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The status of academic advising in Tanzanian universities

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Abstract

The need to enhance students' participation, retention, and academic success has compelled universities to provide student advisory services. This study examines the status of academic advising in Tanzania, focusing on the significance, structure and incentives provided. Faculty members, students, and institutional documents informed the data generation process. The findings show that the academic advising programme is generally perceived as significant in enhancing students' academic and social integration into the university life. The shared model is used to provide the advisory service based primarily on the prescriptive approach. Training and incentives are not provided to advisors, something which rendered the advisory service to operate in a haphazard fashion. The study offers recommendations to help higher education policy makers and practitioners to improve the delivery of student advisory services to attain higher retention, participation, and graduation rates.

Keywords: student advising, student retention, prescriptive advising, developmental advising, higher education

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Introduction

The need to enhance students' participation, retention, and academic success has compelled many higher education institutions (HEIs) across the globe to provide academic advisory services to their students (Amador & Amador, 2014; He & Hutson, 2016). Academic advising denotes on-going deliberate interactions between institutional representatives (i.e., professional advisors, faculty members) and students that aimed at facilitating students' understanding, development, and realisation of personal, educational, and career goals through better and maximal use of institutional resources (He & Hutson, 2016; Kot, 2014). As such, academic advisors offer guidance to students on appropriate courses to study, key expected learning outcomes, effective and prudent use of the university teaching and learning resources, including time and meeting of other academic requirements to improve academic performance and keep one on track for graduation. Suvedi, Ghimire, Millenbah, and Shrestha (2015) highlight that academic advisory service is an essential element within HEIs that can assist students to address academic challenges and succeed in their academic and professional endeavours.

Academic advising can be traced back to the inception of the world's early universities in the 1200s when senior university leaders and academic staff members informally advised students on moral issues, intellectual habits, and extracurricular activities. In the 1970s, European and North American universities began to systematically define and adopt academic advising as a discipline and activity worthy of undivided attention (Lemire, Snyder, & Heuertz, 2005). The formal acceptance of academic advising in HEIs was a result of several social, political, and economic factors, such as government higher education policies, performance-based funding policies, explosion of the student population, and high student attrition rates. Higher education accreditation and quality assurance bodies in countries, such as England, Saudi Arabia, and Scotland, for example, have established policies and guidelines to ensure that students are provided with the academic advisory support to improve their academic performance (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia National Commission for Academic Accreditation & Assessment, 2013; The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education Scotland, 2014).

Similarly, governments in the United Kingdom, the United States, the Netherlands, Australia, Denmark, and New Zealand, for example, have reduced their budget allocation to HEIs and have linked public funding to institutional outcomes rather than student enrolments (Dougherty, Natow, Bork, Jones, & Blanca, 2013; Kot, 2014). The system of performance-based funding tends to shift the responsibility of student success to the institutions as the rate of student retention and graduation determines the quantity of (monetary) rewards the institutions receive (European Union, 2015). As a result, many HEIs have charted out systematic and coordinated academic advisory services to improve their student performance and graduation rates. These HEIs have instituted and expanded student advising centres in their respective campuses and hired full-time professional academic advisors (Kot, 2014; Nel, 2014). The University of Johannesburg (South Africa), for example, has established the Academic Development Centre, which has since 2009 been implementing a systematic academic advising intervention for students (Nel, 2014). Similarly, Habley's (2004) survey on academic advising conducted in America found a substantial increase from 14% in 1979 to 73% in 2003 of institutions with

academic advising centres.

Despite the formal recognition and increase in numbers of academic advising programmes, many HEIs are failing to retain and graduate their undergraduates at a significant level (European Union, 2015; Kot, 2014). The graduation rate in countries, such as Belgium, Argentina, Chile, Indonesia, China, Mexico, Estonia, Greece, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia is less than 25% which is below the OECD's 39% average (OECD, 2014). In Chile, for example, three out of 10 undergraduates drop out of their HEIs (OECD, 2012). The headache of student dropout prompted the European Union (2015, p. 13) to state that, "too many students in Europe drop out before obtaining a higher education diploma or degree."

