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Abstract

A sample of 187 university students (53, 41 and 93 first, second and third year respectively) participated in this study. No significant relationship (r = 0.138) was found between the rate at which students seek academic advising and their perception on the programme. The findings showed that the perception on academic advising of students in different years of study is significantly (P < 0.05) different. The perception on academic advising of male and female students was not statistically significant (P > 0.5). A positive and significant (r = 0.256; P < 0.01) relationship was reported between academic performance and students' perception on academic advising. It was concluded that ways of sustaining and improving students image on academic advising be put in place.

Introduction

Academic advising is viewed as the process of "assisting students to realize the maximum educational benefits to them, by helping them to better understand themselves and to learn to use the resources of the institution to meet their special educational needs and aspirations" (Crockett, 1978 p. 3). According to Sindabi (2007), the purpose of academic advising programme is to assist students in the development of meaningful educational and career goals. Academic advisors assist students in developing educational plans consistent with their life goals. Academic advisors provide information about academic progress and degree requirements and carefully review students' academic and educational needs, performance, and challenges.

When students join university for the first time, they are exposed to a lot of freedom which is a big contrast to the strict discipline and restriction that characterize many secondary schools and homes in Kenya. It is assumed that these students are above the age of 18 and therefore mature enough to make decisions independently. Consequently, they might engage themselves in behaviors that may compromise their studies. Peer influence sometimes entices students into antisocial behavior like drug abuse and irresponsible sex which eventually interrupt their studies. Some students might not have been admitted into programmes of their choice and therefore may lack motivation to concentrate in their current programmes.

Students begin university education with limited knowledge about career prospects

related to the courses they are enrolled in. The job market is very dynamic and keeps on changing every so often that unless students get up to date information they find difficulties after completion of their studies. Students who need to pursue further education also need information on opportunities for advancement. The guidance and counseling programme in many Kenyan universities may not adequately tackle academic advising since they are mainly focused on social and psychological issues. If students' academic needs are not addressed, they may fail their examinations or drop out from college and therefore lose out on the tuition spent and minimize their chances of employment (Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Brower, 1992).

The teaching style in secondary schools is different from the instructional methods applied in university settings. At the university level, students are expected to do a lot of academic work and research by their own. By the time students adjust from secondary school to university, they will experience difficulties. It is the many problems that are related to academic work that made universities in many parts of the world including some Kenyan universities to introduce academic mentoring. Whether or not students will seek academic advising services from their academic mentors will depend on their perception on the programme among other factors. On the other hand, their perception on the academic advising programme may be affected by a number of factors including; gender, tendency to seek advice, and year of study. The need for this study was stimulated by a desire to evaluate students' perceptions on an existing academic advising programme after noticing that their response to the service was low. Specifically, the study attempted to provide answers to the following research questions:

i. Is there a significant relationship between the rate at which students seek academic advising and their perception on the programme?
ii. Is there a significant difference between the perceptions of students on academic advising in different years of study?

iii. Does gender influence students' perceptions on academic advising?
iv. Is there a relationship between academic performance and students' perception on academic advising?

Literature Review

According to George and Neale (2005), mentoring can be defined as an interaction between a more experienced person and a less experienced person whose aim is to provide guidance that motivates the mentored person to take action. The availability of exemplary, caring role models is important for all students, but may be especially critical to the retention (Walker & Taub, 2001) and success of college students who do not have role models at home. Research on mentoring indicates that it has a positive impact on the personal and professional development of young adults (Levinson, 1978). Research shows that students value most highly academic advisors who are perceived to be accessible, approachable, and helpful in providing guidance that connects their present academic experience with their future life plans (Gordon, Habley, & Associates, 2000; Frost, 1991).

Students at different years of study experience different and unique problems and therefore are likely to perceive the need for help differently and vary at the rate at which they seek academic advising. For example, first year students are expected to need a lot of help in subject and career choice than students in the subsequent years. Once students settle down and acquire a lot of information about university life, they may not require much assistance from their academic advisors. In this study, it was expected that the need for help at different years of study will be directly related to students' perception on academic advising.

