

Social, Economic and Academic Characteristics of Students on Academic Probation at Sultan Qaboos University: (A Field Study)

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims at monitoring the demographic, social, economic and academic characteristics of the students on academic probation at Sultan Qaboos University. The data were collected from participants selected based on a non-probabilistic sampling. The study was conducted on university students more than two-thirds of whom are unmarried male bachelors studying at the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Economics and Political Science. The results of the study indicated that most of the students under study were living in private and shared houses outside the University, and those who live on campus are not satisfied with the quality of housing. Most of them came from households characterized by monthly incomes of medium and low, where a low percentage of them are economically active, i.e., currently working, and that their monthly income is not enough to meet their own expenses and living.

Keywords: Academic probation, demographic characteristics, socio-economic characteristics, academic characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

There is a consensus in local, social, and educational literature, prepared in the Sultanate of Oman, on the intensity of reflections emerged from the issue of further expansion in the admission of students at Sultan Qaboos University in recent decades. The concerns have been mainly about high number of students, their increasing needs and diversity, as well as their academic, social, economic and psychological problems. These problems are caused by housing, transportation and commuting to and from the University campus. Moreover, the problems regarding the process of academic guidance and study habits, as well as those related to the issue of adaptation and integration of students into University life as well as the

difficulties in choosing specialization have caused a number of special negative effects on the students' conditions and their ability to compete with each other and enhance their achievement (Al-Bahrani & Al-Khawaja, 2008, and Al-Manizel, 1999). These problems have been along with placing many students on the so-called academic probation at the University of Sultan Qaboos since the beginning of the 1990s and have created more prominent features of this phenomenon at the beginning of the third millennium. The figures issued by the Department of Admission and Registration at the University indicate that there has been a steady increase in the number of students on academic probation, that is, 1461 students during the period 2012-2014. This makes 8.8% of the total number of students officially enrolled in the University. The available indicators confirm that most of these students are on no probation and further indicate the possibility of expanding the phenomenon of placing on academic probation in the near future unless effective measures are developed to reduce and address the causes (Deanship of Admission and Registration, Sultan Qaboos University, 2017).

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From a structural standpoint, human beings are ultimately subject to social and cultural processes taking place within the family and their social environment. They can only reproduce the circumstances and considerations. It is only a net product of a variety of other patterns surrounding the student, particularly, since the family has previously been the first and most important format that controls the behavior of individuals. It should be noted in this regard that the transformations experienced by the societies and their associated changes, such as the increase in the division of labor and the emergence of specialization, and the accompanying complexity and development of production systems and relations, have strengthened the family institution's transition to a more specialized institution preserving its roles and functions (Al-Khouli, 2008: 57) Its traditional functions and previously used to control the behavior of its elements, and the decline of these roles in favor of the institution and other formats.

The nature of the family structures and the other patterns surrounding the students as well as their social and cultural characteristics and their different circumstances are important, in this regard, as specific factors for the students' performance and success. On this basis, the present study focused on investigating and analyzing the aspects regarding the students' characteristics and their social, economic and academic backgrounds by taking into account that these characteristics may affect motives and incentives which have, in turn, a profound impact on their academic performance and their ability to compete with each other and enhance their achievement. Moreover, as the students are necessarily surrounded by these conditions and circumstances, the study meets such the requirements as the role and expectations of different social and economic circumstances.

In light of what is said earlier, this study is an attempt to cover a phenomenon characterized by a strong structure and the intensity of ambiguity that surrounds its

aspects. It includes many dimensions and overlapping aspects, and includes several reasons related to the low academic achievement of the students, dimensions and aspects that have not been so far studied thoroughly. Therefore, the importance of this study comes as one of the few studies that seeks to remove the ambiguity about the coverage of such academic phenomena from different perspectives, and tries to deepen the analysis of its characteristics, especially with regard to the students' conditions and their backgrounds as well as their different social, economic and demographic characteristics.

The most common models for interpreting students' incongruity with university life requirements and subsequent failures are the negative interaction between students on the one hand and the university environment on the other (Tinto, 1993). In addition to the interaction of some external factors such as economic or social ones, students' emotional and psychological characteristics contribute to their failure and to finish university life. The high drop-out rate has been due to the students' lack of compatibility with the requirements of university life. Bowker (1993) attributed the high levels of drop-out from university education to students' lack of congruence with university life and its requirements, their poor social integration with their peers, and their sense of low self-esteem.

Statement of the Problem

The information released by the relevant authorities confirms the relationship between students' characteristics as well as their different backgrounds on their being placed on academic probation. There are multitude of reasons and diverse factors leading to such problems (Planning and Statistics Department, Sultan Qaboos University, 2017). This, along with the importance of the phenomenon itself, and the accompanying complexity and composition of the shortages in previous studies, is a significant incentive in

conducting the current study. It is worth mentioning that by 'academic probation' it is meant a system under which the students are subject to being observed when their cumulative GPA falls below 2.0, when cumulative GPA is 2.0 or higher, but the current semester GPA falls below 1.0, and when the cumulative GPA is 2.0 or above, but the semester GPA to be below 2.0 for two consecutive semesters (Deanship of Admission and Registration, Sultan Qaboos University Undergraduate Academic Regulations, 2017). This study aims to identify the social, economic and academic characteristics of the students on academic probation and to thoroughly investigate the role of these aspects in the decline of their academic situation

Research Questions

In order to understand the depth and importance of the problem stated above, the following questions are addressed in the present study:

1. What are the social and economic characteristics of students under academic probation?
2. What are the academic characteristics of students under academic probation?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from several considerations, the most important of which is that it focuses mainly on investigating a specific academic dimension, i.e., the phenomenon of the occurrence of the students of Sultan Qaboos University under academic probation, and its relationship with the students' different social, economic and academic characteristics. The study is also significant in that it attempts to shed light on some characteristics of students' academic life and what can be done for the university students who may encounter such problems, i.e., the problems that may cause them lag behind others in their academic achievement. The implications of this study with respect to addressing these problems and thus raising the levels

of academic performance are so significant.

