

Perceptions of Lecturers and Adult Learners on the Importance of Mentoring and Academic Advising Needs in Universities

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Abstract

Institutional Based Students (IBS) are adult learners who usually come back to the universities after a period of time. They face significantly different challenges to completing an education program than students who enrol in college immediately after high school. In Higher Education Institutions, Mentoring and Academic Advising (MAA) services targets improving learning processes and outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and non-traditional students. The objective of this study was to find out perceptions of lecturers and IBS on the importance of MAA needs in universities. Respondents were the sampled three hundred and twenty IBS and fourteen lecturers. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The findings of the study showed that 77.2% of the IBS were unaware of such services. Despite this, 95.9% indicated that they considered MAA needs to be important in terms of advising them on non-academic and academic related issues.

Keywords: Mentoring and Academic Advising, Higher Education Institutions, Institutional Based Students, Non-traditional Students.

1.0 Introduction

Worldwide, expansion of education systems at all levels has led to a dramatic increase of the number of students seeking access to and enrolling in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) including Non-traditional undergraduates. Many students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds spend less time in HEIs than their peers because they have other commitments such as family, employment and community, and are more exclusively focused on academic achievement. This affects their understanding of HEIs structure such as registration, university regulations and procedures, careers and unit combinations due to time constraints and other obligations. This concurs with a study by Githinji, Changach and Maina (2015) on frequency of interaction between advisors and adult learners during mentoring and academic advising in universities where an adult learner said, "I tried my level best to get the units that I wanted. I could not find someone to guide me. We had fears that when we were selecting the subjects we were taking what the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) would not have accepted as the combination, but according to most of us we wanted a certain course to make our lives better". In this study the non-traditional students were Institutional Based Students or adult

learners enrolled in the institution during the school holidays. In a 2002 report, the National Center for Education Statistics defined non-traditional students as students with any of following seven characteristic risk factors: Delayed enrolment in postsecondary education beyond the first year after high school graduation; part-time attendance; financial independence from parents; full-time work; having dependents (other than a spouse); being a single parent; and no high school diploma. The respondents in this study fit these characteristics as most of them enrolled after many years of being out of school. The current study sought to find out the perceptions of lecturers and IBS on the importance of Mentoring and Academic Advising needs in the universities.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the perceptions of lecturers and Institutional Based Students on the importance of Mentoring and Academic Advising needs in the universities.
2. To establish if the lecturers and Institutional Based Students were aware of the mentoring programme the institution.
3. To establish from the lecturers and Institutional Based Students the areas in which students sought MAA at the institution.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study was significant in that the findings would explain to the university the importance of integrating the IBS into the existing mentoring services currently offered to the regular students in the institution. The findings also spelt out how adopting MAA policy by the institutions of higher learning could improve the quality of their diversified programmes with the increasing number of students.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Social Support Theory by Williams, Barclay and Schmied (2004). Social support in this case refers to the infrastructure that must be in place for individuals and families to "plug in" to the social services, community events and basic fellowship that is essential for a happy and well adjusted life. Social support is the perception and actuality that one is cared for, has assistance available from other people, and that one is part of a social support network.

In this study, social support theory was used to partially explain the success of student mentoring. The theory posited that the degree of social support availability was positively correlated with the degree of effective coping measures that an IBS would employ in response to stressful circumstances. If support was available, coping might have been more rational and effective. If support was lacking, coping might have been absent and the individual might have given up. Social support theory encompasses the concept of social integration which is a term used frequently by researchers of attrition and retention in universities (Tinto, 1997, 1998; & Goodsell-love, 1993).

This theory was applicable to the IBS since they spent less time at the institutions, and most had stayed away from academic environments for a long time and so they needed more social support mechanisms to cope with the demands of academic life. Social support ranged from students' personal issues to broad issues that emanated from the academic culture of the institutions. These circumstances created stressful situations for the students and this might have led to attrition as they tried to balance academic and non-academic interests. Hence, if IBS were supported and engaged through MAA, they were likely to be motivated, satisfied, felt recognized and had a sense of belonging to the university community. They would also

be persistent to the end and this would increase student retention and high rates of graduation.