Even though there is no comprehensive data on higher education students' dropout at national level, the rate of undergraduate student dropout has been increasing over the years in some Tanzania's HEIs. For example, Table 1 shows the number of undergraduate students who were discontinued for failing to attain the required grade point average (GPA) at one public HEI in Tanzania.

Table 1. Number of Discontinued Students on Academic Grounds at One Tanzania's HEI

Academic year	Number of discontinued students
2012/2013	14
2013/2014	12
2014/2015	91
2015/2016	161
2016/2017	199

Note. From Mkwawa University College of Education, 2018.

The researcher also learned that the first-semester performance of first-year science-based education students in 2015/2016 at the reported institution was dismal. Almost half of the students (46% of 338) failed one course, and 11% failed three to five out of six courses offered in the first semester. Three students failed all the six courses offered in that first semester.

For the discontinued students, appropriate academic advice could have helped to make a difference in their academic lives at the reported institution. The discontinuation implies a waste of students' investments of money, energy, and time as well as the nation's future skilled personnel and tax base following the employment of these students in the post-graduation period.

Previous studies on the contribution of academic advising to promoting student academic success in terms of student retention, academic performance and graduation, have largely been based in developed and middle-income countries in Europe, North America, Asia and the Pacific (c.f., Al-Ansari, Tantawi, AbdelSalam, & Al-Harbi, 2015; Cahill, Bowyer, & Murray, 2014; Egege & Kutieleh, 2015; Gudep, 2007; He & Hutson, 2016;

Kot, 2014; Lemire et al., 2005; Ng, 2014; Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2014; Suvedi et al., 2015). These studies, regardless of the methodology employed, have found an improvement of examination performance for students who received academic advising. However, findings of these studies cannot be extended to a developing world's context.

Nonetheless, a few studies on the issue exist in developing economies particularly in Africa, for instance, in South Africa (e.g., Nel, 2014), Kenya (e.g., Muola, Maithya & Mwinzi, 2011), and Tanzania (e.g., Mkumbo, 2013; Sima, 2007, 2010). These African-based studies have some limitations as their focus was on secondary education and on general guidance and counselling services commonly offered by the Dean of Students' Offices and the University Guidance and Counselling Units (e.g., Mkumbo, 2013; Sima, 2007, 2010). Guidance and counselling services are usually found wanting in tackling effectively academic issues because they tend to focus on social, emotional, and psychological issues upsetting students (Bitew, 2016; Muola et al., 2011).

Although there are some African-based studies focused on academic advising in higher education (e.g., Muola et al., 2011; Nel, 2014), such studies are few and were not based in Tanzania where this study was specifically conducted. Thus, academic advising as a discipline of enquiry and more particularly in post-secondary education (higher education) has received little attention in Africa. Given the contextual variation of countries educational policies and practices and the diverse needs of student populations (Bitew, 2016), this paper adds knowledge to the academic advising literature from Tanzania. The paper sought answers from the following three research questions: (1) How significant is the academic advising programme in the eyes of students and faculty in the institutions under review? (2) How is the academic advising programme being structured and delivered? And, (3) what kind of training and incentives do academic advisors receive?

In addition to the advancement of knowledge frontiers, this study also sought to provide empirical-based data that could help higher education planners and practitioners, both locally and globally, to revisit and improve student advisory services to attain higher retention, participation, and graduation rates. Student retention and success are fundamental to improving the academic and financial bases not only of the institution but also of the nation (Egege & Kutieleh, 2015; He & Hutson, 2016). Empirical literature suggests a strong positive association between higher education participation rates and levels of development (Bloom, Canning, Chan, & Luca, 2014). The higher education participation rates in many high-income countries, such as Korea, Australia, Denmark, Finland, the United States, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, are 50% and above. Whilst in low-income countries, such as those found in Africa, the higher education participation rates often fall below 5% (Bloom et al., 2014; OECD, 2012).

