



Role of an Educational Advisor from the Viewpoint of Professors and Students: A Qualitative Study from Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences, Iran

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Authors HJ and MH designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the manuscript. Authors RS and AM managed the analyses of the study, managed the literature searches and wrote the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Professor of the educational advisor is responsible for the academic and counselling guidance of students in educational, research and social fields. Also should be familiar with all the indicators of the consultation and be aware of duties and responsibilities. The study aims to explain the features of the professor of an educational advisor from the viewpoint of professors and students from Sabzevar University of medical sciences, Iran.

Methods: In this qualitative study, participants were selected using purposive sampling, and it continued based on snowball and theoretical sampling. A semi-structured interview was used to

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collect the data. A total of 27 participants (12 Professors and 15 Students of medical science) were interviewed in 2 months. Interviews were analyzed using Graham and Landman's content analysis method. To ensure consistency and accuracy of data, credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability criteria were assessed.

Results: Nine main categories were conceptualized including "Improper notification in task description", "Permanent and voluntary inaccessibility", "Teacher-student relationship in the teaching process", "Attention to students' comments and access", "Lack of knowledge of task description", "Refer to other professors", "Specialization", "Strengthen teacher-student relationship", "Follow up on student affairs".

Conclusion: Based on results, holding workshops to learn about the duties of a professor of educational advisor and the techniques of counselling, and to pay attention to student demands such as the right to choose, can be effective in improving students' satisfaction and solving their problems.

Keywords: Qualitative research; professor; student; pharmaceutical education; Iran.

1. INTRODUCTION

The period of time which people study in university is one of the most sensitive periods of life and mostly students confront numerous problems and pressures like, a change in lifestyle, being away from the family, financial problems, marriage, having a job while studying, and educational problems like low scores, abandoning university and prolongation of the study time. These issues show the necessity of the university policy-makers attention in recognition, control and prevention of the educational problems [1-3]. Various conducted studies showed the fact that almost half a million of students who enter different universities of the world fail, go on probation, or abandon studying and are not able to finish their education in the determined time [4,5].

Pharmaceutical education is a dynamic professional education for the development of country, individual and with a view to protect public health [6]. This should correspond to the needs of working life and foster a good quality of learning in order to produce pharmacy experts for challenging, multidisciplinary assignments [7]. Education of medical and pharmacy students has a crucial role to play in preparing future practitioners to respond appropriately to drug promotion [8].

To introduce effective factors in student's educational progress, study can point to some special factors which have roles in students failure in educational matters such as incuriosity 35%, not studying 25% and individual problems 8% [9]. The purpose of education is dependent on the form of the family and society, and the

historical context and place an individual is raised within [10]. Consultation is a purposeful relationship between advisor and client which is done according to the needs of the client. In this regard, the advisor, using professional capabilities, helps the person being consulted to meet his needs [11]. Consultation is applied in different fields, including facing academic problems and is used in the educational system to improve the educational process at different levels [12,13]. Although the main task of the professor is teaching and educating, he is expected to help students as much as possible in collecting educational information. When a good relationship exists between the students and professors it leads to student achievement and increases in their motivation and self-confidence to continue their education [14]. A qualitative study conducted by Alrakaf et al. [15] and colleagues to investigate undergraduate pharmacy students' preferences for teaching indicated, without prompting, that students highly value this quality [16].

Professor of the educational advisor is one of the full-time faculty members of the university who is responsible for conducting educational guidance and counselling for students at different levels of education, research and individual fields [17]. Interprofessional education consists of students from different health-related professions learning 'from, with and about each other to improve collaboration and the quality of care [18,19]. To execute the counselling program in universities of medical sciences, regulations for the professor of educational advisor has been developed and presented which includes 36 materials and 14 notes. These regulations are set to guide students in educational matters for

their further more growth and prosperity by explaining the goals, duties and specific executive structures to prevent students from academic failure, providing the groundwork for scientific improvement and resolving different problems [17]. Counselling professor must be familiar and confident with all of the educational, welfare, cultural, social, research and counselling regulations and instructions and must be aware of duties and capabilities [14,17]. The findings of Ford [20] emphasized that pharmacy faculty and student pharmacists both acknowledge the importance of an instructor being knowledgeable about the subject matter.