2.0 Review of Literature

Importance of Mentoring and Academic Advising to Institutional Based Students

Mentoring and Academic Advising (MAA) in Higher Education (HE) cannot be overstated. 'Mentoring and academic advising' interventions are used in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) to improve the quality of students' academic life and the quality of learning outcomes (Mullen, 2005). While the two terms are often used interchangeably in the literature on HE, academic mentoring is conceptualized as a process involving a relationship of a more knowledgeable individual with a less experienced one. This relationship provides professional networking, counselling, guiding, instructing, modelling, and sponsoring as a developmental mechanism (personal, professional, and psychological) and as a socialization and reciprocal relationship and provides an identity transformation for both mentor and mentee (c.f., Wilson, 1997: 178). Hence, academic advisors complement the mentor's knowledge by advising students on what classes are available, clearing them for graduation, assisting with scheduling or registration issues, and providing academic policy and procedural information as needed. Advising is defined as "a systematic process based on a close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of institutional and community resources" (Ender, Winston & Miller, 1984:18-19). The purpose of MAA is to enable an individual to find classes and programmes that suite his/her educational and career objectives. MAA services provide accurate, up-to-date information, tailored to addressing students' needs. The goals of MAA as instructional process help students clarify their values and goals to better understand the nature and purpose of HE. Stull (1997) characterizes MAA as an ongoing and active process involving the student, advisor, and institution, the primary goal of which is to assist students in the development and accomplishment of meaningful educational plans that are compatible with their life goals.

According to Habley (1993), MAA is the most significant mechanism available on college and university campuses for aiding this process and this makes it a crucial component of all students' experiences in HE. The advising process guides students in making responsible academic and career choices, setting goals, and developing sound educational plans compatible with career aspirations (Albany State University, 2009). Good advising entails helping the student to discern what direction his/her course of studies takes. Academic advising has been referred to as the "cornerstone of student retention" (Crockett, 1978). Advising contributes to the teaching and learning mission and is a student-centred process that facilitates behavioural awareness and problem-solving, decision-making and evaluation skills; encourages both short-term and long-term goal-setting; makes the students feel that they "matter"; stresses the shared responsibility between students and their advisor. The expansion of advising to mirror a more holistic/developmental approach would likely support the retention, graduation, and success rates among advisees. Koring, Killian, Owen and Todd (2004) argue that "Advising and teaching are similar because both advisors and teachers are instructed in the areas of skills and content. Advising teaches skills like decision-making and critical thinking, as well as content like curriculum and academic regulations (Koring et al., 2004).

Worldwide, expansion of education systems at all levels has led to a dramatic increase of the number of students seeking access to and enrolling in HEIs. HEIs have been tasked by governments to increase the diversity of the student intake and student retention as critical performance indicators (Alexander, 2000). The two-fold nature of this success is significant,

as it has been asserted that greater diversity would necessarily lead to an increased student withdrawal. As Banya & Elu (2001) noted in 1996, the sharpest increase in HE enrolment worldwide was reported in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the number of students registered was 7.5% more than the previous year. In countries such as Kenya, HE has been the fastest growing segment of the education sector in the past 10 years, averaging 6.2% each year (Republic of Kenya, 1997-1998). The complex situation, as noted by a leading World Bank education specialist then, was that most African countries had to double their HE enrolment over the next decade to simply maintain that current, very high demand yet very low participation (Saint, 1992). In the past decade, issues of student diversity had moved from the periphery to become central concerns of HEIs (Brown, 2004).