Theoretical framework and summary of the literature

A retention theory developed by Tinto's (1975, 2007) was adapted to guide this study. Tinto's retention theory focuses on the integration of students into the academic and social

systems of the educational institution through the use of advisory and support services. The retention theory maintains that the integration of students, both academically and socially, into the college community increases students' commitment to their institutions and educational expectations which, in turn, increases the likelihood of students' retention and ultimately graduation (Tinto, 1975, 2007). Social and academic integration occurs fundamentally through formal and informal interactions with faculty members, administrative personnel, peer group associations, and through participation in extracurricular college activities (Tinto, 1975, 2007), which in their totality have been found to influence directly student retention and completion (Habley, 2004; He & Hutson, 2016). In light of this, Tinto (1975, 2007) proposed that improving student retention and completion requires HEIs to offer accessible and affordable academic and social support services.

For academic advising to operate successfully, advisors should be provided with training opportunities to enable the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Additionally, there should be a systematic approach to recognise and reward the advisors' performance (Lemire et al., 2005). Empirical evidence shows that training and rewards provided to advisors, such as monetary, external recognition, and promotions, enhance the importance and success of academic advising in the institution (Lemire et al., 2005; Muola et al., 2011; Nel, 2014). The Emporia State University (USA) and Flinders University (Australia), for example, have been successfully offering the academic advisory service because they have factored in rewards and training elements in their respective academic advising programmes (Egege & Kutieleh, 2015; MacDonald & Aman, 2014).

Similarly, research has found that the academic advisory service has consistently been contributing to students' performance, retention, and completion in HEIs (Haught, Hill, Walls, & Nardi, 1998; Kot, 2014). Moreover, academic advising has been reported to foster the fiscal stability of the institution as a result of student retention and performance, particularly in countries that apply performance-based funding policies to fund their universities (Dougherty et al., 2013; Kot, 2014). Thus, the benefits accruing from academic advising have resulted in the growth of academic advisory services in universities as they now utilise both institutional representatives, such as professional academic advisors and online platforms, such as social media and computer-assisted programmes.

The structure and organisation of academic advising tend to vary from one institution to another. This variation is determined by several variables, such as student populations, the institutional administrative structure and capacity, the willingness and interest of academic staff members to participate in academic advising, the institution's vision, mission, and academic policies as well as degree programmes on offer (Lemire et al., 2005; Pardee, 2004). As such, academic advising is structurally categorised into three models: centralised, decentralised, and shared (Habley, 2004; Pardee, 2004). The centralised model entails the use of professional advisors in one centralised office or unit at the institutional level. The decentralised model involves using academic staff members and/or professional advisors in offering academic advisory services in the institution's academic units or departments. The shared model combines both the centralised and decentralised models as it provides students with opportunities to use both professional advisors in a centralised unit and faculty in their respective units or departments. The shared model also involves the use of trained students as peer-advisors who complement

the advisory services of professional advisors and faculty members.

The shared model is preferred by many HEIs in the world as it has been a source of success in the provision of better academic advisory services (Habley, 2004; Kot, 2014; Lemire et al., 2005; Pardee, 2004). The University of Johannesburg (South Africa), Flinders University (Australia) and the Emporia State University (USA), Seoul National University, and Yonsei University (South Korea), for instance, employ this shared model whereby a selected number of trained students, faculty members, and full-time professional advisors advise students on academic matters. Studies conducted in these universities (c.f., Cahill et al., 2014; Nel, 2014) have found that the shared model has resulted in an effective delivery of the academic advisory services. As indicated in the previous research, the shared model has been applied across the world, however data regarding which model of academic advising is currently being used in Tanzanian universities is limited. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this knowledge void.

In delivering the academic advising programme, universities tend to use mainly two approaches: prescriptive approach and developmental approach (He & Hutson, 2016). The advising process in the prescriptive approach involves advising students on institution-specific information, such as programme requirements, registration processes, class scheduling, courses on offer, core and optional courses, calculation of GPA, institutional policies, and graduation processes. The prescriptive approach usually tends to be one-way communication and focuses on procedural or descriptive knowledge, which is equated to the way a doctor (advisor) prescribes medication for a patient (student) after diagnosis. As such, the prescriptive approach is widely criticised for its narrowness of attending to student needs and affairs (National Academic Advising Association [NACADA], 2013; Suvedi et al., 2015).