Couch and Chaffin (2004) conducted a study on sophomore (second year) students' perceptions of academic advising services at East Tennessee State University (ETSU). The results indicated that continued improvements in academic advising services were needed at ETSU. The data also showed that ETSU students were satisfied with assistance received from their advisors in some areas and not others. In a

different study, Kennedy-Dudley (2007) found that senior students had a more positive evaluation of advising than sophomores. Those with professional advising had a better perception of advising than did those with faculty advising.

A study by Wolfe (n.d) on 350 students in post secondary institutions revealed that a majority (76%) of them view their faculty advisors as their primary source of academic advising. This implied that students had a positive attitude towards academic advising. The study also showed that students made an average of approximately four visits to their advisors per academic year. The numbers of visits were higher among students in older classes. In the same study, 78% of students rated their academic advisors as good.

Generally and traditionally, males have been less willing to seek help in dealing with academic difficulties (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997; Daubman & Lehman, 1993), psychological problems (Möller-Leimkühler, 2002; Cook, 1984; Padesky & Hammen, 1981), career counseling (Di Fabio & Bernaud, 2008; Rochlen, Mohr, & Hargrove, 1999), and retirement planning (Joo & Grable, 2001). Such lower rates of help seeking among males transcend racial and national limits (Oliver, Pearson, Coe, & Gunnell, 2005; Neighbors & Howard, 1987). Gender differences in willingness to seek help was expected to be reflected in the perceptions on academic advising of male and female students in this study.

Men do not fail to seek help because they do not have problems but because social norms of traditional masculinity frowns on help seeking by men (Möller-Leimkühler, 2002; Lee, 1997; Wisch, Mahalik, Hayes, & Nutt, 1995; Kessler, Brown, & Broman, 1981). Unfortunately, males appear to be reluctant to avail themselves of services even when the helper is a peer rather than some authority figure. With males, it may be prudent to institute an "intrusive" form of mentoring (Redmond, 1990), in which the mentor takes the lead and contacts the student on a periodic basis rather than waiting for the student to initiate such communication.

Kennedy-Dudley (2007) found that women were more likely than men to have been advised professionally. This could imply that, women are more likely to have a positive perception on advising compared to men who have been found to be more reluctant in seeking help (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997; Daubman & Lehman, 1993).

In a study by the National Science Foundation (2008), it was found that Female respondents at the bachelor, masters and doctoral degree programme levels considered all types of mentoring roles to be significantly more important than male respondents. For all degree levels, the level of significance was stronger for undergraduates ($p > 0.001$) than for the more advanced students ($p > .01$). The exception to this trend was the Academic/Career factor, which shows no significant differences in gender for the masters' level student respondents. These findings imply that gender is likely to influence perceptions on academic advising and the tendency to seek the service. In another study of 238 students (Clark et al., 2005), it was reported that females had a higher perception of being mentored. Male students have less social support in university settings and are less likely to reach out for educational support (Hernandez, Cervantes, Castellanos, & Gloria, 2005).

Whether male or female, students fail to make contact with their faculty advisors due to their own tendency to leave immediately after class, lack of extracurricular involvement, the lack of on-campus residence, lack of on-campus employment, and the large number of adjunct instructors that do not have office hours (King, 1993). All these factors may hinder interaction between Kenyan University students and their mentors. In addition, the academic advisor-student ratio (which was higher than 1:50 in the current study) prohibits effective student mentoring. The lack of easy contact and the big numbers involved may have varying impact on the perception of academic advising of male and female students. Male and female students may experience different problems that affect their studies and therefore their perception on

academic advising and the desire to seek for the service may differ.

A study on the impact of academic advising on Grade Point Average (GPA) and retention found no relationship between satisfaction with advising and GPA and retention (Pietras, 2010).The study showed that students were satisfied with a number of aspects of the academic advising programme such as, the time allowed to address concerns and questions (84.5%), amount of privacy afforded them during their meeting (86.1%), advisor's desire to listen and help (82.3%) and ability to address questions or concerns (82.2%). This showed that majority of students had confidence on academic advising.

