a similar issue (Eisner, 1991). Data reliability was ensured by comparing the questionnaire in the final questionnaire to that in the pilot study. On the other hand, data validity refers to the level of accuracy in the research instruments. As seen, the research involves collection of diverse data sets, which are to be combined and simultaneously analyzed to generalize the finding of the study. Data triangulation improves data validity and reliability in two ways, systematic combination of different methods and using data from different sources. Triangulations can reduce chances of the research drawing erroneous conclusions through an overreliance of a single data set or technique while increasing the likelihood that produced explanations that have wide resonance and not limited by empirical parameters of the research (Cohen et al., 2011).

Limitations of the Study

Given the time allowed for this study and restricted access to the participants, the majority of the data consisted of a limited sample.

1. There existed the possibility of inaccurate information or misinterpretation from the participants.
2. Cultural limitations made it difficult to collect data from female participants.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were treated with respect in line with the ethical guidelines set by the university and American Psychological Association (APA). The study did not hold any identifiable risk because it excluded confidential information. A common language and culture made it easy for the researcher to maneuver around the participants and administration. However, it was expected that the researcher would have difficulties assessing female participants owing to the cultural aspects of the country.

Summary

This research deployed a mixed-research design. A combination of two techniques is the best since it can remedy the shortcoming of one approach using the others, thus eventually drawing on the strength of the two. Besides, the mixed-method approach can answer a wide and complex range of research questions while also improving insights in understanding the data, something that would be missed if one single approach were adopted (Creswell, 2012). The instrument of data collection was questionnaires, individual interviews as well as telephone interviews. Results of the same then coded, categorized into themes and presented in graphs and charts. Triangulation as

well as content analysis will be utilized to give credibility to the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

CHAPTER V

PRESENTATION OF DATA

This study aimed to investigate the extent to which Saudi Arabian and American students are satisfied as well as dissatisfied with education, and much data was collected regarding the factors that contributed toward them dropping out of school. In both America and Saudi Arabia, the number of students who drop out or terminate their studies has increased, and because of this, it has become a growing concern as shown in the collected data discussed below. In addition to this, several factors have been identified to be the main issues that lead to an increasing number of dropouts in both Saudi Arabia and America. The research design used by the study in the collection of data included a survey, which involved the collection of data and information from a sample of different groups through their response to the provided questions.

The collected data was based on several different groups, which included the students from both Saudi Arabia and the United States; the other group of participants included the teaching staff from various faculties from both the United States and Saudi Arabia. The third group of participants in the survey was the administrative staff from both the United States and Saudi Arabia.

Data for Students in the United States

From the data collected from students in the United States regarding their interests after high school or college, it is evident that most are likely to study architecture,

anatomy and criminal justice. Other students also considered pursuing broadcasting, psychology, technology support, and nursing.

Based on how much time the students spend studying after school per night, it is evident that all four students indicated that they all take 1 hour reviewing what they have learned during the day (see Figure 2). To some extent, the students are making some efforts towards bettering their studies. Taking at least 1 hour every night makes the students master what they have studied during their stay at school.

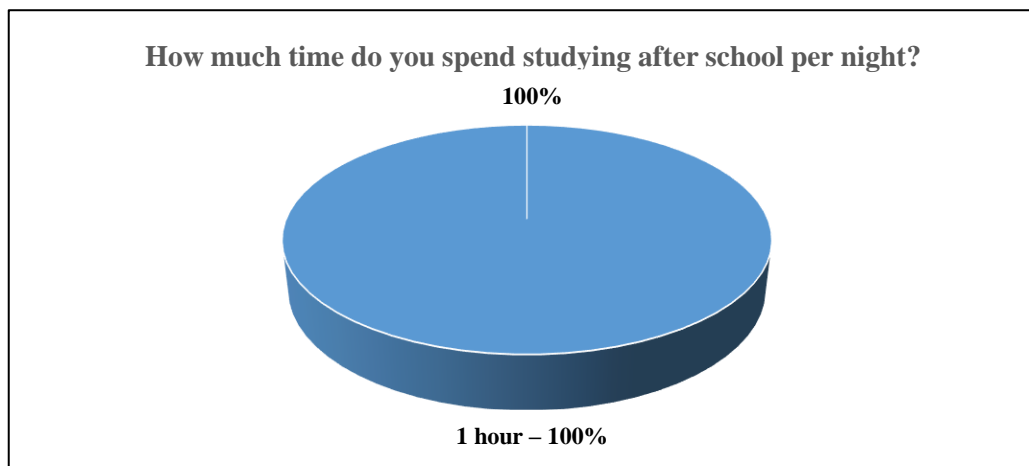


Figure 2. Time spent studying after school per night.

The United States students found academics and sports more appealing as compared to other aspects such as extracurricular activities, student support, and faculty. Academics and sports are both at 43%, followed by extracurricular activities at 14% and lastly faculty and student support both at 0% (see Figure 3).

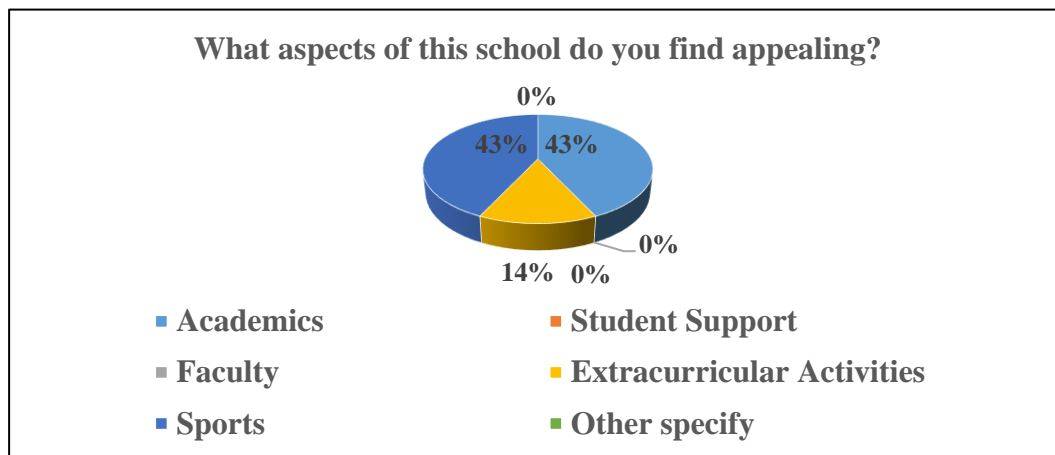


Figure 3. Aspects of school participants found appealing.

Based on Figure 4, the students responded to the aspect of ranking the level of their academic achievements. In this case, about 70% of the students stated higher achiever 70% and above, average achievers 50% to 70% at 30%. Lastly, below average were at 0%.

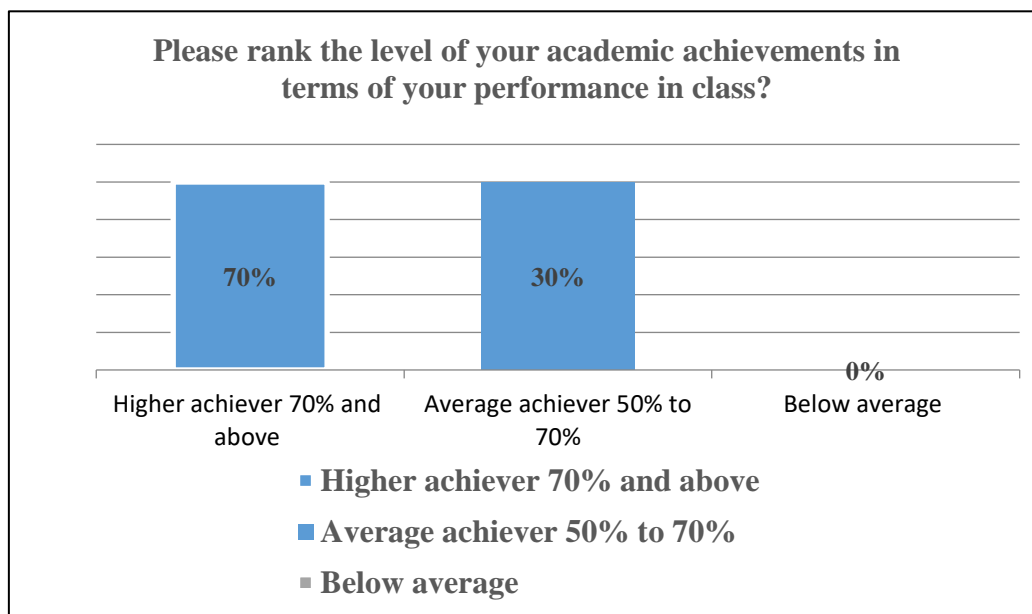


Figure 4. Level of participants' academic achievements.