Conversely, the developmental advising approach is holistic and flexible as advisors and students together discuss student learning needs that go beyond prescriptive information and share student learning responsibilities and success (He & Hutson, 2016). This approach encourages independence as students become an integral part of the goal-setting and decision-making regarding their learning. Previous research has found that students favoured developmental advising and found advisors who employed the prescriptive approach to be impersonal and authoritarian (Hale, Graham, & Johnson, 2009; Muola et al., 2011; NACADA, 2013). However, such empirical evidence is inconclusive as little is known about the preferred approach used to operate the academic advising programme in Tanzanian universities and the motive for employing such an approach, which this study intends to fill this gap.

Research design and methodology

This study was conducted in two Tanzanian universities. To observe ethical issues in empirical research, names of the two universities will not be identified, instead letters A and B have been used to represent the two universities. Institution A is a private university based in Arusha region/province. During data collection, Institution A had enrolled 3,200 students and 62 faculty residing in five faculties that make up the university: the Faculty of

Law, the Faculty of Business and Economics, the Faculty of Theology, the Faculty of Education, and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Institution B is a public university located in Iringa region/province. It is made up of three faculties: the Faculty of Education, the Faculty of Science, and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, with a total student enrolment of 3,691 and 154 faculty.

A set of two criteria, namely teacher education element and institutional foundation types, were used to select the two universities. Both public and private universities were involved in this study to enhance the diversity and richness of data from private and public institutional foundation types. Moreover, the teacher education element was purposively used as a selection criterion because the teacher education programme involves training student-teachers, who by virtue of their professional training are going to work with various learners and, at one point, may be needed to advise them. These student-teachers are, therefore, expected to be imbued with academic advising values and skills through their interaction with their academic advisors and the general university learning environment which could also be an invaluable asset in their eventual work environment. As the number of universities in Tanzania was 47 during data collection, the choice of only two universities for this study was driven by the need to collect in-depth knowledge regarding how the academic advisory service is being valued and exploited, rather than collecting many views for generalising the findings.

Before accessing individual institutions and participants, the author obtained a permit to undertake the study from the relevant university authorities. The Director of Research at the author's institution granted this permit, which was then used to access individual institutional leaders for further authorisation to reach the study's participants. Each participant was then requested to participate either through a verbal or written invitation explaining the voluntary nature of their participation after they had been briefed about what the study entailed. The participants were also assured of confidentiality as the researcher used codes instead of actual names in data presentation and analysis to avoid disclosing their identities and that of their institutions.

The study involved a total of 38 participants, comprising four faculty deans, 12 members of academic staff and 22 undergraduates, selected using both purposive and stratified sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to select the faculty deans by virtue of their leadership position while stratified sampling was used to select faculty members and students based on the faculty, work experience/year of study, and sex. In order to meet the purpose of the study as stated elsewhere in this section, only teacher education-related faculties from the two institutions were involved, that is, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Faculty of Education, and the Faculty of Science. Faculty members who were selected from different faculties also had at least three years' work experience – assumed to be familiar with the institutional vision, mission, and various courses on offer. Similarly, student participants involved both males and females and at least five students from each year of study out of the three-year undergraduate education programme operating in the two institutions under review. The use of a variety of participants from different faculties and of different sex and work experience/year of study was intended to collect diverse and rich data.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and documentary review. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data

from the faculty deans and faculty members whereas FGDs were used with students. All the interviews and FGDs were conducted in the participants' offices and lecture rooms, respectively, areas considered convenient for both the participants and the researcher to interact comfortably in a relaxed manner for the generation of rich data. Interviews took between 20 and 30 minutes, and FGDs took between 30 and 50 minutes. A total of 16 interviews and four FGDs were conducted at the two institutions under study. With the participants' consent, interviews and FGDs were audiotaped to supplement manual note-taking.