The most important point that distinguishes this study from similar ones is that it endeavors to remove shortcomings of previous local studies that examined this subject. In fact, there is no scientific study investigating the details of these academic facts and relating them to considerations regarding the students' conditions and their social, economic and academic characteristics in details, in spite of their vitality and depth of reflections. In light of the above, this study is one of the first specialized studies at the local level that focus its concern on the examination and analysis of the backgrounds of the students under academic probation along with monitoring their different characteristics.

Objectives of the Study

This study attempts to come up with a set of practical recommendations contributing to understanding the problem of university students' being placed on academic probation and to discuss the case with much precision and comprehensiveness. Specifically, this study seeks to determine the causes of students' academic probation at Sultan Qaboos University and to examine the characteristics of these students. There are also three minor aims addressed in this study.

1. Previewing the demographic characteristics of students on academic probation.
2. Examining the social and economic characteristics of students on academic probation.
3. Reviewing the academic characteristics of students on academic probation.

Theoretical Framework

The Vincent Tinto Model, developed in 1993, shows that lack of academic and social integration among students is the major cause for their academic failure. This model assumes that each student has distinctive personality characteristics, along with their own

backgrounds as well as the features of their families and previous preparations and school achievement, which contribute to a great extent in determining the ability to achieve and carry out their study and achieve their "academic integration". This model further focusses on the concept of social integration of students because of its significant roles in their success in completing their university life. The model asserts that the "student failure process" is an academic process; it is a "longitudinal" factor that requires sufficient time to reduce the students' performance and reach an academically critical situation which forces them to decide to quit university life.

Moreover, the model concentrates on students' failure to achieve their expectations because of what happens within the university regarding events and interactions of students among themselves, their social and economic backgrounds, the nature of their interactions with others on the campus (both formal and private), and considerations related to their different circumstances. These factors confirm that the failure of the students to actualize their expectations is as the result of the negative interaction between university students and university atmosphere, in addition to external circumstances and factors related to the students' life and different socio-economic characteristics (Farid & Abdel-Jaber, 2012).

Literature Review

The previous literature and related studies, which have examined the phenomenon of students on academic probation and their different determinants, reveal that an absence of a particular specific study which examining these dimensions in a general and integrated manners. There is also a series of studies that have investigated this topic in part. In order to present a general and clear picture of the results of these studies, they were classified as follows: first, local and Arabic studies, and secondly, foreign studies. Chronological order, i.e., from the oldest to the latest, has been taken into account. These studies

are reviewed carefully and their contents and results are presented here in the following sub-sections.

Local and Arab-world Studies

A study conducted by Sulaiman and Al-Manizel (1999), is entitled 'The degree of compatibility among the students of Sultan Qaboos University and its relation to the gender variables, the semester, the achievement rate and the residential location'. The study was done on a sample of 1226 male and female students. The results showed that personal compatibility increases by the end of the first year of university, and that students living on campus are more in harmony with the university environment and better in their academic performance than students living outside the campus, and that female students were more in line with university than their male counterparts.

Another study done by Al-Musharraf, 2000, entitled 'Problems of students of Sana'a University and their indicative needs: An exploratory study', conducted on a sample of 257 students, highlighted that Sana'a University students have obvious problems with academic guidance. In addition, it was found that a clear percentage of them suffer from psychological, social and family problems. The results of the study showed that students of Science suffered more than other those in the Humanities, and that their family problems usually had a negative impact on their academic achievement.

Al-Muhanna's study (2017) revealed the factors of academic failure among the students at intermediate schools. The sample was 300 students from the middle schools in Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam. The results of his study showed that there were intervening factors that cause academic failure, including: personal factors such as: psychological and physical illnesses, drug abuse, tension with supervisors, poor relationship between other students, and family problems such as divorce, polygamy, large family size, low socioeconomic status these students have been suffering from.

In the study done by Al-Omar (2002), titled, 'Academic achievement of enrichment program students and the effect of some family variables', there were 94 outstanding student participants studying in Kuwaiti middle schools. The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of social factors on the level of the students' academic achievement. The study concluded that there were no statistically significant differences between students' achievement according to the area of residence, their fathers' level of education, the number of family members, and monthly household income.

In the same context, Al-Ashri, Al-Azmi and Al-Ajmi (2004), studied factors leading to female students of the College of Basic Education in the State of Kuwait to receive academic warnings. This study was conducted on a sample of 83 female students at the Faculty of Basic Education. It found that social and health factors cause low level of academic achievement and leads to receiving academic warnings. On the other hand, the study showed the importance of the impact of variables such as gender and poor family conditions on academic warnings.