Based on the collected data regarding whether the study skills affect the academic accomplishments at school all students agreed by stating, “Yes,” while none of the students responded “No.”

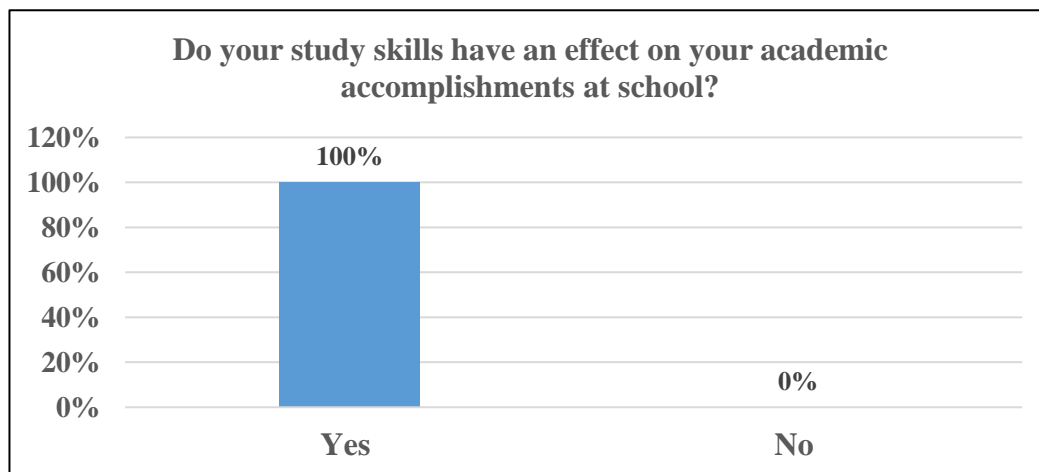


Figure 5. Effect of study skills on academic accomplishments at school.

The collected data, in this case, reveals that 75% of the students from the United States agreed that the learning culture at school was supportive of students. Besides, 25% of the students strongly agreed, and none of the students were uncertain, disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Figure 6).

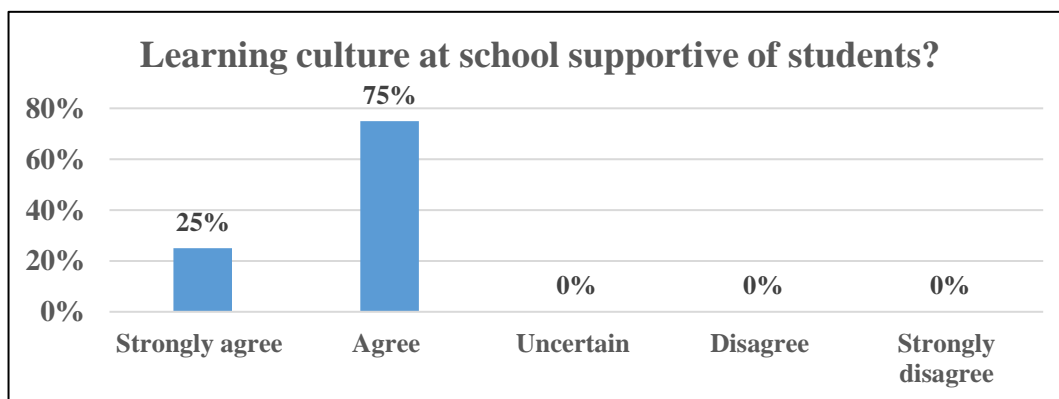


Figure 6. Learning culture at school.

From the collected data referring to the students from the United States, 100% of the students (which means that all students) responded with less than 30. Besides, none of them responded with less than 20 as well as 50 and more.

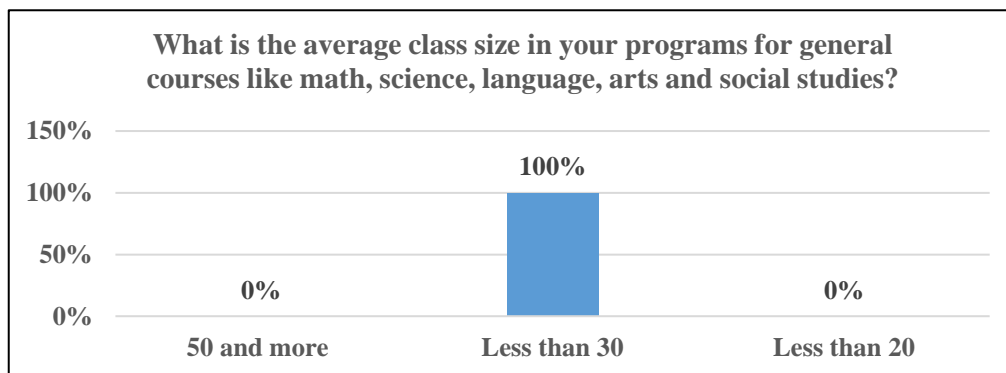


Figure 7. Average class size in general courses.

Fifty percent of student stated “no,” the class size does not influence academic achievement, while 25% stated “Yes,” while the remaining 25% reported others and specified broadly.

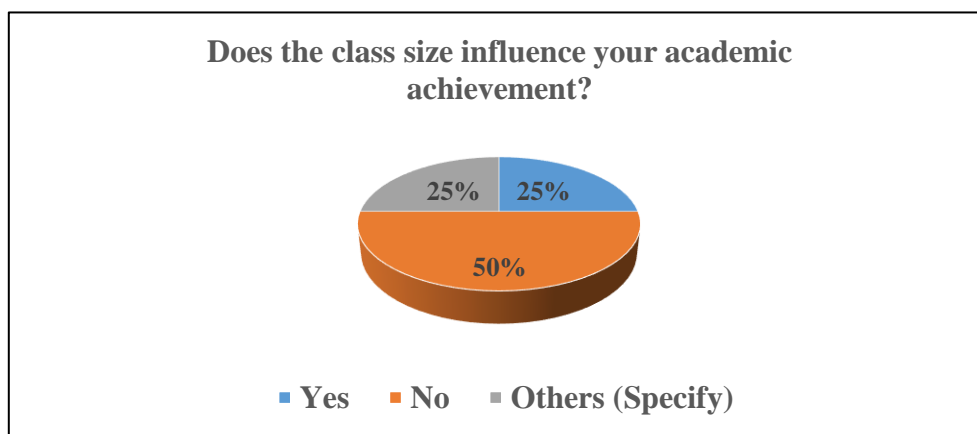


Figure 8. Influence of class size on academic achievement.

Data for Saudi Students

Saudi Arabia students have varying interests regarding what they study after high school or in college. The first student interviewed had an interest in chemistry, the second student had an interest in mathematics, the third student had an interest in law, the fourth student had an interest in nursing, and the last student had an interest in biology.

