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PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS ON ACADEMIC TRACKING PRACTICES AND ITS IMPACT ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AT OMAN

Dr. Sangeetha Natarajan
Business Studies Department, Nizwa College of Technology
Email: sangeetha.natarajan@nct.edu.om
Rahma Modaffar AL-Owimri
Email: s26j1543@nct.edu.om
Buthaina Khalifa AL-Aghbari
Email: s21j15163@nct.edu.om
Haneen Khalifa AL-Sinani
Email: s21j1527@nct.edu.om
Kawther Issa AL-Tobi
Email: s21j1542@nct.edu.om
Business Studies Department, Nizwa College of Technology

ABSTRACT

Academic tracking aids student to realize the way to develop the abilities and skills to the maximum possible extent within the given time duration, removing the obstacles in their way, eliminating problems that student's face and support them to attain career goals. Students' perception of academic tracking has a strong influence on the development of academic identity, which in turn results in greater academic achievement. Hence an attempt is made to study the perception of students on existing academic tracking practices and how it impacts the student's academic achievement at College of Technology (COTs) at Oman. The objectives of the present research are to examine the existing academic tracking system at College of Technology's, to study the student's perception on the existing academic tracking system and to study the influence of academic tracking on student's greater academic achievement. Structured questionnaire was built and a survey was conducted at a College of Technology covering all the academic departments say English Language Centre, Business studies, Information Technology, Engineering department and all the four levels of education namely Diploma year 1 and 2, Advance Diploma and Bachelorate. The collected data were analyzed using Summary statistics and percentage analysis, Likert's five-point scaling technique with mean analysis, Chi Square analysis and the results were drawn out, based on which findings, recommendations and conclusions were sought.

KEYWORDS: Academic Tracking, Academic achievement

1. OVERVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION'S (HEIS) IN OMAN:

Government of Oman takes great initiative in education sector to combat the rate of illiteracy. Education is provided free of charge up to the level of secondary education. In 1970 there were only three formal schools with 900 students in the whole country. Oman's national educational program expanded rapidly during the 1970s and the 1980s. In 2006–2007 about 560,000 students attended 1053 public schools. The number of students in private schools is about 65,000. Extensive programs were planned and as a result Sultan Qaboos University was found in the year 1986 with around 13,500

in 2006.[1] According to Human Development Report (2006) the literacy rate of adults was up by 31.4% when compared to previous year statistics. For the same period, the youth literacy rate increased from 85.6 % to 97.3%[2].

The Omani higher education system is relatively young, as the first public university in Oman, Sultan Qaboos University was found in 1986. But from then Oman's Ministry of Higher Education started its initiatives in HEIs and as of now it administers six Colleges of Applied Sciences, seven Colleges of Technology's. Ministry of Health runs a number of health institutes to prepare assisting medical staff like nurses, paramedics and pharmacists. In addition the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs sanctioned the College of Sharia Sciences and the Central Bank of Oman sanctioned the College of Banking and Financial Studies.(Royal Decree No. 62/2007). Technical education is one of the oldest academic systems in Oman. It was created in 1984 through the establishment of Oman Technical Industrial College. Technical education first began with an initial student enrollment of 65 male and female students. Now, the annual average number of students is10,000 male and female students who graduated with a General Education Diploma, accounting for 38% of all students enrolled under government coverage in Oman. The number of enrolled students in all the seven colleges of technology is 40,000 male and female students. In the year 2015-2016 the number of graduates accounted to around 5485 across all disciplines.(Deepa Hasan, 2016)[3]

2. ACADEMIC TRACKING AT COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY:

Years of study are the most beautiful years of life if invested properly. Teaching and learning at college develop the reasoning skills needed to make life decisions, self-discipline, study habits and cooperative behaviors that can be applied to career projects and tasks. Colleges of Technology (COT) offers strong and flexible academic system based on credit hours with multi-level qualifications that begin from Foundation Year, Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Bachelor's Degree. Each level requires specific grade that is required to proceed to higher levels**.** This system encourages students and motivates them to work harder to achieve a higher grade that gives them a chance to move to the next level of their studies. COTs offer various streams of education including Engineering, Business Studies, Information Technology, applied science etc. that is designed to meet the national labor market needs of Omani professionals. Academics at COT's are being tracked by:

