



Exploring Perspectives of Lecturers and Administrators at Universities On the New Foundation Year Policy for Enhancing Higher Education Quality in Somalia

Professor: Said Abubakar Sheikh Ahmed

Dean of Postgraduate Program and Research, Mogadishu University

Email: baashaa4@gmail.com/ saidbaashaa@hotmail.com

DOI: 10.1104/SEJ.2023223996

Abstract

This study examined the perspectives of 107 lecturers and administrators from universities in Mogadishu on the new Foundation Year program introduced by the Somali Ministry of Education, Culture, and Higher Education in the academic year 2023/2024. The study aimed to explore the program's effectiveness in enhancing the quality of higher education, investigate its impact on students' academic performance, and identify the challenges associated with its implementation. The findings revealed that participants generally had positive views of the Foundation Year curriculum, perceiving it as beneficial for meeting students' educational needs, integrating theory and practice, and preparing them for further academic studies. The program predicted to produce positive results in academic performance, writing abilities, analytical capabilities, and self-confidence in academic skills. However, the participants expressed concerns about several challenges related to its implementation, including limited resources, faculty training and support, student adaptation, stakeholder coordination, and awareness of the program's policy.

Keywords: Lecturers, Administrators, Foundation Year, Higher Education, Quality, Somalia.

Introduction

A foundation year is an educational program designed to introduce students to college/faculty life and university-level courses, providing them with an opportunity to acclimate to the academic environment. By equipping students with the necessary

skills and knowledge required for higher education, foundation years aim to enhance their academic success and readiness for future academic pursuits.¹

A foundation year in university presents both pros and cons. One significant advantage of undertaking a foundation year is its ability to improve the likelihood of gaining admission to prestigious universities, especially for students who may not meet the necessary A-level qualifications.²

A foundation year acts as a means to close the educational disparity between a student's existing level of education and the prerequisites for enrollment in a bachelor's or master's program. This proves especially beneficial for international students who may hold diverse educational qualifications compared to their preferred university.³

Engaging in a foundation year allows students to delve into diverse subjects, and gain expertise and competence across multiple fields. This exposure aids them in making well-informed choices regarding their prospective degree and specialization. Furthermore, it allows students to become acquainted with the university setting, cultivating a sense of ease and familiarity.⁴

The foundation year in university does present certain disadvantages, such as prolonging the duration of the academic journey by an additional year, spending more time enrolled in university, and the possibility of incurring higher expenses.⁵

Following the collapse of the Somali central government, the country faced a significant challenge in the education sector. Prior to the collapse, the Somali National University, under the administration of the central government, played a crucial role in offering a wide range of scientific disciplines. However, with the absence of a functioning government during the civil war in 1991, there was a noticeable educational gap as the government ceased to provide educational services.

In the early 1990s, Somali educationalists mobilized to address this gap and rebuild the education sector. Their aim was to restore the educational services that were previously provided by the central government. To achieve this, various entities such as education associations, privately owned schools, institutes, and higher education institutions were established. These initiatives aimed to fill the void left by the Ministry of Education, which had previously provided education services to the population before 1991. (Plan, 2011).

¹ <https://www.academiccourses.com/foundation-year>

² <https://gabbitas.com/university-foundation-programmes/>

³ <https://amberstudent.com/blog/post/why-take-a-foundation-year>

⁴ <https://amberstudent.com/blog/post/why-take-a-foundation-year>

⁵ <https://www.pouted.com/6-must-know-main-advantages-of-your-foundation-year/>

One significant milestone in Somalia's education history is the establishment of the private education sector at different levels, including primary, secondary, and university education. This initiative aimed to address the educational gap caused by the government's inability to provide educational services due to the outbreak of the civil war in 1991. During this challenging period, the Somali diaspora, international NGOs, and Islamic aid agencies played a crucial role in contributing to the rehabilitation and development of the education sector. (Anon, 2013).

