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A Survey of Student Preferences toward Summer Session Enrollment at Jordanian Universities: Empirical Investigation

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Abstract:

Summer semester plays a significant role in the life of college students. The enrollments of students depend mostly on the way universities schedule their sessions. Unfortunately, most universities arrange their sessions without looking at students' preferences. Therefore, this study investigates students' preferences toward summer session scheduled at Yarmouk University and Al-Balqa'a Applied University/ Irbid branch. The authors designed a questionnaire upon students' views. A random representative sample of 528 students was surveyed. Results of data analysis revealed that most students prefer to retain the system of five days a week rather than four days a week.

Keywords: summer session, enrollment, scheduling, students' preferences, change, Jordan

1. Introduction

The fact that most Jordanian universities have an enrollment in the (2015) summer session approximately equal to ninety percent of total student body means a relatively healthy interest in the summer term. Viewed from the other side, however, that same percentage also indicates inadequate utilization of universities facilities and a forfeiture of the same percentage in potential tuition and fees, factors negatively affecting Jordanian universities capital. Nonetheless, they are factors which no institution can afford to ignore.

If we chose to pursue the matter in depth, we would undoubtedly find that a complex interplay of various aspects is at the root of the matter, among them lack of clear policies, economic considerations and increased competition for the same target group. Such an examination, however, is beyond the scope of this paper. This paper will be concentrating on the scheduling of Yarmouk University and Al-Balqa' Applied University (Irbid college) summer term in an attempt to discover whether students prefer the (five days) or (four days) a week schedules are indicative of a perceptible desire for change and, consequently, at least part of the reason for low summer session enrollment.

Summer session in Jordan usually appears in a pleasant, socially busy time throughout the year. It mostly takes place in the mid of June and lasts eight weeks until the mid of August. During that time, temperature levels are very hot during day time (the time in which college hours take place) and most likely pleasant at night making it a perfect season to fulfill social obligations, go out for vacations...etc. Furthermore, in the past couple of years, religious obligations took place throughout the summer session or after it in a month. Thus, students during summer session in Jordan have to deal with more than just their studies making the summer session one of the hardest sessions for studying throughout the year.

2. The Problem

Students needing to enroll in the (four days) a week, 3 courses per semester (9 credit hours), 90 minutes/class and 4.5 hours/ day during 8-week summer session find themselves faced with a 3-day vacation with a heavy-duty work towards exams. In addition to that, scheduling difficulties can arise to run consecutively, and if, this will increase the daily learning hours.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether:

- (1) Students would prefer the introduction of a different scheduling policy for the summer sessions, and
- (2) if so, what changes would they prefer.

The following options were tested in the course of this study to determine student preference.

1. Students will prefer the 8-week summer session, 4 days/week, 90 minutes/class.
2. Students will prefer the 8-week summer semester, 5 days/week, 60 minutes/class, (keeping the old system).

3. Research Questions

This paper has been set out to answer the following research questions:

1. What are students' preferences toward summer session scheduled at Yarmouk and Irbid University College?

2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between demographic factors (gender, age, marital status, Source of finance, student classification) on respondents' perception toward summer session scheduled at Yarmouk and Irbid University College?

4. Delimitations

The following delimitations were applied during the course of this study:

1. The data will reflect preferences only for those students attending the summer sessions in 2015 and 2016 at Yarmouk and Irbid University College.
2. The study will focus on student preferences; therefore, no attempt will be made to canvass instructors for their opinions.
3. To avoid administrative predispositions, no attempt will be made to ascertain whether changes in scheduling policy would be feasible.

5. Basic Assumptions

The following assumption was considered of basic importance to the success of the study:

Every student studying at Yarmouk and Al-Balqa' Applied University/ specifically in Irbid University College in the summer session, 2015 and 2016 has an equal chance of being selected for the random sample. Therefore, the random sample is a representative of all students at Yarmouk and Irbid University College.

6. Study Significance

The value of the study lies primarily in its validity as a mirror of students' opinions on the scheduling of the summer sessions at Yarmouk and Irbid University College. It could serve as a basis to channel student feedback into both university administrations. It could also serve as a basis for broader student discussion of the matter. Students may not be aware that they can affect changes and the administration may perhaps be unaware that changes are desired.

