

## A STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ABOUT ACADEMIC ADVISING IN AN INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of the research was to explore undergraduate students' perceptions about academic advising in an Indonesian university by measuring aspects of academic advising, involving the nature of advising relationship, the frequency of activities occurring during advising sessions, and students' satisfaction with academic advising. The research applied quantitative research conducted by administering a questionnaire. The sample consisted of 302 undergraduate students who were asked to respond about the type of academic advising they perceived, topics discussed between advisor and student during academic advising sessions, and their satisfaction with academic advising in the university. The results show that the undergraduate students at an Indonesian university perceive their academic advising as 'developmental advising' rather than 'prescriptive advising'. Undergraduate students perceive that the advisors not only focus on academic performance but also students' holistic development. Most students are satisfied with the academic advising they have experienced. The topics most frequently discussed are related to the registration and course selection, while the topics most rarely discussed are related to institutional policies. In general, 72,85% of students satisfy with the academic advising they have experienced.*

**Keywords:** *academic advising, students' perception, undergraduate students, prescriptive approach, developmental approach*

### INTRODUCTION

Entering a university needs a significant adaptation for many students. They will encounter changes in the system and style of education that are different from those in high school. Students are responsible for arranging their own schedules in university and have the flexibility to fill their schedules with various activities outside of regular class hours. In university, students will spend much more time doing readings and assignments on their own. The large student populations can also make for many opportunities to get involved in clubs, societies, and campus events. Here, time management is critical to success. Postponement and failing to meet progression requirements can lead to serious academic difficulties. One thing that can help students with their transition is an academic advising program.

Academic advising is identified as one of the activities that help students comprehend the sense and purpose of higher education and foster their intellectual progress and personal growth toward academic success, career goals, and everlasting learning (Tobi-David, Adekeye, & Odukoya, 2018). Academic advising can be defined as an ongoing process, a dynamic relationship involving the academic advisor as the facilitator of communication, and helps students use educational institutions' resources to meet their special needs and aspirations (Michaud & Eduljee, 2014).

The academic advisor serves as a personal mentor and an academic counselor for students. The academic advisor should be available and accessible, well-informed, helpful, attractive, and communicative (Michaud & Eduljee, 2014). The roles of academic advisors are: (1) to assist students to make good

academic decisions by considering courses, major, and extracurricular activities that associate with students' goals, (2) to motivate students to achieve goals, and (3) allow students to be responsible for their own life, career, educational goals, and practice their decision making and problem-solving skills (Owens, 2015). Academic advisors should also consider students' skills and abilities when selecting courses and understand each student as a unique person outside the academic world and provide appropriate academic guidance to assist students in understanding how things work at the university. Occasionally, academic advisors assist students with career options by considering students' personal and professional interests.

The basis of students' academic success begins with positive relationships among students and advisors. When students and advisors communicate well, more satisfied students are willing to persist to graduation. Therefore, academic advising plays an important role in students' commitment to academic institutions and students' satisfaction. Positive interactions between the students and advisors can also yield positive outcomes in students' attitudes, achievement, motivation, and personal development. These will affect students' retention and recruitment. On the other hand, unsatisfactory advising received by students can lead to negative outcomes, such as negative attitudes, lower academic achievement, and the decision to leave the university.

There are two dominant approaches to academic advising applied by academic advisors, the prescriptive or traditional approach and the developmental approach (Pargett, 2011). The prescriptive or traditional approach is related to informing students about academic matters, such as requirements for a specific course or a degree program, registration process, explanations of curricula that the students are supposed to follow, and others. However, in the developmental approach, students are allowed to make all choices in their education. They feel as if they have selected their own way rather than being told what they should do. Here, academic advising can not only be viewed as the responsibility of the advisors to make contact with the students, but it is also the students' responsibility to advising requests in promoting their academic success. Students must make an effort to promote their academic goals. Their effort is as important as the advisor being accessible, which means students' focus and readiness are the key factors when meeting with their advisors. In developmental advising, a holistic approach is provided to a student-advisor relationship outside of the classroom environment. They can discuss topics such as career and values. The informal interactions between students and advisors can build positive relationships as the foundation of students' academic success (Hackett, Panelli, & Petersen, 2013).

To provide appropriate academic advising that meets students' needs, the students must be understood the perceptions about academic advising. Many previous studies on students' perceptions of academic

advising have been conducted by researchers. Al-Omari and Khasawneh (2014) have investigated the academic advising types apprehended by undergraduate students in The Hashemite University, Jordan. The result exposes that the undergraduate students notice their academic advising as a prescriptive style that only concentrated on the requirements of academic achievement and not on the students' holistic growth. Based on the result, it is recommended that academic advisors in the university have to realize the needs of individuals and also need to be aware of the stress during the critical transition phase as students begin their experiences in university.