Presently, tertiary education in Somalia encompasses both public and private sectors. It is worth noting that a majority of universities in Somalia are privately owned, which has posed significant challenges for educators within the private sector. However, community-driven academic institutions have emerged as influential contributors to the higher education landscape, particularly in the absence of a functional national government. These initiatives deserve recognition and appreciation as they represent remarkable achievements attained through community-driven efforts and sacrifices. (Eno, A. M., Mweseli, N.W.M., & Eno, 2015).

Currently, the primary requirements for higher education in Somalia involve the reconstruction of higher learning institutions to align with clearly defined objectives that adhere to international standards and the production of competent human resources. (Amaral et al., 2013). Additionally, private universities have made significant efforts under their leadership to enhance the quality of education in accordance with international standards. In line with these efforts, the Ministry for Education, Culture, and Higher Education has developed a strategic plan for tertiary education from 2018 to 2020. This plan aims to increase enrollment among youth and adults, establish quality standards, establish a Higher Education Commission, and strengthen research capabilities. (By, 2020).

On September 9, 2023, the Somali Ministry of Education, Culture, and Higher Education released a directive outlining the implementation of a "foundation year" guideline for undergraduate education beginning from the academic year 2023/2024.

Problem Statement:

Somalia is a post-conflict country with a fragile education system. The quality of higher education in Somalia is a major concern, as evidenced by the low graduation rates, high unemployment rates among graduates, and the mismatch between the skills of graduates and the needs of the labor market.

In the academic year 2022/2023, the Somali Ministry of Education, Culture, and Higher Education introduced a new Foundation Year Policy for Enhancing Higher Education Quality in Somalia. The Foundation Year is a one-year pre-university program that is designed to prepare students for the rigors of university studies. The policy is intended to improve the quality of higher education in Somalia by ensuring that all students have the necessary academic skills and knowledge to succeed at university. However, there is limited research on the perspectives of lecturers and

administrators at universities on the new Foundation Year Policy. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the perspectives of lecturers and administrators on the implementation of the new policy and its impact on the quality of higher education in Somalia.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be significant for several reasons. First, the study will provide insights into the perspectives of lecturers and administrators on the new Foundation Year Policy. This information will be valuable for the Somali government and other stakeholders as they work to implement and improve the policy.

Second, the study will identify the challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of the new Foundation Year Policy. This information can be used to develop strategies to address the challenges and maximize the opportunities. Third, the study will contribute to the body of knowledge on the quality of higher education in Somalia. This knowledge is essential for developing evidence-based policies and programs to improve the quality of higher education in Somalia.

Research Objectives:

1. To examine the perspectives of lecturers and administrators at universities in Somalia regarding the new Foundation Year policy.
2. To explore how the curriculum of the Foundation Year program is perceived by lecturers and administrators in terms of its effectiveness in enhancing higher education quality.
3. To investigate the relationship between the implementation of the Foundation Year policy and students' academic performance at universities in Somalia.
4. To identify the challenges for implementing the Foundation Year

Research Questions:

1. What are the perspectives of lecturers and administrators at universities in Somalia regarding the new Foundation Year policy?
2. How do lecturers and administrators perceive the effectiveness of the Foundation Year curriculum in enhancing higher education quality?
3. What is the relationship between the implementation of the Foundation Year policy and students' academic performance at universities in Somalia?
4. What are the challenges for implementing the Foundation Year?

Related work

Several studies have investigated the effectiveness and challenges associated with foundation year programs in higher education, including the research conducted by Lesley (2006) who opined that Students who successfully complete a foundation year demonstrate higher academic performance in subsequent degree studies compared to

directly admitted students who have similar academic profiles. The foundation program has a profound impact on various aspects of students' lives, extending beyond their academic achievements. The students themselves highly appreciate the non-academic advantages provided by the course (Lesley,2006). The Foundation Year courses can benefit students by aiding their transition and improving academic performance. (Lalage ,et al., 2012).