A documentary review method was also used to collect data available in documents – institutional prospectuses, policies, strategic plans, and circulars. These documents were accessed through the internet – from the respective institutions' websites – and upon requests of hard copies during data collection. The documentary review method enabled the researcher to learn about the institutions' and participant academic advising behaviour, actions, and events over a span of years. Specifically, the review of those documents helped the researcher to ascertain the kinds of academic advisory services available, how students were encouraged to access and utilise these services, and how the institutions under study organise, monitor, and evaluate the academic advising programme. The use of a variety of data collection methods in this study – interviews, FGDs and documentary review – helped the study to benefit from the strengths of each method and to offset their weaknesses in collecting valid and reliable data.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse data, as the method involves examining and classifying qualitative textual-formatted data according to patterns/themes and making sense of the evolving thematic structures by looking for similarities, differences, relationships, central patterns, theoretical and analytical constructs (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2009). Thematic analysis in this study has followed three steps as provided by Creswell (2009). First, audio data recorded from the interviews and FGDs were transcribed to produce written text. Then, the textual data including documentary review information were repeatedly read through to establish a general understanding and to reflect on their overall meaning. Second, the author organised the data into segments of text and generated themes and sub-themes for analysis. Third, the author conveyed and clustered the findings stemming from the analysis whereby similar and related ideas were put together to form three major themes: significance of academic advising, approaches to academic advising, and training opportunities for academic advisors, as presented in the findings section. Then, the author discussed and interpreted the findings by relating them to the theoretical framework guiding the study and empirical literature. Although presented in steps, the process of data analysis was not a linear process, but rather a recursive one, which involved moving and returning to the analysis throughout the various steps.

Findings

During data analysis, three major themes were identified: significance of academic advising, approaches to academic advising, and rewards and training opportunities for academic advisors. These findings are presented in the three subsections that follow.

Significance of academic advising

Participants were asked during interviews to explain the benefits of academic advising as their perception can predict the kind of efforts and energy dedicated to offer the academic advising programme. The findings show that the participants perceived academic advising as significant in enhancing the students' academic performance. Participants maintained that many students during their first year of studies tend to apply the high school experience (the immediate home for direct university entrants) while the university life is complex and quite different from that of high school. In this regard, if the academic advising programme is being delivered effectively, it can reduce many snags towards elevating academic performance. The following statement confirms this view:

> It is very important to have academic advisory service as this will make students better understand how the teaching and learning process is being conducted and how should they behave so that they can achieve academically as they are expected to. (Faculty Member: Institution B)

Another participant offered a similar view:

> Academic advising came into being due to the recognition of the fact that students might have different academic needs and problems, but they have no one to share them with. (Faculty Dean: Institution A)

Participants added that for the period that academic advising has been operating within their institutions, it has shown some benefits as captured in the following statements:

> The programme [academic advising] has aided my performance. I am in the third year now, and I have not failed any course in the second year. (Student: Institution A)

Another participant added the following view:

> The establishment of this service has impact on students' academic achievement as the students become informed of a lot of issues concerning their studies and university life. (Faculty Member: Institution A)

The findings also indicate that academic advising offered an opportunity for faculty members and students to interact and establish a close relationship outside the classroom setting or academic matters. Students sought advice related to not only academic matters

but also social issues, something that has helped these students to fare well in their studies:

> I even ask my advisor how she manages to take care of her children while studying when I was raising my first born in the first year. (Student: Institution B)

> A similar view was proffered in the following statement:
> Students come here with a number of issues, so they need guidance. Academic advisors often advise students if they have social problems, as well. (Faculty Member: Institution A)

The implication is that academic advising serves as a bridge to help students deal with the university's social and academic life, as most of the students are coming from high school where the culture and structure of academic life is different from that of the university.

Approaches to academic advising

Data related to the modality used to organise and deliver the academic advising programme was also sought in this study. The study has found that the institutions under review employ both faculty members and students to deliver academic advisory services. The practice is that each student is allocated an academic advisor from a pool of faculty members. The allocation of advisors is based on the degree programme pursued by the student. For example, students in the Bachelor of Arts in Education are allocated advisors from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, students in the Bachelor of Education are allocated advisors from the Faculty of Education, and students in the Bachelor of Science in Education get advisors from the Faculty of Science. Names of faculty advisors are posted on the noticeboards together with the names of their advisees/students. This arrangement was mainly reported at Institution B and around 35 students were allocated to one academic advisor per annum. Conversely, Institution A does not allocate advisors to students. Instead, it has liberalised the advisory service by directing students to consult any faculty member when the student feels a need for advice. Indeed, students in Institution A are also directed to consult the special advisory office established to provide both academic and non-academic advice. The office is overseen by two advisors both appointed for that purpose from a group of faculty members.