- Standardized test scores: that includes quizzes, class activities and participation, assignment, exams and mini project.
- Behavior and discipline: that comprises advisory role, counseling and probation systems.
- Attendance monitoring system and auto generation of absence warning notification to students.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The adherence to the rules and regulations of the college, whether educational or administrative, helps the students to understand his duties and responsibilities as well as his rights that help to achieve his academic goals. Academic tracking aids each and every student to realize the way for developing his/her abilities, skills to the maximum possible extent within the given time duration, removing the obstacles that stand in his/her way by eliminating the problems that student's face, thereby reduces the frustration and strengthen the accessibility to achieve their career goals[4]. Positive academic identity is associated with better grades, higher motivation, and greater classroom participation. Students' perception of academic tracking has a strong influence on the development of academic identity, which in turn results in greater academic achievement. Hence an attempt is made to study the perception of students on existing academic tracking practices and how it impacts the student's greater academic achievement.

As an initiative the present study was conducted at a College of Technology, committed to promoting competitive graduates and professional programs that support interdisciplinary inquiry, intellectual development and skill acquisition. Every department and administrative unit at the college is committed to student success. Through a series of programs and initiatives, thecollege strives to create a positive teaching and learning environment designed to engage students and enrich all aspects of the student experience. All academic programs are designed to meet the needs of learners. It offers academically motivated students extraordinary opportunities to develop their thinking, reasoning, and analytic skills, regardless of specialization. The college encourages interaction among students and faculty through small classes and

[1] http://www.squ.edu.om/
[2] https://mohe.gov.om/InnerPage.aspx?
[3] Deeba Hasan, More Omani females than males in college this year, September 4, 2016, deeba @ timesofoman .com
[4] Samuel Kutty, Need for skilled national workforce,Oman Observer June 14,2019

unique on-campus opportunities. Presently it works with Business studies, Information Technology, Engineering departments and English Language center with around 5150 enrolled students.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

Academic tracking's has an impact on student's Cumulative Grade Point Average(CGPA) which in turn influences the level of motivation of students, increases effort and thereby the level of satisfaction. These mutually benefit students and the academic achievement of the college. Hence the present study tries to examine: how the academic tracking system functions at Colleges of Technology? What impact the present academic tracking system of COT has created in the minds of the students? Whether the academic tracking system results on greater academic achievement?

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To know the existing academic tracking system for students at Colleges of Technology at Oman.
2. To understand the student's perception on the existing academic tracking system at College of Technology at Oman.
3. To study the influence of academic tracking on student's greater academic achievement.

6. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Schwarzwald, J., and Cohen, S. (1982) in their studies on "Relationship between academic tracking and the degree of interethnic acceptance" examined the relationship between academic tracking and degree of cross-ethnic acceptance in integrated homeroom classes. John Nicholls and Ping Chung Cheung (1989) in their studies on "individual differences in academic motivation" argued that research on academic motivation should help us reflect on the problems occasioned by the preoccupation, characteristic of our society, with one's ability relative to that of others. Robert J. Valler and Luc G. Pelletier(1992) conducted a study on, "The Academic Motivation Scale: A Measure of Intrinsic, Extrinsic, and A motivation in Education" and examined a new measure of motivation toward education has been developed in French, namely the Echelle de Motivation en Education (EME). The EME is based on the tenets of self-determination theory and is composed of 28 items subdivided into seven sub-scales assessing three types of intrinsic motivation (intrinsic motivation to know, to accomplish things, and to experience stimulation), three types of extrinsic motivation (external, introjected, and identified regulation), and a motivation.