Increasing globalisation present new opportunities and challenges for HEIs internationally (Hanassab, 2006). Research indicates that facilitating early engagement of students with their studies and campus life leads to greater student satisfaction and improved rates of retention (Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005). The challenge remains how to provide engagement opportunities to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, adult and part-time students who are increasingly becoming the majority in African universities (Krause et al., 2005). The importance for student support in the academic planning and decision-making process is highlighted by research findings, which indicate that:

Three of every four students are uncertain or tentative about their career choice at college entry (Titley & Titley, 1980; Frost, 1991). Only 8% of new students felt they knew “a great deal about their intended major” (Lemoine, cited in Erickson & Sommers, 1991). Over half of all students who entered college with a declared major changed their mind at least once before they graduated (Foote, 1980; Gordon, 1984). Only one senior out of three would major in the same field they preferred as a freshman (Willingham, 1985). This degree of student uncertainty and propensity for changing educational plans has been reported by research at all institutional types, including selective private universities (Marchese, 1992), large research universities (What We Know About First-Year Students, 1996; What Do I Want to Be, 1997), and small liberal arts colleges (Alpha Gives Undecided Students a Sense of Identity, 1996).

In the developed countries, MAA is part of the academic life in HEIs. Nagda, Gregerman, Jonides, Von Hippel and Lerner (1998) found that most students, including academically achieving students, entered university unprepared for the required level of work and often needed assistance to acclimatize to a new environment. These students typically entered college and were fearful, lonely, away from home, confused, in a strange environment, and needed an anchor/advisor, to provide stability, assurance and consistency. They needed an outlet for frustrations, someone to hear them out and to answer questions, and a source of confidential guidance, affirmation, and support (p. 91). They went to campus with a set of needs that had to be addressed in university so that they might succeed (Strommer, 1993). According to Bosler and Levin (1999), if an academic advisor provided information on institutional policies and procedures, it reduced students’ frustrations and contributed to their success.

Researchers (Astin, 1993; Nagda et al., 1998; Tinto, 1993) found that, students’ difficulties in identifying with and connecting to the academic and social cultures and sub-cultures within an institution led to poor academic performance and eventual withdrawal. MAA not only influenced students' academic and career choices but also played a critical role in creating and facilitating a productive academic culture among teaching staff in a departmental and university-wide context. MAA engaged students beyond their own world views, while acknowledging their individual characteristics, values, and motivations as they entered, moved through, and exited the institution.

A study done in the London Metropolitan University, United Kingdom, by Skordoulis and Naqavi (2010) sought to identify the value of advising as perceived by undergraduate faculty

members, attitudes and perceptions of faculty toward advising, and perceived competence and preparation level of faculty to advise students. A total of thirty-two respondents from the Business School faculty at the London Metropolitan University participated in the study. Advisors agreed that there was value in advising students, and most faculties perceived advising as a teaching activity and indicated that it should be a component in promotion and performance review. Most respondents reported that advising undergraduate students was a good use of their time, although the level of agreement was higher in reporting that they felt more competent and prepared to advise students on academic matters. However, most respondents had received little or no professional development in advising, and they expressed the need for assistance in advising on issues of university systems and regulations as well as personal matters. The previous study had looked at Business School faculty students. The respondents of this study were students in SoE in one of the largest public universities in Kenya.

A study conducted by Albany State University's College of Business Student Advising Improvement Committee in 2009 on importance of MAA found that almost 99 per cent of the respondents indicated that advising played an important role in retaining students. Faculties in this study perceived themselves to be competent and prepared to advise students on academic and career decisions, but needed assistance in learning university procedures and regulations, using advising technology, advising on personal matters, and understanding the attendant legal issues. The same study further sought to find out the attitudes of faculty towards advising students. All respondents (100%) indicated that advising graduate students was a good use of faculty time, with 95 per cent of the respondents agreeing that advising undergraduate students was also time well-spent. Likewise, almost all faculty respondents agreed that advising was an effective way to build rapport (99.1%), retain students (98.6%), and recruit students (90.8%). Most respondents also agreed that faculty should advise students regardless of the level of compensation (71.5 percent), and that advising (either graduate or undergraduate students) should be an expectation of all faculties (67.1%). However, this study looked at both graduates and undergraduate students. The current study looked the perceptions of lecturers and adult learners on the importance of MAA needs in the university. Within developing countries, especially those of Sub-Saharan Africa, the dramatic growth in student numbers associated with the shift from elite to mass systems was central to current transformations in terms of structure, purpose, social and economic role of HE. As a part of this process of expansion and diversification, new groups of students who, for various social-economic and cultural reasons, were traditionally excluded from or under-represented in HE, are accessing the institutions in increasing numbers. Emerging evidence from research point to the fact that HE systems have experienced growth in terms of student numbers although this growth had barely addressed equity considerations (Sawyer, 2004; Manuah et al., 2002, Mario et al., 2003). The rising enrolments, however, present new problems both of which are related to the capacity of the institutions to meet the academic and welfare needs of the diversified number of students.

