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FOSTERING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS THROUGH MENTORING PROGRAMME

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Abstract

Mentoring programme that involves mentors and mentees is a creative approach to help mentees strengthen their learning and leadership skills, fostering their academic performance and inspiring them to develop their future careers. The aim of mentoring programme is basically to assist students in developing their learning environment to the maximum which can help to improve their academic performance. Therefore, the objective of this study is to evaluate the influence of mentoring programme on students' academic performance at a private university. It was a cross-sectional study involving 211 students. A self-administered questionnaire consisting of demographic details, general perceptions on mentoring programme, academic support, and mentor's characteristics was distributed. The data was analysed using the SPSS software. The results of the study showed that the respondents agreed that the mentoring programme has assisted students in fostering their academic performance. However, the study revealed that only mentee's perception and mentor's characteristics contributed to the prediction of the influence on students' academic performance. Therefore, the study concludes that mentee's perceptions and mentor's characteristics are the key successful factors of the mentoring programme in fostering students' academic performance.

Keywords: Academic performance, mentee, mentor, mentoring programme

1. Introduction

Nowadays, most of higher education institutions particularly business faculties are facing challenges in attracting new students and retaining existing students. Noufou et al. (2014) claimed that business school students are demanding a more relevant and enjoyable learning experience. Furthermore, potential employers also expect new business graduates to be equipped with variety of skills such as leadership skills, problem solving skills, team and interpersonal skills, and networking skills.

Due to that, the institutions have taken many strategies to meet the demands of students and potential employers such as by developing mentoring programmes and engaging students with mentoring activities. Previous research has shown that mentoring programmes conducted in higher education institutions mostly showed positive effects not only on the mentees and mentors but also to the institution itself. A study conducted by Boyd et al. (2019) identified the key benefits of mentoring programme in an Australian Regional University; and it found that mentoring programme conducted has enhanced the students' retention rate, improved mentees' academic performance and strengthened the social network of mentors and mentees.

Hryciw et al. (2013) also claimed that student peer mentoring is usually intended to benefit both, mentors and mentees. Mentors' capacity to effectively adopt good communication and provide necessary assistance may help mentees in achieving better outcomes, particularly in terms of academic success. According to the findings of a study conducted by Leidenfrost et al. (2014), in comparison to the students who did not participate in the mentorship programme, those who did had a higher number of courses passed and a higher average grade. The findings imply that mentoring programme is significant to be implemented in universities as it offers many benefits particularly in fostering students' academic performance.

Furthermore, Tinoco-Giraldo et al. (2020) found that mentoring process and the learning experiences contribute in helping students to grow their capacities, skills, values, and attitudes. This is due to the process where mentees were given tailored advice on how to enhance their attitudes, values, and talents in order to grasp the curriculum and gain self-confidence in their chosen field.

Similarly, Scerri et al. (2020) also claimed that mentoring relationships help mentees gain knowledge and skills, develop networking opportunities, gain confidence, and learn to reflect on their own learning processes, with the additional benefits for mentors including personal satisfaction and reflection on their own learning processes. The study suggested that by enhancing mentors' emotional support for mentees during the mentoring programme may help to foster more mutually beneficial relationships.

2. Problem Statement

Universities have made continuous efforts to improve the academic performance of students. For instance, universities have used new teaching tools such as simulations, problem-based learning, or multimedia materials. Besides, all the elements of the learning process that include syllabus, teaching methodology, objectives, resources, learning outcomes and type of assessment have also been adjusted to meet the objective.

Mentoring is seen as one of the approaches that could be taken by university to support new students adapting to the transition from school to university culture. As a result, many universities have engaged with mentoring programmes that usually focus on freshmen students and studies have found that mentoring programmes have been shown to be successful in assisting first-year students. (Cutright & Evans, 2016; Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

Numerous studies have proved that mentoring programmes have improved the positive outcomes of mentees, particularly in terms of academic success (Leidenfrost et al., 2014; Ismail & Jui, 2014; Ismail et al., 2015). Besides, some studies have shown that mentoring programmes have helped not only in improving mentees' academic performance but also reducing drop-out rates from university and offering better social integration (Boyd et al., 2019; Leidenfrost et al., 2014). A strengths-based mentoring approach should be implemented to help improving enrolment of new students as well as increasing graduation rates (Butler et al., 2013).