Arja Veerman & Else Veldhuis-Diermanse(2001), in their studies on "Collaborative learning through computer-mediated communication in academic education" assessed collaborative learning facilitated by computer- mediated communication (CMC) systems in academic education. Demmert, William G., Jr.; Towner, John C (2003) in their studies on" A Review of the Research Literature on the Influences of Culturally Based Education on the Academic Performance of Native American Students" found out there is a widespread firm belief among Native American communities and among professional Native educators that meaningful educational experiences require an appropriate language and cultural context. Sahlgrenska Academy (2003) conducted a study on "Academic nursing education guidelines: Tool for bridging the gap between theory, research and practice". The aim of the present study was to develop educational guidelines to be used as a tool for the integration of theory, research and practice to ensure that nursing knowledge and practical skills form the basis of academic tracking in nursing education.

Mieke Van Houtte (2004),in his study on, "Tracking Effects on School Achievement: A Quantitative Explanation in Terms of the Academic Culture of School Staff" found out that research into educational stratification has consistently demonstrated an effect of tracking on pupils' achievement. William Carbonaro (2005) in his study on "Tracking, Students' Effort, and Academic Achievement" examined links between students' effort, tracking, and students' achievement. Selcuk R. Sirin(2005), in their studies on "Socioeconomic Status and Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analytic Review of Research" examined meta-analysis reviewed the literature on socioeconomic status (SES) and academic achievement in journal articles published between 1990 and 2000. ONATHAN COHEN (2006), in his study on " Social, Emotional, Ethical, and Academic Education: Creating a Climate for Learning, Participation in Democracy, and Well-Being" argues that the goals of education need to be reframed to prioritize not only academic learning, but also social, emotional, and ethical competencies.

Mary R. Lea & Brian V. Street(2006) in their studies on "Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach" addresses the issue of student writing in higher education.Karen K.L.Moon (2008) ,conducted the study on "Academic tracking on students intelligence". Gheorghita M. Faitar & Silviu L. Faitar (2009), conducted a study on "The influence of ability tracking on the performances of minority learners" and examined the development of an equally

beneficial and efficient teaching and learning system implies the application of multiple educational theories and methods. Aine MacNamara , Dave Collins , Richard Bailey , Martin Toms , Paul Ford & Gemma Pearce (2009) in their studies on "The educational benefits claimed for physical education and school sport: an academic review" critically examines the theoretical and empirical bases of claims made for the educational benefits of physical education and school sport (PESS).

Junnifer Lucko, (2011) in his studies on "Tracking Identity: Academic Performance and Ethnic Identity among Ecuadorian Immigrant Teenagers in Madrid" argues that academic tracking plays a pivotal role in the trajectory of students' emergent ethnic identity. Virginia P. Collier,(2012), in her study on "Research on Academic Achievement in a Second Language" examined how to expand the current theoretical base in second language acquisition. Erika Leicht (2013), in her study on "Vanderbilt University Board of Trust: "Effects of Different Types of Educational Tracking on Achievement and Achievement Variance" aims to determine whether different types of educational tracking have different effects on students' academic achievement. Anna K. Chmielewski, Hanna Dumont and Ulrich Trautwein (2013), studied on "Tracking Effects Depend on Tracking Type: An International Comparison of Students' Mathematics Self-Concept" with objective to examine how different types of tracking between - school streaming, within-school streaming, and course-by-course tracking—shape students' mathematics self-concept.

Erika Leicht(2013), in his study " Effects of Different Types of Educational Tracking on Achievement and Achievement Variance" aimed to determine whether different types of educational tracking have different effects on students' academic achievement. Bommi Lee (2013), in his study on , "The influence of school tracking systems on educational expectations: a comparative study of Austria and Italy" examined that school tracking is usually criticised as a mechanism for social and cultural reproduction. Jeroen Lavrijsen & Ides Nicaise (2014), in their studies on" Educational tracking, inequality and performance. New evidence using differences-in-differences" examined the effects of early tracking on achievement by combining a diff-in- diff design with data from an array of recent waves of student assessments. Karin Guill, Oliver Ludtke and Olaf Koller (2016), studied on " Academic tracking is related to gains in students' intelligence over four years: Evidence from a propensity score matching study", with objectives to investigate the effect of academic tracking at German school system.