Crockett (1978) agues that academic advising assists students to realize the maximum educational benefits through helping them to better understand themselves and to learn to use institutional resources to meet their special educational needs and aspirations. Existing research shows that students who feel their academic advising was effective are likely to have positive feelings about their college or university (Peterson, Wagner, & Lamb, 2001).

In a study (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez & Rosales, 2005) of 99 Latino undergraduate students, it was found that perceived social support from friends, perceived mentorship, and perception of the university environment strongly predicted academic non-persistence decisions. The findings in this study had implications on the retention of university students. In another study by the National Science Foundation (2008) it was found that associate degree and bachelor degree seekers with self-reported GPA of B+ or lower were significantly more likely than students reporting higher GPAs to indicate that Psychosocial (PS) and Academic/Career (AC) mentoring roles are important.

The cognitive-social learning theory emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling of behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1989). It also considers cognitive evaluation and environmental factors important in the influence of behaviour. In this study, it was assumed that academic mentorship provides exemplary role models who play a critical role in the way students perceive academic advising.

The operant theory associated with Skinner assumes that the consequences that follow behaviour determine whether it will persist or not (Cobb, 2001). Students who have gained from or view academic advising as a beneficial undertaking are likely to perceive it positively and continue seeking the service.

Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory is also applicable in this study since it assumes that learners are assisted by others who are more knowledgeable and skilled to function intellectually and independently on their own as individuals (Hetherington & Parke, 1999). Academic advisors are well informed on academic and career development issues to an extent of being very resourceful to students. Students who recognize the fact that academic mentors are more knowledgeable and can assist them will tend to perceive academic advising positively.

Research Methodology

Research Design
This study applied the *ex-post facto* research design which involves studying the relationship between variables that cannot be manipulated by the researcher because their manifestation have already occurred (Franknel & Warren, 2000). The researchers attempted to investigate the effect of students' tendency to seek academic advising on their perception toward the service. The study also intended to find out whether year of study and gender influence students' perceptions towards academic advising.

Participants
The purposive sampling technique was used to select Egerton University out of the seven public universities in Kenya. One university college (Laikipia) was purposively sampled for the purpose of this study because it had an operational academic advising programme out of the five campuses of Egerton University. The (187) participants who included first (53), second (41), and third (93) year students were

selected through the simple random sampling method from an estimated total population of 950 regular students.

Instrumentation

Data was collected using the Student Academic Advising Questionnaire (SAAQ) developed by the researchers. The questionnaire sought information about gender, year of study, academic performance, the rate at which students consult their academic advisors and students' perception on academic advising. The students' cumulative average score was used as an index of their academic performance. The respondents were also asked to provide other general information that assisted in the interpretation of the data.

Results and Discussions

The first research question sought to establish whether there is a significant positive relationship between the rate at which students seek academic advising (as measured by the frequency at which academic advising is sought) and their perception on the programme. A Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.138 was reported. This low and insignificant correlation was attributed to the fact that only about 13% of the 187 students who participated in the study sought academic counseling at one time or another in a period of one year. A t-test analysis showed that the perception on academic advising of students who seek academic advising is not statistically ($P > 0.05$) different from that of students who do not seek the service. These findings contradict the researchers' expectation that students who have been advised will tend to perceive the academic advising programme positively. In this case, there is need to find out how the perception of students on academic advising would vary in a situation where all students seek academic mentorship at varied rates. The reasons as to why few students avail themselves for academic advising should also be established.

The second research question sought to establish whether there is a significant difference between the perceptions of students on academic advising in different years of study. A test of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was carried out to establish whether the perception of first, second and third year students on academic advising is significantly different. The results are presented in Table 1.

The results showed that, the perception on academic advising of students in different years of study is significantly ($P < 0.05$) different. This implies that the way students perceive academic mentorship is affected by the year of study. The mean score on academic perception for first year (M = 72) students was higher than that of second (M = 65) and third (M = 68) year students. A post hoc test showed that the differences between all the three groups were significant.