Many articles discuss the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for administrative leaders in academia. For example, Basham identified transformational leadership characteristics necessary for college and university presidents in higher education [21,22]. As a dean in the health professions, Haden outlined a conceptual framework for leadership [23]. Others have identified leadership attributes that deans of dentistry and nursing schools should have [24,25]. Finally, Schwinghammer and colleagues identified leadership characteristics for department chairs in pharmacy schools [26]. Educational consultation causes more efficacies in the educational system and reduction in the academic failure of students [27]. Failure to provide counselling services for students leads to dissatisfaction, insecurity, weakness and more stress during the students' education period [28]. Result of a study conducted on students in Iran to assess their satisfaction about counselling and guidance, suggests that providing consultation was not able to have a place of satisfaction for students. Also, students did not recognize the professor of educational advisor as a reliable and specific source to meet their needs during the period of education [29]. Results of various studies [29-32] in universities have shown that professors of educational advisor didn't have a complete success in providing consultation and guidance for the students according to the students' viewpoint. Despite being one of the most common and efficient ways to gather broad student feedback, student ratings of instruction are one of the most scrutinized and debated topics in higher education [33]. There are over 3000 publications dedicated to the topic, yet misperceptions, questions, and concerns about student ratings of instruction design, administration, and use of results still persist [34,35].

Most studies in Iran [36-39] have been conducted on the role of professors of educational advisor and the importance of consultation in the educational quality of the students and performance of professors of an educational advisor from the viewpoint of students.

However, researchers have neglected to assess student's viewpoint about the features of good professors of the educational advisor which this issue may be one of the most important effective factors in executing this program in universities and having students participate in it. A more recent article described an approach to student assessment using entrustable professional activities in pharmacy education [40,41]. Qualitative study is an appropriate method for discovering the characteristics and experiences of individuals and what's behind those experiences. These kinds of studies give us a deeper view of the whys and hows of a phenomenon comparing to quantitative methods. This means the researcher is needed to have a deep understanding of the emotions and experiences of the participants [42]. Therefore the present qualitative study was designed to have a better understanding of good professors of an educational advisor from the viewpoint of the students and professors to help establish an appropriate relationship between the professors of educational advisor and the students.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

According to the type of questions asked in the research and explanation the reasons why students do not go to the professors of educational advisor, the present study is a qualitative type with content analysis method which was conducted in Sabzevar University of medical sciences in 2018. Qualitative content analysis is a method for analyzing written, spoken or visual messages. In this method, raw data is summarized and put within the categories and subcategories based on inference and interpretation [29].

2.1 Participants

Participants being studied include students and professors of Sabzevar University of medical sciences. A total of 15 students participated in the study in a group discussion (3 groups of 5) and 12 professors who were interviewed in 2 months. Participants were selected among the students who had spent at least one semester of

their education and professors who had experience working as a professor of educational advisor and voluntarily willing to participate in the study.

First, the study started with targeted sampling in a way that 2 participating students and two professors who had the experience of counselling the students were interviewed. The study continued with the participation of 13 other students and 10 more professors who were chosen by theoretical and snowball sampling and based on interview samples and considering the maximum variation among different groups in terms of age, the field of study and duration of counselling experience. Sampling continued until data saturation.

2.2 Data Collection

The data collection method was a semi-structured interview. The research was conducted in Sabzevar University of medical sciences. The researcher attended the gathering of students and professors after obtaining a license to conduct research and initially introduced himself and expressed the goals of the study. Then the interview was executed in a two-sided dialogue, and with their consent, the whole process of interview was recorded and typed word by word later the same day. At the beginning of each interview, the participant was asked to introduce himself briefly and then questions were asked about the demographic and educational status of the participants. To guide the interview an interview guide was used which began with the following opening questions considering the main question of the research: what is your opinion about the reasons why students do not go to the counselling professors? In your opinion what are the characteristics of good professors of an educational advisor from your viewpoint? What are your solutions for the students to go to professors of an educational advisor more?

After that further questions were asked to continue the interview and obtain richer answers based on the interview progress and type of the participants. Considering the participant's responses, the interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. The whole process of the interviews was recorded with the participant's consent. They were written word by word. Data saturation happened after 15 students and 12 of professors participated in the interviews. Data collection and

analysis continued up to the evolution of categories and subcategories.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis began on at the same time with data collection. Data were analyzed using Graneheim and Lundman method with content analysis. Thus after the interview, the participant's words were written and typed, and then the written interviews were read several times to understand the content of the written interviews along with research's question and important phrases and sentences, and meaning units were extracted and codes were identified. Then the primary codes were classified according to semantic similarity and minimized as much as possible. The codes were divided into subcategories then by examining the relevance of the subcategories; main categories were extracted [29].