Chao Fu & Nirav Mehta (2016), in their study on " Ability Tracking, School and Parental Effort, and Student Achievement: A Structural Model and Estimation" developed and estimated an equilibrium model of ability tracking in which schools decide how to allocate students into ability tracks and choose track specific teacher effort; parents choose effort in response. JILL BARSHAY "MRS (2016) conducted a study on ,The Upside of Academic Tracking" and examined tracking, the practice of putting a small group of higher achieving students into separate advanced or honors classes, isn't popular with progressive educators.Alan E. Bayer & Jeffrey E. Dutton(2016) in their studies on 'Career Age and Research-Professional Activities of Academic Scientists" used six alternative theoretical models to determine the relationship between age and several performance and activity variables for a national sample of doctorate faculty members in seven selected physical science, engineering, biological science, and social science fields. Ennifer Acosta, Celia Garrett, Nia Moore and Victoria Prince, et al (2017), in their studies "Schooling and Parenting: Implications for Students' Academic Identity, observed that students' perceptions of teachers are important for academic identity development and school interventions. This study adds to the literature on how tracking contributes to disparities in students' achievement outcomes.

Micheal Becker and Marko Newmann (2017) in his article on, Recent Developments in School Tracking Practices in Germany: An Overview and Outlook on Future Trends observed several German states have changed their tracking practices and now differ in the extent to which they implement explicit tracking. The paper presented an overview of the specific structures of and changes in tracking practices and explores how the system in Germany can be described, both historically and currently. It also gives an outlook on the political and educational implications of these changes. Emma Garcia and Elaine Weiss(2017) in his article titled,Education inequalities at the school starting gate, Gaps, trends, and strategies to address them, examined it is increasingly apparent that performance gaps by social class take root in the earliest years of children's lives and fail to narrow in the years that follow. That is, children who start behind stay behind and are rarely able to make up the lost ground. Katte Barington(2018) in her article titled,The Pros and Cons of Tracking in Schools stated Tracking was once the standard of public education in the United States but today there is a great deal of controversy regarding its relevance and added consider the pros and cons of tracking to decide whether it might be a good option for your child.

