

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ACADEMIC ADVISING PRACTICE IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Academic advising is an important component of a university's structure that assist students to realize their potentials and fulfill their educational, career and professional goals. This study investigated academic advising practice in public and private universities in Nigeria. It sought to determine students' and faculty advisers' perception of academic advising practice. Survey research design was used. Questionnaire and focused group discussions were used to collect data. Students from two universities participated in focus group discussions of 10 students per group. Faculty advisers participated in individual in-depth interview. Random and split sampling techniques were used to select students and faculty advisers. A total of 560 undergraduate students (296 males and 264 females) and 85 faculty advisers (49 males and 36 females) completed the questionnaire to examine academic advising practice (AAP) in Nigerian universities. The collated data was analyzed using regression and multi-variance to test the hypotheses while content analysis was used to explore the narratives of the focused group discussions. Some of the findings were that: Academic advising is at the developing stage and majority of the students 389 (85%) were of the opinion that academic advising practice in Nigerian universities was moderate. Advisers knowledge of university's requirements [$F_{(1,518)} = 91.804, P < 0.01$]. Faculty Advisers' skills [$F_{(1,203)} = 199.984, P < 0.01$] and university type ($t = 4.76$) all have significant impact on the academic advising practice. Gender effect was only significant in the use of advising skills ($t = 2.088$). This study concludes that Advisers' skills and knowledge are essential in academic advising practice. It was recommended that universities should establish Academic Advising centers because of its inherent benefits to students.

Keywords: Academic advising practice, student, faculty adviser, comparative study.

1 INTRODUCTION

Academic advising is a fundamental component of all students' experiences in Colleges and Universities. Within this framework, students have the opportunity to find meaning in their life pursuits and make important decisions about the future, receive support to achieve to their maximum potential, and access all that higher education has to offer them. Academic Advising is seen as a process of assisting students match the university's resources to their educational needs and goals so that they get the maximum benefit from their university's experience and, at graduation, are well equipped for life outside the university (National Academic Advising Association {NACADA}, 2003).

Most institutions of higher learning recognize academic advising as an important function of higher education, and not an outlying activity in providing educational programmes. For example, most institutions had consistently agreed that the purpose of academic advising is to aid students in developing effective educational plans that are attuned with their life goals. In recognition of the importance of academic advising, an increasing number of colleges and universities have developed well documented set of academic advising goals consistent with the stated mission of the institution. Academic advising is fundamental to realizing the teaching and learning mission of higher education and has been identified as one of the activities that help the most to ensure long term success for both students and the institution. It is "an educational process that, by intention and design, facilitates students' understanding of the meaning and purpose of higher education and fosters their intellectual and personal development towards academic success and lifelong learning" (NACADA, 2006). Academic advising is a central element for a student's academic success; it is a necessary requirement for any developmental education to take place. "it has been recognized as a viable and necessary component of higher education that results in the success of college students (Grites, 2008).

"Academic advising had evolved from a routine, isolated activity by faculty to a holistic developmental approach by student personnel staff and professional academic advisors to aid students in achieving academic, career, and personal development goal" (NACADA, 2009). Most students witness major

transition in their lives as they enter College or the University. It is a challenging time for most young persons who are leaving the comforts of their parents' home and the guided secondary school life for the first time. Majority of these freshmen are in the age bracket of 15-18 (young adults) who are expected to take decisions independently about their educational and career goals. As a result, they may engage in some behaviours and covert activities that are capable of interfering with their studies. Some may be overwhelmed by the new academic demands, while others may succumb to peer pressure and engage in antisocial behaviours like substance abuse, immorality etc. which can disrupt their education. Some others may have been forced either by their parents or certain conditions to accept courses that are out of tune with their original aspirations and therefore may find it difficult to create interest and transit smoothly.