In his study titled 'The determinants of the academic performance of male and female students of Taibah University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia', Al Jabri (2009) explained that the appropriate economic conditions for students may contribute to improving their academic performance. The study also showed that the result of the secondary examination had a clear positive correlation with their university achievement. The study also went on to emphasize that the most important factors leading to the decline of students' academic achievement are frequent absence from lectures and weakness of the good memorization process, especially among the students studying physics and the Arabic language.

In his examination of the issue of *Equal Academic Opportunities at Kuwait University: The Impact of Social Variables*, Wafah (2011) reported a relationship between social groups and the issue of university

admission. He pointed out that the members of the higher professional groups are more connected and present at the university than members of the lower professional groups. It also showed that the success rate for students increases as we move up the parents' professional ladder and that the enrollment rate of students in the important scientific branches increases as we head towards the higher professional groups and vice versa. The study revealed that students with low academic achievement are mostly from the poor and that there is a direct correlation between the economic level of the family and the students' intelligence levels.

International Non-Arab Studies

In their study, Jaggia and Kelly-Hawke (1999) sought to investigate the factors that might affect the academic performance of university students by using the cumulative average as an indicator of their academic performance. They came up with a set of factors that strongly influenced students' performance, including those related to the curriculum and teaching method, the characteristics of the faculty members, the characteristics of the family such as the extent of stability and cohesion and the level of education of parents, and the characteristics of the students themselves. The study also showed that variables such as the length of time spent by the student at the university and the level of income of his family have no statistical relationship with his academic level.

In their article titled 'Factors Affecting Student Academic Success in Gateway Courses at Northern Arizona University' Benford and Gess-Newsome (2006) examined a sample of 719 students with non-passing grades in gateway courses. They found that such aspects as poor adaptation and stability, and incomplete academic preparedness, are the main factors leading to the low academic level of students. The study also showed that ethnic and cultural diversity among students, poor performance of faculty members and the

use of inefficient traditional teaching methods were important causes to reduce their academic level.

Mckenzi, and Schweitzer's (2001) study titled 'Who Succeeds at University? Factors Predicting Academic Performance in First Year Australian University Students' was conducted on a sample of 197 male and female students. The students' grades in the first semester played an important role in determining the cumulative GPA, while those in the second semester had nothing to do with these rates. The students with high self-efficacy exhibited higher tendency to get cumulative rates. Regular students and full-time students usually achieve higher cumulative rates. The study concluded that the low level of student achievement is primarily due to the responsibility of the family and the nature of its performance, and that academic failure of the students may indicate the failure of the family to perform its functions and what is expected from it.

Crocker and Luhtanen's (2003) study on self-esteem, academic, social and financial problems students face conducted on a sample of 642 university students, showed a strong correlation between low self-esteem among students and the emergence of their social problems. The study showed that high self-esteem is related to the high level of students' academic achievement. It further indicated that there is a significant correlation between the high students' academic achievement and their economic and social level. The results of the study also indicated that low self-esteem among students may contribute to the emergence of serious academic problems.

Rausch and Hamilton (2006) found a set of factors, such as inability to make friends, lack of adaptation to social life within the university, absence of clear goals, and the distractions due to living conditions, responsible for students' academic failure. The study was conducted on a sample of 20 students who dropped out before the end of their first year of study from two American universities. The researchers obtained their necessary data through a

two-hour individual interview made with each student.

Boute, et al. (2007) identified the importance of social relations among students and their impacts on their adaptation and academic achievement during the first year at Canadian universities. They concluded that there was a strong relationship between the first year students' ability to make new friends and their social adjustment as well as to their academic achievement. They also found that that the strength of interrelationships between social and academic factors was more pronounced among students living in student dormitories on the campus compared to their counterparts outside the campus.

Guillen (2010) conducted his study on the relationship between academic guidance and bachelor's degree completion time. He did it on 232 students at the University of Hambloft. He found that there was a significant correlation between students' degree of satisfaction with their respective majors, the process of academic guidance provided to them and the duration of study they spend to finish the bachelor degree on the one hand, and academic achievement on the other.

The present study is unique in its analysis of the demographic, social and economic characteristics of the students on academic probation. It attempts to exclusively cover these aspects on the assumption that these characteristics cause thorough and influential effects on the students' academic performance and academic achievement. The study is unique in that it relies on the collection of its necessary data from a sample exclusively devoted to the study of the case of students on academic probation in the community of Sultan Qaboos University. It endeavors to present a clear understanding of the topic by analyzing it at both scientific and cognitive levels.

The Study

'Students enrolled at Sultan Qaboos University on academic probation' is the main and pivotal variable in the

study. This variable was used as an indicator of student transgression of the minimum marks allowed within the university. It should be noted that the participants selected for the study are considered homogeneous, as all of them are students studying at Sultan Qaboos University and are on academic probation. The other variables under study can be divided into 'students' economic and social background', in which factors such as 1) permanent residence of the student (the Governorate in which the student currently resides), 2) the quality of accommodation (inside the university, private accommodation with other students, single living room, separate accommodation with wife and children, residing with parents in Muscat, residence outside Muscat), 3) the students' current social status (living together, divorced or separated, father or mother traveling, father married more than one wife, mother divorced and married to non-father, father divorced and married to non-mother, deceased), 4) the income level of the student's family (249 and less, 250-499, 500-749, 750-999, 1000-1249 OMR), and 5) the students working condition (whether he works to support himself outside University time or no).