Research by Suvedi et al. (2015) has aimed to seek students' input about academic advising at Michigan State University and gather suggestions to improve it. The results based on an online survey held from 2005 to 2013 show that, overall, undergraduate students are positive about academic advising; however, their perceptions are different by gender, place, and academic year. Respondents show that academic advisors need to be managed and communicated more often with the students. Students also indicate that better advising related to volunteer programs and study abroad can help them prepare for jobs and achieve their career goals.

Saba'Ayon (2015) has investigated students' perceptions of academic advising. It discusses their attitudes, awareness of the process, academic advisors' role, and the relationship between gender, major, or academic status on the students' attitudes at a Lebanese University. It is because some students do not seem to appreciate the meaning of academic advising, and they do not usually seek it. The result shows that students perceive the process poorly as they have negative experiences with their academic advising process and advisors. The researcher suggests several changes to ascertain effective academic advising at the university.

Cheung, Siu, and Shek (2017) have explored students' views and expectations for academic advising in Hong Kong. For the research, they administer a questionnaire survey, and the result shows that students admit that academic advising helps them understand their study plan and graduation requirements. The students are also notified that the acquisition of information about the career aspect is one of the most important academic advising functions besides advice on ways to improve skills and profession-related competencies. In the research, students' responses may reflect their conceptual understanding of academic advising rather than their actual experiences. Thus, the researchers suggest to conduct a qualitative study to explore the reasons for students' views, expectations, and preferences.

In qualitative research, Walker et al. (2017) have conducted individual discussions and facilitated story circles with students in Great Lakes State University to specify their perceived effectiveness of academic advising. The participants are given a specified description of their advising experiences, the methods that align with their expectations, and the

characteristics they believe academic advisors should possess. Based on the data gathered, the researchers propose a model for understanding the formation and preservation of students' perceptions.

Although many research pieces about students' perceptions of academic advising have been conducted in various regions, there is no research about students' perceptions of academic advising that have been done in Indonesia. The previous research findings may not equate to the students' perceptions in universities in Indonesia. Therefore, the research is conducted to explore the undergraduate students' perceptions of academic advising in an Indonesian university.

## METHODS

The research applies a quantitative method conducted by administering a questionnaire adapted from Al-Omari and Khasawneh (2014). They use a questionnaire from Academic Advising Inventory (AAI) that is originally developed by Winston and Sandor in 1984 and 2002. The AAI is a questionnaire that evaluates the degree of prescriptive or developmental advising perceived by students and students' satisfaction with the advising.

The participants are undergraduate students at a university in Bandung, Indonesia, who voluntarily completed the online questionnaire. The trend of implementing online questionnaires is growing in many disciplines, particularly in social sciences. Online questionnaires are generally less costly and less time consuming than paper-based questionnaires, more accurate, and easier access to large populations (Ward et al., 2014). A total sample of 302 undergraduate students completes the questionnaires. The questionnaire consists of four parts. Part I is arranged to collect demographic characteristics information about the students, such as gender, age, place of origin, and academic class standing. Then it is arranged to know their advising situation, including the frequency of advising received and the amount of time spent in advising.

Part II consists of 13 pairs of expressions used to assess the nature of the academic advising approach that the students apprehend based on their experience with their advisors. Each pair of expressions reflects an eight-point continuum between the two contrasting academic advising styles, prescriptive or developmental. In prescriptive style, advisors inform or tell students about what to do in academic matters. This style is indicated by expressions such as advisor tells students what they should major in, what courses are most appropriate to take by considering scores and grades, and what realistic academic goals are for them. Prescriptive style does not focus on the growth of the students, but only on academic performance. On the contrary, in developmental style, advisors are interested in helping students to identify options and consider consequences of each options in academic matters. This style is shown by expressions like advisor

is interested in helping students learn how to find out about courses, advisor shows an interest in students' outside-of-class activities, advisor and student discuss expectations of advising and advisor talk with students about other-than academic interests and plans.

Students are requested to choose one of the two expressions that most appropriately represent the academic advising they have experienced throughout the year. In constructing Part II, one pair of expressions has stated, "my advisor registers me for my classes" and "my advisor instructs me how to register myself for classes" are considered inappropriate based on researchers' judgment. It is because, in this university, classes are scheduled randomly on a computer basis. Neither advisors nor students register the classes. To fit the local context, this item is discarded. Another series of items analysis produces the present questionnaire of 13 items, which define the prescriptive-developmental advising scale. The higher the score, the more developmental the nature of academic advising. According to the original AAI, prescriptive advising is indicated by a score between 14-56, and developmental advising is indicated by a score between 57-112 from 14 pairs of expressions used to assess the trait of advising relationship (Al-Omari & Khasawneh, 2014). However, modification has been made in questionnaires of the research that only use 13 pairs of statements. Therefore, the score is also modified to 13-52 for prescriptive advising, and 53-104 for developmental advising.