Furthermore, Becker et al. (2017) suggested that there is a need for higher education institutions to adopt mentoring and coaching students' work for them to gauge and learn complex problems as well as exploring new frontiers in gaining new skills. Educators or lecturers need to change their position from lecturing towards guiding students to emphasise more hands-on relationship where the former is encouraged to collaborate regularly with the latter.

In line with the current needs, Faculty of Business and Accountancy (FBA), Universiti Selangor (UNISEL) has also put an effort to implement mentoring programme which formally started in September 2017. The mentoring programme first involved new students from September 2017 intake that consists of degree and diploma level students. The primary purpose of this programme is to improve the educational climate for undergraduate students. It also emphasises on how to facilitate formation of mentor relationships and strategies for maintaining those relationships, establishing appropriate involvements and monitoring, and how to ensure that the programme meets the faculty needs. The most important aspect is to make sure that this programme would help and guide students in identifying their self-potential and self-confidence to achieve academic excellence.

However, the mentoring programme has yet to be evaluated since there has been no research done in FBA on this matter. Therefore, this research is conducted to investigate the effectiveness of the mentoring programme in fostering students' academic performance. The findings of this research will provide important and valuable information particularly for the faculty, lecturers and students to improve the effectiveness of mentoring programme in the future as the success of this programme requires commitment from all parties involved.

3. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

The literature review of three independent variables and a dependent variable employed in this research is discussed in this chapter. This chapter also provides information about theoretical foundation for the research, the empirical evidence between dependant variables and independent variable and hypotheses development. To put it another way, this chapter elucidates the connections between the current study and existing research on the topic.

3.1. Academic Performance

Academic performance is an important aspect of education across the levels of education especially in higher education institutions. Academic performance is the achievement of an educational goal by a student, teacher, or institution over time, as measured by examinations or ongoing evaluations. (Narad & Abdullah, 2016). Studies on academic performance of higher education institutions normally associate academic performance with the grade point average and graduation rate of the students (Arshad et al., 2015; Santos & Reigadas, 2002). According to Rabgay (2015), students with high academic performance have been found to be more productive and they contribute more towards the economic growth of a country. Additionally, academic performance also determines students' job placements after graduation.

3.2. Mentoring Programme

Mentoring is a relationship between two persons in which one person shares their knowledge, skills, and experience with another to help them advance personally and/or professionally. Rekha and Ganesh (2012) defined mentoring as a process in which an older, more experienced individual serves as a guide, counsellor, and friend to a younger, less experienced individual.

Mentoring programmes should be designed to have activities which can contribute to the development of the higher skills needed in life and careers of a mentee. Crisp et al. (2017) proposed four mentoring activities which are psychological and emotional support, degree and career support, academic subject knowledge support, and existence of a role model.

Higher education institutions which are involved in mentoring are more likely to have opportunities in developing a good relationship between lecturers and students as well as building up students' personality and attitude. According to Hudson (2016), establishing trust and respect between a mentor and a mentee requires sharing information, resources, and expectations, as well as being professional, enthusiastic, and supportive.

A study done by Toklu and Fuller (2017) discovered that mentors and mentees will and can advance themselves through mentoring programme. The knowledge and experience gained by both participants aided mentees in becoming more self-regulated and confident in their performance. Mentors, on the other hand, achieved elevated higher self-esteem in order to enhance leadership skills and personal satisfaction.

As institutions of higher education continue to evolve in the face of growing competition and reduced number of students, mentoring programmes should be considered a priority in providing support and professional guidance to the students which can improve organisational outcomes. Mentoring programme is a creative approach to help mentees strengthen their learning and leadership skills, fostering their academic performance and inspiring them to develop their future careers. In general, mentoring programmes are usually created and implemented based on the policy and objectives of an organization (Ismail & Jui, 2014).

3.3. Mentee's Perception

A mentee is a person who receives advices, training, or counselling from a mentor. The mentee's perceptions towards the mentoring program implemented, particularly the mentor, has become a key aspect in determining the mentor-mentee relationship. A good relationship between a mentor and a mentee seems to be an indicator of an effective mentorship programmes.

A study by Lombardo et al. (2017) confirmed that mentees felt comforted with the knowledge that they could have the required support from a mentor. This is because the mentees of the mentoring programme perceived that mentors are a reliable source of information as they were more aware of current realities of the education system. They also believed that mentoring programme offers security as they can be a quick source of information and advice when needed.