7. Background

According to Jordanian universities as well as international universities, a semester is either of the two usually 16-week periods of instruction into which an academic year is often divided. It can also apply to the summer term of study. Merriam Webster defines summer session as a school session conducted in summer enabling students to accelerate progress toward a degree, to make up credits lost through absence or failure, or to up-grade professional education. The majority of American summer session literature concentrates on evaluating student's attitudes toward a 6 week or 8-week period of study. On the other hand, decision makers in Jordanian universities perceived summer session from a different point of view (i.e. 8-week summer session, 4 or 5 days/week). This changing in scheduling policy has caused some sort of conflict among students. In fact, that change in scheduling policy is a more normal procedure than one might suspect and that a broad roster of scheduling possibilities has arisen over the past hundred years and has been amply verified by researchers (e.g. Kubitschek, et. al. 2005; Young, et. al. 1991; Smith, 1975;). As far as scheduling possibilities are concerned, in her review of summer session schedules at forty American universities (Tickton, 1963) found a great deal of variety not only in the type of basic sessions offered (i.e. trimester, quarter, and semester) but more particularly deviations in the duration and numbers of those sessions. The same study also showed a wide diversity in the duration and numbers of summer sessions offered.

Unfortunately, however, aside from scattered surveys (Young, et. al. 1982) state that "published materials on summer sessions seem to have been greatly under-represented in the professional literature" not only was the sole definitive book on the subject written over 30 years ago, but those few dissertations which have been written since on the subject of summer sessions tend either to be limited to one university or to one problem area. In all fairness, however, it is worth mentioning that the under-representation which (Young, et. al. 1991) complain of above may be attributed to the inability of the academic community itself to agree on what exactly the summer session is. It is no wonder then that, as the same authors point out elsewhere, "many institutions are operating summer session programs without a clear statement of role and purpose."

Considering the development of the summer session up to the present, the fact that administrators have been unable to set a common denominator for summer sessions, as they have for those of fall and spring, should neither surprise nor disturb. It is precisely the summer session which has always followed, and still follows, the dictates of an evolving society. Thus, just as noteworthy as the fact that the summer session schedules seem to be in a constant state of flux is the fact that this flux is caused by external, social forces and not by internal, institutional ones. For example, it is important to point out that Yarmouk University has not undertaken the schedule of summer session of 2015, (i.e. 8-week summer session, 4 days/week) except for one time due to these external social economic forces. Whereas, Irbid community college has not responded to these forces and applied the same strategy of 2015 summer session in the following years.

8. Literature Review

Referring to summer session enrollment, (Kenneth, 2011) distinguishes between undergraduate students who enroll in summer session and others who do not. Data was collected from a nationally representative sample. He concludes that there are significant differences between summer enrolled and not enrolled students. Keith et. al. (2010) examined the factors influencing student's decisions to enroll at summer school agricultural courses at North Central Texas College. Data was collected from forty-eight students through a 23-item questionnaire developed by the researchers. Findings revealed that the majority of agricultural students at the college were interested

in taking summer school agricultural courses. Jenkins et. al. (2007) investigate the relationship between summer school enrollment and time to degree at the University of North Carolina. Data was collected from three undergraduate student classes (i.e. class of 1998, 1999, 2000). They found that attending summer school significantly impacts time to degree. Moreover, they found that the majority of students taking summer school classes are upper division students. Kowalik (2005) exerts his effort to develop and validate two instruments to identify motivational and key factors that influence students' decisions to attend summer session at North America institutions. He collected data for each instrument separately from (i.e. 315 and 369). He concludes that both instruments are reliable and valid for assessing students' decision. To determine reasons to attend summer school (Wayland, Jane P. et. al., 2000) collected data from (442) students attending business school at Midwestern regional university. They concluded that students enroll in summer school to graduate, lighten the load for the regular session, and meet prerequisites. Donnelly & Kessler (2000) investigate reasons for attending summer session in Keene State College. Data was collected from 300 students through a questionnaire. They concluded that enrollment data, curriculum and cost were more likely the variables that impact enrollment outcomes. Trewatha, et. al. (1997) investigate student's decision to attend the summer session. (869) students from Midwestern university were surveyed. They concluded that students are capable of recognizing their need to attend summer session before making decision to attend. Chandler and Weller (1995) investigate factors that influence business student's decision to enroll in summer school at a Midwestern regional university. Data was collected from (171) useable questionnaires. They found that social and economic factors motivate student's decision to enroll in summer school. Anthony and Master (1989) surveyed (122) managers at land grant colleges and universities in the United States and at 15 selected private institutions to investigate selected operational characteristics of summer programs. They concluded that summer sessions remain a vital and necessary part of academe. Lins et. al. (1962) investigate student preference for the length of the summer session. They randomly interviewed 184 students from 9000 students enrolled in 1961 summer session at Madison. When surveyed to ascertain whether they preferred a 4-week, an 8-week, a 12-week session or a summer semester equal in length to a regular semester, 60% rejected the idea of a 4-week session (too short or too concentrated), (47.3%) would not be willing to attend a 12-week session (too long and too inconvenient), and 52.7% would not agree to attend a regular summer semester. Sixty-nine percent of those polled, though, indicated that an 8-week session was exactly the right length.