Moreover, the students' academic background has also received due attention in the current study. This variable falls into 1) degree of current academic probation the student is classified in (first, second, third, fourth and above), 2) percentage of students in high school (69% and less, 70% -79%, 80% -89%, 90% and

more), 3) the quality of the school from which the students has graduated (private, government), 4) the current academic year of the student (first, second, third, fourth, fifth and above), and 5) the College the student is currently studying (Arts and Social Sciences, Economics and Political Science, Education, Nursing, Law, Medicine and Health Sciences, Science, Agricultural and Marine Sciences, Engineering).

Research Method

A descriptive research method has been used to examine the phenomenon under study. This was done by conducting a survey of the students on academic probation at Sultan Qaboos University. As the participants in the study are homogeneous (i.e., all students of Sultan Qaboos University on academic probation), statistical measures suitable for the nature of the study were employed to process and analyze the data collected.

Study Sample

In the current study, the samples were all individuals who were in a way related to the problem under investigation. In light of this, the participants were the total number of 1348 students enrolled in Sultan Qaboos University. All these students were on academic probation during the Spring Semester, 2014. (See Table 1).

Table 1

The Frequency of the Students on Academic Probation in the Spring Semester, 2014 in Nine Colleges of the University

Faculty	Number of students on academic probation
College of Arts and Social Sciences	130
College of Economics and Political Science	244
College of Education	89
College of Nursing	25
College of Law	64
College of Medicine and Health Sciences	57
College of Science	297

Faculty	Number of students on academic probation
College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences	189
College of Engineering	282
Total	1348

* Source: Admission and Registration Deanship, (2014)

The researchers obtained the samples of the study from the University's Deanship of Admission and Registration, and then, in cooperation with the University authorities, they could approach the participants. In the current study, which is a quantitative descriptive one, the necessary data was collected through a field survey and the samples were selected according to non-probabilistic sampling. In order to collect data from the members of the study population, the researchers prepared a special electronic questionnaire (see below for the validity and reliability of the questionnaire). It was, then, sent to all students on academic probation. The number of students who responded to the questionnaire was 619 out of the total number of 1348 students on academic probation. This constitutes 45.9% of the total number of students on academic probation at Sultan Qaboos University during the period in which the study was conducted. This represents a high representation rate, which adds to the validity of the study and enhances the reliability of its results.

Questionnaire Validation

The validity of the questionnaire, the objectivity of its questions, its layout and wording, its accuracy in measuring and its capacity for helping the researchers achieve the objectives of the study were statistically established. In order to validate the questionnaire, a group of 20 specialists and academics from the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, the Deanship of Scientific Research and the Department of Admissions and Registration went through it. Based on their guidance and suggestions, some modifications were made and new items were added and the final version was prepared. The questionnaire contains a variety of items on the demographic, social and economic characteristics of

students on academic probation. A pilot study was conducted on 35 students from Sultan Qaboos University, who were already on academic probation, one week prior to the beginning of the data collection in order to test the accuracy of the items and their relevance to the nature of the phenomenon under study. The validity of the items, their accuracy and the consistency of the results, and the fact that the content of the questionnaire was based on the demographic, social and economic data of the students (gender, college, income, social status, etc.) were determined as constant and unchanging.

Limitations of the Study

The concerns of the study are based on a set of considerations, most of which are related to the study population, i.e., the group of students on academic probation at Sultan Qaboos University, during Spring 2014. The students answered the items of the questionnaire sent to them electronically in coordination with Deanship of Admission and Registration. The participants were assured about the importance of the data and the fact that the data will be kept confidential and will be used only for the purposes of research purposes. All officials' approval for the study was taken and implemented, and the timeframe for the study was set to be done in five months. The study was also limited to the specified population and the objectives it sought to achieve. In addition, the study was limited with respect to the data collection procedure, i.e., questionnaire, as well as its method, i.e., descriptive.

Data Analysis Procedures of the Study

Appropriate statistical methods were chosen so that

the two levels of analyses would be possible. Simple descriptive statistical measures were employed to represent frequency and percentages. Moreover, Chi-square analysis was used in order to explore the different determinants and causes of the students placed on academic probation at Sultan Qaboos University. This statistical measure is one of the most appropriate statistical ones for investigating the phenomenon under study, especially when the data are classified in a nominal scale and ranked in the form of frequencies and percentages. Chi-square is a non-parametric test and is used to detect differences in the intensity and concentration of the relative distributions (Karadsheh, 2013). This is a suitable measure, particularly when the participants of the study are homogeneous, i.e., they are students studying at Sultan Qaboos University and are subjects to academic probation.

Results and Discussions

Below attempts are made to provide a comprehensive presentation of the results of the study, as well as its discussions and analyses based on appropriate statistical measures such as descriptive statistics such as simple frequencies and percentages of the students on academic probation. The students' different demographic, social, economic and academic characteristics, which might be the main causes for taking them on academic probation, have been taken into account. In order to find out in detail concerning the characteristics of this phenomenon, this section has been divided into two sub-sections.

Economic and Social Characteristics of Students on Academic Probation

This part of the study seeks to examine the economic and social characteristics of the students on academic probation at Sultan Qaboos University. It investigate the role of these characteristics in the deterioration of their academic situation, based on the model of the analysis of the percentage distributions and the Chi-square.