At the University of Botswana, the importance of MAA was recognized since the establishment of the university in 1982. However, a few issues had been seen as absent from the programme if it was to attain its value of creating a holistic environment that ensured learning as the central focus for the students and established opportunities that facilitated the full realization of their potential for academic and personal growth (A Strategy for Excellence, 2008:16).

2.3 Importance of Mentoring and Academic Advising in Kenya

At the time of fieldwork for this study, Kenya had seven public universities and eighteen private universities. There were also other HEIs such as polytechnics and colleges. Due to this, there was diversity of students and therefore, called for the establishment of MAA at all

Kenyan public universities. The Strategic Plan for Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, 2009/2010 – 2013/2014 for example, made a proposal for the mentoring of Science and Technology Middle Colleges through the establishment of linkages and collaborative relationship, approving credit transfer programme for diploma graduate, establishing programme for training of teachers and other staff and initiating collaborative research and innovative activities. The plan also made wide proposals, which though they did not mention MAA, pointed to the need for these services to serve the diversified student populations. Such proposals included the promotion of gender equity through establishing and operationalizing a gender unit, mainstreaming gender in the university policies, maintaining affirmative action in admission of female students, implementing affirmative action in the provision of scholarships and establishing mentoring groups.

The institution of the study was the only public university, at the time of study, which had an established mentoring programme which aimed at nurturing and producing holistic graduates who would influence others positively. The programme however, targeted students in the regular mode of learning. The Mission of the programme was to promote personal, social and academic success for undergraduate students of the institution, while the vision was to contribute to a positive university experience and provide each student with the support needed to succeed at the University. The weakness with the mentoring programme was that it was specifically tailored to the MAA needs of regular undergraduate students. This meant that the adult learners, who attended the institution during school holidays (April, August, and December), did not have a MAA programme tailored to their needs. This was despite research evidence, some of which had been reviewed here showing that they should have been given priority when institution designed MAA programmes.

3.0 Study Design

The study used descriptive research methodology, qualitative in approach. A case study technique was adopted to enable the researcher to achieve, among other things, an in-depth collection and analysis of data. According to Cochran (1997), descriptive research methodology enabled the researcher to investigate and describe the current phenomenon within its context.

3.1 Study Locale

One public University was purposively sampled as the locale for the study.

3.2 Study Population

A population is defined as all members that are described by the characteristics selected by the experimenter. This entailed all the lecturers, administrators and students enrolled in the IBP at the university at the time of the study. This was because all the students shared characteristics that designated them as non-traditional students.

4.0 Results

Three items were used to establish the perceptions of lecturers and adult learners on the importance of MAA needs in the institution. The first was an item in the questionnaire that required respondents to confirm if they were aware of the mentoring programme in the institution. The second were items both in the questionnaire and FGD sessions that required the respondents to state what they perceived to be the importance of MAA services to students generally. Third, items in the questionnaire and FGD asked them to state the areas in which they sought MAA at the institution.

A majority of the students (77.2%) indicated that they were not aware of the mentoring programme, while only 22.8% indicated they did. These responses represented the true picture since as had been indicated, the formal mentoring programme at the institution was meant for regular students and IBS who came to the institutions on short periods were unlikely to be aware of the programme. But despite the majority of the students not being aware of the programme 95.9% indicated that they considered MAA to be critical for IBS in terms of advising them on non-academic and academic related issues that they encountered in the institution. These findings were in agreement with a study conducted by Marcus (2007) which showed that students who were uninterested in their study, in the first instance, were not likely to seek assistance compared to more motivated students.

An item in the students' questionnaire required those who indicated MAA to be important for adult learners to give reasons why they thought so. Table 1 summarizes the responses and attendant frequencies from students' respondents.

