The Perception of Emirati Students Towards Academic Advising in Higher Education: A Case Study of Abu Dhabi Polytechnic

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ABSTRACT

Academic advising is a critical element of the university system. This practice can support students to solve their academic problems and succeed in their academic and professional careers. This study aims to investigate student perceptions of academic advising at ADpoly programs. It employs a descriptive and analytical approach for collecting data from a sample of 364 students (both males and females) from all academic years. The results of the online survey conducted in the first semester of the academic year (2022-2023). Overall, the respondents were positive about academic advising services. Significantly, newer students tended to be more satisfied with academic advising than the long term students. Also, the results indicated no statistically significant difference between students related to their gender. Finally, the study provides recommendations and future work related on the studied topic.

1. Introduction

The interest in academic advising has increased significantly due to the development of university education systems and the introduction of the credit hour system. Since the university education system differs in nature from the pre-university education system, the student's adaptation to the university system may suffer from some inconsistency problems (Fricker, 2015). Furthermore, the credit hour system gives the student the choice to select courses that are unfamiliar to the student during the stages of public education. The adoption of this system is a result of educational and psychological applications. This emphasize the uniqueness and freedom of the university student and his/her to choose and make decisions regarding his/her study requirements according to their tendencies, abilities, and attitudes (Al-Sarem, 2015a). Therefore, academic advising as it is one of the pillars of the credit hour system and without which the system cannot achieve its goals as effectively.

To meet the academic advising needs within the credit hour system, it is assumed that the academic advising tasks are integrated and comprehensive; no matter how numerous and varied the methods and means from one university to another. It is also necessary to consider all educational stages at the university according to each stage separately. In the pre-specialization

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counseling stage, the student should be directed to the mechanisms of choosing a major, and how to proceed with their study plan. Therefore, the academic advisor needs to provide fixed office hours. This includes holding periodic open meetings and directing students on how to communicate with faculty members' appropriately. The purpose of this approach is to provide each student with the information that will help them satisfy their academic guidance needs (McGill, 2019).

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), all educational institutions adopt an academic advising strategy to achieve the desired educational goals. Among these educational institutions is the Abu Dhabi Polytechnic (ADPoly). Since its inception, ADPoly has been characterized by its personal attention to their students as an essential component of university education. This is carried out in a particularly effective way through academic advising. Academic advising is the training strategy, that allows the adaption of educational tasks to be carried out by the University. This should align with the personal characteristics of each student in their different dimensions and manifestations. Therefore, academic advising responds to the goals of each educational institute, which is above all is a meeting place between professors and students (ADPoly, 2022).

At the ADPoly all programs provide academic advising services which aligns with a comprehensive training approach for the students. The purpose is to ensure their vocational and technical skills acquired are embedded with the personal qualities. The aim is to prepare students with the necessary skills to develop into responsible human beings. Additionally, ADPoly supports students to gain a high moral sense of life in their chosen area of employment. Academic advising contributes to this goal by providing students with advice and guidance. This is achieved via a professor during their early years and onward with a purpose to better develop the full potential of each student. This requires academic advisors to carry out a set of tasks which include, holding several meetings with each student individually. Furthermore, the adviser determines possible alternatives to assist the student academically.

A key role of the advisor is to suggest additional competent authorities including counselors and psychologists. Additionally, the advisor may need to suggest the possibility of transferring the student to another major before dismissal procedures occur (Drake, 2015). In the advising meetings, the academic advisor must use scientific methods to help solve individual problems. A democratic approach to managing multidisciplinary dialogue can be employed to ensure the student are safe and can express their problems or opinions honestly and openly. The academic advising process requires the advisor to keep a student file for each case, which includes his/her academic achievement and study plan. This is a tool that can help inform any decision-making processes to a student referral, to a different department to obtain specialized services (Iatrellis et al., 2017).

Based on the intended approach, this study attempts to shed light on students' perceptions about the academic advising process in the UAE higher education institutions and in turn improve the future of the academic advising process. The study tackles the use of technology in the academic advising process as new facilitator form of media. The organization of this paper presents the following parts: firstly, the theoretical literature review that refers to academic advising. Secondly, the methods and methodology employed in the study. Thirdly, the population and sample type. Lastly, the materials and tools used in the data collection, analysis and the results of the study.