2.4 Data Strength

Four criteria provided by Lincoln and Guba were used to assess reliability including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability [30]. Methods used in this present study to provide acceptability include: high participation of the researcher with university professors and students, using various information sources like students and professors, and active participation of specialists as members of the research team in addition to the main researcher at all the stages of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Two specialists in quality approach, two specialists in health education).

Also in the present study after coding each interview a full version of it including codes and key phrases was given to specialists to evaluate the compatibility of the codes with the experiences of the participants. Research team's assessment and discussion about paradoxical findings and concluding was one of the other methods to provide credibility of the findings.

To obtain the dependability, researchers re-read and recoded the written texts of the interviews and discussion groups after a few days from the primary coding, and compared the results with each other. If the same results were achieved the stability and coordination of the data was confirmed. To enhance the dependability and confirmability, parts of the interview along with their analysis were given to two external observers whom they had good experience

about the subject and indeed qualitative research.

Also, the study process with all the details from the beginning of the studying was assessed by reviewers who had sufficient research experience in the qualitative field. To reach transferability, study results were shared with students and professors with the experience of giving and receiving consultation and the extent to which they were matched with the experiences of these individuals were reviewed.

3. RESULTS

27 participants including 15 students studying at Sabzevar University of medical sciences and 12 professors working in there participated in this study. The average age of the participants in this research was 22.4 ± 2.1 for the students and 41.2 ± 3.2 for the professors. Total of 64% of the students were girls and 92% of them were single. The findings of the study were conceptualized into nine categories from the viewpoint of students and professors (Table 1).

Reasons why students do not refer to the professors of the educational advisor from the viewpoint of students:

3.1 Improper Notification in Task Description

Students lack knowledge about professors of educational advisor duties in different fields such as educational, cultural, familial, social, etc.

Many students said that they do not have knowledge about all of the professors of educational advisor duties and because of that they go to the very little. "We had problems but we didn't know that professors of educational advisor can help us in these situations. Only some of our friends had courses which they weren't passed, and they went to the professor of educational advisor. We thought they only can help us in the educational matters..."

"Most of the times we don't go to them because we don't know what duties the professor of educational advisor has. Because nobody has told us anything about what duties do the professor of educational advisor have?. Sometimes we ask questions that they said it's not in my job description"

Interference of the professors of educational advisor duties with the tasks assigned to do the Department of counselling and education.

One of the other problems raised by the students related to not going to the professor of educational advisor was interference between the duties of a professor of educational advisor and department of counselling and education. "Because the last semester we went to the professor of educational advisor and didn't receive any help from him and we got more stressed out so we didn't want to go back to them. For example, we asked questions about educational matters and he answered: It's not in my area of expertise ask the educational department. When we got to the educational department they said: We don't have time to explain everything to every single student. Anyway, they toss you around and finally, the student decides to forget about this problem. Professor of educational advisor must at least have some basic information." "As far as I know, my other friends and I usually go to the counselling centre of the university. We didn't know about the role of professor of educational advisor in this we thought only educational matters concern them."

3.2 Permanent and Voluntary Inaccessibility

Professors of educational advisor not being one person from the time of admission to the graduation of the students.

Students have introduced the change of professors of educational advisor as one of their reasons why they do not go to them.

"Professors of educational advisor usually changes every semester. I think it shouldn't be like this because as we get to know him and we can talk about our problems more easily, the semester finishes and the professor is changed."

Absence of the professors of educational advisor within the times designated on the timetable.

Absence of the professors of educational advisor in the designated hours can have a major effect on the reduction of the students referring to them.

"So far I have gone to the professors of educational advisor but they weren't present at their office. I don't exactly know what hours they're here so that I can go to them."

Table 1. Classes and subclasses of the professors of educational advisor characteristics

Viewpoints	Subject	Categories	Subcategories
Students	Reasons*	Improper notification in task description	1: Students lack knowledge about professors of educational advisor duties in different fields such as educational, cultural, familial, social, etc. 2: Interference of the professors of educational advisor duties with the tasks assigned to do the Department of counselling and education
		Permanent and voluntary inaccessibility	1: Professors of educational advisor not being one person from the time of admission to the graduation of the students 2: Absence of the professors of educational advisor within the times designated on the timetable 3: Students having no part in choosing the professors of an educational advisor
	Strategies**	The teacher-student relationship in the teaching process	1: Following up student's educational profile (total academy failure, etc.) 2: Professors of educational advisor and the student is from the same field of study
		Attention to students' comments and access	1: Choosing professors of educational advisor according to the opinion of the majority of the students. 2: Providing the chance of distance counselling, such as by the telephone
Professors	Reasons*	Lack of knowledge of task description	1: Lack of knowledge about the program and duties of the professors of an educational advisor 2: Unclear duties of the professors of an educational advisor 3: Interference between the duties of the professors of educational advisor with the department of education and counselling 4: Professors of educational advisor lack of knowledge about their duties towards the students 5: Lack of knowledge about the time of the professors of an educational advisor assigned to counselling 6: Not being a good professor of educational advisor despite being an expert in teaching
		Refer to other professors	1: Students referring to other professors rather than professors of an educational advisor 2: Students insufficient trust toward professors of an educational advisor 3: Students being disappointed by the professors of the educational advisor who are not good enough in counselling
	Specialization		1: Using two processes of the faculty for dealing only with educational and personal problems 2: Using one or two professors whom they are interested, instead of multiple people in every faculty