Table 1: Importance of Mentoring and Academic Advising as Perceived by adult learners

Importance of Mentoring and Academic Advising	Freq	%
Guidance and Counseling To give guidance, help students tackle challenges in the institution, for students to adjust to the new academic and social culture, make right choices and encourage us to forge ahead in times of discouragement.	127	41.4
Academic Issues Gain knowledge, enables students get good results/excel academically, psyches the student to advance in academic, clarifies academic issues in case of doubt, gives advice on effective ways of studying in and out of campus and enables students cope with the tight schedule.	69	22.5
Course Selection Enables students learn easily by choosing the right course, to understand the relevance and requirements of our courses and assists students in areas of specialization.	45	14.7
Personal Issues Enables us solve personal problems and help us in balancing our studies with work and parenting.	24	7.8
Completion Maximizes on the short duration the students have and enables students to finish their programmes successfully.	23	7.5
Role Model They are role models and our eye openers.	8	2.6
Career For career and personal development and help students acquire good professionalism.	6	2.0
Financial Issues Enables one to tackle socio-economic issues, helps on how to plan and manage their finances.	3	1.0
Future Prospects Guide on future prospects and helps us in academic progression to reach Ph.D level and beyond.	2	0.7
Grand Total	307	100

Table 1 indicate that a majority of the respondents (41.4%) considered MAA important in addressing various non-academic issues which, however, affected their academic life. The issues mentioned by the students included guidance on how to access the university facilities and services, adjusting to the new academic and social culture, making right choices,

preparing students psychologically for academic life, advising students on issues beyond their reach as well as providing orientation to the institution after being out of academic life for a long time.

The students' responses here are clearly indicating that they thought MAA services as important in terms of helping them fit into the institutional life which in turn could facilitate their academic progress. It was important to note the response of students regarding use of institutional facilities and services. This seemed to include how to use the library, locate classrooms and other services that helped the students settle down for their academic activities. The second group of responses were more specific to academics. Sixty-nine (22.5%) students indicated gaining knowledge, obtaining good results academically; advancing in academics, clarifying academic issues in case of doubt, effectively studying in and out of campus and coping with the tight schedules. This group regarded these as the critical benefits they would gain from a MAA programme. Forty-five (14.7%) students indicated that the MAA programme had assisted them in going through the course without difficulty. They were able, for example, to choose the right academic programmes, understand the relevance and requirements of courses and were encouraged in choice of units and areas of specialization.

Twenty-four (7.8%) students cited being enabled to solve personal problems and balancing studies with their employment duties and parenting as critical. Twenty-three (7.5%) students indicated reasons related to progression and completion of their academic programmes. This included maximizing on the short duration they usually had at the institution so that they could complete their programmes successfully. Eight (2.6%) students gave role model related reasons for the importance of MAA, such as: equipping students to mentor their pupils and colleagues. This pointed to the benefits they thought they would derive from MAA in terms of their future careers. Six (2.0%) students gave career reasons for the importance of MAA. These reasons included future career change and career development and professional ethics. Generally, the responses and findings from students here pointed to the fact that students appreciated MAA as an important service in resolving their personal career related issues, academic progression and professional development. This finding agree with (Astin, 1993; Nagda et al., 1998; Tinto, 1993) who point out that non-traditional students usually have difficulties in identifying with and connecting to the academic and social cultures and sub-cultures within an institution.

The responses from questionnaires corroborate with various responses that the students gave during FGD sessions. For example, the following opinions were frequently expressed by students during the sessions: It is important since the IBS are students just like any other. Other issues arise also now that we are adults and some of us are married, have children, are mentoring other people who are in the schools we are teaching so they need mentoring more than the other younger students.

This finding is in agreement with ASU (2009) which found that the advising process guides students in making responsible academic and career aspirations. The findings also concur with studies by Titley and Titley choices, setting goals, and developing sound educational plans compatible with (1980) and Frost (1991) which indicated that three of every four students were uncertain or tentative about their career choice at college entry. Only 8% of new students felt they knew "a great deal about their intended major." Over half of all students who entered college with a declared major changed their mind at least once before they graduated, and only one senior out of three would major in the same field they preferred as freshers.