There are four key factors that play a role in students' selection of a first-year foundation course: personal interest in the course, forming an impression of the course, scheduling considerations, and the perceived likelihood of the course actively engaging the learner (Duncan, et al., 2008)

Over the past twenty years, there has been a focus on the first year of higher education and the growth of knowledge surrounding FYHE in the Australasian higher education sectors. The importance lies in crafting and implementing impactful and sustainable FYHE programs and practices that encourage active participation, intellectual stimulation, and support for first-year students. Despite progress has been made in the first year in higher education, challenges remain, and more focused attention on the role of institutions in fostering student success throughout their enrollment is needed (Karen, et al., 2014).

The International Foundation Year program improved students' resilience and confidence during their transition to the first year of university. Participants emphasized the importance of being proactive in seeking help from lecturers and developing independence as learners. Furthermore, International Foundation Year (IFY) students have different learning and teaching experiences from non-IFY students. This includes differences in English language support, essay writing, academic skills, presentations, group discussions, and curriculum content. (Stephanie, et al., 2015).

Lalage et al. (2016) investigated whether initial assessments of student confidence and expected performance could forecast academic outcomes in foundation year programs. The results imply that enhancing interventions for student retention could be more effective by anticipating doubt or the early stages of disengagement before noticeable classroom absences occur. The study also highlighted a significant gap in entry requirements between foundation year programs and the subsequent degrees they lead to, which could potentially impact student retention and overall success (Lalage et al. ,2016). The Foundation Year facilitates the transition to the main undergraduate degree, it doesn't directly contribute to the students' preparedness for postgraduate studies (H., D., et al., 2018).

Thuraya et al. (2019) conducted a case study with 372 students at Manchester Metropolitan University to assess their mathematical knowledge during Foundation year at university. The students underwent an initial assessment followed by a second test to evaluate their conceptual development. The analysis of both quantitative and

qualitative data indicated an improvement in student achievement (Thuraya et al., 2019).

The main findings from the studies mentioned above can be summarized as follows: the implementation of foundation year programs in undergraduate education has shown positive outcomes for students. Research studies have demonstrated that students who complete a foundation year display higher academic performance in subsequent degree studies. Additionally, the foundation programs have been found to have a profound impact on various aspects of students' lives, providing non-academic advantages and aiding in their transition to university education.

The studies have identified key factors that influence students' selection of foundation courses, including personal interest, course impressions, scheduling considerations, and the perceived likelihood of active engagement. Adequate support and resources during the foundation year have been emphasized as crucial for student success.

While progress has been made in the first year of higher education, challenges remain, highlighting the need for institutions to foster student success throughout their enrollment. International Foundation Year programs have been found to improve students' resilience, confidence, and transition experiences. Early assessments of student confidence and expected performance can help anticipate and address potential disengagement. However, the readiness for postgraduate studies may not be directly influenced by the foundation year experience.

Methodology

In this study, a descriptive quantitative research approach is employed to investigate the viewpoints of lecturers and administrators at universities in Somalia regarding the recently implemented Foundation Year policy, which aims to improve the quality of higher education. The researcher utilized G*Power software to conduct an "A Priori Compute Required Sample" analysis on the mean: Wilcoxon-Mann Whitney (two groups) test to determine the minimum sample size required, considering a margin error of 0.05, the effect size of 0.35, and statistical power of 0.80. The analysis indicated that a minimum sample size of 107 participants was necessary. The quantitative data for the study was gathered using a questionnaire that utilized a Likert scale. Statistical methods were employed to analyze the collected data, and the research process adhered to ethical guidelines.

Results

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Survey Participants

		Frequency	Percent %
Gender	Male	98	91.6%
	Female	9	8.4%
Education Level	Bachelor	11	10.3%
	High Diploma	1	0.9%
	Master's	80	74.8%
	PHD	9	8.4%
	Professor	6	5.6%
Faculties	Share 'a	3	2.8%
	Education	20	18.7%
	Economics	17	15.9%
	Political sciences/Public admin	12	11.2%
	Engineering & Computer science	19	17.8%
	Agriculture	3	2.8%
	Health Sciences	28	26.2%
	Other	5	4.7%
Job	Lecturer	73	68.2%
	Administrator	34	31.8%
Experience	1-5	25	23%
	6-10	32	30%
	>10	50	47%