In a study conducted at a medical school in Malaysia, Mohammad et al. (2019) discovered that mentoring relationships are crucial to assist mentees in adjusting to a new situation, such as during the learning transition. According to the findings, offering appropriate protected time and frequent mentoring communications will help to support the mentees' welfare during their transitional phases.

3.4. Academic Support

Academic supports are programmes and practices that aim to improve students' academic performance particularly for students who are at risk of falling behind. Mentoring programme is a common form of tutoring that can also provide students with motivational support regarding academic matters. Effective mentoring programmes require mentors to give motivation, personal individual attention, direct instruction, and error correction in helping mentees improve their academic performance.

In a study done to students' academic mentoring programmes in UK, the academic support provided by mentors enhanced the students' confidence level and increased their self-efficacy which can be measured by their involvement in academic related projects (Pye et al., 2016). The study also found that the students who had regular one-to-one mentoring responded positively when discussing about the academic support that they received from their respective mentors, asserting that they felt much more assured and confident about planning, writing, and referencing.

3.4.1. Mentor's Characteristics

Lombardo et al. (2017) described mentors as individuals who provide advice and referrals to suitable resources in order to reduce academic stress and uncertainty while also providing insight into university social opportunities. The research confirmed that the helpful behaviours of mentors such as being resourceful and providing emotional support to mentees lead to positive insight of the mentoring relationship.

Nachimuthu (2006) claimed that mentors play many roles in the life of a mentee by acting as a counsellor, advisor, consultant, tutor, and teacher. Similarly, Robbins and Sanghi (2006) stated that a mentor has many roles to play in mentoring programme which include coaching by developing the skills of his mentee. The mentor also acts as a counsellor by providing support and helping to strengthen his mentee's self-confidence.

A positive relationship between mentor and mentee was established in a study done by Stanulis and Bell (2017), where mentors who effectively communicate with their mentees will help the novice to achieve success in their future career. The study was carried out using teachers at beginners' level as the subjects where they were able to set their long-term goals within the context of effective teaching if their mentors played an effective role towards them.

Sheehan et al. (2016) suggested that having a professional mentor is significant or extremely important because it emphasises the importance of developing a mutually beneficial connection between mentors and mentees. This is because a strong mentoring relationship can provide counsel, resources, and networking opportunities that can help participants make better career decisions and increase their productivity.

3.5. Empirical Studies on Mentoring Programme and Academic Performance

Numerous studies had been conducted to examine the effects of mentoring programme towards academic performance of mentees. Leidenfrost et al. (2014) conducted a study to examine the effect of peer mentoring programme on mentees' academic performance and the finding of the study suggested that participants in the mentoring programme had a better academic performance than their peers who did not participate. A study done by Ismail and Jui (2014) confirmed that a mentoring programme is a significant predictor of mentees' academic performance. According to the study, this can be achieved when a mentor is able to adopt good communication skills and provide sufficient support to a mentee. The finding is consistent with Ismail et al. (2015) whereby the study also found a significant relationship between mentoring programme and mentees' academic performance.

Athanasiou et al. (2016) also supported the view that mentoring is associated with high academic performance. More importantly, it was suggested that frequent use of mentoring skills and quality of mentoring have positive effects on academic performance. Guhan et al. (2020) conducted a study on 148 first year medical students who were enrolled in the mentorship programme. The results confirmed that the mentoring programme clearly enhanced the students' academic performance, particularly those who were below average and needed additional care and support. In addition to their findings, they found that the mentoring programme enhanced relationships of the mentees with teachers, improved self-esteem, and stress reduction.

Although students who performed well in their academics may not always require a mentor to assist them during their study years, Simanungkalit and Rondonuwu (2020) found that any mentorship style has a beneficial effect on contributing to a high score in the academic achievements of the students. Another study done by Dos Reis and Yu (2018) in South Africa towards commerce degree students found that those who engaged in peer mentoring programmes outperformed those who did not, even without having a basic economics background. These students received additional tutorial support from a peer mentoring programme, and it has been proven to be successful.

3.6. Development of Research Hypothesis

This conceptual framework was needed to gauge the relationship among the variables. Therefore, the research hypotheses of this study are as follows:

H1: There is a significant relationship between a mentee's perception and the mentee's academic performance.