Viewpoints	Subject	Categories	Subcategories
			3: holding workshops about counselling methods for the professors of an educational advisor
		Strengthen teacher-student relationship	1: Holding a session to introduce the professors of educational advisor to the students at the very first semester 2: Requiring professors of educational advisor to attend student camps for further communications 3: Setting the time which professors of educational advisor attend the faculty with the student's curriculum
	Strategies**		
		Follow up on student affairs	1: Providing the professors of educational advisor with the student's full information to identify them 2: Mandatory confirmation from the professors of educational advisor at the course choice 3: Assessment of students behaviour changes by the professors of an educational advisor

* Reasons why students don't go to the professors ** Strategies to increase referral to the professors

"Professors of educational advisor have to assign a special time regarding the student's time table, like 8 to 2 and make sure he's there so that the students can go to them if they are free at that time. I didn't go to professors of educational advisor very much but I remember once when I was choosing my courses I went to them and the door was locked."

Students having no part in choosing the professors of an educational advisor.

Students stated that if they choose the professors of educational advisor themselves they would go to them more often.

"We would like to choose our professors of educational advisor. If we had any choice I would choose the one who I feel is the most compassionate and the best among the professors."

"We have a better relationship with some professors and we can share our problems better with them. If somehow they asked about our opinion in choosing professors of educational advisor it would be very good. Right now most of the students go to another professor than professors of educational advisor because they are more comfortable with them....."

Reasons why students do not refer to the professors of the educational advisor from the viewpoint of professors:

3.3 Lack of Knowledge of Task Description

Lack of knowledge about the program and duties of the professors of an educational advisor.

"Well one of the main reasons that can lead to students going to the counseling processes less than they should is that they don't even know that this program exists and what exactly are the duties of the professors of educational advisor and in what cases they can help them, and to solve this problem it requires to notify the students precisely and more about this....."

Unclear duties of the professors of an educational advisor.

"Due to the fact that informing about the duties of the professors of educational advisor present in the department does not adequately address the students, it is likely that the students will think that the problem and the questions that they are

facing with do not have anything to do with the professors of educational advisor and that only in special courses they can ask them for help"

Interference between the duties of the professors of educational advisor with the department of education and counseling

"Well, professors of educational advisor are obligated to be present at their hours of duty according to the curriculum and student's internship time, as a result, their educational activities may conflict with their counselling duties, for example they cannot be available according to the announced timetable, so that students can go to them."

Professors of educational advisor lack of knowledge about their duties towards the students

"One of the reasons I think has an effect on implementing the professors of educational advisor program is inadequate mastery of the professors of educational advisor regulations and their job descriptions that sometimes leads they don't find students problems related to themselves and refer them to other units."

Lack of knowledge about the time of the professors of an educational advisor assigned to counseling.

"When I ask a student that: Do you know what days and hours do your professors of educational advisor are available so that you can go to them to solve your problems? They claim that they don't know and say nobody has shared any timetable with them regarding this, so it's quite natural that when the scheduled plan is not announced nobody can take advantage of its benefits."

Not being a good professor of educational advisor despite being an expert in teaching

"Providing a professional consultation that can solve student's problems requires a lot of experience and the chosen professors may have a very appropriate outcome and knowledge in their professional fields but this doesn't necessarily mean they can perform their part in being a professor of educational advisor pretty well."

3.4 Refer to Other Professors

Students referring to other professors rather than professors of an educational advisor.

"It has been seen from time to time that the students go to professors that they are not professors of educational advisor but because they thought that the professor they chose better has an understanding about their problems, they didn't go to those people for counselling and solving their problems."

Students insufficient trust toward professors of an educational advisor.