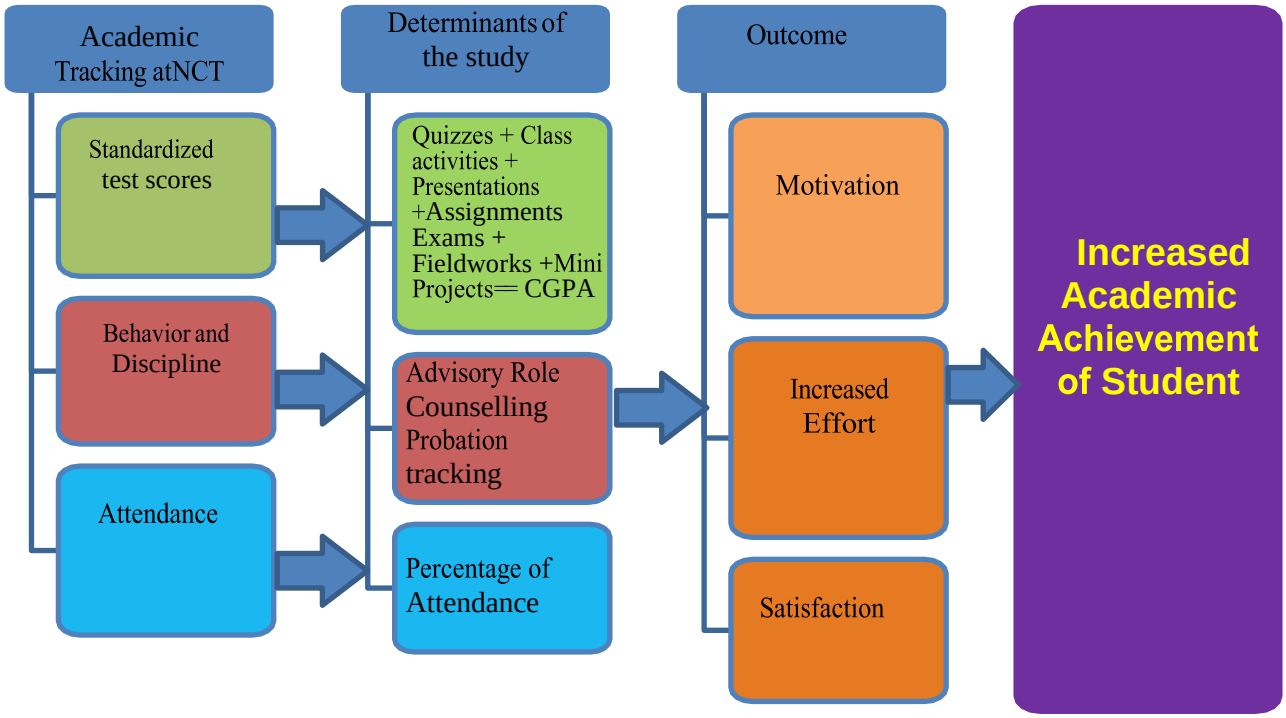

Figure 01: Conceptual Framework

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is descriptive in nature as the present research, studies the existing academic tracking system of students at a College of Technology, their perception on academic tracking system and its impact on student's academic achievements. The present research uses both types of data namely primary and secondary data. Structured questionnaire is used for collecting data that includes the profile of the respondents and the questions that assess the defined objectives. Determinants influencing the study were tested for its reliability using Cronbach's Alpha test where the respective scores are greater than seven. Hence the validity of the determinants was proved. Population of the present study includes all currently enrolled in all academic departments say ELC, IT, Engineering and BSD, N = 4674. The sample was proportionately selected from different departments of a particular COT. The quota fixed for the present study is 2 % from each department covering all four levels say diploma year 1 and 2, Advance diploma and Bachelorate. Thereby Proportionate Quota sampling is adopted in the present research study. The collected data was analyzed using Summary statistics and percentage analysis, Likert's five-point scaling technique with mean analysis, Chi Square analysis for testing the association between Gender, Level of Education and various determinants considered for the study.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Duration of study is limited to a period of twelve weeks only. Hence limited samples can only be collected. Availability of published resources is limited. It is difficult to find sources in specific related to our topic. Biased responses may have an influence on the validity of the data collected and analyzed.

9. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS:

9.1 Demographic profile

Demographic profile of the respondents indicates an equal number of male and female respondents participated in the survey and about 43 % are between 19 to 20 years of age. Majority of respondents have secured 3.1 to 3.6 CGPA.

9.2 Results of summary statistics

indicate that 78.3 % of respondents agreed that tracking system assess the performance of students and 71.7 % of the respondents are aware of the academic tracking system and 84.8% are aware of the standardized tests conducted at

COTs in the form of Quizzes. Among the standardized tests, around 67.4% are aware of the Class activities, 80.4 % are aware of Presentations, 67.4% about Written Assignments, 78.3 % about Midterm and final exams, 63 % about Mini project field work study. Majority of the respondents (71.7 %) are aware of academic tracking of behavior and Discipline is by way of advising by staff members and equal number of students (52 %) are aware of Counseling given to students as a disciplinary measure. Nearly 56% of the respondents are aware of probation tracking system provided to students of COTs. Majority of respondents are aware of the attendance tracking and monitoring system, absence warning notice being administered among students of COTs (84 %).