H2: There is a significant relationship between academic support and mentee's academic performance

H3: There is a significant relationship between a mentor's characteristics and the mentee's academic performance

3.7. Theoretical Foundation of Research Framework

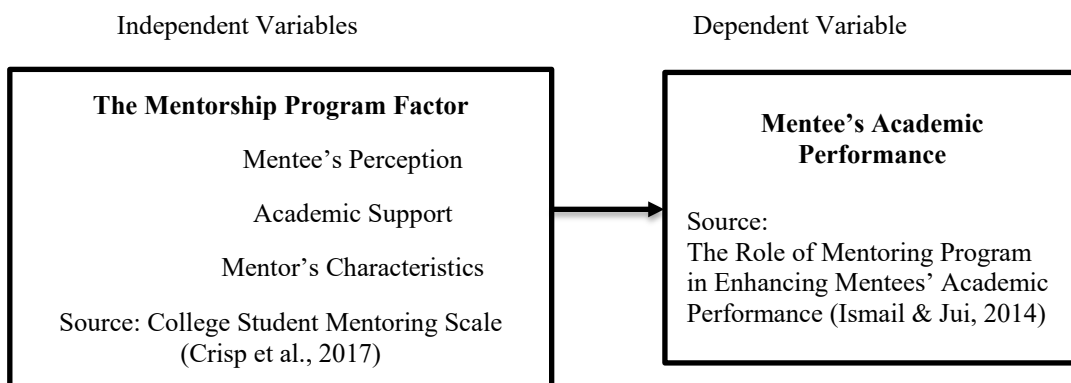Based on these findings, the proposed research framework for this study is presented in Figure 1.

Independent Variables   Dependent Variable

The Mentorship Program Factor

Mentee's Perception

Academic Support

Mentor's Characteristics

Source: College Student Mentoring Scale (Crisp et al., 2017)

Mentee's Academic Performance

Source:
The Role of Mentoring Program in Enhancing Mentees' Academic Performance (Ismail & Jui, 2014)

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

4. Research Questions

The study has two major research questions that were formulated to support the research objectives. The research questions of this study are summarised as follows:

i. Is there any relationship between the mentoring programme and students' academic performance?

ii. Which factor of the mentoring programme has the greatest impact on students' academic performance?

5. Purpose of the Study

This study is conducted to achieve the following objectives:

i. To determine the relationship between the mentoring programme and students' academic performance.

ii. To determine which factor of the mentoring programme has the greatest impact on students' academic performance.

6.   Research Methods

This section describes the methodology used in this research which includes research design, instrument development, sampling techniques and data collection method, and reliability test.

6.1. Research Design

This research adopted a cross-sectional research design which is a quantitative approach to process and interpret the data. A closed-ended structured questionnaire was used to obtain information from the respondents. There are three determinants of mentorship programme used in this research, namely mentee's perception, academic support and mentor's characteristics which collectively consists of 15-items whereby academic performance consists of 7-items.

6.2. Instrument Development

To achieve the objectives of the study, the primary data collection process was carried out in FBA, UNISEL. For statistical illustration of the results in this study, respondents were provided with quantitative research in the form of questionnaires. The structured questionnaire which was adapted from Crisp et al. (2017) and Lian et al. (2013) had four sections. Section A requires the students to fill out their demographic details while Section B contains 15 items that assess the students' perceptions towards mentoring programme, academic support and mentors' characteristics through six-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Section C is to assess the students' academic performance and lastly, Section D is purposely designed for students to be able to rate the mentoring programme and give suggestions.

6.3. Sampling Technique and Data Collection Method

The main method of survey distribution and collection is through self-collection. The research sampling technique used in this study is simple random sampling to obtain more scientific results in characterising the population as a whole.

For this study, the students of FBA from September 2017 intake until April 2019 intake were selected from a population of 1709 students as the respondents. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to students from 5 degree programmes and 4 diploma programmes in FBA. Out of 400 questionnaires distributed, only 281 were returned. After going through the respondents' data, 211 questionnaires were usable for further analysis, giving a usable rate of 75% and the sample represents 12.35% of the population.

6.4. Reliability Test

The internal consistency of the items utilised in this research instrument was used to assess its reliability. The consistency of the questionnaire items on the reliability of the research instrument can be demonstrated by this method. To obtain the consistency of the instrument items, Cronbach's coefficient

alpha value was used. It is the most commonly used reliability measure by researchers to identify each item of the questionnaire as an equivalent test and all correlations between items are the same.