Moreover, the institutions under study have formally recognised students' associations (one for each institution), which act as a platform for students' academic advising and for bridging communication between students and their respective university administration, as explained in the following statement:

> Our students' union office helps us to solve a lot of our academic problems, especially when we need to write letters for postponing university examinations or appealing against examinations results. (Student: Institution B)

This statement suggests that the students' organisation is one of the key organs at the university that guides students in academic matters. As such, the use of both students and faculty members to provide academic advisory services in the institutions under review suggests that these institutions employ a shared model of academic advising that allows for peer advisors (students) and faculty advisors (academics) to provide such services.

Furthermore, the study's participants explained that the academic advisory services delivered either through peer advisors or faculty advisors mostly centred on a student's problem, as advisory meetings between the two parties (the advisor and the advisee) are usually convened after the student has presented a problem. It was further clarified that the advisory meetings are mostly conducted at the end of the semester when the course assessment results have been released. Thus, students, particularly those who did not perform at a required average, are then flocking to the advisors' office to seek advice:

> In a normal situation, there is no regular interaction between the academic advisor and the student. What I have experienced is that if the student has a problem is when he/she begins to look for his/her academic advisor. (Faculty Member: Institution B)

> Another participant further added this:
> Many students pop in our offices after the coursework results are out. Some of them come in crying seeking advice because they have failed, and they do not know what to do. (Faculty Member: Institution A)

These findings suggest that the prescriptive advising is the most prevalent approach in the provision of academic advisory services in the two institutions under study. Given the findings that it is the students who frequently initiate the advisory meetings and they do so only when faced with a problem, the question arises what role do academic advisors play? Most faculty members were found to be rather unconcerned about academic advising, as these faculty advisors admitted that they were not taking initiatives to find students who do not initiate or show up for the advisory meetings. In fact, if the student does not show up, then there is a high probability for not conducting an advisory meeting between the two parts (the advisor and the advisee) until the student graduates, as confirmed in the following statement:

> It has been a tendency that you are given students to advise, but they spend three years you don't even know their faces. After three years, a student graduates without even knowing each other. (Faculty Member: Institution B)

> Another participant offered this similar view:
> It is fortunate that my colleague knows some of his advisees, on my side I do not know them. It is just recently that one student came to my office and say madam you know that you are my academic advisor. (Faculty Member: Institution B)

Some participants, particularly finalist students added that they had never met with their academic advisors since they started their undergraduate studies, and they did not even know their advisors' names:

> I have not faced a problem related to academic issues, probably had I faced such a problem I would have consulted my advisor. (Student: Institution B)

These findings indicate that there is more reactive than proactive advising. The emerging of the problem on the part of students dictates the operation of the academic advising, something which necessitates the domination of the prescriptive advising approach. Even for the advisory meetings that were reported to have been conducted, the findings show that records of these meetings were not formally kept. The faculty advisors admitted to not keeping the records of their students they had advised or their advisees in general, and neither did they document what had been discussed during the previous student advisory sessions. This raises a fundamental question: why are the academic advising programmes in these institutions under review being treated as a trivial responsibility that many would rather do without? Responses to this question are presented in the following section regarding rewards and training opportunities for academic advisors.

Rewards and training opportunities for academic advisors

Findings regarding training and rewards provided to advisors show that both faculty advisors and peer advisors receive no training prior to the participation in the academic advising activity, and neither are they rewarded for providing academic advisory service. The following statements illustrate the shortcomings of the present setup:

> We play the role of advising, but we do not know what is it in details. (Faculty Member: Institution A)

> We are not being paid or rewarded whatsoever for being a patron or a matron. I just perform the advising activity as a charity. (Faculty Member: Institution A)

Participants further explained that the advisory service is not stated as a compulsory activity in the institutional strategic policies and practices. "There are no institutional documents that provide guidance on what an academic advisor ought to do" (Faculty Member: Institution B). As a result, the advisory service is often taken for granted by both faculty and students. Indeed, in the absence of significant mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of the programme and ensure compliance, advisors and advisees treat academic advising activity as a leisurely and optional activity, as noted in the following statement:

> Academic advisors are like counsellors. They need to know the scope and limitations of their duty. As advisors in our institution are not prepared for such a role, you find that some reveal secrets of students obtained during advisory sessions. (Faculty Member: Institution B)

The implication is that the academic advising activity within the institutions under study depended mostly on the interest and empathy of the advisors, as there was neither training, policy guidelines nor remuneration for the academic advisors. In such a situation where the academic advising programme gets less institutional support, uncertainty arises as to whether the student advisory services as currently provided in the institutions under review will work for the students and the institutions at large.