Most of Saudi Arabia students take 1 hour to study after school every night, which stands at 60%. Out of the five students, two stated that they always take 2 hours and below to study after school every night (see Figure 9).

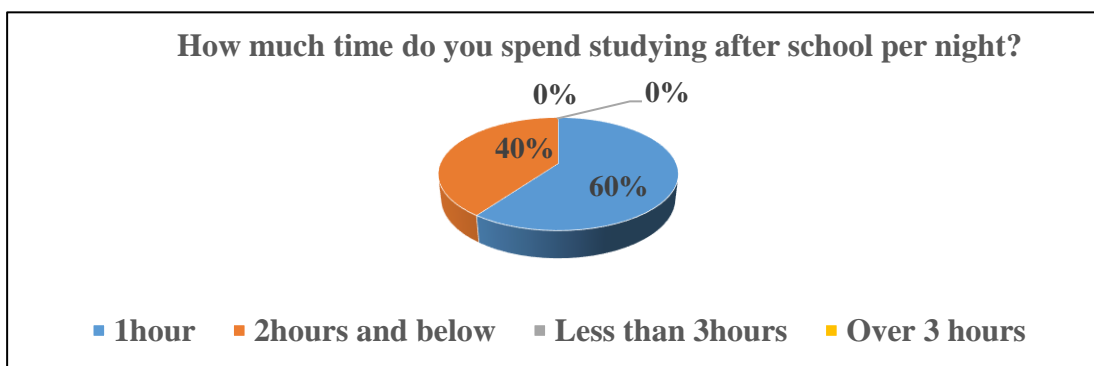


Figure 9. Time spent studying after school per night (Saudi students).

From the collected data, 29% of the students specified other aspects such as study cultures. Twenty-one percent stated academics and faculty as the critical aspects of the school they learned in and find it appealing. Student support and extracurricular activities were at 7%, and a sport was at 15% (see Figure 10).

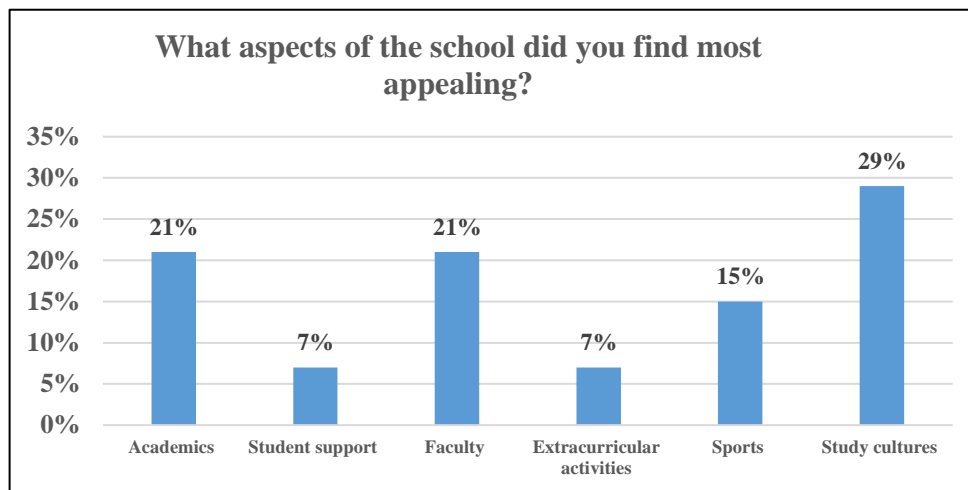


Figure 10. Appealing aspects of school (Saudi students).

Based on Figure 11, the students responded to the aspect of ranking the level of their academic achievements. In this case, about 60% of the students stated higher achiever 70% and above, average achievers 50% to 70% at 40%. Lastly, below average were at 0%.

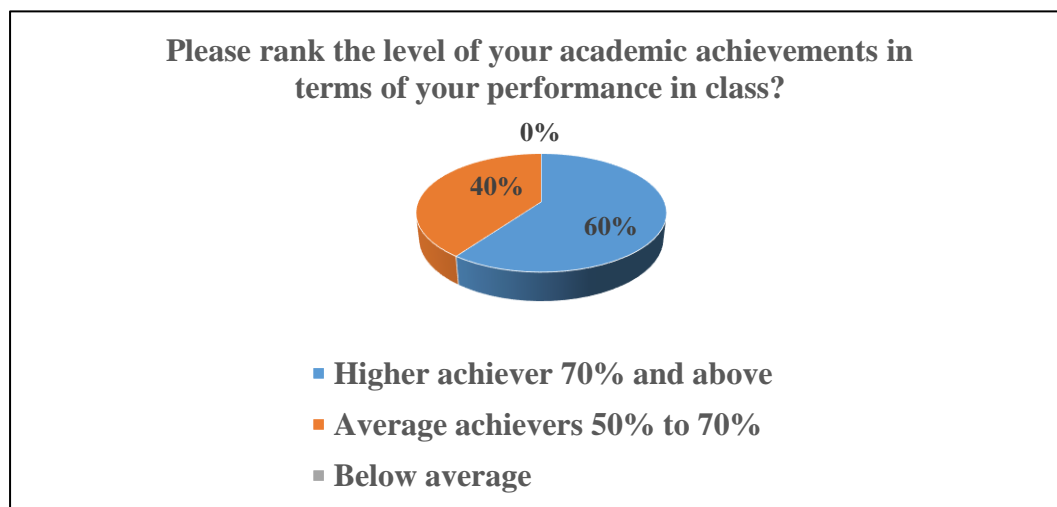


Figure 11. Level of academic achievements (Saudi students).

Students strongly agreed that learning culture at school supportive of students stood at 20%. Those who agreed were at 80%, and the rest were at 0% including those uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree (see Figure 12).

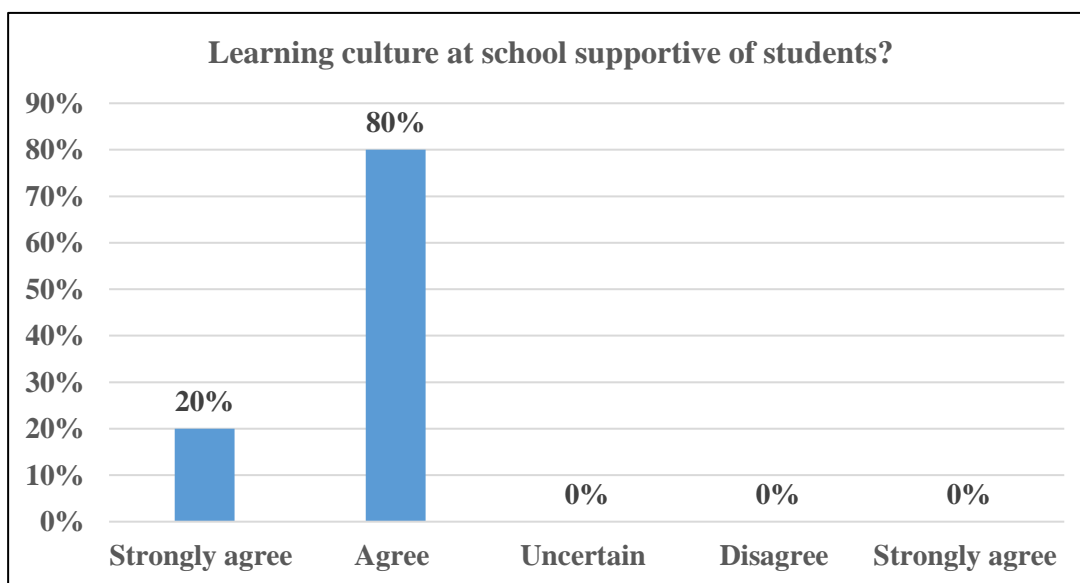


Figure 12. Learning culture at school (Saudi students).

