

THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC ADVISORS ON FUTURE CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIAN HIGHER INSTITUTION

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Abstract

The focus of this study is on the Role of Academic Advisors on Future Career Development in Nigerian Tertiary Institution. Three research questions guided the study. The design used in this study was a descriptive survey. The population of the study comprises all staff of AIFUE Owerri, giving a total of 750 staff. A total of 266 respondents were sampled for this study using the Taro Yamane sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a structured Questionnaire by the researchers titled Questionnaire on The Role of Academic Advisors on Future Career Development (QRAAFCD). The instrument was validated by experts in Guidance and Counseling and Measurement and Evaluation all from Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha Statistics and a value index of 0.75 was obtained. Data collected was analyzed using mean statistics and standard deviation. The findings revealed that exploring the career potentials of students, providing academic assistance, planning appropriate course schedules, and sharing knowledge, experience and insight are the most relevant importance of academic advisors in the career development of students in AIFUE, Owerri. It was recommended among others that government should design educational policy that will accommodate a compulsory course in academic advising to all University students. More so, ministry of education needs to review the curriculum of schools and make improvements to accommodate career/skills acquisition activities.

Keywords: Role of Academic Advisors and Future Career Development

Introduction

Academic advisors according to Chandana (2020) help students in making wise choices that advance their goals for the future and position them for success. Urhahne, and Wijnia, (2023) pointed out that academic advisors set clear objectives, seek feedback, explain knowledge and skills, demonstrate values and impact, explore opportunities and challenges and maintain passion and motivation. Top Education Degree (2024) described an academic advisor as a type of counsellor who works with students, usually at the college level. Collins English Dictionary (2024, ed.) defined an academic advisor as a faculty member who helps and advises students on academic matters such as planning their academic careers. An academic advisor in this study is defined as someone in a professional position in an institution who guides prospective and current students through the admission process, course registration and selection, program planning, degree completion, scholarships and more.

An academic advisor may also refer to someone under the Registrar's Office who provides students with information on their degree, courses and University regulations. Advisors help students navigate academic and personal concerns that may influence their academic performance. They are available to meet free of charge on campus. Academic advisors help students understand how degree programs can help meet their career/academic goals, identify program requirements, plan appropriate course schedules, and make changes to class schedules (The University of Arizona, 2024).

Exploring the roles and responsibilities of academic advisors in Nigerian higher institutions is of paramount importance in the twenty-first century teaching and learning. The relevance of academic advisors has been felt in Nigeria history,

back-dating from the colonial era to the democratic dispensation in the educational system of Nigeria. Unfortunately, academic advisors have not been given the expected accolade they deserve in the upbringing of students for future career development and in nation building at large. Academic advising promotes students' growth and learning through informed and experts' advice from advisors (Antoney, 2020). Miller, (2022) noted that academic advisors appeal to student's emotions to promote their academic well-being, using different strategies, such as ideas, concepts, and tactics. In most cases, they use student's testimonials to present factual evidence that could be beneficial to their education. Academic advisors provide students with relevant information that facilitates learning opportunities, success and attainment of key learning outcomes (Gugu & Francois, 2021).

Universities and Higher Education Nationwide provide academic advising for both undergraduates and postgraduates to bring holistic support to students as they proceed to their higher education to postgraduate journey. EU Business School (2021) described an academic advisor as a special kind of counsellor, and their role is to work directly with students pursuing higher education. They also noted that academic advisors support students to make informed, effective decisions that serve as their future ambitions push them toward success and provide a well-rounded education. Academic advising according to Dimple (2023) is a decision-making process through which students, scaffolded by advisors, search for educational benefits available to them by better understanding themselves and learning how to navigate and utilize the resources of the institution to meet their own individual needs, both personal and academic.

Structured advising according to Dimple (2023) increases retention. Lent (2020) opined that when students perceive that their learning is valuable, meaningful and relevant, they are more likely to persist towards their career goals. Ryan (2020)

states that meeting with your academic advisors allows you to work with someone who has your success at heart and helps you to answer questions you may have about your major career or coursework. The role of academic advisors in the career development of students cannot be overemphasized; because they have a lot to do if students must succeed academically and beyond. Students make choices during college that influence their careers. Many students, however, report that their academic advisors do not integrate vocational topics into their advising discussions (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2018; Strada & Gallup, 2017). Troxel and Kyei-Blankson, (2020) also reported that when academic advisors respond to surveys; they validate students' self-reported experiences and acknowledge that they do not often address or assess career concerns during advising conversations.

However, Condoa (2023) argued that academic advisors validate students' self-reported experiences and assess their career concerns during advising conversations. It is further stated that academic advisors help students find solutions to course or degree-specific requirements. They also connect students to specific services needed. They also provide academic assistance and individualized attention to promote each student's success, share knowledge, experience and insight that is beneficial to the students, and help the students evaluate and realize educational and career options (Đurišić, & Bunijevac, 2017). Hart-Baldrige (2020) states that academic advisors help foster a sense of belonging with students which can lead to greater persistence.