6.5. Data Analysis Technique and Tool

Descriptive and frequencies analyses were performed based on the total number of respondents answering each question and mean score was computed for the Likert Scale items. The descriptive analysis illustrated the basic features of the data in the study which may resulted in the simple data summaries of sample and measures. The multiple regression analysis was then conducted to test the hypotheses and this technique works by modeling the relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. The analysis was conducted by using the IBM SPSS Statistics software.

7. Findings

Based on the analysis of the questionnaire, this section includes discussion on reliability analysis, respondents' profile and regression analysis to examine the relationship between the mentoring programme and students' academic performance.

7.1. Reliability Analysis

Table 1 below presents the reliability analysis of dependent variables (mentee's perception, academic support and mentor's characteristics) and independent variable (academic performance). All values exceeded the values of 0.70. According to Rovai et al. (2014), reliability tests with an alpha of 0.7 are generally recognised as having good reliability.

Table 1. Reliability Analysis

Items	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Mentee's Perception	0.719	5
Academic Support	0.929	5
Mentor's Characteristics	0.953	5
Academic Performance	0.930	7

7.2. Respondents' Profile

Table 2 shows that most of the respondents in this study were female students of 72% and 28% were male students. The highest percentage is Malay in terms of race, which is 152 (72%) followed by Indian 24.2%. As for the programme, 20.9% of respondents are Bachelor of Accountancy students followed by Bachelor of Human Resources Management (18.5%) and Bachelor of Business Management (18%).

Table 2. Respondent Profile

	Respondents Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	59	28.0
	Female	152	72.0
Race	Malay	152	72.0
	Chinese	2	9.0
	Indian	51	24.2
	Others	6	2.8
Programmes	Diploma in Administrative Management	1	0.5
	Diploma in Accountancy	5	2.4
	Diploma in Business Management	4	1.9
	Diploma in Sport Management	26	12.3
	Bachelor in Finance	33	15.6
	Bachelor in Human Resources Management	39	18.5
	Bachelor in Accountancy	44	20.9
	Bachelor in Business Management	38	18
	Bachelor in Business Administration	2`	10

7.3. Regression Analysis

A regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between mentee's academic performance and the mentee's perception; academic support; and mentor's characteristics. The results are presented in Table 3. The ANOVA outputs show that the adjusted R^2 is 0.517 with the $R^2 = 0.524$. This means that the mentoring programme factors explain 52.4% of the variance in academic performance. It also suggests that 47.6% of the variation is still unaccounted for, implying that adding more independent variables could enhance the model's fit.

Meanwhile, the F-ratio in the ANOVA table (see Table 4) determines whether the overall regression model fits the data well. The mentoring programme factors statistically significantly predict the mentees' academic achievement, $F (3, 207) = 75.997$, $p < .0005$, as shown in the table. It indicates that the regression model fits the data. Furthermore, Table 5 shows that the predictor variables of mentor's characteristics ($p = 0.000$), and mentee's perception ($p = 0.000$) are significant because of their p-values are less than 0.05. Since the P-value is less than (or equal to) α, then the null hypothesis 1 and 3 is rejected in favor of the alternative hypotheses. Therefore, null hypotheses are rejected and accepted the alternative hypotheses.

However, the p-value for academic support ($p = 0.174$) is higher than the standard alpha level of 0.05, suggesting that this amount is not statistically significant. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is rejected. In conclusion, mentor's characteristics has the greatest impact on students' academic performance with the highest score ($β = 0.418$) compared to mentee's perception ($β = 0.267$).

Table 3. Anova[a]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted r square	Std. error of the estimate	Sig
Regression	.724[a]	0.524	0.517	4.37176	.000

A. Predictors: (constant), characteristics, perception, academic support

Table 4. Anova[a]

Model	Sum square	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	4357.420	3	1452.473	75.997	.000
Residual	3956.249	207	19.112		
Total	8313.668	210			

A. Dependent variable: academic performance

Table 5. Coefficient[a]

Model	Unstandardized coefficient		Unstandardized Coefficient	T	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(constant)	6.954	1.560		4.457	.000
Mentee's perception	.204	1.55	.267	3.711	.000
Academic support	.126	0.93	.107	1.363	0.174
Mentor's characteristics	.289	0.56	.418	5.135	.000

8. Conclusion

This section presents the discussions of findings and conclusions of the study. Its focus areas are discussion of findings, implication of the research and recommendation for future research.