9.3 Likert scaling technique

indicates that respondents strongly agreed that academic tracking system at COTs motivates the students(4.21), academic tracking system make the students understand his duties and responsibilities(4.36), academic tracking system influences the students to put increased effort in learning process(4.23), academic tracking system creates positive attitude among students(4.74), academic tracking system at COTs facilitates smooth process of teaching and learning(3.89), academic tracking system is considered important for slow learners and advance learners(4.71), overall quality of tracking system at COT is good (4.566).In all the above stated determinants the mean value is greater than 3 hence proves a favourable response. But in assessing determinants like; academic tracking system is taken by students by force (4.5), academic tracking system makes students more active and participative in teaching learning (2.87), Academic tracking system prepares students to take greater responsibilities (2.56), the mean value is less than 3, stating an unfavourable response in the mentioned parameters. In case of determinants like academic tracking system results in securing better CGPA (2.98) and academic tracking system aids increased academic achievement (3.34) it is neither favorable nor unfavorable.

9.4 Testing of Hypothesis using Chi-square analysis:

Ho – There is no association between Gender and the various determinants considered for the study.
Ha- There is association between Gender and the various determinants considered for the study.

Table 01: Association of Gender and the determinants of Academic Tracking

GENDER		Academic tracking system motivates the students of COT					Total
		SA	A	N	DA	SDA	
Gender	male	8	22	12	2	2	46
	female	6	32	8	0	0	46
Total		14	54	20	2	2	92
		Make the students understand his duties and responsibilities					
		SA	A	N	DA		Total
Gender	male	16	16	6	8		46
	female	16	14	12	4		46
Total		32	30	18	12		92
		Influences the students to put increased effort in learning process					
		SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Total
Gender	male	10	18	8	8	2	46
	female	12	16	12	4	2	46
Total		22	34	20	12	4	92
		Creates positive attitude among students					
		SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Total
Gender	male	12	16	12	4	2	46
	female	6	24	12	4	0	46
Total		18	40	24	8	2	92
		Facilitates smooth process of teaching and learning					
		SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Total
Gender	male	10	14	10	6	6	46

	female	6	20	12	6	2	46
Total		16	34	22	12	8	92
		Makes students more active and participative in teaching learning					
		SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Total
Gender	male	10	14	8	12	2	46
	female	4	20	12	4	6	46
Total		14	34	20	16	8	92
		Tracking system results in Securing better CGPA					
		SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Total
Gender	male	14	18	8	6	0	46
	female	8	16	16	4	2	46
Total		22	34	24	10	2	92
		Tracking system aids increased academic achievement					
		SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Total
Gender	male	12	18	14	2	0	46
	female	18	16	8	2	2	46
Total		30	34	22	4	2	92

The results of the above table show that there is no association between Gender and the listed factors say: Academic tracking system motivates the students of COTs (P=0.003), Influences the students to put increased effort in learning process (P=0.002), Makes students more active and participative in teaching learning (P=0.001), Tracking system results in Securing better CGPA (P=0.003) as the p value is less than Alpha statistics at 5 % level of significance, hence rejecting Null hypothesis. Other variables shows an association between Gender and selected determinants.

Ho – There is no association between Level of Education and the various determinants considered for the study
Ha- There is association between Level of Education and the various determinants considered for the study.

Table 02: Association of Level of Education and the determinants of Academic Tracking

	Academic tracking system motivates the students					Total
Level of education	SA	A	N	DA	SDA	
Foundation	4	10	10	2	2	28
Diploma First year	4	12	4	0	0	20
Diploma Second year	4	16	2	0	0	22
Advanced diploma	0	10	2	0	0	12
Bachelorate	2	6	2	0	0	10
	Make the students understand his duties and responsibilities					
	SA	A	N	DA		Total
Foundation	10	6	4	8		28
Diploma First year	2	4	10	4		20
Diploma Second year	10	10	2	0		22
Advanced diploma	2	10	0	0		12
Bachelorate	8	0	2	0		10
Total	32	30	18	12		92
	Influences the students to put increased effort in learning process					
	SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Total
Foundation	6	10	2	8	2	28
Diploma First year	6	8	2	2	2	20
Diploma Second year	4	8	8	2	0	22
Advanced diploma	4	2	6	0	0	12
Bachelorate	2	6	2	0	0	10