Discussion

The study has established that participants perceived academic advising as significant in enhancing the students' academic performance. This finding is consistent with Tinto's theory of retention. Tinto's retention theory advances that academic advisory services enhance the learners' capabilities to function independently and intellectually as individuals and to cope with the institutional socio-cultural and academic fabric. As a result, such academic and social integration of students in their institutions increases the students' commitment to their educational goals and expectations which intensify their academic performance, retention, and graduation rates (Tinto, 1975, 2007). Moreover, the finding is similar to an online survey study conducted for a decade (2005-2013) to capture perspectives of 4,875 students on academic advising at Michigan State University (Suvedi et al., 2015). The online survey study showed that the students were positive about academic advisory services, and the need for and satisfaction with the academic advisory services were higher to the newer and female students than the older and male students.

The finding on the significance of academic advising are also supported by other studies that indicate academic advising plays a significant role in improving students' performance, retention, and the fiscal stability of the institution (c.f., Egege & Kutieleh, 2015; Gudep, 2007; Lemire et al., 2005). In his propensity score-matching study that involved 2,745 first-year undergraduates, Kot (2014) found that students who received the academic advisory service experienced a GPA increase both in the first and second semesters and first-year aggregate GPA. This implies that HEIs ought to use academic advisory services to make students understand how the teaching and learning process is conducted at the university and how they should approach social and academic issues to perform better and realise their educational and career goals.

Similarly, the findings of the present study show that the institutions under review use a shared model of academic advising – peer advisors (fellow students) and faculty advisors (academics) in the academic advising endeavour. The shared model has been a source of success in the provision of better academic advisory services across many HEIs globally (Habley, 2004; Kot, 2014; Pardee, 2004), and thus, many HEIs have adopted this model. Peer advising allows students to talk and get advice from someone with first-hand and shared experience but with a better grasp of academic and social matters at their institution (MacDonald & Aman, 2014). Additionally, faculty advisors are invaluable and complement peer student advisors yet to become professionals and hence without career experience that reinforces advisory skills. Faculty advisors are often familiar with the institutional mission and vision, programmes and courses on offer, study techniques,

academic and career advancement issues, characteristics which are vital in the effective offering of the academic advisory activities.

Although the institutions under study use a shared model in the provision of academic advising, membership composition of the current shared model creates uncertainty whether the academic advisory service can be effectively and professionally delivered. In its present arrangement, members involved in the academic advising programme are sourced from a group of students and faculty members only, which is contrary to the current development in the use of the shared model where professional academic advisors are also used to enhance the effective operation of the academic advising activity. For example, the University of Johannesburg (South Africa), Flinders University (Australia), the Emporia State University (USA), Seoul National University and Yonsei University (South Korea), employ the shared model whereby a selected number of trained students, faculty members, and full-time professional academic advisors advise students on academic matters (Egege & Kutieleh, 2015; MacDonald & Aman, 2014; Nel, 2014).

Moreover, despite the significance attached to the academic advising programme as presented in the findings and discussed in this section, the findings of the present study also indicate that academic advising in the institutions under study is more reactive than proactive. The prescriptive advising approach is prevalent, where the emerging of the problem on the part of students determines the operation of the academic advising. Indeed, the faculty advisors admitted to not keeping the records of the student advisory sessions, which is essential for the advisors to follow up and establish whether the students had benefited from the advice or simply check on their general student progress. Previous research has also reported a similar tendency of operating the academic advising activity based on students' problems that need immediate resolution (Hale et al., 2009; NACADA, 2013). Undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia and Kenya, for example, tended to seek academic advice from faculty advisors after receiving their examination transcripts and were unhappy with their performance (Al-Ansari et al., 2015; Muola et al., 2011). Seeking or providing advice only when the student faces a problem as the present study and other studies have established could not bring about the desired effect because earlier intervention could have stopped the problem.