8.1. Remarks of Literature Review

The in-depth and critical review of summer session literature reveals a dearth of empirical investigation in the undertaken area. In fact, no evidence can be found of an empirical study that was developed to measure student's preferences towards scheduling policies that supports four or five-day attendance. The majority of summer session literature concentrates on investigating whether or not students would like to attend summer session at all.

9. Methodology

9.1. Questionnaire Development

To answer the research questions, it is important to indicate that the in-depth literature review has not resulted in an appropriate scale to measure students' preferences towards the five or four days' summer session attendance per week. The majority of research undertaken in the area adapted questionnaires that investigate preferences or attitudes of students towards summer session enrollment duration, choice and/or motivational factors, time to degree and so on. Therefore, for the purpose of this research the authors developed their own questionnaire through the following steps.

First, the authors interviewed a representative sample of twenty students from both universities. The authors discussed with students their opinions and preferences concerning the five or four days' attendance per week; (Yin, 1994) states that interviews are "essential sources of case study information". Secondly, upon students' opinions, the authors developed the study questionnaire. Thirdly, the questionnaire has been reviewed by a number of experts in the college of education at both universities for validity. Finally, the final reviewed version of the questionnaire has been pilot tested on twenty students from both universities. This piloting allows for further amendments to the questionnaire. The refined questionnaire with 20 items was also piloted by twenty students from Yarmouk University business students and the result is the validation of the questionnaire (i.e. all students understand the questions of the questionnaire). The 23 items structured in a 5-point Likert- scale format ranging from (1) to (5) representing (1) as "strongly disagree" to (5) as "strongly agree". The internal consistency of the items was evaluated by Cronbach's coefficient alpha.

9.2. Sample

A stratified random sample of 550 undergraduate students enrolled in summer session in 2015 and 2016 summer were surveyed. The authors distributed the questionnaire to students in classes and collected them by hand. A total of (550) questionnaire returned, 22 questionnaires were found incomplete, and 528 questionnaires has been analyzed with a return rate of (0.96%).

To study the influence of demographic factors (i.e. Gender, age, marital status, Student classification, source of finance) on students' preferences towards summer session, some statistical tests were carried out (e.g. Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis). Sekaran and Bougie (2013) indicate that Mann-Whitney's test is used on two groups of scores that are independent, while Kruskal-Wallis' test is used for three or more groups.

10. Data Analysis and Results

10.1. Demographic Characteristics

To analyze the questionnaire of participants, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program (Version 22) was used to examine the demographic characteristics of respondents (i.e. 528). Table (1) shows the results of the analysis. The respondent's profile consists of: male (59.8 percent); female (40.2); between 21-24 years' age group (37.5 percent); followed by 17-20 years age group (36.4 percent); marital status single group (72.3percent); above 5-years' experience group (69.2 percent). Analysis of students' classification is as follows: junior (39.8 percent), freshman (23.9 percent); senior (22.0 percent); sophomore (14.4 percent). Analysis of the source of financing for education is as follows: Parents (48.3 percent), students loan (20.6 percent); scholarship (19.5 percent); work and husband (11.6 percent). These results may be due to the nature of Jordanian culture society (i.e. parental dependent society).