Table 2
Frequency and Percentage Distributions of Students on Academic Probation According to Their Place of Permanent Residence (Governorate)

Permanent Residence	Frequency	Percentage
Muscat	109	17.6%
Musandam	22	03.6%
Dakhiliyah	89	14.4%
Sharqiyah, North	37	06.0%
Sharqiyah, South	54	08.7%
Al-Batinah, North	127	20.5%
Al-Batinah, South	80	12.9%
Burami	8	01.3%
Central	0	0.00%
Dhofar	37	06.0%
Al-Dahira	55	08.9%
Missing Cases	1	0.20%
Total	619	100%

The results displayed in Table 2 reveal that most of the students on academic probation are from Al-Batinah, North, i.e., 127 students, 20.5% of the total sample. Students from Muscat Governorate (17.6%) fall in the second place. Those from Dakhiliyah make 14.4%, and in the fourth place there are students from Al-Batinah South Province, 12.9%. In contrast, the number of students on probation in the governorates of Dhofar and Sharqiya North are only 6.0%. Musandam by 3.6% and Burami by 1.3% come next. This result can be explained by the fact that the number of students admitted to the University from these areas much lower than other areas.

Table 3
Frequency and Percentage Distributions of Students on Academic Probation According to the Nature of Their Current Housing

Present Residence	Frequency	Percentage
In-Campus	134	21.6%
Off-Campus, private with other students	334	54.0%
Off-Campus, Alone	37	06.0%

Present Residence	Frequency	Percentage
Living with Wife and Children	3	0.05%
Living with Family in Muscat	93	15.2%
Living with Family outside Muscat	17	02.7%
Missing Cases	1	0.20%
Total	619	100%

As far as students' accommodation is concerned, Table 3 shows that the percentage of the students on academic probation is significantly high for those concentrated in private and shared housing outside the university, i.e., 54%, followed by female students residing inside the university, that is, 21.6%. On the other hand, the percentage of students who live outside the university with their parents or with wife and children, i.e., 15.0% and 6.0%, respectively, justifies the importance of the nature of housing for students under investigation. This has a significant role in determining the profile of their academic status. This finding is in line with the results of previous studies which emphasized the importance of the nature of students' place of residence and their active role in determining the students' academic achievement (Boute et al., 2007). Al-Harathi, Al-Hashemi, Kazim, & Al-Bahraniya. (2011) attributed the deterioration of the situation of students living outside the campus due to separation from the family and the consequent social and economic responsibilities that may contribute to the drawbacks of their academic status. These findings are consistent with the findings of the study of Sulaiman and Al-Manizel (1999). They emphasized that students who live on campus (usually females) are more integrated and involved in the university environment and less exposed to the challenges associated with their transition to university life.

These results confirm the importance of the nature and quality of accommodation because of the different social, economic and psychological effects on the academic situation of the students, which can be

important factors affecting the possibility of their being put on academic probation. However, what appears to be the effect of the place of residence may not be more than that of the influence of other social or economic factors. There might be a combination of these two factors affecting the students' academic situation. However, separating these two variables from one another is difficult. Therefore, the effect of each in isolation cannot be determined.

Table 4
Frequency and Percentage Distributions of Students on Probation According to Their Current Social Status of Their Parents

The Parents' Social Status	Frequency	Percentage
Living together	512	82.7%
Divorced or Separated	20	3.20%
Father or Mother Travelling	20	3.20%
Father is Married to More Than One Wife	0.00	0.00%
Mother is Divorced and Married to Another Man	0.00	0.00%
Father is Divorced and Married to Another Woman	5	0.80%
Both or One of Them Have Died	61	9.90%
Missing Cases	1	0.20 %
Total	619	100%

As shown in Table 4, the percentage of students who suffer from family disintegration is low. Only 3.2% of the students suffer from separation and divorce, compared to having more than one wife, which is 0.0%. While 9.9% of the students reported suffering from the death of one of the parents; the proportion of students who grew up in coherent families is high, i.e., 82.7%. The results of the previous studies confirm the importance of the impact of the disintegration of family structure and the disruption of the role of the family which lead to the disruption of the process of

socialization and the attendant disorder of social control factors within the motives of children and their desire to compete for academic achievement (Al-Tahan, 1990; Al-Tarrah, 2003). Jaggia and Kelly-Hawke (1999) highlighted the importance of family cohesion and stability in raising academic achievement levels among its family members.

In general, this finding shows that most of the students came from socially cohesive families. The process of controlling their children's behavior is traditionally practiced, but it seems that a clear proportion of these families do not follow the performance of their academic children. That is the case for families suffering from some disintegration, some of whom came from families suffering from the divorce of one of the parents or the death of one of them. In this regard, literature on social and educational affairs shows the association of poor academic attainment among many students with a breakdown or defect in the structure of the family, which is the most important institution of the social upbringing of the individual (Karns, 2002).

Relevant literature suggests that any dysfunction that can affect family structure may lead to a lack of or poor performance in its roles and inability to satisfy the needs of the members psychologically, cognitively or academically (Al-Nohaili, 2002). Al-Shami and Muhani (1992) confirmed that the divorce of parents would have a negative effect on children's academic achievement due to the negative feelings, social and psychological problems, and the emergence of various disorders and emotions among them. This may lead students to develop depression and cause the emergence of multiple psychological and social problems. This ultimately results in a decline in academic achievement. It seems that the students were not immune to these changes, and it further seems that these events have touched the essence of these details in the lives of students and contributed to diminishing their incentives. Students' ability to succeed seems to be governed by their backgrounds.