All the students making 100% alleged that the size of the class influences their academic achievements, while none that is 0% responded “No” (see Figure 13).

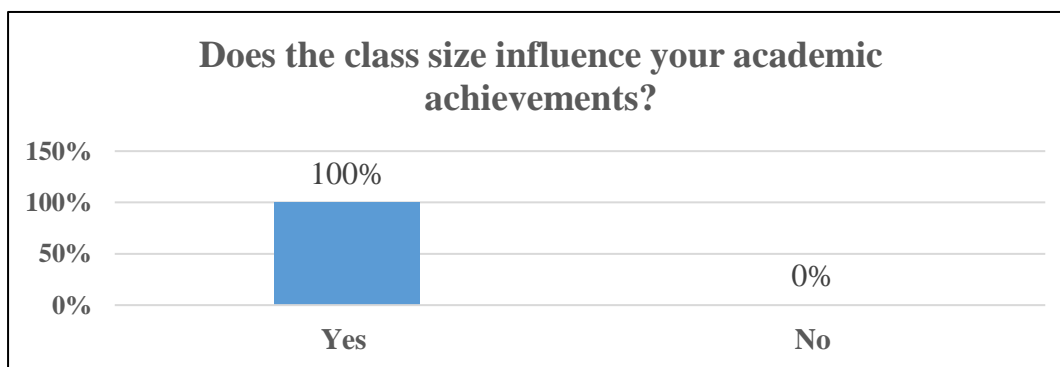


Figure 13. Influence of class size on academic achievement (Saudi students).

Data for Administrative Staff in the United States

The administrative staffs from both the United States and Saudi Arabia were provided with the questions, and they responded as follows.

Based on the question of whether the schools have adequate resources the administrative staff from the United States had varying opinions, 20% strongly agreed, and strongly disagreed. Besides, 40% agreed, while 0% was uncertain.

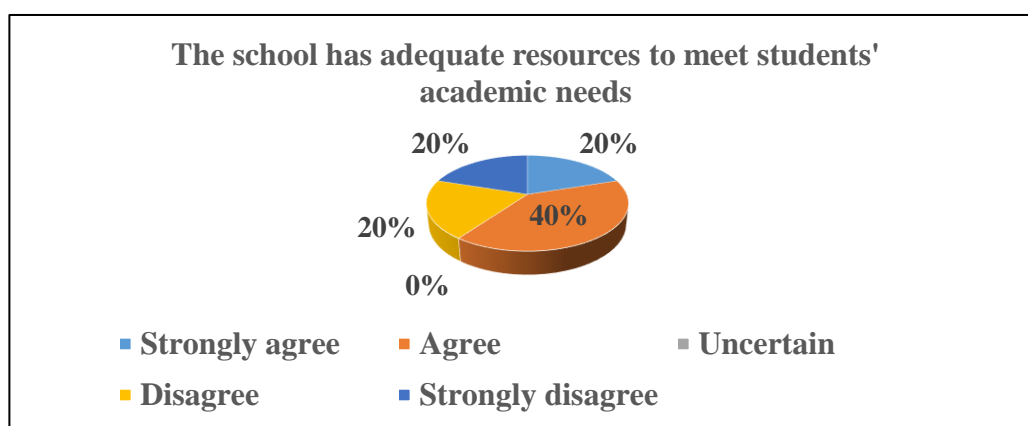


Figure 14. Adequate school resources (U.S. staff).

As seen in Figure 15, 60% agreed that learning culture is oriented towards student achievement, 20% were uncertain and disagreed, while 0% both strongly agreed and disagreed as well.

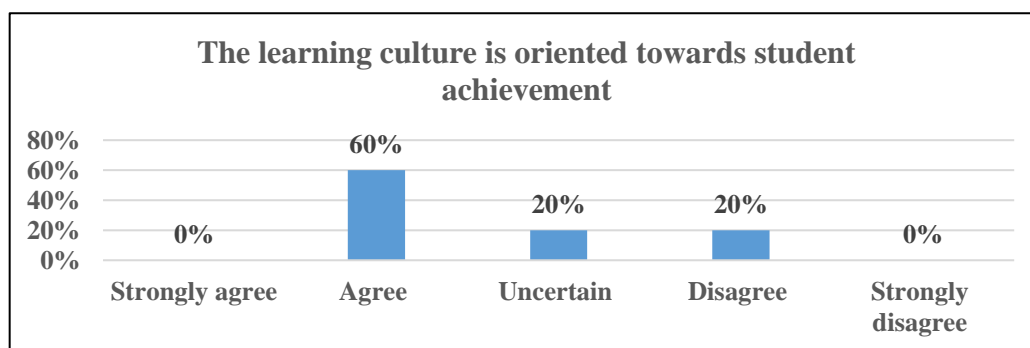


Figure 15. Learning culture and student achievement (U.S. staff).

Figure 16 indicates that 60% disagreed that the schools have adequate resources in meeting the non-academic needs of the students. It also implies that 20% agreed and were uncertain as well.

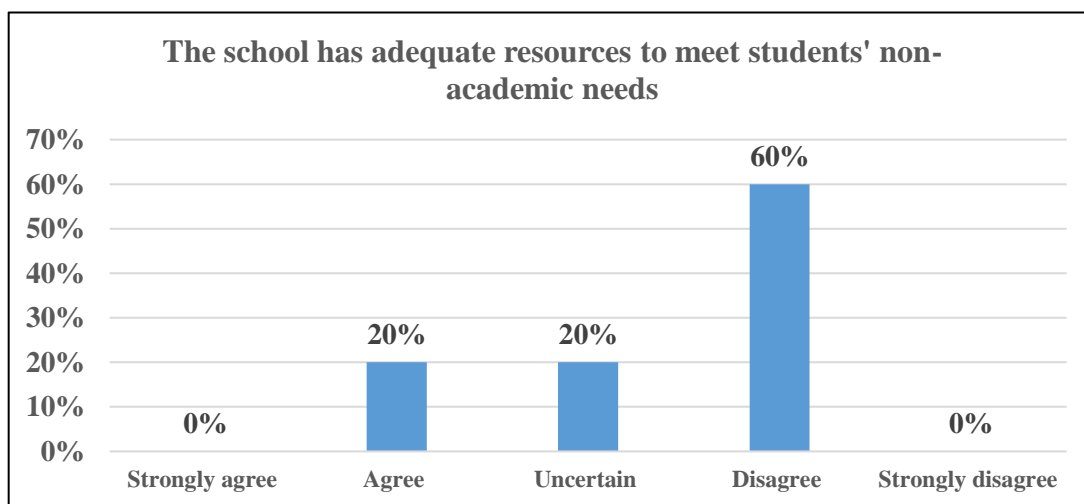


Figure 16. Adequate resources to meet students' nonacademic needs (U.S. staff).

Based on Figure 17, a larger number, that is 40%, both disagreed and agreed that there are sufficient events and activities fostering interactions between the students and the administrative staff.

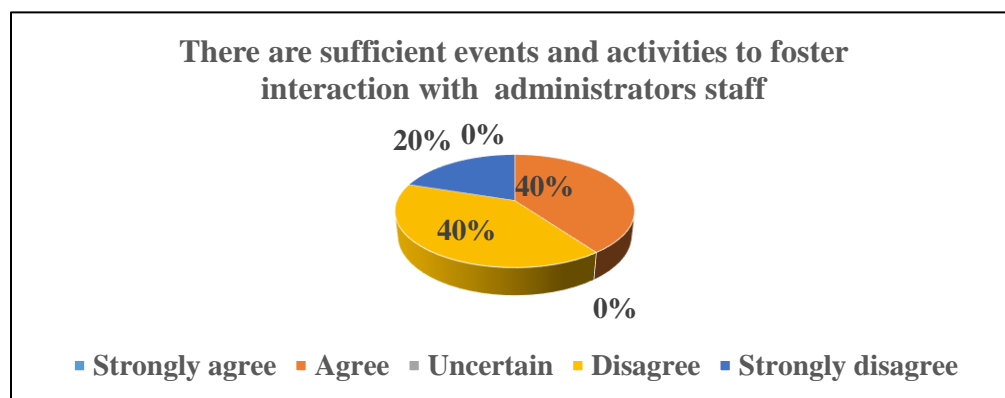


Figure 17. Interaction with administrators (U.S. staff).