Other students, during FGDs noted the contribution of MAA in promoting student retention and completion of academic programmes. At the same time one student noted:

There is a big lag and as you know for us being adult learners most of the time we are very busy when we are outside there. When we come here, we are so much loaded and discouraged by all that we are doing outside there. If someone had a mentor it would be more profitable in encouraging the person to move on.

Another student concurred with these feelings by noting that:

‘Academic mentoring is something very crucial especially at the university level since we go to the university with plans and expectations that we would like to achieve in our lives and academic mentoring will help us realize our goals... Our desire is as we go back to our areas of operation we shall be better than when we joined the university. We should be nurtured on how to handle the world outside’.

This response complements findings by Stull (1997) who characterized MAA as an ongoing and active process involving the student, advisor, and institution, the primary goal, of which, was to assist students in the development and accomplishment of meaningful educational plans that were compatible with their life goals. Using an item in the questionnaire and discussions during FGDs, the researcher sought to establish from the students the issues they most required MAA services. Table 2 summarizes the responses from students.

Table 2: Institutional Based Students Responses on the Areas/Issues they required MAA Most

Responses	Frequency	%
Use of library	232	20
Examinations	211	18.2
Timetabling	201	17.3
Choice of Academic Units	157	13.5
Various Study Facilities	127	10.9
Student Welfare Issues	111	9.6
Course Progression and Graduation	79	6.8
Availability of Student Mentoring and Advising	43	3.7
Total	1,161	100

Note: Frequency responses shown in the table are more than the number of students in the sample as the responses were mutually inclusive (a respondent could give more than one response all of which were interrelated).

Table 2 shows that most IBS needed MAA in relationship to use of library, 232 (20%), examination related issues, 211 (18.2%), timetabling related issues, 201 (17.3%), choice of academic units 157 (13.5%), utilization of study facilities, 127 (10.9%), student welfare related issues, 111 (9.6%), issues related to progression of academic programmes and graduation requirements 79 (6.8%). Finally, some 43 students (3.7%) indicated they needed more information regarding the availability and utilization of MAA services at the University. Overall, the results indicated that academic related issues were the most that troubled the students while on campus, and these were the issues they thought MAA services at the institution should focus on. This observation was supported during FGD sessions when a student responded that, “information on MAA was not extensively provided”. These findings are also similar to those of a study by Choy (2002) which revealed that this population of the

non-traditional learners often need assistance with time management, negotiating financial aid, course schedules and childcare, to name a few.

These responses were reinforced by those of a follow-up item that required the respondents to name the specific academic areas that required MAA services. One hundred and ten (26.6%) responses indicated they needed MAA advice on unit registration issues such as unit registration and subject choice. Sixty-one (14.7%) needed mentors' advice on academic issues. Such issues included: study methods, research, study materials, assignments, library, lecturing, teaching practice and credit transfer. Forty-four (10.6%) needed mentors' advice on examinations which included: missing marks, how to tackle examinations and on classification (graduation requirements). Forty (9.7%) needed mentors' advice on professionalism and future prospects.

Thirty-six (8.7%) needed mentors' advice on ICT which included: how to access ICT, help in e-learning, have computer studies on the timetable, computer and internet to be accessible throughout. Thirty-four (8.2%) needed mentors' advice on finance which included: advice on fees and financial management. Thirty-three (8.0%) needed mentors' advice on time, which included advice on time/duration of study, lecturers' punctuality and time management, deferment of studies and on timetabling. Thirty-one (7.5%) needed advice on personal issues which included; family issues such as how to balance family life and work, how to cope with distance from their children while they were at the university during holidays among others. What this meant was that the status of most IBS, being family members was one component that affected their studies. Unfortunately, the university did not even have separate accommodation and other welfare issues to cater for this category of students. Relationship issues, students' health issues, behaviour change in children, stress management and communication.