Table 5
Frequency and Percentage Distributions of Students on Probation According to Monthly Family Income

Family income per month	Frequency	Percentage
249 OMR or Less	86	13.9%
250-499 OMR	147	23.7%
500-749 OMR	126	20.4%
750-999 OMR	106	17.1%
1000-1249 OMR	61	9.9%
1250 OMR or more	92	14.9%
Missing Data	1	0.2%
Total	619	100%

As for the economic situation of the students, the results shown in Table 5 reveal that there is a rather high percentage of those who are not financially capable, 23.7 percent of them indicated that the average income of their families originally ranged from 250-499 Omani Rial (OMR), 13.9 percent of them reported the monthly income of their families did not exceed 249 OMR. On the other hand, 20.4 percent of them indicated that their monthly income ranged between 500-749 OMR. This reveals that most of the students on academic probation belong to families with low or average monthly income. This finding confirms that there is a clear correlation between the economic conditions of the students' families and their low academic attainment.

Table 6
Frequency and percentage Distributions of Students on Academic Probation According to the Current Working Condition

Work outside the University Daily Time	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	92	14.9%
No	492	79.5%
Other	32	5.2%
Missing Cases	3	.5 %
Total	619	100%

A careful look at the results reported in Table 6 related to the current working condition of the students under study shows that 14.9 percent of the students studying during their university period are economically active and that they themselves cover their personal expenses. This means that either they have to work to cover their living needs or because they belong to low-income families. On the other hand, the largest percentage of students, 79.5%, indicated that they are not currently working full-time.

In general, the results of this part of the study show a clear drop in the economic level of the families of students on academic probation, that is, a clear percentage of them suffer from insufficient monthly income to meet their educational expenses and living. The results of the study showed that a significant percentage of the students under study are economically active and are currently engaged in labor market. It is worth mentioning here that some studies confirm the weakness of the contribution of the students of Sultan Qaboos University in the labor market. This is due to considerations of their desire to obtain a certificate as a basic goal for them, especially considerations relating to the importance of obtaining a university degree. In addition to the nature of social upbringing that enhances the children's economic dependence on their families economically (Al-Zubaidi, Al-Daman, Ibrahim, Kazim & Al-Sarmi, 2002). Most of the students at Sultan Qaboos University are students with a high grades in general diploma examinations and are awarded scholarships to cover their university studies (Deanship of Admission and Registration, 2017).

These results call for more attention, and re-examination of the importance of the role of economic factors and the consequences that they include in the life of university students. This may be the most important reason for their being placed on academic probation.

Academic Characteristics of Students on Academic Probation

This section is devoted to the examination and investigation of the nature of academic characteristics of students on probation. It is an attempt to understand these characteristics in order to come up with a deeper understanding of the specificity of this phenomenon in different aspects and dimensions.

Table 7
Frequency and Percentage Distributions of the Students on Academic Probation According to Their General Diploma

Percentage of students in the secondary School	Frequency	Percentage
69% and Less	5	0.8%
70% to 79%	46	7.4%
80% to 89%	333	53.8%
90% and More	201	32.5%
Missing Cases	34	5.5%
Total	619	100%

Table 7 shows that the percentage of students with 90% and above in the general secondary exam and on academic probation reaches 32.5%, thus constituting one third of the sample, 80% -89% to 53.8%, which means that most of these students are students who have a high average in the general secondary exam. This result corresponds to the general context of the admission system at Sultan Qaboos University, as it accepts students who have been able to obtain the highest scores in the general secondary exams in the Sultanate.

These results are in contradiction with the results of previous studies, which indicated a clear correlation between the low grades of students in their general diploma and their being put on academic probation applied to them due to their weakness in their academic achievement (Tolafah, 2013). The findings of this study reveal that the low secondary grades are an important reason for the low

academic achievement of university students. The results of the current study also contradict Taras' (2001) study, which indicated that the low secondary level is an important reason for the low grades of university students. Al-Rihani, Shaykh and Dawood (1987) showed a clear correlation between students' academic achievement at the university and their scores in the general diploma. This is in contrast with the current study.

Table 8

Frequency and Percentage Distributions of Students on Academic Probation According to the Type of School They Graduated from

School Type	Frequency	Percentage
Private School	14	02.3%
State School	604	97.6%
Missing Cases	1	0.20 %
Total	619	100%

As shown in Table 8, a very high majority of the students under study are graduates from public schools, 97.6 percent, while the proportion of graduates from private schools on academic probation is as low as 2.3 percent. This shows that there is a clear correlation between the quality of the school and the possibility of students falling on academic probation, that is, the more likely to graduate from private schools the less likely to be placed on academic probation. This finding can be explained by the specificity of the university admissions system in Oman, which gives most of the university seats to students of public school graduates. The results of this study are consistent with the results of Thompson, Warren, and Carter's (2004) study, who assert that there is a significant correlation between the quality of the school from which the students graduate and their being on academic probation. This finding is also in line with the expectations of our study, which went on to confirm the relationship between the quality of the school and the possibility of students being placed on academic probation.