Total	22	34	20	12	4	92
	Creates positive attitude among students					
	SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Total
Foundation	8	12	4	2	2	28
Diploma First year	4	8	8	0	0	20
Diploma Second year	2	10	4	6	0	22
Advanced diploma	2	6	4	0	0	12
Bachelorate	2	4	4	0	0	10
Total	18	40	24	8	2	92
	Facilitates smooth process of teaching and learning					
	SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Total
Foundation	8	8	6	0	6	28
Diploma First year	4	4	2	8	2	20
Diploma Second year	2	12	6	2	0	22
Advanced diploma	0	8	4	0	0	12
Bachelorate	2	2	4	2	0	10
Total	16	34	22	12	8	92
	Makes students more active and participative in teaching learning					
	SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Total
Foundation	6	6	6	8	2	28
Diploma First year	0	8	4	4	4	20
Diploma Second year	2	14	2	2	2	22
Advanced diploma	2	2	6	2	0	12
Bachelorate	4	4	2	0	0	10
Total	14	34	20	16	8	92
	Tracking system results in Securing better CGPA					
	SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Total
Foundation	10	10	4	4	0	28
Diploma First year	4	8	6	2	0	20
Diploma Second year	2	10	6	2	2	22
Advanced diploma	2	4	4	2	0	12
Bachelorate	4	2	4	0	0	10
Total	22	34	24	10	2	92
	Tracking system aids increased academic achievement					
	SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Total
Foundation	6	12	8	2	0	28
Diploma First year	6	6	6	2	0	20
Diploma Second year	14	4	2	0	2	22
Advanced diploma	2	8	2	0	0	12
Bachelorate	2	4	4	0	0	10
Total	30	34	22	4	2	92

The results of the above table shows that there is no association between Level of Education and the listed factors say: Academic tracking system at COTs motivates the students (P=0.003), Make the students understand his duties and responsibilities (P= 0.001), Influences the students to put increased effort in learning process(P= 0.001), Tracking system results in Securing better CGPA (P=0.003), Tracking system aids increased academic achievement (P=0.0002) as the p value is less than Alpha statistics at 5 % level of significance hence rejecting Null hypothesis. With respect to other variables the results shows an association between Level of Education and selected determinants.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The adherence to the rules and regulations of the college, whether educational or administrative, helps the student to understand his duties and responsibilities as well as his rights that help to achieve his academic goals. Academic tracking aids each and every student to realize the way for developing his/her abilities, skills to the maximum possible extent within the given time duration, removing the obstacles that stand in his/her way by eliminating the problems that student's face and strengthen the accessibility to achieve their career goals. Hence the present study examines the existing academic tracking system for students at COTs tries to understand the student's perception on the existing academic tracking system at COTsand studied the influence of academic tracking on student's greater academic achievement. With this objective a survey was conducted among all the four academic departments covering all the four levels with duly structured questionnaire, whereby the collected data was analyzed with Summary statistics, Likert five-point analysis, percentage analysis and Chi square technique and the results were presented with the help of tables. Based on findings following recommendation were suggested:

Timely counseling will help incorporate valuable lessons in daily life of the students. Special sessions on career guidance, advising students on selection of courses can be a part of coaching. It's important to prepare them for life after collegiate education. Occasionally students have to undergo proper guidance on how to deal with psychological problems that may impact their studies badly. Through these sessions, students might develop problem-solving skills, which to an extent help them deal with issues in their way of life. Students should be advised on how to cope with divergent critical issues they might encounter during collegiate life. Although countless measures are being practiced at COTs for slow learners, probation student's involvement and commitment is observed to be poor. Coordination with career guidance and counseling with the involvement of stakeholders in coordination might strengthen the tracking system. Students have to be inculcated that academic tracking system aids their betterment, growth and progression in education. Management can think on organizing motivational programs that would impart positive attitude chiefly among slow learners. A student has to be oriented on the academic tracking system being practiced to help them understand the rules of that system and COTs from their end should ensure that an easy-to-follow user friendly academic tracking system is being administered to sustain long-term efficiency.

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