Table 2. The Results of Perception of Lecturers and Administrators of the Effectiveness of the Foundation Year Curriculum in Enhancing Higher Education Quality. N=107

		Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	Foundation Year curriculum adequately addresses the educational needs and demands of students.	3.60	1.220
Q2	Foundation Year curriculum effectively integrates practical applications with theoretical knowledge.	3.37	1.095
Q3	Foundation Year curriculum prepares students for further academic studies in their respective disciplines.	3.82	1.097
	Grand Mean	3.59	1.137

The table (2) shows that the grand mean of three statements is 3.59 with the “Std. deviation” of 1.137. This grand mean is above 3.00, which is the midpoint of the Likert scale that was used to collect the data. This suggests that most respondents agreed with the statements, i.e., they believe that the Foundation Year curriculum adequately addresses the educational needs and demands of students, effectively integrates practical applications with theoretical knowledge, and prepares students for further academic studies in their respective disciplines. The standard deviation for all three statements is relatively low, which suggests that the data is clustered close to the mean. This means that there is a general consensus among respondents about the quality of the Foundation Year curriculum.

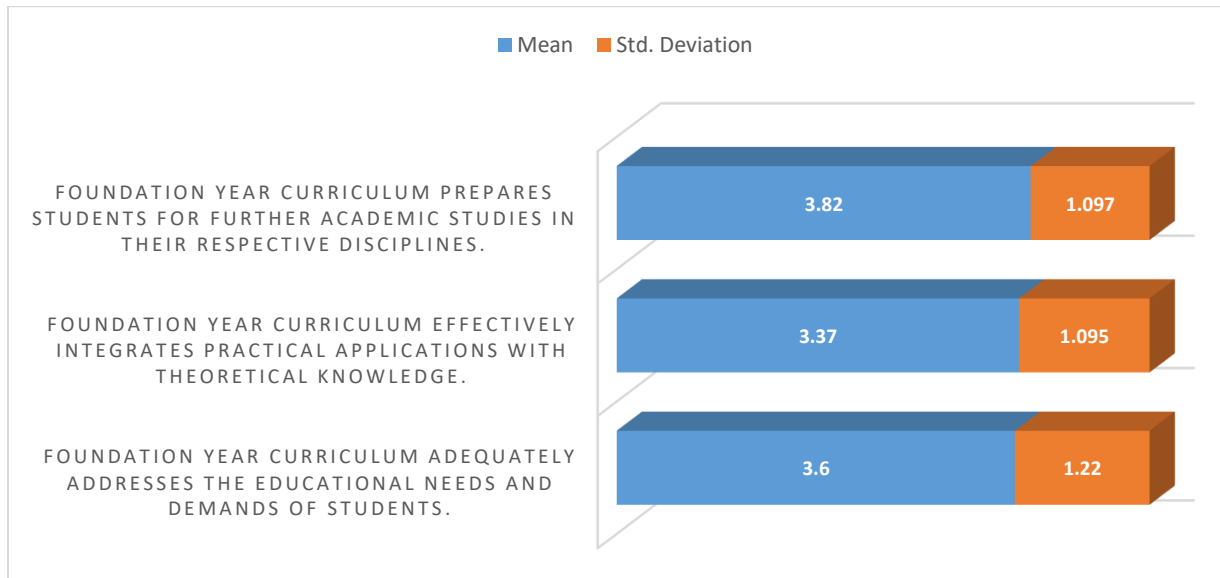


Figure 1. The Results of Perception of Lecturers and Administrators of the Effectiveness of the Foundation Year Curriculum on the three questions.