Having a clear academic path that works towards the successful completion of a university degree or higher learning certificate is very essential in any higher education. Drake (2016) without the necessary academic direction, students can find themselves staying in university longer than necessary since they are not taking courses that will satisfy graduation requirements. These are the wide array of challenges that students encounter especially freshmen. Therefore, they need assistance to navigate smoothly in the University. Sequel to these academic problems being encountered by students, most universities in the world, especially in the Western countries have introduced academic advising.

1.1 Objectives

The objectives of this study include the following:

- To ascertain students' perception of academic advising practice in public and private universities in Nigeria.
- To find out the difference (if any) in the advising skills of male and female advisers.
- To determine the impact of faculty adviser's skills on academic advising practice.
- To ascertain the impact of faculty adviser's knowledge of university's requirements on academic advising practice.
- To ascertain the effect of formal training in academic advising practice.
- To determine the impact of university type on academic advising

1.2 Sample

For this study, the sample for this research consisted of undergraduate students and faculty advisers in two universities. The random and split sampling techniques were adopted for this study. Using the split sampling technique, the sample for the hypothetical study was selected from among the population of the university undergraduate students. A total of 560 students constituted the sample. Out of this number, 296 were males and 264 were females. The Course/level advisers were selected by split sampling from amongst the population of current faculty advisers. A total of 85 faculty advisers constituted the sample. Out of this number, 53 were males and 36 were females. The design adopted for this research was the Cross-Sectional survey method.

1.3 Instrument

Data was collected using the instrument Academic Advising Questionnaire (AAQ) designed by the researcher. The parametric properties of this instrument were ensured in two ways, reliability and validity. In ensuring reliability and validity, Cronbach alpha was used to test internal consistency while the content validity was ascertained by my supervisor, a Psychometric expert. The internal consistency reliability was ascertained using Cronbach alpha yield of $r=0.78$. This implies that the instrument has sufficient internal reliability. See Appendix I and II for sample questionnaire.

1.4 Data Analysis

The responses on students' perception of academic advising practice were aggregated and divided into range. The range was 21-105. This was subsequently divided into 3 equal parts to derive the 3 categories of students' perceptions. These are Low quality (21-47), moderate quality (45-69) and high quality (70-105). Students rating response were aggregated and divided into range. The range was 0-

28. This was divided into 3 equal parts to derive the three categories of the students rating of faculty advisers' skills. These are Low rating (0-9), moderate (10-19), and high rating (20-28).

In this study, an analysis of respondent's characteristics was made in order to boost accurate analysis of the questionnaire. The data obtained by the researcher was subjected to statistical analysis. Multiple regression and Multi-variance were used in testing all the hypotheses as it is used in mean differences. The demographic data was reported using frequency counts and percentage.

Content analysis was used to explore the narrative themes, and to summarize the main ideas and make valid inferences. This method was deemed appropriate. According to Hall and Irvine (2009), content analysis is a more appropriate method for analysing a large amount of data in written and verbal format. An inductive approach was adopted to enhance the accuracy of interpreting the interview recording. To ensure the reliability of the research study, during the interview, the research assistant cross-check the participant's expression during the interview to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding or misinterpretation. All data were carefully analysed in a rigorous and comprehensive manner.

2 RESULTS

Table 1: Students perception of the quality of Academic Advising Practice (AAP) for Covenant University.

Quality of AAP	Frequency	Percent
Low quality	101	28.5
Moderate quality	175	49.3
High quality	79	22.3
Total	355	100

Table 2: Students perception of the quality of AAP for University of Lagos.

Quality of AAP	Frequency	Percent
Low quality	76	37.1
Moderate quality	113	55.1
High quality	16	7.8
Total	205	100

Hypotheses 1: Advisers' knowledge of University's requirement has no significant effect on academic advising practice

Table 3: Knowledge of University's Requirements for Covenant University.

R	R Square	Adj R Square	Beta	Mean Square	F	Sig.
.454a	0.206	0.204	0.454	15519	91.804	.000b

Table 10: Knowledge of University's Requirements for University of Lagos.