2. Literature review

According to modern psychology, the conceptualization of perception is based on Gestalt theory (Çeliköz et al., 2019), which focuses on the basic process of events associated with mental representations, judgments, ideas, and concepts. Perception is a mental process through which the brain is responsible for receiving, analyzing, and interpreting various stimuli that are obtained via the senses. This process is associated with personal experience which allows him to recognize a sign and select it. Therefore, perception is considered as the set of activities that are linked to external data that is filtered via the senses where information about the environment is interpreted. The mental image is based on the experience and needs of each person. This is generated from by a process of selection, organization, and interpretation of sensations. It should be noted that perception is a subjective process and will always be related to the unconscious (Hamlyn, 2017).

Perception is a process that takes place in three stages: selection, organization, and interpretation. Selection refers to how the person perceives the messages according to their attitudes, values, interests, needs, motivations, and expectations. The organization of sensory data shapes stimuli selected and quickly classifies them. Furthermore, the perception process subconsciously labels any connotation derived and can vary depending on how they have been classified. Finally, the interpretations assign a context to the previously selected stimuli (Broadbent, 2013).

Over time, there has been a change and development in the academic advising methods adopted in higher education institutions. This development as described in (Grits & Gordon, 2009), had a positive effect and generated an increase in the creation of educational theories and practices aimed at providing quality education. This development of Merva (2018) supported this educational movement with three basic principles, related to student performance. The first is based on the premise of the student having a clear understanding of themselves. This is in relation to their aptitudes, capacities, interests, resources, limitations, and other qualities. The second principle focused on student knowledge. The third is based on the opportunities and advantages of each in their field. In (Bhupathyraaj et al., 2021), the author evaluates the three principles. Bhupathyraaj comparison the first two principles and the professional interests of students led to the postulate of academic advising and counseling in the university settings. However, according to (Al-Sarem, 2015b), academic advising experienced exponential strengthening and development because of the credit hours system.

In the literature, number of studies deal with the perception of students and university academic advising. Table (1) shows the findings of these recent studies published in (2015-2022) years range.

Table 1.
Summary of related previous studies

Study/Reference	Findings
(Sierra et al., 2022)	Most students preferred to meet with their faculty advisor in a group as compared with one-on-one (59 versus 29, 67%). Most students found the advisor/advisee relationship beneficial (n = 77, 85%).
(Springer & Tyran, 2022)	For the study participants, information resources and empathy were found to significantly influence satisfaction with advising.
(Hannon, 2022)	The findings of this study suggest that most students who receive academic advising from Rowan University have effective and positive experiences, find themselves to be academically successful by their own definition, and believe that academic advising experiences align with academic success.