Part III presents information about topics discussed during academic advising sessions. The information in Part III will describe activities that occur during advising sessions. The topics categories include personal growth and interpersonal relationships, institutional policies, registry and course selection, learning capacity, and academic majors and courses. Assessment of Part III can be completed by tabulating the frequencies of each response (ranging from 0 to 4).

Part IV is composed of five items that measure students' satisfaction with their academic advising experience. Students are requested to rate each item using a Likert scale, choosing from 1 (truly disagree) to 5 (truly agree). Low average scores imply dissatisfaction with the overall academic advising and/or specific aspects of academic advising. At the same time, higher average scores imply greater satisfaction with academic advising.

The original AAI is known to have a substantial construct validity and reliability based on studies released in the test manual by Winston and Sandor. They establish the reliability for AAI by using Cronbach's alpha procedure. The alpha coefficient for the developmental-prescriptive level is obtained to be 0,78. This indicates that AAI is relatively homogenous and stable for use with variant groups of students (Harris, 2018). In the validity test, the result shows a statistically significant difference in the whole AAI scores used to measure whether groups of students received developmental or prescriptive advising

(Harris, 2018). On the whole, the questionnaires demonstrate good structural validity and internal consistency.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive statistics are used to analyze the result. Figure 1-6 provides the demographic characteristics and advising information of the sample obtained from Part I.

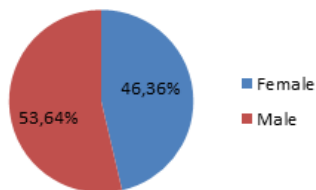


Figure 1 Gender Characteristics of Student Sample

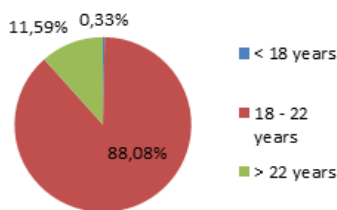


Figure 2 Age Characteristics of Student Sample

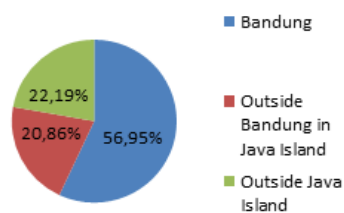


Figure 3 Place of Origin of Student Sample

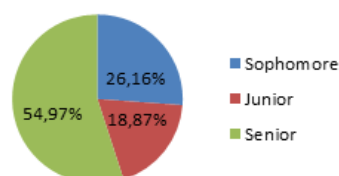


Figure 4 Classification Characteristics of Student Sample

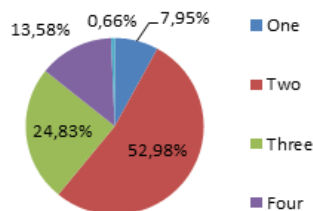


Figure 5 Number of Academic Advising Sessions Students Have in One Semester

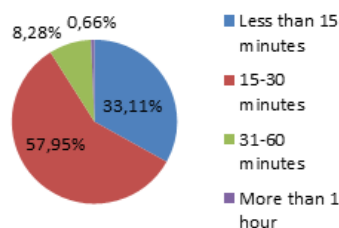


Figure 6 Amount of Time Spent in Each Advising Session

In Part II, when asked about what kind of academic advising style that undergraduate students currently apprehended, they give an average score of 68,83 with a standard deviation of 20,67. This result indicates that the university provides developmental advising (ranging from 53-104).

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for the respondent who reports experiencing prescriptive advising, and those who report experiencing developmental advising. The data shows that 21,85% of the 302 respondents have experienced prescriptive advising, and 78,15% have experienced developmental advising. It means that students experience more developmental advising than prescriptive advising. In developmental academic advising, advisors focus on students' potentialities, students' liveliness and struggle, growing, maturing, and self-direction. Students and advisors may take the initiative. High scores of advising style scales also indicate that advisors and students have built a warm, caring, and gracious relationship. They share and obviously discuss responsibility for various advising tasks. Academic advising is based on an interest in the students' holistic education.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Advising Styles

Advising Styles	n	M	SD	Scores
Prescriptive	66	38,01	10,90	13-52
Developmental	236	77,45	13,15	53-104

In Part III, the results in Table 2 exhibit the frequency of topics (ranging from 0-4) that discusses between advisors and undergraduate students during academic advising sessions. The topics have been categorized into personal development and interpersonal relationships, institutional policies, registration and course selection, learning skills, academic majors and courses.