Data for Administrative Staff in Saudi Arabia

All the administrative staff from Saudi Arabia agreed that the learning culture is oriented towards the achievement of the students. Besides, 0% of the administrative staff strongly agreed, agreed, was uncertain, disagreed and strongly disagreed (see Figure 17).

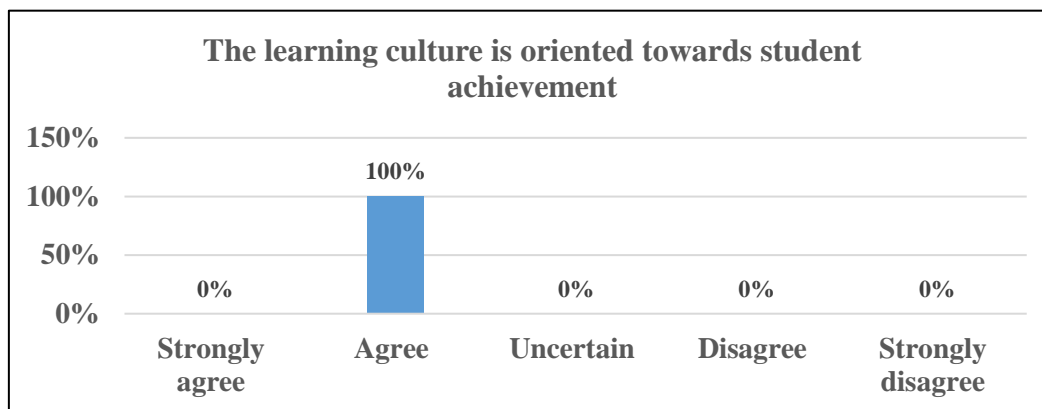


Figure 18. Learning culture of Saudi administrative staff.

As Figure 19 indicates, 40% of the administrative staff in Saudi Arabia agreed that the schools have adequate or sufficient resources towards meeting the academic needs of the students. Moreover, 20% of the administrative staff was uncertain, disagreed and strongly agreed. Lastly, 0% of the administrative staff strongly disagreed.

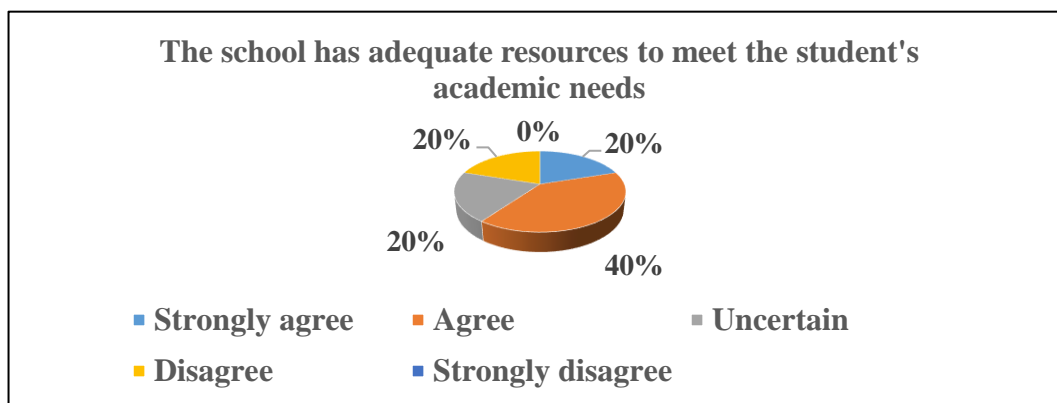


Figure 19. Adequate school resources (Saudi staff).

The administrative staff in Saudi Arabia agreed with all that there is an interaction between students and administrative staff and stands at 100%. Moreover, none or 0% disagreed strongly disagreed, uncertain and heartily agreed (see Figure 20).

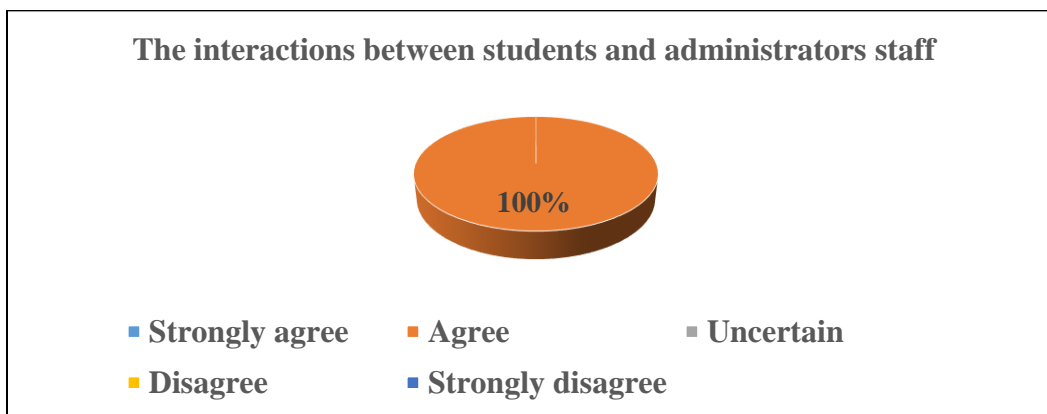


Figure 20. Interactions between students and administrators (Saudi staff).

The data revealed that 60% of the administrative staff agreed that there are sufficient activities and events fostering interaction within the schools, while 40% disagreed. However, none of the administrative staff members, which stands at 0% strongly agreed, opposed or was uncertain (see Figure 21).

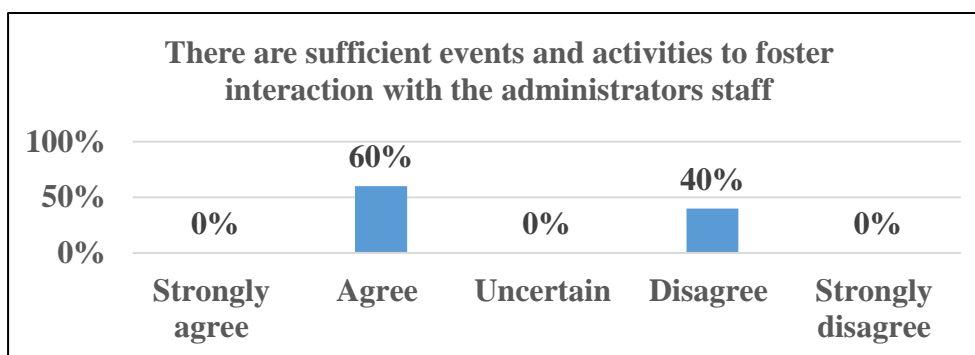


Figure 21. Sufficient activities to foster interaction with administrative staff (Saudi staff).

Data for Academics and Teaching Faculty (United States)

The collected data from the academic and teaching faculty in the United States were as follows.

The academic and teaching faculty in the United States strongly agrees at 60% that the learning culture is oriented towards student achievement. On the same question, 40% agree that the learning culture is aimed towards student achievement (see Figure 22).