(Pitts, 2022)	The first- and second-cycle coding of the data revealed four academic counselors confirming behaviors: (a) recognizing students' experiences outside the classroom, (b) collaborating on educational/career goals, (c) recalling past interactions with the student, and (d) providing praise and responses Positive verb. In addition, students identified three uncertain behaviors in which academic advisors were involved: (a) they failed to give students their full attention, (b) answered questions indirectly, and (c) refused to personalize students' experiences. More than half of the participants answered focus group questions that "yes" the affirming behaviors of their academic advisor positively affected cognitive learning outcomes, emotional learning outcomes, and satisfaction. Four supportive and connected climate behaviors as identified by participants are: (a) inquiries about student progress, (b) creating a welcoming physical space, (c) soliciting feedback about the counseling session, and (d) displaying knowledge of student resources. These findings add to the current understanding of teacher assertion, counselor-advisor relationships, and instructional communication. Three limitations must be considered: the lack of non-behaviour-based outcomes, the lack of a link between affirmation and a supportive and connected climate, and a failure to address the institutional context. Despite these limitations, the findings in this letter offer future possibilities for researchers in the field of educational communication and the practice of academic advising.
(Suvedi et al., 2015)	Results of online surveys showed that respondents were generally positive about academic advising services. Freshmen and female students were more satisfied with academic advising than the older male and female students. Respondents noted the need to improve guidance on participation in volunteer and study abroad programs.
(Mu & Fosnacht, 2019)	The results indicate that institutional indicative climate is positively correlated with perceived gains, but not scores. The results also showed that the relationships between counseling and student learning and development varied across institutions. Implications for policy and practice are discussed.
(Walker et al., 2017)	Analyzes revealed four cross-cutting themes: a student's difficulty distinguishing between the roles of high school guidance counselors and post-secondary academic advisors, counselors' communication, the student's desire for a relationship, and counselor accessibility. Based on the data collected, we developed a model to understand the formation and maintenance of students' heuristic perceptions.
(Vianden, 2016)	The results confirmed that academic advisors can strongly connect students to the institution by creating an ongoing and lasting relationship with someone who cares deeply about the student's success. Therefore, everyone in the institution must refer to academic advisors as agents for managing student relations, and advisors must receive training and professional development to work in this important role for the institution. The advisor-advisor relationship may positively influence student perseverance and ensure that students become supportive graduates of their home university.
(McGill et al., 2020)	The results show that excellence in undergraduate education can be achieved to support student success by promoting excellence in Academic Advising, Academic Advising Core Competencies in Higher Education Standards, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education Standards, the Professional Framework for Counseling and Tutoring, and the UK's National Occupational Standards.

Similarly, at ADPoly, there are several objectives of academic advising supported by the college which include (ADPoly, 2022):

 a. Inform and guide students from the beginning of their university studies. The commencement of their program requires special support from the advisor. The advisor can provide detailed information on the most important aspects of university life and the distinctive features of the ADPoly. It is also the task of the advisor to guide the student regarding active participation in all areas of the university life, advise on

the organization of their time, or anticipate possible deficiencies or difficulties in the learning the process.

b. Contribute to training in personal habits and professional skills. Due to its nature, academic advising is an exceptional tool for the development of habits and attitudes of the student. The instructor's knowledge on the abilities, strengths and weaknesses of the student. Having a knowledge of their personal circumstances allows the advisor to propose a personal training plan. This plan should focus on the development of the positive habits and attitudes which are necessary to prepare the student for competence in work.

Furthermore, academic advising in ADPoly has its characteristics that differentiate it from other possible teacher-student relationships: From a personal perspective ADPoly process it is described below (ADPoly, 2022):

a) The university provides individualized advice and guidance. It is offered to all students, including those who attend only at the university for a limited period.

b) It is voluntary for the student and, therefore, it is not mandatory nor is it part of the academic curriculum. This distinguishes it from other teaching activities such as tutorials, which can be assessed and compulsory. Due to its voluntary nature, students perceive it as a clear commitment by teachers to favor it. Importantly, that when deciding to study at ADPoly, each student will have chosen to be part of an institution which is characterized by a personal approach. In this sense, it is convenient that the advisors take the initiative on some occasions. An example is during the first interview or when they detect that the student has a problem.

c) It is universal approach, aimed at adults and responsible people. It does not replace the initiative or responsibility of the student but rather aims to help them take charge of their own training. It responds to the universal need to have the advice and support of an experienced person to support advancement effectively in any area. In addition, training proposals goes beyond that which is strictly professional. The consultancy is designed to help the student discover new horizons in the process of helping the student become an holistically educated citizen.

3. Problem statement

The review of the theoretical literature revealed a consensus on the importance of academic advising in higher education. This is most significant in the preparatory year! This interest is linked to a survey of student's perceptions of the academic advising process. The study aimed at improving the quality of advising and considered the needs of new students in a university setting. Fortunately, the researcher unearthed a gap in the literature associated with studying student perceptions in the context of Emirati higher education. Specifically in polytechnic settings. Thus, the study attempts to reveal student perceptions of Emirati academic advising, with a focus on technical and vocational education.

Until now, there has not been study that has been conducted to determine academic advising for long term students. For this reason, an investigation will be carried out on the variables that are related to the environments that would favor the permanence of students at ADPoly. Moreover, this paper highlights the use of technology and online channels utilized in academic advising.