Table 3. The Results of Perception of Lecturers and Administrators toward the Relationship between the Implementation of The Foundation Year and Students' Academic Performance N=107

		Mean	Std. Deviation
Q4	Students who undergo the Foundation Year demonstrate improved academic performance in their subsequent undergraduate studies.	3.47	1.135
Q5	The Foundation Year enhances students' research, writing, and analytical skills.	3.63	1.051
Q6	The Foundation Year positively impacts students' confidence in their academic abilities.	3.71	1.095

Grand Mean	3.60	1.09
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Table (3) shows that the overall average of the three statements is 3.60, with a standard deviation of 1.09. The mean value is higher than 3.00, which is the middle point of the Likert scale used to collect the data. This implies that most participants agreed with the statements, reflecting their confidence in the Foundation Year’s capacity to improve students’ academic performance, research, writing, and analytical abilities, as well as positively impact their self- confidence in their academic skills. Additionally, the standard deviations for all three statements are relatively small, suggesting that the responses are tightly grouped around the mean. This demonstrates a general agreement among participants about the positive impacts of the Foundation Year program.

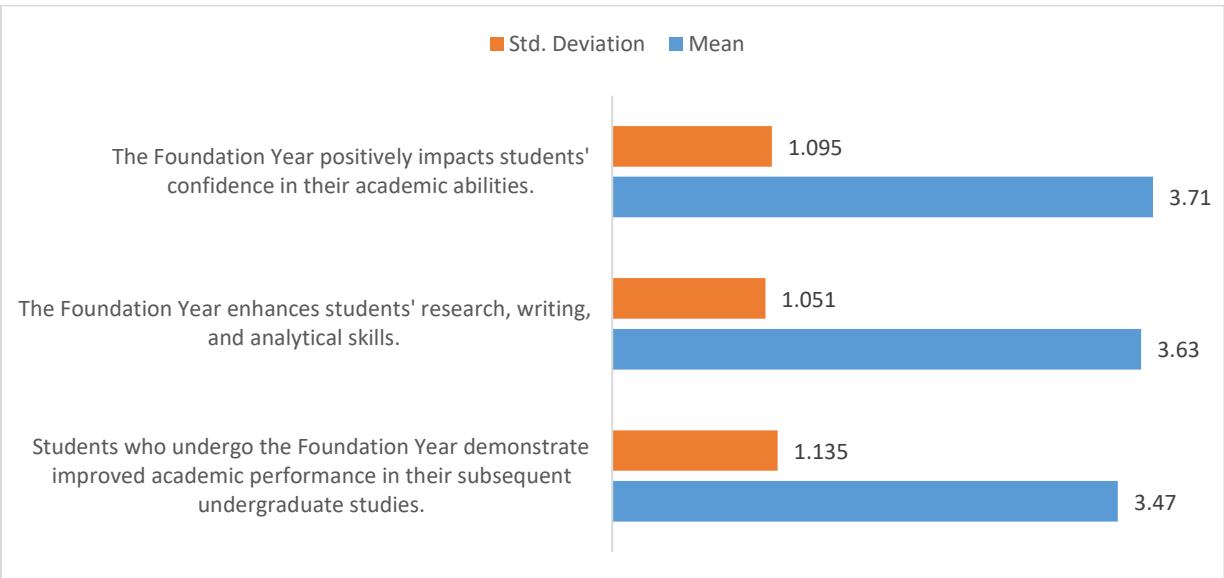


Figure 2. The Results of Perception of Lecturers and Administrators toward the Relationship Between The Implementation of The Foundation Year and Students' Academic Performance

Table 4. The Results of Perception of Lecturers and Administrators toward the challenges for implementing the Foundation Year N=107

		Mean	Std. Deviation
Q7	The implementation of the Foundation Year Policy faces challenges related to limited resources and infrastructure availability.	3.91	1.024
Q8	Faculty training and support pose challenges to the effective implementation of the Foundation Year Policy.	3.65	.870
Q9	Students encounter difficulties in adapting to the demands of the Foundation Year curriculum.	3.77	.896
Q10	The Foundation Year Policy faces challenges in terms of stakeholder coordination and collaboration.	3.66	1.081
Q11	Limited awareness and understanding of the Foundation Year Policy pose challenges to its successful implementation	3.85	1.062
	Grand Mean	3.77	0.98

Table (4) indicates that the grand mean of five statements scored up 3.77 with SD 0.98. The mean is higher than 3.00, which is the midpoint of the Likert scale that was used to collect the data. This suggests that most respondents agreed with the statements, i.e., they believe that the Foundation Year Policy would face challenges related to limited resources and infrastructure availability, faculty training and support, student adaptation to the demands of the curriculum, stakeholder coordination and collaboration, and limited awareness and understanding of the policy. The standard deviation for all five statements is relatively low, which suggests that the data is clustered close to the mean. This means that there is a general consensus among respondents about the challenges of implementing the Foundation Year Policy.