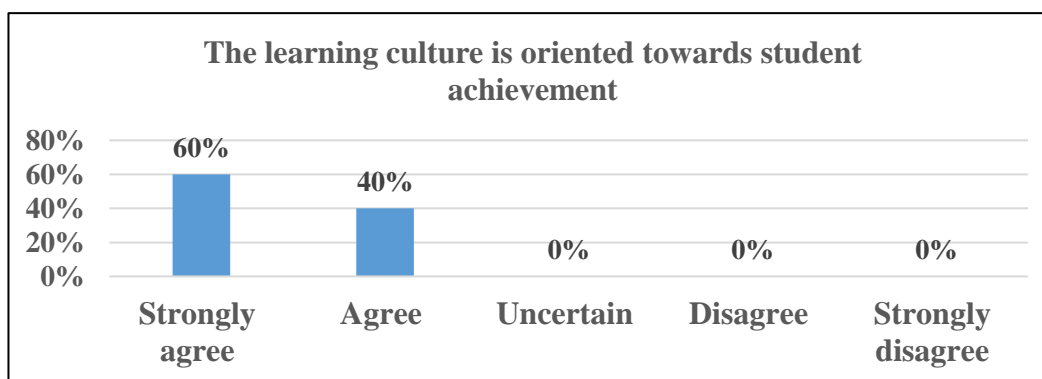


Figure 22. Learning culture and student achievement of U.S. faculty.

Figure 23 shows 60% of the staff agrees that the school is supportive towards meeting the students' academic needs. Besides, 40% of the team strongly agreed that the school is supportive, while there were 0% for uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree (see Figure 23)

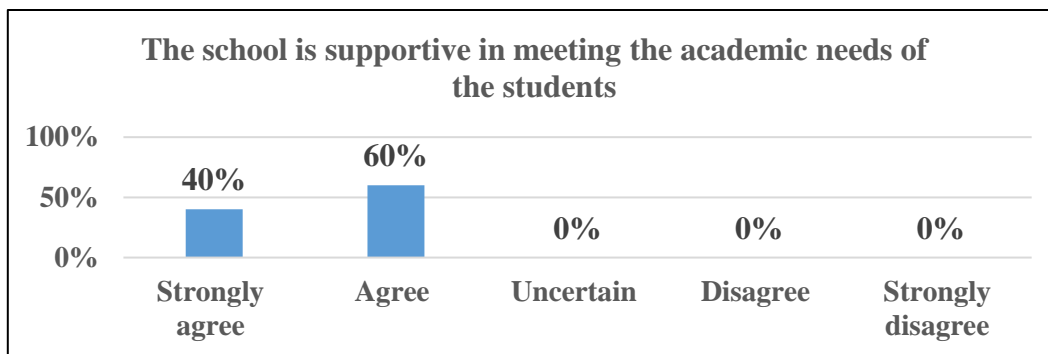


Figure 23. School support in meeting academic needs of students (U.S. faculty).

As Figure 24 shows, all of the staff members were supportive of the student needs, while 0% stands for those that disagreed, agreed, uncertain, and strongly disagreed.

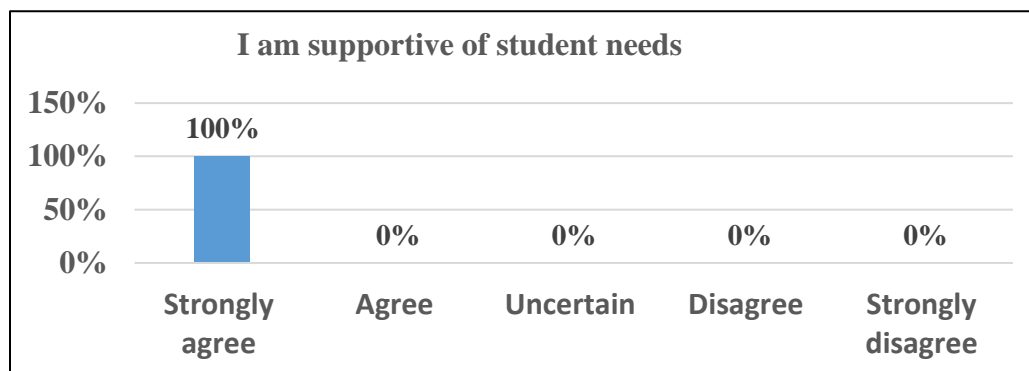


Figure 24. Staff members' support of student needs (U.S. faculty).

Data for Academics and Teaching Staff in Saudi Arabia

The collected data from the academic and teaching staff from Saudi Arabia is as follows:

Based on the collected data, it is evident that 80% of the academic and teaching staff from Saudi Arabia strongly agreed that learning culture is oriented towards the

achievement of the student's academic needs. In addition, 20% agreed that the learning culture of the schools have an impact on the students' academic achievement (see Figure 25).

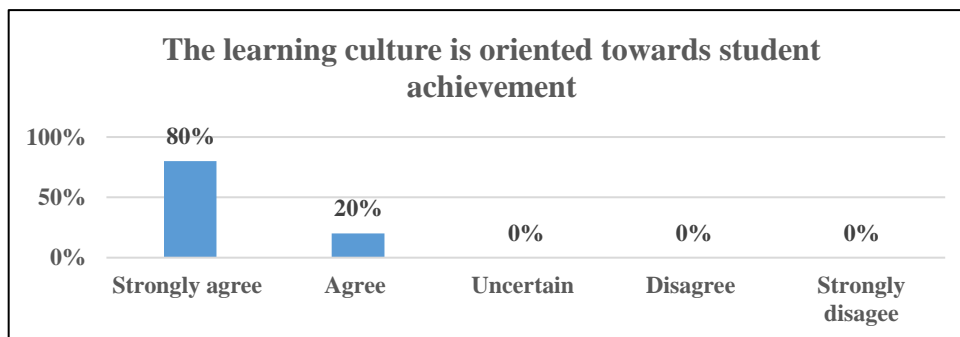


Figure 25. Learning culture towards student achievement (Saudi teaching staff).

From Figure 26, it is noted that 80% of the teaching staff from Saudi Arabia agreed on the fact that the school is supportive in meeting the academic needs of the students in one way or the other. Moreover, 20% of the participants strongly agreed and 0% of the participants were uncertain, disagreed and strongly disagreed.

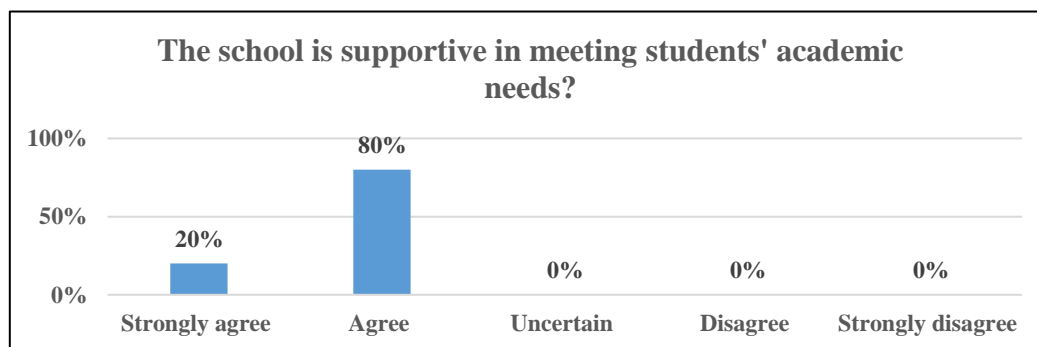


Figure 26. School support in meeting students' needs (Saudi teaching staff).

From the Figure 27, it is evident that 80% agreed that the school is supportive in meeting the nonacademic needs of the students. In addition, those who were uncertain stood at 20%, while 0% or none of the participants disagreed, strongly disagreed and strongly agreed.