3.1. Objectives

This paper aims to assess students' perceptions about academic advising in the ADPoly. Thus, specific objectives evaluate the trends of academic advising in ADPoly during 2022-2023. Additionally, this study will assess student perspectives of academic advising by their demographics and academic years.

3.2. Research questions

RQ1: Students attending programs at ADPoly. What rating do you give for academic advising: Low, Moderate, High?
RQ2: Between student different year levels. Are there different perceptions of academic advising?
RQ3: Between female and male students. Are there different student perceptions of academic advising?

4. Methods and materials

This study is a cross sectional study that employs the descriptive and analytical approach for collecting and analyzing the research data from the study sample. The undergraduate students at ADPoly programs were the population of interest for the study during the academic year (2022-2023). However, the study population was represented by a sample of (203) students with various demographics (gender, year, department) as shown in Table 2-3. This study used data collected from online surveys of undergraduates at ADPoly programs, carried out during (2022-2023) academic year. The online survey instrument was developed by the researcher at ADPoly and was reviewed by the academic advisors before data collection. The online survey link was sent to all students in ADPoly to be completed within one month.

Table 2.
ADPoly Population department and Gender

Major/ Department	Gender	Count
Advanced Energy Engineering	Male	70
Technology	Female	15
Electromechanical Engineering	Male	319
Technology	Female	261
Information security engineering	Male	210
	Female	187
Petroleum Engineering	Male	107
Technology	Female	89
Meteorology	Male	23
	Female	6
Aircraft Engineering Technology	Male	70
	Female	69
Aircraft Maintenance	Male	954
Technology	Female	**716**
Total number of males	**954**	
Total number of females	**716**	
Overall	**1670**	

The final valid responses after one month of distribution via the online survey link, reached (364) of males and females from various departments. However, this sample includes students

from all levels (1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year, and 4th year). Table 3 show a description of students by demographic, year, as the control variable.

Table 3.
Sample distribution by year level

Year level	Count	Percentage %
1st year	125	34%
2nd year	90	25%
3rd year	79	22%
4th year	70	19%
Overall	**364**	**100%**

Figure 1 shows the percentage of each year level out of (241) total number of respondents.
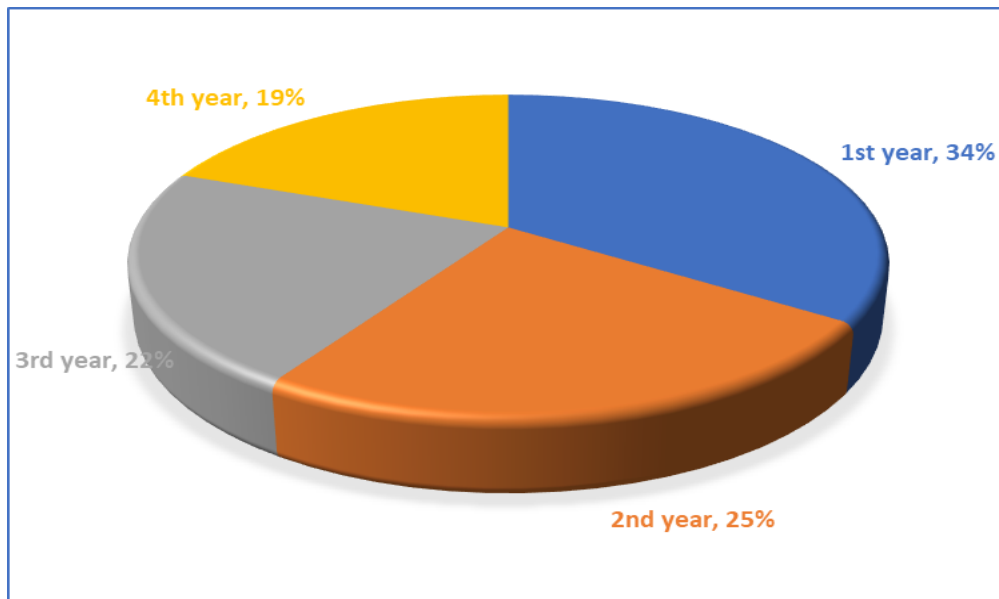