"Experience has proven to me that people will consult someone who they trust when they feel they need to talk. In my opinion, students don't have sufficient trust towards their professors and they imagine that their words would be transferred to other people and they do not look at the professor as a person who they can receive help from."

Students being disappointed by the professors of the educational advisor who are not good enough in counselling

"When the student receives a solution from the professor that is not beneficial in solving his problem trust will be lowered towards the professor and he or she may not go back to the professor after a few times he or she doesn't get a result. Thus proficiency and mastery of the professors on the principles of counselling and presenting applicable solutions is important for the students and it seems that holding workshops related to the professors of educational advisor program could be beneficial for the chosen professors...."

4. DISCUSSION

The aim of conducting this study was to assess the reasons why students go and the reason why they do not go to the professors of educational advisor from the viewpoint of the professors and students and presenting solutions. The study findings showed that "students lack knowledge of counselling professors duties, professors of educational advisor not being one person from the time of admission to the final period of graduation, absence of professors according to the times announced, etc". Among the reasons student stated as affective factors, they're not going to them. Also, professors have counted reasons such as "students going to other professors instead of professors of educational advisor, interference between professors of educational advisor duties with their educational activities, professors lack complete awareness of professors of educational advisor duties and..." effective in students not going to them.

In the assessment of the students opinions about the professors of educational advisor, Sum et al. [43] found out that from the viewpoint of most students it is very important that counseling professor being from the same field of study as students (91.3%), having an approach so that students can choose the counselling professor themselves (92.7%), and also increase in students' knowledge about counselling professors duties which matches with the opinions of the students in the present study. Also in the study of Rafiee et al. [44], professors of educational advisor active presence, according to the scheduled time table is one of the functional items that obtained great desirability which matches the results of the present study about the factors why students don't go to the professors of educational advisor.

In the study of Adhami and Alizadeh [45] only 20 per cent of the participants were aware of how and in what cases they can receive help from professors of educational advisor, that matches with the reasons mentioned by professors and students in the present study saying students going to other professors rather than the determined counsellors, and students lack knowledge about the duties of the professors of educational advisor. The study of Nouhi et al. [46] also points the students lack knowledge about the counselling program in a way that 77.6 per cent of them didn't go to the professors of educational advisor.

Jebreili et al. [47] state that from the viewpoint of the students things such as consultation about continuing education, assessment of the students educational condition by the counsellor, and guidance about courses choice has a higher level of importance that matches with the students suggested solutions in order to increase their visits with the professors of educational advisor in the present study.

In the assessment of students level of satisfaction from their educational consultation Galehdar et al. [48] have found that the level of satisfaction in students whom they had met the counselling professor at the beginning of the semester or at the time of choosing courses in comparison with others was significantly higher than matches with the professors suggested solution in the present study based on the necessity of getting to know each other at the start of the semester. Also the results showed [48] that among the existing units in the university for solving students problems, the

highest satisfaction level was related to the guiding professor, which itself confirms the necessity of existence of trust between the students and the counselling professor or other related units, as in this present study professors stated lack of trust is one of the reasons why students don't go to the counselling professor.

Haji Aghajani et al. [49] have found out that in their study there's a relationship between the educational level of students and their satisfaction rate about consulting with the professors of educational advisor in a way that PhD students found these guidances more effective in comparison with Master of Science and Bachelor of Science students. More than half of the students believed that counselors must be from the same field of study as the students and be chosen based on the opinions of final year students of each educational groups that matches with the results indicating the necessity of existing encouraging factors such as, students having their share in choosing professors of educational advisor and being from the same field of study with the professor. It also seems that professors of educational advisor weren't quite successful in preventing students from academic failure and transferring information, which lack of training was introduced as the main cause in this subject [49] that matches with the professor's suggestion about holding workshops and professional courses for counselling professors in this study.

5. CONCLUSION

Given the importance of professors of educational advisor activities and their key role in resolving student's problems, it is suggested that educational workshops should be held for professors to have more knowledge about the professors of educational advisor duties and techniques for presenting consultation at the university. Also, the necessity of holding a session to introduce the professors of educational advisor to the students at the beginning of each semester is felt more than always. It is hoped that by conducting these courses and familiarizing both parties with the professors of educational advisor program, we will be able to improve in professors and students satisfaction.

CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

While doing this research items such as obtaining informed consent in form of a process,

observing the principles of secrecy and confidentiality (keeping the information as a secret) and assuring the participant that this principle is respected, observing honesty when analyzing data, and providing participants with the needed opportunity to submit questions and suggestions were considered. This study was confirmed at the Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences Committee of medical ethics after it was approved in the university's research council.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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