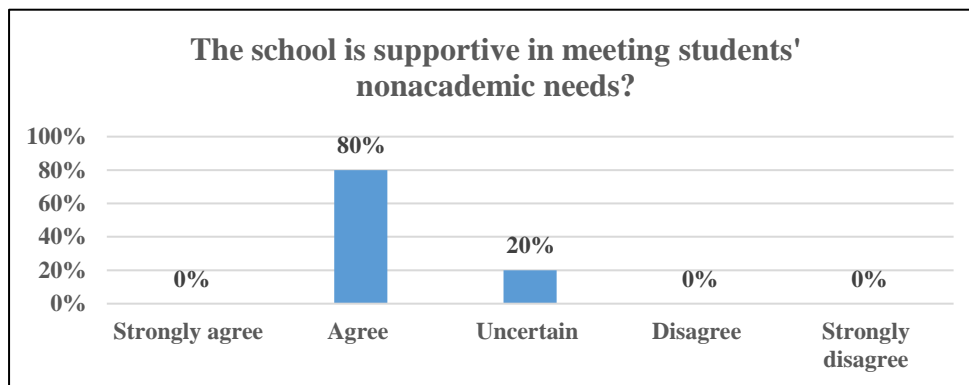


Figure 27. School support in meeting nonacademic needs (Saudi teaching staff).

Data Analysis and Findings

Based on the collected data, there is not much difference between the schools in the United States and Saudi Arabia regarding the factors leading to dropping out of school or terminating their studies. It is evident that both the administrators and teaching staff play a significant role in the achievement of the students' academic and non-academic needs in one way or the other. From the data presented above, it is evident that all the academic and teaching staff in the United States and Saudi Arabia is supportive towards the achievement of the students' academic and non-academic needs, which stands at 100% strongly agreeing that they are supportive towards the achievement of the student goals.

The administrative staff and teaching staff provides or ensures that there are adequate and sufficient activities as well as events that would enable the students to achieve their anticipated goals, while they are in school. However, some aspects tend to influence the students' stay in school in one way or the other; for instance, the learning culture being oriented towards the achievement of the students' needs. In this case, the academic and faculty teaching staff in the United States acknowledges that the learning culture is oriented towards the achievement of the student's goals and they strongly agree at 60%, while those that agree are at 40%.

Some of the key findings from the collected data are that the students take less time to spend every night to go through what they had learned in school. All students from both Saudi Arabia and the United States only take one hour of their time to study, which is an indication that there is no connection to their books. In this case, it is also evident that study skills affect them concerning their performance in one way or the other. For instance, when the students were asked whether their study skills affected their performance, all of them, from both the United States and Saudi Arabia, agreed by stating, "Yes" at 100%. Table 2 shows frequencies for the collected data.

It should be noted that both schools, the United States and Saudi Arabia, were involved in helping the students achieve their goals and objectives in their areas of interest. Both the schools have lecturers who are highly trained and are professionals, who aim to ensure that the students' goals and needs are achieved to the latter, and this is acknowledged by both the teaching and administrative staff from both countries.

Table 2

Frequencies for the Collected Data

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Lecturers are highly professional	1	9.1	9.1	18.2
School has adequate academic resources (tutoring) to support students	1	9.1	9.1	27.3
School has adequate nonacademic resources (counseling and health services) to support students	1	9.1	9.1	36.4
School library is currently updated with physical and eBooks	1	9.1	9.1	45.5
School administrative staffs are supportive of students' needs	1	9.1	9.1	54.5
School Teaching Faculty are supportive of student's needs	1	9.1	9.1	63.6
The career advisors are supportive of student's needs	1	9.1	9.1	72.7
The curriculum for each course is innovative	1	9.1	9.1	81.8
The learning culture is supportive of students	1	9.1	9.1	90.9
The School provides opportunities to raise questions about concerns affecting students	1	9.1	9.1	100.0
Total	11	100.0	100.0	

It is also noted from the collected data that the schools have adequate resources that aim towards the achievement of the students in a collective manner. It is also evident that the schools have non-academic resources or materials that are supportive to the

students, for instance, the extracurricular activities. In most cases, the students might be performing averagely or below average in matters, concerning academics, but the same student, in one way or the other is likely to act flawlessly in cases regarding extracurricular activities.

It is also evident that the career advisors are supportive of the student's needs as reported by both the teaching and administrative staff from the United States and Saudi Arabia. However, some of the students especially in the United States disagreed on the aspect that the school teaching faculty are supportive of the needs of the students. Besides, some were uncertain especially those from Saudi Arabia, based on their responses. Thus, some of these are among the issues that lead to the high number or the increase in the number of dropouts of students in the two different settings. Once the students have in mind that the academic and teaching faculties are not supportive, they tend to lose that urge of continuing with their studies and the result is leaving school and engaging in activities they feel fits them in the society. Therefore, lack of support from the expected body or team is among the key factors that increase the number of student dropouts in both the United States and Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, the schools in both Saudi Arabia and the United States are at the forefront to provide opportunities to raise questions on matters concerning the students. In this case, it is evident the student councils are in the position to air out grievances of the students, which in one way or the other the students are in the position of addressing their complaints to the relevant authorities. However, some of the students were uncertain

regarding whether the school administrative staffs are supportive of the needs of the students.

Summary

Based on the data analysis it is evident that several factors affect the students in their various areas of study. It is evident that students from the United States and those in Saudi Arabia are faced with common factors. Some of these factors include both the administrative staff and teaching staff being supportive towards ensuring that the students achieve their needs or goals. In addition to being supportive, the schools also have activities and events that help the students realize their goals while pursuing their career, more broadly. The student's academic achievement is also affected by the fact that the schools themselves provide the students with opportunities that enable them to raise issues that affect them while in school. Besides, both the administrative staff and teaching staff from both the United States and Saudi Arabia are supportive of students' achievement needs, and through their support, the students have experienced a more inclusive environment.

CHAPTER VI
FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion of Findings

The collected data demonstrates that several factors affect students' academic achievement in most of the universities or colleges across various countries. In this study, the two countries of comparison are the United States of America and Saudi Arabia, whereby 30 participants in different categories were interviewed seeking to investigate the factors affecting students' academic achievements. The participants included United States and Saudi Arabian students. In addition, the participants also comprised both the teaching and administrative staff from the university and the school. The participants were eager and willing to participate in the study and from this in one way or the other, the collected data helped in the realization of the research goals and hypothesis.

1. The size of the class affects student academic achievement.

Based on the gathered data, it is evident that several factors affect or influence student academic achievement when in school. The factors are both academic and non-academic, in the essence that school is a community comprised of different and varying individuals having different ambitions and goals to achieve, within the period they spend in school. In this situation, some of the critical factors identified to be of significance in the life of a student included the class size, which influences the student retention to some degree. From a broader view, it is evident that student achievement and retention is

higher in a smaller class as compared to larger classes. With a small size class, the students tend to have a better opinion regarding their lecturer, the course as well as their respective field of study. In a smaller class, the teachers and students interact effectively in regards to discussing some of their issues with the teachers. Moreover, it is evident that having a smaller size of the class affects the students positively leading to higher levels of retentions in higher institutions such as universities and colleges.

1. The school curriculum affects the academic achievement of the students.

Based on the study, it was noted that the curriculum also affects the students' academic achievement, in the sense that not all the students are competent in academics. For instance, in Saudi students, about 21% responses were for academics, 7% were for the student support. Twenty-one percent were for faculty, 15% were for sports, 7% were for extracurricular activities, and about 29% of the responses specified other aspects such as study cultures to be appealing for them. From this, it is evident that students have a diversified opinion regarding what they want to achieve when they join higher education institutions. As such, either of the aforementioned aspects appeals to every given group of individuals or students. Moreover, in an institution, apart from the primary curriculum, there should be other programs to build the students emotionally, physically and spiritually, as well.