Figure 1. Sample by year level

ADPoly students' perceptions about academic advising were determined by 12 items measured on a Likert scale rating (5: strongly agree;4: agree; 3: neutral; 2: disagree; 1: strongly disagree). The items covered academic advising through advisor accessibility, advisor knowledge helpfulness, encouragement of students in academic and professional growth. Additionally, perceptions were gathered on the topic of providing timely information for the successful education of students. Items about academic advising were developed from the 'student assessment of advising form' developed by Zimmerman & Mokma (2004) and cited by Suvedi et al. (2015). However, the tool originally included 10 items, but was later modified to include 2 new items related to advisor accessibility to online channels. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient was conducted to verify the reliability of the survey instrument and show relevant items for academic advising. Resulting in 0.91, which indicates high reliability for the survey instrument.

For determining the students' perception of academic advising, the calculated means of their responses were judged based on three categories (High, Moderate, Low). The process relies on Likert 5 scale and the following equation:

$$Differnce\ rate = \frac{highest\ response\ value - lowest\ response\ value}{\infty Number\ of\ catogarises} = (5-1)/3 = 1.33$$

Thus, the judgment of the students' perception of academic advising will be decided based on the categories shown in Table 4.

Table 4.
Perception level categories

Mean	Level
1-2.33	Low
2.34-3.67	Moderate
3.68-5	High

For statistical processing and, several statistical techniques were utilized to analyze and review the data. Further descriptive statistics (frequency, mean and standard deviation), independent t-test was applied to identify the differences in students' perceptions by their gender, and ANOVA was used to determine differences between students' perceptions of advising by their academic years. The statistically significant cut-off point was set at ($\alpha<=0.05$).

5. Results

This section presents the analytical results of student responses to the online survey. The results start with answering the research questions RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3 as follows:

RQ1: Among students at ADPoly programs, which of the following perception level they maintained about academic advising: Low, Moderate, High? To answer these questions, a descriptive analysis was carried out to find the frequencies, means, standard deviation and the perception level as shown in Table 5.

Table 5.
Students' perception of academic advising at ADPoly Programs

#	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
5	My academic advisor provides timely information on internship opportunities.	364	3.77	.90	High
2	My academic advisor gives me accurate information about degree requirements.	364	3.79	.92	High
1	My academic advisor is easily accessible.	364	3.83	.94	High
10	My academic advisor uses online channels in advising me.	364	3.91	.75	High
3	My academic advisor helps me with academic problems.	364	3.93	.78	High
6	My academic advisor encourages me to participate in internships.	364	3.93	.81	High
11	My academic advisor is available face to face and online when needed.	364	3.93	.75	High
4	My academic advisor refers me to helpful resources when I need them.	364	3.97	.75	High
8	My academic advisor encourages me to participate in volunteer programs.	364	3.97	.88	High
7	My academic advisor encourages me to participate in study abroad.	364	3.99	.75	High
9	My academic advisor shares information on career opportunities.	364	4.00	.77	High
12	Overall, I am satisfied with the academic advising services I have received.	364	3.91	.77	High
	students' perceptions	364	3.91	.54	High
	Valid N (listwise)	364			

Table 5 shows a high positive correlation of the academic advising process at ADPoly programs, with mean (3.91) and Std. Deviation (0.54).

RQ2: Between different year levels for students at ADPoly programs. Is there a difference on student perceptions of academic advising? To answer this question, ANOVA test was applied, and the results shown in Table 6.