Demographic variable	Group Category	Frequency	(%)
Gender	Male	316	59.8
	Female	212	40.2
Age	17-20 y	192	36.4
	21-24 y	198	37.5
	Above 24 y	138	26.1
Marital Status	single	382	72.3
	married	129	24.4
	divorced	17	3.2
Student classification	freshman	126	23.9
	sophomore	76	14.4
	junior	210	39.8
	senior	116	22.0
Source of finance	parents	255	48.3
	scholarship	103	19.5
	Students loan	109	20.6
	work	42	8.0
	husband	19	3.6

Table 1: Demographic Information (N= 528)

10.2. Reliability

Reliability estimates were utilized to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. Sekaran and Bougie (2013) state that "the reliability of a measure is an indication of the stability and consistency with which the instrument measures the concept and helps to assess the -goodness- of a measure". Table 2 shows the results of questionnaire reliability. Cronbach's alpha reliability estimates for general preferences is (0.85), for five days' preferences (0.87), for four days' preferences (0.80). All of these values are above (0.70). Flynn et. al. (1994) indicate that an alpha value with a score of .70 is the minimum acceptable value and indicates good reliability.

Variables	No. of Items	Excluded items	Cronbach's α
General preferences	5	0	0.85
Five days preferences	7	0	0.87
Four days preferences	10	0	0.80

Table 2: Reliability analysis summary (N= 528)

10.3. Analysis of Research Questions

To answer the first research question, tables (3, 4, and 5) show the descriptive statistics of this study according to the mean and the standard deviation. To analyze the relationship between demographic factors and students' preferences towards summer session, Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U test were utilized. Table (6) shows this relationship.

General Preferences	Mean	Sd
1. I enroll in summer school to finish my studies early	4.43	0.81
2. I enroll in summer to take a lighter load in the fall or spring	4.26	0.92
3. I enroll in summer because classes are smaller	3.80	0.98
4. I enroll in summer to make up for failed classes	3.62	1.10
5. I work during summer session to earn money for fall and spring fees.	3.94	0.99
Mean average	4.01	-

Table 3: descriptive statistics of general preferences (N= 528)

Table (3) shows results of students' general preferences. The table shows that the overall mean average for all statements is (4.01). The table also reveals that the highest mean of general preferences is seen in statement (1) I enroll in summer school to finish my studies early; and statement (2) I enroll in summer to take a lighter load in the fall or spring. The lowest mean is seen in statements (4) I enroll in summer to make up for failed classes with a mean of (3.62). Analysis of the respondents' answers of standard deviations also revealed that it is below (1) which indicates an overall agreement among respondents about the significance of summer session in surveyed universities.

Five Days Preferences		Mean	Sd
6. I prefer 5 days a week to improve my GPA		4.31	0.75
7. I prefer 5 days a week to concentrate in classes		4.15	0.76
8. I prefer 5 days a week to handle homework load		4.01	0.74
9. I retain more in summer with 5 days classes a week		3.81	0.82
10. I prefer 5 days as it enables me take more credit hours and shorten my graduation period		3.85	0.89
11. I feel that Instructor's enthusiasm continues until the last minute during the 60-minute lecture		4.22	0.72
12. I prefer 5 days a week to use my time wisely.		3.94	0.91
Mean average		4.04	-

Table 4: descriptive statistics of Five days' preferences (N= 528)

Table (4) shows results of students' five days' preferences. The table shows that the overall mean average for all statements is (4.04). The table also reveals that the highest mean of five days' preferences is seen in statement (1) I prefer 5 days a week to improve my GPA. The lowest mean is seen in statements (9) I retain more in summer with 5 days classes a week with a mean of (3.81). Analysis of the respondents' answers of standard deviations also revealed that it is below (1) which indicates an overall agreement among respondents about the preference of these five days in surveyed universities.

Four Days' Preferences		Mean	Sd
13. I prefer 4 days a week to have three days' vacations to work and cover my expenses.		2.44	1.03
14. I feel board in the 90-minute lecture		2.82	0.99
15. My concentration level drops as a student when the lecture lasts 90 minutes		2.83	1.02
16. I educationally benefit from a 3-day vacation when I go to college four days a week		2.34	1.01
17. I feel that Instructors get board in the 90-minute lecture		3.59	1.04
18. Attending college four days a week decreases transportation and other expenses		3.61	1.05
19. The 90 minute lecture increases my daily learning hours		2.76	1.09
20. I prefer 3 days holiday a week to use the university facilities as library and sport yard		2.23	1.14
21. I prefer 3 days holiday a week to spend reasonable time with family as my home is in a different city		2.32	1.10
22. I prefer 3 days holiday a week as weather in Jordan is pleasant and vacation days enable me to visit historical placed (e.g. archaeological sites, roman castles.....etc.)		2.29	1.11
Mean average		2.72	-