R	R Square	Adj R Square	Beta	Mean Square	F	Sig.
.643a	0.414	0.411	0.643	12188.743	143.18	.000b

For Covenant University, advisers' knowledge of University's requirement has significant effect on academic advising practice ($R^2 = 0.206$, $F = 91.804$, $P < 0.01$). This implies that Covenant University level of advisers knowledge could predict 20.4% of the variance in academic advising practice.

For University Lagos, advisers' knowledge of University's requirement has significant effect on academic advising practice ($R^2 = 0.414$, $F = 143.18$, $P < 0.01$). This implies that University Lagos level of advisers knowledge could predict 41.1% of the variance in academic advising practice.

The degree of effect of advisers' knowledge of university's requirement is more pronounced at University of Lagos than Covenant University.

Hypothesis 2: Faculty advisers' skills have no significant impact on the academic advising practice.

Table 4: Advisers' skills for Covenant University.

Model Summary						
R	R Square	Adj R Square	Beta	Mean Square	F	Sig.
.665a	0.430	0.427	0.650	19518.7389	193.999	.000b

Table 5: Advisers' skills for Covenant University.

Model Summary						
R	R Square	Adj R Square	Beta	Mean Square	F	Sig.
.704a	0.496	0.494	0.704	14624.98	199.984	.000b

For Covenant University, advisers' skills have significant effect on academic advising practice ($R^2 = 0.430$, $F = 193.999$, $P < 0.01$). This implies that Covenant University's faculty possession of advising skills could predict 42.7% of the variance in academic advising practice.

For University Lagos, Faculty Advisers' skills have significant effect on academic advising practice ($R^2 = 0.704$, $F = 199.984$, $P < 0.01$). This implies that University of Lagos faculty adviser's skills could predict 49.4 % of the variance in academic advising practice. The degree of effect of adviser's skills is more pronounced at University of Lagos than Covenant University.

Hypothesis 4: Faculty Adviser's Gender has no significant impact on advising practice

Table 6: Gender differences on advising practice.

	Sex	N	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Use of Advising Skill	Male	49	21.71	-2.088	83	0.04
	Female	36	23.22			
Knowledge of University Requirement	Male	49	24.29	-0.761	83	0.449
	Female	36	24.94			

Table 18 shows that gender effect was only significant in the use advising skills ($t = -2.088$). The results of the analysis show that there is no significance difference in male and female faculty adviser's advising skills.

Hypothesis 5: There is no significant impact of university type in academic advising practice

Table 7: University Type on academic advising practice.

Group	Mean	N	df	t	p
Covenant University	46.16	355	558	4.76	0.01
University of Lagos	40.44	205			

The University type result shows Covenant University with a mean value of 46.16 and t-test statistics of 4.76, $P < 0.01$. University of Lagos has a mean value of 40.44 with t-test statistics of 5.01, $P < 0.01$.

The results show significant difference in university type in academic advising practice. University type has significant effect on academic advising practice ($t = 4.76$).

Table 8: Summary of Focused Group Discussions.

S/N	Advising Skills	Students	Course/Level Advisers
1.	Perception of Academic advising practice	Students see Level/Course Advisers as signing and approving authority majorly signs course registration forms	Students should be given proper orientation about academic advising so as to enhance advising
2.	Rapport Building	Some of the Course/Level Advisers are not approachable, as they do not initiate contact with the students. They are detached from us.	Students should be open to their advisers, be free to ask questions and clear their doubts
3.	Possession of advising skills	Advisers have not built relationship with the students they are advising	Students should be assisted to have clear educational goals. It is important that student learn about their profession as soon as they enter the university.
4.	Use of Advising skills	Some Faculty advisers are not patient and shows no empathy to the students. Seems judgmental in their approach to students' challenges.	Training is needed to enhance Advisers' effectiveness.
5.	Influence on Student's success	Advisers focus majorly on their intellectual quotient and neglect other parameters that may affect their academic success	Academic advising is a serious job that should not be taken lightly. It is very demanding