Table 6.
ANOVA test of differences between years levels

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.151	3	2.050	7.474	.000
Within Groups	98.752	360	.274		
Total	104.903	363			

The results in Table 6 show a significant difference in the students' perception of academic advising attributed to years levels, as sig value ($\alpha <= 0.05$). However, to examine the differences among year levels, LSD test was applied and the results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7.
Multiple Comparisons between Years Level

(I) Year Level	(J) Year Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1st year	2nd year	.04907	.07240	.498	-.0933	.1915
	3rd year	.22637*	.07528	.003	.0783	.3744
	4th year	.32738*	.07819	.000	.1736	.4811
2nd year	1st year	-.04907	.07240	.498	-.1915	.0933
	3rd year	.17730*	.08075	.029	.0185	.3361
	4th year	.27831*	.08347	.001	.1142	.4424
3rd year	1st year	-.22637*	.07528	.003	-.3744	-.0783
	2nd year	-.17730*	.08075	.029	-.3361	-.0185
	4th year	.10101	.08597	.241	-.0681	.2701
4th year	1st year	-.32738*	.07819	.000	-.4811	-.1736
	2nd year	-.27831*	.08347	.001	-.4424	-.1142
	3rd year	-.10101	.08597	.241	-.2701	.0681

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Based on the results in Table 6, the differences are significant when comparing 1st year with 3rd and 4th years in favor of 1st year students. However, there is no statistically significant differences between 1st and 2nd years. Furthermore, there is there a statistical difference between 3rd and 4th years in favor of 3rd year students. Figure 2 depicts the differences among the year levels.
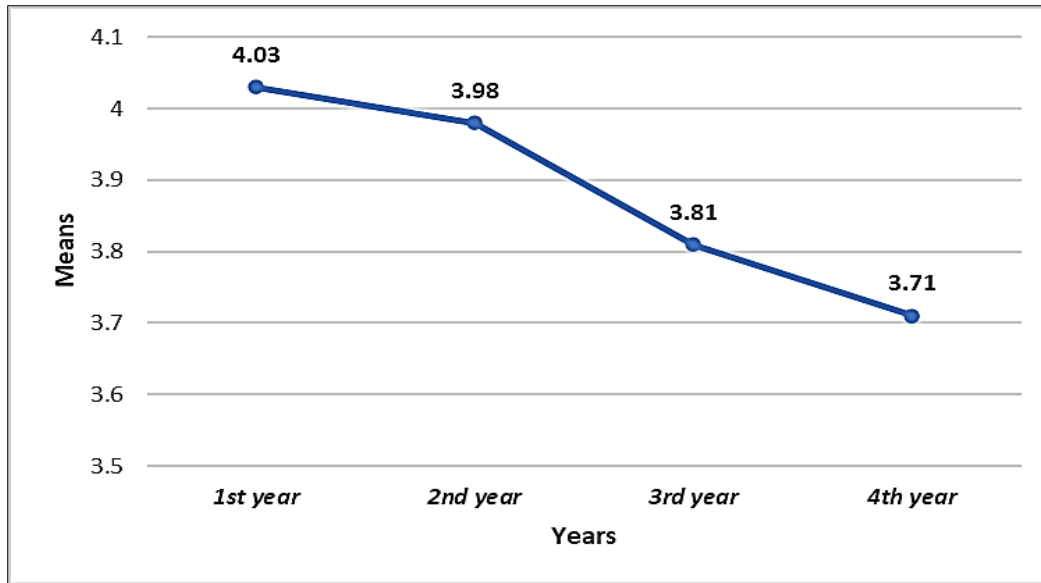
Figure 2. Students' perception of academic advising by years level

Figure 2 shows that 1st year students tended to hold more positive and had different perceptions about academic advising services than 2nd, 3rd and 4th years. As the students move up the academic ladder, their ratings of academic advising tend to decrease. The 1st year rated academic advising higher than 2nd year on each item.

RQ3: Between female and male students at ADPoly programs. Is there a difference on student perceptions of academic advising? To answer this question, tow independent sample t-test was applied, and the results shown in Table 8.

Table 8.
T-test of differences between gender

		F	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
students' perceptions	Equal variances assumed	20.852	-.508	362	.611	-.02877	.05658
	Equal variances not assumed		-.522	349.411	.602	-.02877	.05513