Table 9

Frequency and Percentage Distributions of Students on Academic Probation According to the Colleges in Which They Study

Faculty	Frequency	Percentage
Education	45	7.3%
Science	116	18.7%
Engineering	123	19.9%
Medicine and Health Sciences	33	5.3%
Agricultural and Marine Sciences	71	11.5%
Nursing	16	2.6%
Law	30	4.8%
Economy and political science	115	18.6%
Arts and Social Sciences	70	11.3%
Total	619	100%

Regarding the nature of the colleges to which students who are on academic probation belong, the results indicated in Table 9 reveal that they are concentrated in the Faculty of Engineering, which ranked first (19.9%), the Faculty of Science (18.7%), The Faculty of Economics and Political Science ranked third (18.6%). The Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Marine Sciences ranked fourth with 11.5 percent, followed by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences with 11.3 percent. It seems that the quality of the college has an important role in determining the possibility of students being put on academic probation, because it has clear links to the conditions of academic nature within these colleges. Ibrahim, et. al. (1993), confirmed that most of the students on academic probation belong to the science faculties, and attributed to the nature of their academic preparation, and the circumstances related to purely academic aspects, such as the language in which they are taught, the difficulty of examinations, and the faculty member's ability and skill in communicating information to students.

Table 10
Frequency and Percentage Distributions of the Students on Academic Probation According to Academic Year

Faculty	Frequency	Percentage
First	29	4.7%
Second	52	8.4%
Third	225	36.3%
Fourth	153	24.7%
Fifth and above	159	25.7%
Missing Cases	1	0.2 %
Total	619	100%

The results of the study shown in Table 10 indicate that the percentage of students on academic probation in the third year has increased to 36.3, followed by students in the fifth year and above (25.7%) and then in the fourth year (24.7%). The drop in the number of students observed in the first and second year is due to the fact that most students at Sultan Qaboos University are at Foundation Stage, which may extend for more than one year. This period is not counted in the cumulative rate of students. This result is inconsistent with the results of previous studies, which emphasized the concentration of the difficulties faced by students in the first academic year. They attributed the fact to the considerations of the process of integration of students in university environment and the beginning of their university life and the consequent social, cultural, and psychological problems. Sulaiman and Al-Manizel (1999) asserted that the students find themselves in a new environment they did not know before. This new environment may be accompanied with many social and psychological challenges, increased loneliness, high levels of anxiety, inability to integrate, and poor skills in making new friends, as well as problems of academic nature, which add to the intensity of the problems and difficulties the students may be exposed to. In a way, all these factors affect the students' academic performance (Al-Bahrani, 2004).

In this context, the outcome of each study (Al-Musharraf, 2000) confirms that the enrollment of new students in the university may be accompanied with social disarray as well as social and psychological problems that may have a negative impact on their academic career. It seems that the difference in the university environment from that of the secondary schools, in addition to the specificity of the university environment and the nature of its requirements may contribute to the deterioration of students' academic achievement, especially the first year students. The results of this study are also in consistence with that of Nelson (2007), which showed that with the passing of the first academic year, students are more interested in academic aspects and their focus on achievement becomes more. After the first year of study, students studying at their colleges become more mature and more rational in dealing with the requirements of university life, and more capable to solve problems they might be exposed to. This, in turn, manifests its positive effects on their academic performance.

The previous studies showed that the high possibility of students being placed on academic probation is related to factors concerning the nature of the college and specialties, the nature of faculty members and their skills in clearly transferring information to the student, and the nature of the language in which they are taught. All of these factors may be important drivers pushing students forward to be put on academic probation at science colleges (Al Musharraf, 2000), while the percentage of students on academic probation in colleges such as Nursing, Medical School and the Faculty of Law is low.

It seems that the overall results of the previous studies emphasize the process of personal and social consensus, and the ability to overcome the problems resulting from the process of transition of students to the new university environment. The students increasingly become more able to harmonize themselves with the

university environment and more skillful in solving problems interfering their academic life. Moreover, their integration becomes better, their level of anxiety and tension decreases and their self-confidence increases. These are reflected in their improved academic performance (Mckenzi and Schweitzer, 2001).

Students' transition to university and the occasional shift away from parental care and from living with family to independent housing seem to be fraught with many social, psychological and material difficulties (Boute et al., 2007). These circumstances may be combined with economic and cultural conditions that may impede the lives of new students and contribute to their academic decline. The university may contribute, as an official bureaucratic institution, to the laws and regulations that students had never experienced before, a scientific and cultural environment that has its own peculiarities in which students have psychological, social or economic challenges. All these reduce the students' level of academic achievement and cause them to fail to provide appropriate responses to the challenges they face (Al-Harithi, et al, 2011). In this regard, Al-Tarrah (2003) points out that the experiences new university students face and attempt to get along with are challenging. They may come across problems such as housing, registration, choice of specialization, physical, social, and health difficulties, lack of new ways, habits and skills suitable for university, inability to manage and organize time, or emotional glitches different from those in school environment. University has an environment with a very special and unique system of study. It has its own rules and regulations (Albahrani, 2004). Al-Harithi et al. (2011) also stress that the experience of transition to the university is often accompanied by many academic, social and psychological challenges, and some students may not be able to exhibit appropriate responses to the requirements of the academic life and to adapt themselves to this environment and its requirements. Inability of the new students to cope with problems that

may hinder their university life might be due to the nature of their social upbringing and their dependency on traditional patriarchal societies with conservative social structures. Therefore, they are more likely to be put on academic probation because they cannot manage their own lives away from their families (Al-Harathi, et al, 2011).

In general, the results of Chi-square showed the importance of all the variables representing the academic background of the students on academic probation. Most of their effects were significant at the level of 0.05 or less.