Table 5: descriptive statistics of Four days' preferences (N= 528)

Table (5) shows results of students' four days' preferences. The table shows that the overall mean average for all statements is (2.72). The table also reveals that the highest mean of four days' preferences is seen in statement (18) Attending college four days a week decreases transportation and other expenses. The lowest mean is seen in statements (20). I prefer 3 days holiday a week to use the university facilities as library and sport yard with a mean of (2.23). Analysis of the respondents' answers of the standard deviations also revealed that it is above (1) which indicates an overall disagreement among respondents about the insignificance of these four days' dimension in surveyed universities.

Study dimensions	Demographic Factors				
	Gender	Age	Marital status	Source of finance (parents)	Student classification (Junior)
General Preferences	.748	.543	.600	.000(*)	.000(*)
Five days Preferences	.162	.099	.428	.000(*)	.000(*)
Four days Preferences	.214	.476	.752	.01 (*)	.01(*)
* Significant at (P ≤ 0.01)					
** Significant at (P ≤ 0.05)					

Table 6: results of Mann Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests (N= 528)

Table (6) shows Mann -Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis results of students' preferences (i.e. general, five days, four days) toward summer session. The table shows that gender, age, marital status, have no significant impact at ($p \leq 0.05$) on students' perception toward summer session in general and toward five or four days' preferences.

The analysis also reveals that Source of finance factor has a significant impact at ($p \leq .01$) on students' perceptions toward general, five days and four days' preferences. The results of general preferences show that (chi square= 23.381) at the level of ($p \leq .01$), based on the means rank clarified by Kruskal-Wallis test, was (234.78) for parents group. The results of five days' preferences show that (chi square= 20.266) at the level of ($p \leq .01$), based on the means rank clarified by Kruskal-Wallis test, was (235.95) also for parents group. The results of four days' preferences show that (chi square= 12.251) at the level of ($p \leq .01$), based on the means rank clarified by Kruskal-Wallis test, was (247.75) also for parents group. Moreover, the analysis reveals that student classification factor has a significant impact at ($p \leq .01$) on students' perceptions toward general, five days and four days' preferences. The results of general preferences show that (chi square= 14.938) at the level of ($p \leq .01$), based on the means rank clarified by Kruskal-Wallis test, was (273.66) for junior group. The results of five days' preferences show that (chi square= 20.487) at the level of ($p \leq .01$), based on the means rank clarified by Kruskal-Wallis test, was (272.36) also for junior group. The results of four days' preferences show that (chi square= 8.726) at the level of ($p \leq .01$), based on the means rank clarified by Kruskal-Wallis test, was (272.04) also for junior group.

11. Conclusions, Recommendations and Further Research

11.1. Conclusion

Internationalization and globalization are two concepts that play a decisive role in universities classifications toward quality. Furthermore, students play a significant role in achieving and maintaining these concepts. Therefore, this study aimed to look at students' preferences to emphasize the importance of students' opinions that may affect changes upon administrations and college life at universities.

An evaluation of the data showed that the majority of the students favor retaining the old system (i.e. 8-week summer semester, 5 days/week, 60 minutes/class). Data also showed that the main reason students attend the summer sessions is to finish their studies early. Furthermore, a close look at the data revealed that most students rely on their parents as a source of finance to support their college education.

11.2. Recommendations

The results of the survey warrant that the follow recommendations be made:

Representatives of student government at both universities should canvass the student body to determine to what extent the results of the present survey correspond with student preferences in general toward the summer sessions and toward which courses should be offered in the summer sessions. Moreover, representatives should consult with the heads of departments to discuss scheduling of courses in summer sessions and to make recommendations based on the results of their own research.

11.3. Further Research

Recommendations for further research into the subject of summer sessions include the following:

1. A more extensive survey encompassing a larger random sample of students enrolled in all Jordanian universities should be undertaken to elicit students' preferences toward the summer sessions.
2. Research should be undertaken to determine which segments of the student population are most weakly represented in summer sessions enrollment, to determine the reasons for that and to determine what motivational incentives would be effective in increasing their future enrollment.
3. Research should be undertaken to determine to what extent students' academic needs are being met in the summer sessions.
4. Research should be undertaken to determine faculty preferences toward the summer sessions and the summer session clientele.

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