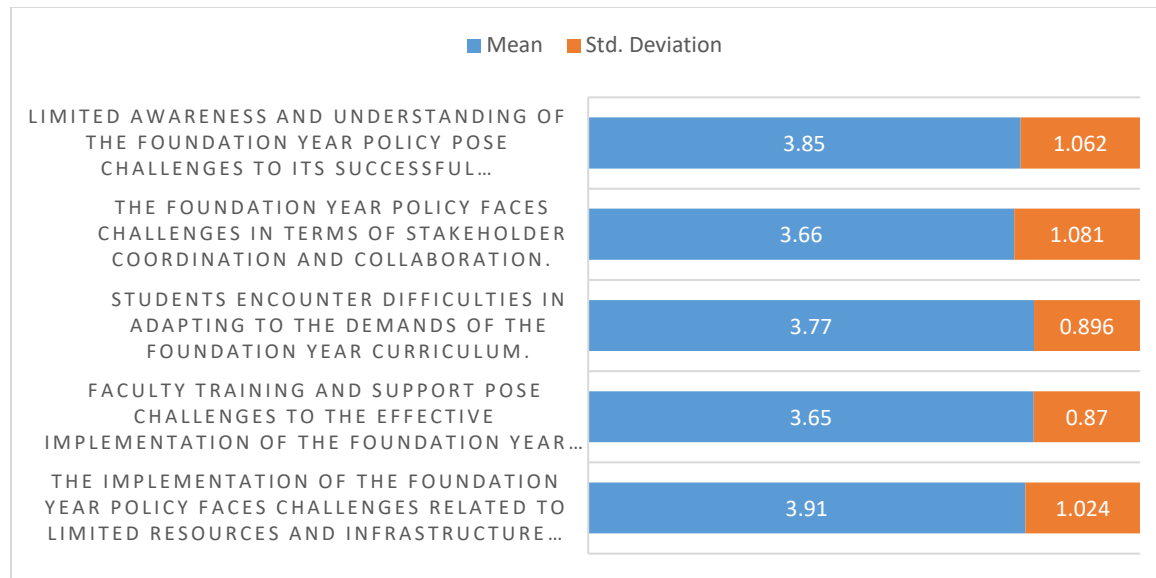


Figure 3. The Results of Perception of Lecturers and Administrators toward the challenges for implementing the Foundation Year.

Table 4, Results of Mann-Whitney Test for the Study Variables

		Ranks		
Variables		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Curriculum	Lecturer	73	54.84	4003.00
	Administrator	34	52.21	1775.00
	Total	107		
Student Performance	Lecturer	73	53.58	3911.00
	Administrator	34	54.91	1867.00
	Total	107		
Challenges	Lecturer	73	51.24	3740.50
	Administrator	34	59.93	2037.50
	Total	107		

Table 4. reveals the rankings of lecturers and administrators on the three variables of the study : curriculum, student performance, and challenges. The rankings are based on a survey of 107 people, and the mean rank and sum of ranks are also shown.

Curriculum

Lecturers have a higher mean rank (54.84) than administrators (52.21) on the curriculum variable , which suggests that they are perceived as having a better understanding of and being more involved in the development and implementation of the curriculum. This may be due to the fact that lecturers are typically more directly involved in teaching the curriculum than administrators.

Student Performance

Administrators have a higher mean rank (55.48) than lecturers (52.60) on the student performance variable , which suggests that they are perceived as having a better understanding of and being more involved in assessing and monitoring student performance. This may be due to the fact that administrators are typically more involved in developing and implementing assessment policies and procedures.