Generally, the results imply that, first year students are more likely to have a positive perception on academic advising which may decline as they get to the second and third year of study. Although first year students had a higher perception of academic advising, only 21% of them sought academic advising as compared to 27% and 4% of the second and third year students respectively. This is contrary to the expectation that students who perceive academic advising more positively will tend to seek the service more.

The findings may also imply that, first year students start off with a positive attitude towards academic advising which declines as they realize that other students do not perceive it to be important. These results contradict the findings by Kennedy-Dudley (2007) which show that senior students tend to have a more positive evaluation of advising than their juniors. The findings also do not agree with previous findings by Wolfe (n.d) which show that students in higher classes tend to visit their academic advisors more

First year students may need information on many issues concerning life in a university. Surprisingly, more second year students seek academic advising compared to their counterparts in first year who have significantly higher perception on the service. Possibly at second year, students may begin to realize that they assumed a lot of things while in first year. This is the first time they are getting their academic transcripts for first year. When they realize that they are not performing as they expected and that some of the subject areas they

chose for study are not as easy as they thought, they begin to seek help from their academic advisors.

The third research question tried to establish whether gender influences students' perceptions on academic advising. An independent t-test analysis did not reveal significant (P > 0.5) differences between the perceptions on academic advising of male and female students.

The results implied that gender does not necessarily influence the way university students perceive academic advising. These findings could be attributed to the low percentages of both male and female students seeking academic advising. The findings showed that 14% (13) of the 90 female students sought academic advising within the period of one academic year. Similarly, an equal percentage (14%) of the 97 male students sought help from their academic advisors.

These finding are in contrast with earlier research findings that have tended to show that men are less willing to seek help in dealing with academic difficulties (National Science Foundation, 2008; Clark et al., 2005; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997; Daubman & Lehman, 1993) psychological problems (Möller-Leimkühler, 2002; Cook, 1984; Padesky & Hammen, 1981), and career counseling (Di Fabio & Bernaud, 2008; Kennedy-Dudley, 2007; Rochlen *et al*., 1999). With previous research evidence pointing at poor response towards help by men, one would expect them to have a lower perception on academic advising than women. The number of male and female students seeking academic advising is surprisingly low which means that it may be sensible to institute an "intrusive" form of mentoring according to Redmond (1990), in which the mentor takes the initiative to reach out the students in need on a periodic basis rather than waiting for them to come for help.

In the fourth research question the researchers attempted to find out whether there is a significant relationship between academic performance and students' perception on academic advising. A Pearson's correlation analysis of the second and third year students whose academic results were available showed

that there is a statistically significant (r = 0.256; P < 0.01) relationship between academic performance and students' perception on academic advising. This implies that students who feel that there is need for academic mentorship will tend to perform better than those who do not. Available research ((Pietras, 2010; National Science Foundation, 2008) findings do not seem to support this finding.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were made from the study:
  i.   Academic performance in the university is more likely to be affected by students' perceptions on academic advising.
  ii.   Academic advisors should capitalize on the positive perception on academic mentorship by first year students before they are influenced by older students. Ways of improving students' image on academic advising should be put in place.
  iii. The way students perceive academic advising does not depend on gender.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:
  i.   There is need for universities in Kenya to device methods of actively involving as many students in academic advising as possible.
  ii.   Academic advising should be intensified at the time of registration when first year students are making decisions on subject and career options. Their positive perception on academic advising is an indicator that they are in need of academic mentorship.
  iii. Further research on other factors that influence students' perceptions of mentoring is necessary.
  iv.   Further research is necessary in this area to provide more conclusive evidence.
  v.

Table-1 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of Perception on Academic Advising of First, Second and Third Year Students

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F. Ratio	Sig.
Between Groups	1391.658	2	695.829	3.875	.022
Within Groups	33040.705	184	179.569		
Total	34432.364	186			

Table -2 T-test Comparing Perceptions on Academic Advising between Male and Female Students

Gender	n	Mean	SD	t-cal	Df	Mean Diff	P
Male	97	68.29	12.26	0.173	185	0.344	0.751
Female	90	68.63	14.99				

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