The results in Table 8 show no significant differences in the students' perception of academic advising related to gender, with a sig value of (0.611) and need to be ($\alpha <= 0.05$) to indicate a statistical difference. Figure 3 depicts the apparent differences between students attributed to their gender.
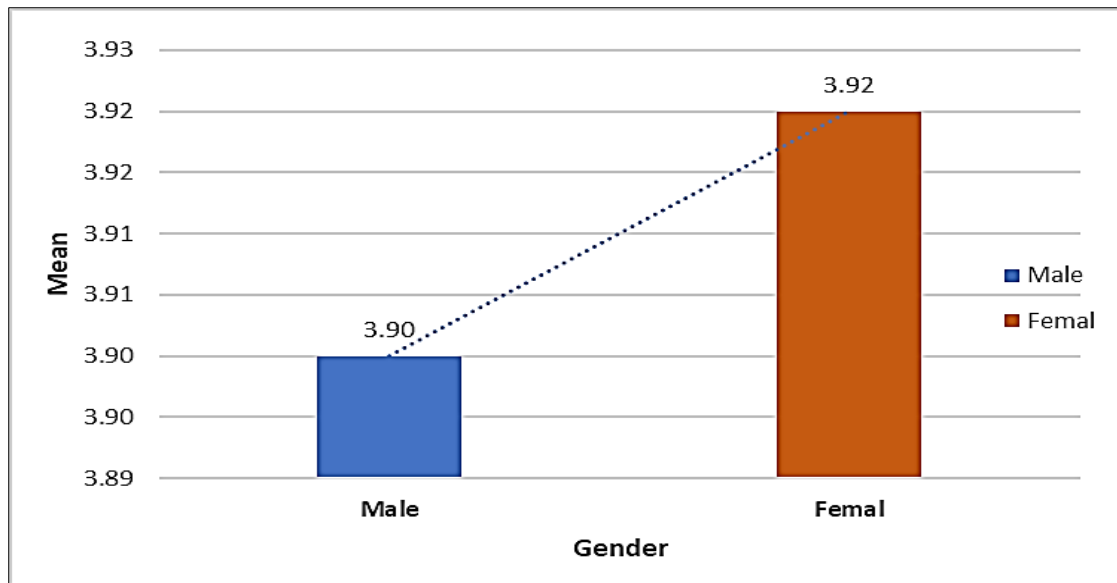
Figure 2. Students' perception of academic advising by Gender

6. Discussion

ADPoly undergraduate students are generally satisfied with the academic advising services they received from the college. However, they wanted more support and encouragement from their major advisors. The purpose is to provide timely information on internship opportunities, and to give them accurate information about degree requirements. Among the two demographic traits tested, Gender (Male, Female), and year level (1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year, and 4th year), high and positive overall perception ratings of academic advising were recorded. However, regardless of year level, students maintained similar perceptions of academic advising services at ADPoly programs.

Roughly, male students rated academic advising the same as female students since the differences were statistically insignificant. This finding supports (Afshar & Dhiman, 2008) stand that students' perceptions of academic advising can't be differed by gender. In contrast, our results differ from the finding of (Suvedi et al., 2015). However, reports suggested that male and female students' rating on academic advising were significantly different. This can be justified on the grounds that the specializations that ADpoly offers, which are of the same nature. Therefore, the students' needs regarding academic advising do not differ according to gender.

In this study, younger students tended to be more positive about academic advising than older students. This could be the reason for higher ratings of advising by 1st year students, who are new and require knowing more about their university coming life. This finding is not consistent with(Suvedi et al., 2015), who stated that there are no significant differences among students' ratings on academic advising by their years' levels. However, it stands with the finding of(Afshar & Dhiman, 2008).

7. Conclusion

The results of the descriptive study indicated that the students at ADPoly programs have a high positive perception towards the academic advising process. The results also showed that students do not differ in their perceptions about academic advising according to gender.

However, there is a difference between students through the variance in their perceptions that are statistically significant, as revealed by the results. This can be justified on the grounds that the specializations that ADpoly offers. They are of the same nature, and therefore the students' needs through academic advising do not differ according to gender. In this study, younger students tended to be more positive about academic advising than older students. This could be the reason for higher ratings of advising by 1st year students.

8. Recommendation and future work

According to results, the study provides the following recommendations and future work:

1- It is recommended to reconstruct the academic advising process to allow students to know more about internships and major requirements.
2- A study can be conducted to highlight the mediating\moderating role of online channels in the relationship between students' perception and academic advising.

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