Challenges

Administrators have a higher mean rank (59.93) than lecturers (51.24) on the challenges variable , which suggests that they are perceived as being more aware of and involved in addressing the challenges associated with implementing the Foundation Year program. This may be due to the fact that administrators are typically responsible for the overall planning and implementation of the program.

Discussion of Findings

The study aimed to explore the perception of lecturers and administrators regarding the effectiveness of the Foundation Year curriculum in enhancing higher education quality, the relationship between the implementation of the Foundation Year policy and students' academic performance, and the challenges associated with implementing the Foundation Year program.

In relation to the first objective, the findings indicated that the respondents generally agreed with the statements assessing the effectiveness of the Foundation Year curriculum. The grand mean of 3.59, which was above the midpoint of the Likert scale, suggests that the majority of participants believed that the curriculum adequately addressed the educational needs and demands of students, effectively integrated practical applications with theoretical knowledge, and prepared students for further academic studies in their respective disciplines. The relatively low standard deviation indicated a consensus among the respondents, highlighting their positive perception of the quality of the Foundation Year curriculum.

Regarding the second objective, the results showed that the participants had a favorable perception of the relationship between the implementation of the Foundation Year policy and students' academic performance. The overall average score of 3.60, above the midpoint of the Likert scale, indicated agreement with the statements assessing the program's impact on enhancing academic performance, research skills, writing abilities, analytical capabilities, and self-confidence in academic skills. The small standard deviations for all statements suggested a high level of agreement among the participants, reinforcing the positive impacts of the Foundation Year program.

In terms of the third objective, the study explored the challenges associated with implementing the Foundation Year program. The findings revealed that the respondents perceived several challenges, including limited resources and infrastructure availability, faculty training and support, student adaptation to the demands of the curriculum, stakeholder coordination and collaboration, and limited awareness and understanding of the policy. The grand mean of 3.77, above the midpoint of the Likert scale, indicated agreement with the challenges identified. The relatively low standard deviation implied a consensus among the respondents regarding these implementation challenges.

Conclusion

The study indicates that the Foundation Year curriculum is generally perceived as effective in enhancing the standard of higher education. The majority of those surveyed believed the program is appropriate to students' educational needs and expectations, skillfully integrating practical applications with theoretical understanding, and preparing students for future academic endeavors. The program is also credited with positively impacting students' academic performance, research capabilities, writing proficiency, analytical skills, and confidence in academic competencies. However, potential obstacles to the implementation of the Foundation Year include constraints in resources and infrastructure, faculty training and support, student adjustment, and collaboration among stakeholders. The participants revealed differing perceptions of lecturers and administrators in terms of curriculum development, student performance, and addressing challenges. Lecturers, with an average rank of 54.84, are viewed as having a superior comprehension and involvement in curriculum development. Conversely, administrators are seen as having a better understanding of student performance and the challenges of implementing the Foundation Year program, with average ranks of 55.48 and 59.93 respectively. This could be due to their roles in formulating assessment policies and overall program planning.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made for policymakers and educational institutions to further enhance the effectiveness of the

Foundation Year program, address the identified challenges, and improve the overall quality of higher education:

1. Provide resources and infrastructure to support the Foundation Year program. This includes providing dedicated classrooms, and other facilities, as well as hiring additional staff to provide academic support and counseling to students.
2. Invest in faculty training and development to ensure that they are equipped to deliver the Foundation Year curriculum effectively. This includes providing training on innovative teaching and learning methods, as well as on the specific needs of Foundation Year students.
3. Develop and implement strategies to help students adapt to the demands of the Foundation Year curriculum. This may include providing additional academic support services, such as tutoring and mentoring, as well as helping students to develop their time management and study skills.
4. Improve stakeholder coordination and collaboration to ensure that the Foundation Year program is implemented effectively. This may involve establishing regular communication channels between lecturers, administrators, and students, as well as developing mechanisms to collect and feedback on the program.
5. Raise awareness and understanding of the Foundation Year policy among stakeholders, including students, parents, and the wider community. This can be done through information campaigns and workshops.

Conflict Interest

The author declares that the paper was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial interest. Thus, no competing interests exist.

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