8.1. Discussion of findings

In conclusion, this paper emphasised on the relationship between mentoring programme and academic performance among students in FBA, UNISEL that covered three dimensions which are mentee's perception, academic support, and mentor's characteristics. This study found a significant relationship between mentoring programme and students' academic performance. This study is in line with a study done by Athanasiou et al. (2016); Boyd et al. (2019); Guhan et al. (2020), Ismail and Jui (2014); and Ismail et al. (2015) which confirmed that mentoring programme is a significant predictor of mentees' academic performances. Moreover, the benefits of a mentoring programme extend beyond academic accomplishment to emotional and personal factors such as learning new skills for improved performance, comprehension of more difficult subject by the mentees and putting what they have learned into practice.

This research revealed that mentee's perception contributes to the prediction of mentees' academic performance. It is proven that mentees enjoyed being part of this mentorship programme and it is beneficial to them. They also preferred to meet their mentor more frequently in discussing academic and personal issues. This is supported by the previous studies done by Lombardo et al. (2017) and Mohammad et al. (2019) of which mentees perceived their mentor as a reliable source of knowledge because they were more aware of current educational realities. Hence, the mentor should be prepared to help his/her mentee solves any difficulties (academic or social) in the role of a counsellor and serves as a positive role model.

Additionally, mentor's characteristics also had an impact on mentee's academic achievement when the mentor displayed topic competence in the mentee's area of need and provided useful direction and counselling on mentee's study concerns. This result is consistent with the study done by George and

Mampilly (2012), Hudson (2016), Stanulis and Bell (2017) and Sheehan et al. (2016) which found that an effective mentor can present ideas clearly, listen well, and empathise with the problems of his mentee and in turn, enable them to assist the student in gaining good grades in their studies. Therefore, mentors' capacity to create comfortable communication and provide necessary support may help mentees achieve positive outcomes. Furthermore, the result revealed that mentor's characteristics has the greatest impact on students' academic performance. It implies that mentor's characteristics such as support, approachability, and trustworthiness have influenced the academic achievement of the mentees.

However, the regression analysis result showed that the predictor variables of academic support are not statistically significant. The result could indicate that the students have not been provided with sufficient academic support from the mentoring programme. Thus, the necessary efforts should be taken in creating and implementing mentoring activities that can support the mentees to succeed academically. Mentors, in particular need to find resources that will assist mentees in their academic performance, personal development and advancement such as books, workshops, or other learning tools.

This study discovered that mentoring programme has assisted mentees in fostering their academic performance, emotionally supporting mentees and mentor challenging mentees to expand mentees' abilities. Serving as a mentor has various advantages and disadvantages, with the finest mentors attempting to mould their mentees into future leaders rather than merely good followers. It is recommended that mentors are to advise their mentees on the courses to be taken, goals to improve grades, develop good time management, maintain good class attendance, boost self-esteem and trust. Such relationship should be focused on mutual trust and respect through scheduled sessions for meetings and discussions. Such meetings should not only be positive and encouraging but the mentees should find it helpful for their personal growth. Finally, the meetings should help mentees in developing life skills prior to graduation.

8.2. Practical implications

The findings of this study will contribute valuable information to UNISEL, especially to the FBA in assessing the effectiveness of mentoring programmes conducted. The findings also have potential implications on the university policies. Universities should continue to offer support programmes, in particular mentoring programmes focusing on supporting first-year students. Any university that wishes to create successful and long-term mentoring programmes must make sure that the foundation is done correctly, that participants are properly trained, and that the programme is evaluated on a regular basis.

Furthermore, the results of the study provide inputs to the lecturers as mentors about the perceptions of the mentees towards the mentoring programme and themselves. For example, the mentoring programme requires the support from mentors which can help mentees to achieve academic excellence.

8.3. Recommendations for Future Research

This research was carried out under certain constraints which must be considered, given that the respondents of the study were represented by FBA students in UNISEL. It is proposed that future research should investigate the relationship between mentoring programme and students' academic performance in

a broader sense to provide various views and results from different universities. Meanwhile, further research should be conducted by FBA to address the topic of academic support activities in the mentoring programmes and how it can contribute to improve the students' academic performance.

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