Conclusion and Suggestions:

The aim of this study was to identify the different demographic, social, economic and academic characteristics of the students of the Sultan Qaboos University on academic probation, to examine these aspects with much comprehensiveness and depth and to try to come up with a set of practical recommendations that can contribute to addressing or limiting this phenomenon. The study aimed to collect data from the students who were on academic probation at Sultan Qaboos University. The students were consequently to be sent to specialized administrative committees to follow up their academic status at the university; some of them, being on academic probation ranging from first to five levels, were even sentenced to academic sanctions..

The sample size of the study was 619 students who were on academic probation, and the data was collected by means of a special electronic questionnaire prepared for this purpose. The descriptive approach was used to analyze and examine the phenomenon. It was based on an in-depth review of the literature and previous studies conducted on this subject, and to extract the most important results and to employ them to serve the purposes of the study. In order to analyze the data in a precise and clear manner, two appropriate statistical measures. The first one was simple descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage. The second one was

the binary descriptive statistical measure, represented by Chi-square analysis in order to explore the different determinants and causes of students' occurrence on academic probation at Sultan Qaboos University and to reveal the direction of concentration of these relative differences. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to process the data and conduct appropriate statistical analyzes.

Summary of the Main Results of the Study

The present study, devoted to the examination of the different characteristics of students on academic probation at Sultan Qaboos University, had the following results:

1. Most of the students on academic probation are students of the Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Economics and Political Science, while their percentage in the Faculty of Nursing and the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Medicine was significantly lower.

2. The results of the study revealed that one third of the students had high levels in the secondary school. Most of the students are graduates from public schools and are at third, fifth and above years of university.

3. Most of the students on probation are from the province of Batinah, North followed by the province of Muscat and the province of the Dakhiliyah. In contrast, this percentage is lower among students coming from the provinces of Wusta, Musandam, and Burami.

4. Most of the students under study are students living in private and shared housing outside the university, as well as those who live in apartments, and are not satisfied with the quality of their accommodation.

5. Most of the students under study had grown up in coherent families (with father and mother) and enjoyed good family relations.

6. Most of the students on academic probation had come from families with average monthly incomes, with a clear percentage indicating that they have been

economically active (currently working) and that their monthly income is insufficient to meet their own expenses.

7. The results showed the importance of the social status of parents (whether they live together, separate or divorced), the sensitivity of the role played by family circumstances and the nature of their cohesion regarding students' being on academic probation.

Suggestions for Further Research

It seems that many aspects of this phenomenon have remained un-touched yet as there are many complexities involved, despite the large number of studies that have addressed the issue. This can be to a large extent related to the fact that this a multitude of factors affect the diversity of the phenomenon. It seems that the literature relevant to this phenomenon is not conclusive and deep enough in this regard and has not touched the depth of the problem of students suffering from psychological, social and economic problems. Therefore, further research is required in this area. Below is a list of the most important suggestions:

1. The need for more research and expansion of its scope to include academically excellent students at Sultan Qaboos University in order to make comparisons between the different social, economic and academic conditions that these students are benefiting from and to investigate the reasons behind their academic excellence. This is a fertile ground for research and study and enrichment of knowledge of the phenomenon under study in all its aspects.

2. Despite the critical situations experienced by students on academic probation and the sensitivity of their psychological and social conditions, most of the research efforts have not been detailed in this phenomenon, especially in terms of economic and cognitive conditions and their implications in this regard, which keeps the field open to further studies and research to examine and reveal the complexity that it involves.

3. The importance of the students' family factors and circumstances should be also investigated so that a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon under study can be achieved. This is significant, particularly because of the nature of the problems and difficulties that can permeate them.

4. Such phenomena appear to be controversial because of the intensity, complexity, and the ambiguity involved. These require more extensive and in-depth research efforts to investigate and examine these phenomena in greater details.

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الخصائص الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والأكاديمية للطلاب الواقعين تحت الملاحظة الأكاديمية في جامعة السلطان قابوس: دراسة ميدانية

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الملخص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى الكشف عن الخصائص الديموغرافية والاجتماعية والاقتصادية والأكاديمية للطلاب الواقعين تحت الملاحظة الأكاديمية في جامعة السلطان قابوس، وقد جمعت بياناتها اعتماداً على عينة غير قصدية من طلبة الجامعة الواقعين تحت الملاحظة الأكاديمية استناداً إلى المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، وأظهرت نتائجها أن أكثر من ثلثي الطلاب الذكور المقيدين في مرحلة البكالوريوس غير متزوجين، ويتركزون في كليات الهندسة والعلوم والاقتصاد والعلوم السياسية، كما كشفت عن أن معظم الطلاب يقطنون في سكنات خاصة ومشتركة خارج الحرم الجامعي، وأن معظمهم ينتمون إلى أسر متوسطة ومنخفضة الدخل، وأن الطلبة الذين يقطنون داخل الحرم الجامعي غير راضيين عن نوعية السكن، وأظهرت النتائج أيضاً أن هناك نسبة بسيطة من الطلبة نشيطين اقتصادياً؛ أي يعملون حالياً؛ وذلك بسبب عدم كفاية دخولهم الشهرية.

الكلمات الدالة: الملاحظة الأكاديمية، الخصائص الديموغرافية، الخصائص الاجتماعية - الاقتصادية، الخصائص الأكاديمية.

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