Personal development and interpersonal relationships are associated with discussing personal values, important social or political issues, personal concerns or problems, internship opportunities, setting personal goals, getting to know each other, discussing extracurricular activities, job vacancy, purposes of education, talking about experiences in different classes, and what students are doing after taking courses. While institutional policies are associated with discussing transfer credit and policies, probation and dismissal policies, financial aids policies and studies abroad, or other typical academic programs.

Registration and course selection are associated with signing registration forms, dropping and/or adding courses, and selecting courses for the next semester. Learning skills are associated with discussing institutional policies about learning systems, study skills and tips, and time management. Academic majors and courses are associated with discussing possible academic concentrations, the content of courses, career alternatives, knowing other campus services that can offer assistance, discussing academic concentration requirements, and changing academic concentration.

Table 2 Frequency of Topics Discussed during Academic Advising Sessions

Topics Categories	Average	Standard Deviation
Personal development & interpersonal relationships	1,53	1,5
Institutional policies	0,88	1,14
Registration & course selection	2,68	1,29
Learning skills	1,77	1,16
Academic majors & courses	1,67	1,29

The students' most frequently reported activity in dealing with advisors here is related to registration and course selection, with an average of 2,68 times. This can be understandable because each semester, students regularly are scheduled to register and take courses for the following semester. The least frequent activity reported is discussing institutional policies with an average of 0,88 times. These activities often need to be dealt once at the beginning of the academic year. They can read all about institutional policies information in student's academic handbook.

Part IV measures undergraduate students' satisfaction toward academic advising in the university composed of five items. The items should be responded with 'Truly Agree', 'Agree', 'Neutral', 'Disagree', and 'Truly Disagree'. The results are indicated in Table 3-7.

Table 3 Students' Satisfaction in General with The Academic Advising They Have Obtained

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Truly Agree	99	32,78%
Agree	121	40,07%
Neutral	51	16,89%
Disagree	20	6,62%
Truly Disagree	11	3,64%
<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

Table 4 Students have Obtained Appropriate Information about Courses, Programs, and Requirements through Academic Advising

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Truly Agree	87	28,81%
Agree	130	43,05%
Neutral	55	18,21%
Disagree	23	7,62%
Truly Disagree	7	2,32%
<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

Table 5 Adequate Previous Announcement has been Available about Deadlines Related to University Policies and Procedures

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Truly Agree	84	27,81%
Agree	127	42,05%
Neutral	64	21,19%
Disagree	19	6,29%
Truly Disagree	8	2,65%
<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

Table 6 Students Get Good Enough Advising when They Needed It

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Truly Agree	89	29,47%
Agree	119	39,40%
Neutral	59	19,54%
Disagree	24	7,95%
Truly Disagree	11	3,64%
<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

Table 7 Adequate Time Has Been Available during Academic Advising Sessions

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Truly Agree	100	33,11%
Agree	117	38,74%
Neutral	50	16,56%
Disagree	25	8,28%
Truly Disagree	10	3,31%
<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

## CONCLUSIONS

Academic advising is seen as a meaningful educational activity and not only an administrative task. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the current academic advising program and determine what should be happening in the academic advising program. Results of the research exhibit that undergraduate students at an Indonesian university apprehend their academic advising as developmental advising rather than prescriptive advising. It means, in academic advising at that university, each student is assumed to be distinctive, with a specific degree of readiness academically, socially, and emotionally.

The topics most frequently discussed in academic advising are registration and course selection, learning skills, academic majors and courses, personal development, and interpersonal relationships, while the topics most rarely discussed relate to institutional policies. Generally, students are satisfied (72,85%) with the academic advising process they have obtained. The 71,86% of students 'truly agree' and 'agree' that they have obtained appropriate information about courses, programs, and requirements needed during the academic advising process. 69,86% of students consider that there is an adequate previous notice for them to meet the deadline related to institutional policies and procedures. 68,87% of students consider that they have obtained adequate academic guidance when needed. At the same time, 71,85% of students think that adequate time has been available during academic advising sessions.

Further research can be conducted to elaborate distinctions in academic advising types categorized by gender, age, place of origin, and classification. A follow-up qualitative research can be established to find out why students or advisors apprehend that they obtain or provide prescriptive or developmental advising. In qualitative research, students are allowed to write comments that enable them to explain their rating and enable the researchers to understand why they choose to rate the item as they do. The result will provide advisors with the type of specific feedback they need to make improvements. Research can also be established for the academic advisors in the university to determine the response of their role as academic advisors to seek input on the academic advising process to improve the program. Then, future

research about the effect of developmental advising and students' satisfaction on retention, academic and career success, and recruitment can be explored.

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