3 DISCUSSIONS

The study focuses mainly on students and faculty advisers in the universities with the aim to determine how academic advising is currently been practiced in public and private universities in Nigeria. In this study, two research questions and five hypotheses were posed and tested. The findings of both the research questions and hypotheses would be discussed accordingly. Research question one sought to know students' perception of academic advising practice in the university. How advising services are offered by faculty advisers and how students perceive the usefulness of advising to their academic, professional careers and personal growth. The findings illustrate students and faculty advisers' perception of academic advising practice in Nigerian universities. The current trend and how it should be. The discourse reflects how students viewed academic advising practice.

Students see the advising services offered by faculty advisers as merely assisting them in course registration and signing of documents. Majority of the respondents from Covenant University and University of Lagos rated the quality of academic advising practice as moderate (49.3%, 55.1% respectively). However, the proportion for University Lagos is slightly higher. This indicates that academic advising practice is higher in Covenant than in University of Lagos. Drake (2011) states that advisers guide students to navigate the higher education maze, to make effective and thoughtful decisions about their futures, to adapt their life skills to the new academic. Research question two was on students' rating of faculty adviser's skills. Faculty advisers were moderately rated in their possession and use of advising skills such as rapport building, empathy, reflection, patience, listening and effective communication. Majority of the respondents from the two universities rated their faculty advisers' skills to be moderate (49% and 49.8% respectively). However, a great proportion of faculty advisers from Covenant University were rated higher than those from the University of Lagos.

Hypothesis one tested the impact of knowledge of university's requirement on academic advising practice. It was found that advisers' knowledge of University's requirement has significant effect on academic advising practice. The results show that it was significant for both universities. For Covenant University ($R^2 = 0.206$, $F = 91.804$, $P < 0.01$). This implies that Covenant University level of adviser's knowledge predicted 20.4% of the variance in academic advising practice. For University Lagos ($R^2 = 0.414$, $F = 143.18$, $P < 0.01$). This implies that University Lagos level of Advisers knowledge predicted

41.4% of the variance in academic advising practice. However, adviser's knowledge of university's requirement is more pronounced at University of Lagos than Covenant University. The role and responsibilities of the advisers are diverse in student advising. "Advisers are expected to share their knowledge of major and graduation requirements, assist students schedule their courses and in general facilitate progression to degree completion in timely manner" (Baker and Griffin, 2010).

Hypothesis two tested the impact of faculty advisers' skills on academic advising practice. It was significant for both universities. For Covenant University, advisers' skills have significant effect on academic advising practice ($R^2 = 0.430$, $F = 193.999$, $P < 0.01$). This implies that Covenant University's faculty advisers' skills predicted 42.7% of the variance in academic advising practice. University of Lagos faculty advisers' skills has significant effect on advising practice ($R^2 = 0.704$, $F = 199.984$, $P < 0.01$). This implies that University of Lagos faculty advisers' skills predicted 49.4 % of the variance in academic advising practice. The degree of effect of adviser's skills is more pronounced at University of Lagos than Covenant University. This is an indication that a unit increase in the advising skill will impact on the practice of academic practice by 0.52%.

Hypothesis three tested the impact of formal training on academic advising practice. From the result analysis, it was not significant for both universities ($t = 1.104$, $t = 0.05$ respectively). However, from faculty adviser' narratives and the frequency count, majority of the faculty advisers (62.4%) had no formal training on advising and (41.2%) were not adequately prepared for the advising roles. The narratives also indicate faculty advisers' need for training in academic advising. Hypotheses four tested the impact of adviser's gender on academic advising practice. The results show that gender was only significant in the use of advising skills ($t = 2.088$). It was not significant in terms of possession of advising skill but in the use. There is no difference in male and female faculty advisers' advising skills. This was also established in the narratives and students' responses. In terms of use of advising skills, the study found that more female than male advisers were skillful in the advising process. This implies that they are likely to more effective than their male counter parts. Although from the students' perspective, there was no significant difference in whether their advisers were male or female.