According to Mansour et al. (2016), it is evident the increasing number of students dropping out of school is attributed to their dissatisfaction of the institution's curriculum. For example, the engineering or science students find it challenging, transforming their lives from their high school experience to campus life. The adopted

curriculum by several engineering and science schools does not consider the social and emotional management in the student's development. Therefore, students finding themselves in such an environment tend to quit their careers or drop out of campus.

2. Both the administrators and teaching staff were supportive towards academic achievement.

The other finding is that both the administrators and academic teaching faculty are supportive of the achievements of the students' academic needs. Both the administrative staff and teaching staff plays significant roles by being supportive of the students in their various capacities within the campus. The teaching staff is supportive in the essence that they provide quality education to the students and at the right time. The administrative staff, on the other hand, tends to be supportive in the essence that they provide the necessary and required resources towards the achievement of the needs of the students. The school, on the other hand, provides the anticipated resources, events, and programs toward the achievement of the student's goals and objectives. In one way or the other, the schools or higher education institutions provide services such as counseling, health challenges, and bullying among other things.

3. The learning culture affects the academic achievement of students.

The other key finding from the collected data is that learning culture within a given educational setting influences the students in one way or the other. From educational theorist view, learning culture has a significant role in a students' life on campus or college. Based on the views of the students, it is evident that the learning culture is integrated towards the achievement of the needs of the students academically.

About 60% of the students agreed that the learning culture is highly oriented towards the students' higher performance. According to Vislocky (2005), the academic achievement of students is mediated via the climate and culture of the school. The environment and the culture that the school embraces define the type of students the school accommodates.

Moreover, Watson (2001) cautioned that an inhospitable learning culture decreases the students' achievement. Studying in such an environment students are likely not to concentrate fully on their studies. The inhospitable climate would result in poor grades, in that the students face several obstructions, and with poor grades, the students feel frustrated in one way or the other. Thus, when they are frustrated, they end up dropping out of school or terminate their studies because of the situation they find themselves in. Some individuals view their situations differently. For instance, one would feel incomplete when they end up getting poor grades, therefore, losing hopes in life.

Moreover, as highlighted by Wang et al. (2012) students having both social competence and intelligence are more likely to cope with all the challenging situations likely to arise within the school environment especially those about the achievement of academic goals and objectives. Therefore, students, who find themselves in such context that tend to incorporate aspects dealing with social intelligence and competence there is higher performance.

Implications

1. The impact of both the teaching and administrative staff.

Some of the impacts from the study or research are that both the administrative staff and teaching staff within any learning institution play significant role towards

student achievement. The administrative staff members being supportive in one way or the other add positively to the life of any given student within the learning institution. In a more organized and friendly learning environment, the student is likely to have all that it takes toward achieving their educational goals. The administrative staff just like the teaching staff, for example, the counseling experts are expected to encourage the students to have a positive thought towards life. The teaching staffs, on the other hand, are obligated to provide the students with quality education through adequate supportive resources.

2. The learning culture and environment in which the students learn.

The learning culture and environment play a significant role in ensuring that the students are on the right track towards achieving both the non-academic and academic needs. In this case, the students would have a better and conducive environment to undertake their various activities, especially in the co-curriculum or the extracurricular activities. In such a given context, the students are in the position of practicing in both fields, that is, academics and extracurricular activities. A good percentage of students find themselves engaging in other curriculum activities. It is evident that most of the student's have become professional footballers and this is through the efforts put across by the school sports department.

3. Higher institutions supportive of the achievement of both non-academic and academic needs.

Moreover, the other implication from the study is that successful higher learning institutions are supportive of the achievement of both the academic and non-academic

needs. Some of the essential supportive resources or services that adequately meet the requirements of the students include counseling groups that are readily available to counsel the students, encourage them, and hope to face challenges. The universities in one way or the other have the health care facilities that would help sustain the students while in school. For instance, students having health complications are likely to be treated within the campus environment. With such efforts and arrangements, the students can continue with their studies as scheduled and achieve both the academic and non-academic needs of the students.

4. Institutional opportunities and adequate academic resources.

Lastly, the other implications include the universities providing opportunities, adequate academic resources such as the libraries. A well-established learning environment, it is evident that the students do not lack anything that pertains to the social and educational wellbeing. The support the students get from the academic staff, the administrative staff and even the parents mostly enables the students to achieve their desires in life both academically and socially. Through this, the definition of a school as a transformative tool holds or stands, in the essence that the parents, administrators' staff and the teaching staffs come together towards helping the students access the right resources.

Recommendations

1. All stakeholders should play their roles well.

From this research study, we can conclude that the highest level of student academic achievement is pegged on several factors that are intertwined together, to yield

the right atmosphere which can enhance student performance. Several factors come into play, both from the side of the student, and from the institution/third parties. It is from a combination of the correct factors; facilitated by the students and or, facilitated by the institutions and the teaching and administrative staff that helps a student to succeed in their academics. Each party in this process should play their role as required. At one point, the students should put the requisite efforts required of them in order to excel in their studies. On the other hand, the teaching staff should deliver the correct content to the students. Either, the administrative staff should play their respective roles; as support functions for proper dissemination of knowledge to the students in the learning institutions.

2. The need for counseling professionals.

Besides, for all the schools, there should be counseling professionals, who have the obligation of providing their services whenever the need arises. It is worth noting that people do undergo different challenging situations in life, and some always succumb to them because of their faint hearts and lack of courage. Having a well-coordinated and informed counseling team, who understand the contemporary issues in the society, would help the students conquer some of the challenges they are likely to face.

3. Have programs that promote social and competent development of the student.

Moreover, learning institutions especially the higher learning institutions such as colleges and universities, there should be programs that aim towards the social and competent development of the student. Through these programs, the students are in the

position of understanding their environment, which would help them cope with the situations at hand and know to deal with any case about academic and survival challenges during their stay at the universities. In such a position, several students are likely to achieve their preferred goals and objectives, and the cases of drop out would reduce significantly if not entirely.

4. Ensure a good learning environment for all students.

Lastly, it is recommended that universities and colleges create an environment that accommodates all students having different and varying interests. People often develop their talents by engaging in most of the extracurricular activities. Through the various organized activities within the schools, there are those students who tend to have passion in one field or the other apart from academics. Such students should be given a chance to engage in the various activities that would help them prosper in their multiple interests. Therefore, the various institutions or colleges should be in the position to provide the students with adequate academic and non-academic resources or support to accommodate all the students.

Conclusions

This research is based on a study seeking to investigate the factors affecting students' academic achievement in both the United States and Saudi Arabia. From the 30 participants including the administrative staff, the academic and faculty staff as well as the students from the various disciplines, several factors are believed to affect the students' achievement of both the academic and non-academic goals and needs. Some of the factors that affect students toward achieving their educational needs include the

learning culture and climate within the college or university. By having a well-coordinated and structured learning culture and environment, the students are in the position of achieving their interests. The administrators and teaching staffs as well are supportive to the students, in various ways. For instance, the administrative staff, in this case, helps the students by providing the non-academic resources that aid the students to achieve their goals.

Moreover, the academic or teaching staff, on the other hand, would provide quality education to the students through adequate interaction between the students and the academic faculty. The class size is also a key factor towards the achievement of the students' educational needs. A smaller class supports the needs of the students through an active engagement between the students themselves and the teaching staff, as well. By having, a more significant interaction between the students and the teaching staff helps both the students and faculty to understand their field of study better.

Additionally, it is evident that extracurricular activities integrated within the school curriculum would result in the students achieving the anticipated needs and objectives. Just as discussed in various studies, people do have different interests and goals to meet even though some are societal and one would want to acquire some status to fit within the society. For instance, acquiring an education is a status that enables one to fit within the current society. However, people have achieved their goals by concentrating on their talents and have achieved societal status, as well. Therefore, universities and colleges or higher learning institutions should consider some of the highlighted recommendations to help them prosper academically and socially.

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