As such, the body of literature on academic advising encourages the use of both the prescriptive and developmental approaches in providing the academic advisory service, as they both have a fundamental role to play and tend to be complementary. Prescriptive advising functions as the icebreaker for developmental advising to take place (NACADA, 2013), as this prescriptive advising familiarises students with the basic institutional information, such as institutional procedures and processes. On the other hand, the developmental approach extends to letting students know about the broad crucial outcomes of a university education and how one can benefit from it and make rational use of resources available for academic success (Hale et al., 2009; He & Hutson, 2016).

Furthermore, the present study has established that the institutions under review did not offer training to academic advisors nor incentives for providing the academic advisory service. Lack of advisors' training and incentives is also experienced in the United Arab Emirates, Kenya, and Saudi Arabia (Al-Ansari et al., 2015; Gudep, 2007; Muola et al., 2011). Conversely, institutions such as Seoul National University and Yonsei University (South

Korea), the Emporia State University (USA), the University of Johannesburg (South Africa), and Flinders University (Australia) provide systematic training and resource development for their advising personnel including peer advisors which have resulted in an effective delivery of the academic advisory service (Egege & Kutieleh, 2015; MacDonald & Aman, 2014; Nel, 2014). Although the institutions under study refrain from providing training and incentives to their academic advisors, again experience from the Emporia State, Johannesburg, and Flinders universities indicate that advisors' training and rewards uplift the status of the academic advising programme and enable the advising programme to operate more professionally (Egege & Kutieleh, 2015; MacDonald & Aman, 2014; Nel, 2014). The implication is that the absence of training and rewards for academic advisors often leads to chaotic and ad hoc advisory services as established in the present study whereas the presence of rewards and training could enhance the professional delivery of academic advising and produce desired outcomes.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study has examined the status of academic advising in Tanzanian universities. The findings show that the academic advising programme is generally perceived as significant in enhancing students' academic and social integration into the university life. The shared model of academic advising is used to provide the academic advisory service. However, the composition of members who participate in this shared model is reduced to only students and faculty members, which is contrary to the current development in the use of the shared model elsewhere where professional academic advisors are also used to enhance the effective delivery of the academic advisory service. Indeed, the current use of the shared model as reported in the findings is based primarily on the prescriptive approach where the emerging of the problem on the part of students determines the delivery of the academic advising. Moreover, the institutions under study did not offer training to academic advisors nor incentives, something which reduced academic advising into a trivial responsibility that many would rather do without. In this regard, the way the academic advising programme is currently offered in the institutions under review may not only bring the desired outcomes but also constitutes a waste of even the little resources these institutions continue investing in managing the programme.

In conclusion, the findings of this study add knowledge to the academic advising literature from Tanzania where from the available literature there was any study of this nature that had been conducted locally. In addition to the advancement of knowledge frontiers, this study also sought to provide empirical-based evidence that could help higher education policy makers, planners, and practitioners, both locally and globally, to revisit and improve the delivery of student advisory services to attain higher retention, participation, and graduation rates.

Based on the foregoing discussion and conclusion, the study offers the following recommendations. First, higher education accreditation bodies and universities should institute academic advisory policies to guide the practice of academic advising programme. In the absence of policies, academic advisory services tend to operate in a

haphazard fashion as the case in the present study. Second, stakeholders and members of HEIs should be sensitised on the importance of academic advisory services and the required level of investment needed to operate such services in a professional manner to achieve the desired outcomes. Third, effective training and incentive programmes should be developed in HEIs to motivate academic advisors to perform the advising task effectively and equip them with necessary advisory knowledge and skills to become more resourceful advisors to students. Forth, further research on academic advising should be undertaken in the developing world as there is currently a dearth of knowledge in this area. More studies may serve as stimulants to the effective provision of academic advising, as such studies have the potential of bringing about more conclusive empirical evidence about which approaches and models work well in the developing world context.

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