Twenty one (5.1%) indicated that they needed mentors' advice on students' welfare which included: students' accommodation, sign language interpreters, culture shock, harassment, student mentoring services and guidance and counselling. Four (1.0%) needed mentors' advice on co-curricular activities such as: sports activities and clubs. Other issues for which students thought they needed the help of a mentor were: issues on units and registration. Such issues included; how to change courses and course requirements, choosing masters course, sequence of units in the course, subject combinations, prior information on units for the following session, some units not well-covered, total number of units to be covered within the four years and after examinations, students should register for next session.

Other students had issues on examinations, which included: examination grading, hard to retake as online registration was only for four units, exam timetable clashing and how to go about retakes. Financial issues were also mentioned by the students and included: financial challenges, awards like scholarships, getting fee donors, what to do when one lacks fees and limited time allocated for online fee payment. It seemed that there was a widespread feeling among the students that the institution had not put in place adequate advising structures to address the needs of this group of students. For example, one respondent expressed the following:

...As adults we have many responsibilities like the family. We also need to fit in the university, time for the family and other responsibilities. While in the university, we need to put things right, manage and maximize time, also on the units that we are taking.

From the responses, it was clear that a majority of issues were academic related and needed attention. These ranged from the learning environment at the institution, the choice and progression of academic units, finance related issues and other personal issues that affected their academic progression. However, only a small percentage of IBS indicated they were

aware of the mentoring programme at university. This implied that although the directorate of mentoring had been in existence for some-time, its operations were not well integrated into students' academic life. It could also imply that since the IBS came to the institution for brief periods in a year, the directorate of mentoring had not designed a suitable mechanism or avenue to reach these students and understand the problems they had.

4.1 Conclusion

Generally, what the responses from the students revealed was the fact that there was no organized and structured programme at the university targeting the institutional based students. Also, information provided by students on their perceptions on the importance of MAA needs shows that the students were aware of the various needs that MAA was supposed to serve, and they understood the benefits of such services to their academic life while on campus. The avenues from which the IBS could access such services were, however, not well structured. Students depended on the general advice they received from their lecturers, advice they received during orientation period when joining the university and frequent communication contained in university documents such as course outlines, brochures and magazines. The lack of a structured programme, like the one for the regular students, therefore, meant that the IBS were disadvantaged in terms of the support available to them from the institution to enrich their academic experience and the quality of their academic output. The lack of a structured programme to address the needs of this group of students also did not conform to evidence in the literature review regarding academic and welfare support for non-traditional students. In all higher education systems that are increasingly enrolling part-time non-traditional students, MAA services are included as an important component to engage the students with the academic life of the institutions and improve the quality of their programs. At the institution, and indeed in all public universities, the segment of non-traditional students was gradually becoming a majority. It was therefore, important that institutions designed MAA as support systems to help these students get integrated into the academic life of the institutions. Students in this study consistently mentioned issues related to examinations, issues of missing marks, course progression and registration. All these issues needed MAA services.

4.2 Recommendations for Policy and Action

This study was envisaged with a view to contributing to the policy in providing mentoring services to the IBS. To ensure MAA needs were adequately provided, the study recommended the following:

- a) Establishment of a formal mentoring program for IBS.
- b) Every university student should be allocated a mentor on registration day whose interaction should start immediately. For example, each administrator on duty on registration day should have a list of mentors and assign each mentor a number of students as directed/required by the mentoring directorate. Such a step would ensure that every student that is the regular and IBS have a mentor to consult in case of any need.
- c) There is a need for mentors to receive training in MAA to improve on their mentoring skills. Students' in-service training on MAA, should be organized for both regular and IBS.
- d) The government policy on HE should stress on the need to mainstream MAA as one of the University Common Units into the existing university curriculum in all HEIs. This would ensure a culture of MAA into university operations.
- e) The university should ensure that they meet the IBS in the course of the semester in their distance learning/regional campuses to guide them on assignments or any issue, be it personal, academic or professional. This would make students feel they belong

to the institution and that someone cares for them. This would lessen uncertainty, increase confidence and self esteem and ensure successful completion of studies.

- f) The university should institutionalize mentorship by broadening and strengthening the existing mentoring program to target students in other modes of study namely: adult learners, postgraduate, open and distance learning, evening and weekend intensive.

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