Hypothesis five tested the effect of university type on academic advising practice. The results show significant difference in university type in academic advising practice. University type has significant effect on academic advising practice ($t = 4.76$). This indicates that academic advising practice in private universities is more pronounced than in public universities. Other findings showed that most course advisers have no scheduled time for advising. Also, most of the faculty advisers have very busy schedule which tend to make them not to have sufficient time for effective advising practice.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Findings from this study indicate that faculty and students' perception of academic advising practice, in Nigerian universities is still relatively moderate and in its infant stage. Academic advising as an essential part of higher education is very crucial in the development of student's strength, abilities, potentials and positive personality traits at the college/university. Proper academic advising practice will help in the realization of a student's educational, career and individual goals while at the same time fulfilling the university's vision and mission. An Academic Advising Center is very vital in the realization of these goals with the academic advisers who are therefore expected to play strategic role in the advising process. Additionally, training of faculty advisers and other professionals in the art of advising is equally very important. It is strongly recommended that Academic Advising Centres should be established in Nigerian universities in order to meet students' increasing needs.

4.1 Limitations

This study has some limitations. First, the data collected was from only two universities, one public and one private. A number of faculty advisers from University of Lagos could not complete the questionnaire because it was during the first semester examination period. More universities should have been involved and this would have enhanced the generalizability of the research. Secondly, data was collected once. A longitudinal design would be used in subsequent studies to determine the effect of advising on students' academic achievement.

4.2 Recommendations

- 1 The entrenching of Academic Advising in the Universities strategic plan and with clear cut vision and guiding principles in line with NACADA model of Academic advising that will aid the creation of an advising service structure. In addition, there should be an institutional commitment and goals for advising.
- 2 Orientation for both students and course advisers on academic advising at the commencement of every academic session to sensitize them on the advisement service available.
- 3 Training for Advisers in line with NACADA's (2017) Core Competencies for Academic Advising, which consist of three components: conceptual, informational, and relational. The conceptual component provides advisors with ideas and theories of advising, while the informational component includes institution-specific knowledge for accurately advising of students. The relational component connects the conceptual and informational components to effectively communicate and build rapport with students (NACADA, 2017). Appendix VI shows some examples of new advisor training (NAT) programs. Such programme will among other things, provide information and training to staff and faculty on the effective delivery of advising services and to maximize use of all tools.
- 4 Establishment of Academic Advising Centre dedicated to advisement as found in most Universities in Western countries.
- 5 Students should be open to their advisers in terms of whatever challenge they may be facing, academic, financial, emotional psychological etc. It will help to build the relationship between the student and the adviser.
- 6 Developing an advising outcome that could be assessed and evaluated to determine what the university expects the students to learn as a result of advising. (Learning outcome of Advising). A process of assessment and evaluation is vital to the achievement of the goals of advising programmes for "without ongoing assessment it is not possible to determine with any certainty that the advising programme is accomplishing its stated mission" (Habley, 2005).
- 7 Putting checks and balances in place, to monitor the effectiveness of the faculty adviser and the advisement process.
- 8 Academic Advising of students should voluntary and not imposed on faculty so that they give their best.
- 9 Since there is an intersection between advising and teaching, experienced faculty and professors could also be involved in advising by utilizing their classrooms to facilitate some advising before the commencement of the lecture.
- 10 Provision of advising tools and resources such as Academic Advising Handbooks, NACADA Journals on academic advising etc.
- 11 Advisers should ensure that they have advising schedules. In this way, students will know what time to come for advising and they could also leverage on ICT and engage on online advising through the various social media. In this way they will not see the students as taking up their useful times.
- 12 Students should also endeavor to keep to scheduled appointments with advisers.

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