Academic advisors approve the student's academic program of study; provide accurate and consistent information; clarify program requirements, policies and procedures; assist the student in identifying appropriate institutional resources; facilitate relationships between the student and other individuals on campus who may provide assistance; and uphold the academic standards of the institution

(Rutgers, 2022). Successful academic advisors are student-oriented, having an interest and concern for students as individuals; knowledgeable about the requirements and policies of the college; skilled in interpersonal relationships, able to listen, able to be directive and non-directive, able to demonstrate patience and tolerance; available to students; careful about details such as record keeping, follow-through, and follow-up; and positive about and committed to advancement (Pope, 2009). Beth (2020) posits that advisers must continually provide supportive outreach and engagement to address students' interests, develop academic plans and identify career paths from the time students first enroll throughout their college experience and oftentimes, well past graduation. Academic advisors' role in career development is always useful for students to succeed professionally and helps to boost employee motivation and productivity in the future when they become staff of an organization

Career Development refers to the process an individual may undergo to evolve his occupational status. It is the process of making decisions for long-term learning, to align personal needs of physical or psychological fulfillment with career advancement opportunities. Career Development can also refer to the encompassment of an individual's work-related experiences, leading up to the occupational role they may hold within an organization. Career Development can occur on an individual basis or an organizational level. On an individual basis, career planning encompasses a process in which the individual is self-aware of his personal needs and desires for fulfillment in his personal life, in conjunction with the career he hold. While every person's experiences are unique, this contributes to the different careers that people will acquire over their lifespan (Aribiyi, 2006). According to Arinze and Ojoru (2009) career development is the series of activities in an on-going/lifelong process of developing one's career which includes defining new goals regularly and acquiring skills to achieve them. Career development usually refers to

managing one's career in an intra-organizational or inter-organizational scenario. It involves training on new skills, making a career change within the same organization, moving to a different organization or starting one's own business.

Troxel, *et al.*, (2022) reported that academic advising emerged as a profession in response to the complex challenges that are inherent in students' educational journey. Kansas State University (2021) in support of Troxel *et al.*, (2022) agreed that there is increasing number of graduates programmes specifically devoted to the work of academic advising. Tatiana (2023) found a range of challenges e.g. (unmanageable advising caseloads, poor visibility into students' need throughout the term, lack of alignment across departments and low students' engagement) that students may face while participating in research teams and how academic advisors can help them overcome these challenges and thus suggested that effective academic advising should be student-centered, emphasizing communication skills and providing support to students throughout their academic journey. Rofayda, *et al.*, (2023) identified some challenges faced by academic advisors as: lack of interest and inadequate training, lack of appropriate settings and lack of enough faculty members. In the part of students is lack of interest, lack of orientation to academic rules. John (2022) identified personal challenges as the most important factor when innovating to e-academic advising. Sidudzile and Sindiswa (2023) identified inadequate understanding of the academic success leading to limited number of students that attend academic advising. Theophilus (2022) stated that a faculty advisor helps to improve students' CGPA. However, increasing the advising load of faculty advisors can negatively impact students CGPA (Lorey, John, Prince, & Latrell, 2023).

It is the role of academic advisors to approve the students' academic program of study, provide accurate and consistent information, clarify program requirements,

policies and procedures, assist the students in identifying appropriate institutional resources, facilitate relationships between students and other individuals on campus who may provide assistance, and uphold the academic standards of the institution (Rutgers, 2022). Academic advisors role in career development is always useful for students to succeed professionally and helps to boost employee motivation and productivity in their future when they become staff of an organization (ACCE, 2020). Many scholar and researchers from different organizations and institutions have carried out research work on career advising and career development, but little or no study have been conducted on the role of academic advisors in future career development in Nigerian higher institutions, precisely Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education. Thus, the above observations initiated the necessity for this study.

Statement of the Problem

In spite of the increased number of students enrolled at Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, academic advisors still receive little or no attention since academic advising is considered as one of the basic duties of teachers only. Irrespective of the large intake of students in the previous academic sessions, the need for professional advisors and experts as well as comprehensive advising programs decreased dramatically especially among new students. Students find it challenging in making the right choice of faculty/department which suits their intended career choices. This is evident in students who lost concentration and interest in academic activities, score low grades in the previous semester exams, and lost motivation and interest in continuing their study.

However, in Arab universities and few African countries, the services of academic advisors have increased due to the development of higher educational system, but Nigeria is an exception to this. Students fail to perform well in college

due to loss of ability or academic skills. Significant non-academic factors also inhibit students' ability to perform to their potentials. These are as a result of lack/inadequacy of academic advisors in educational institutions of Nigeria. The function of academic advisors in improving the academic performance of students, avoiding academic dismissal, and preparing students for future career opportunities is not given the needed support it deserved. It shows the significant role of academic advisors, especially in the aspects of academic, personal life, social, mentoring, suggesting, counseling, coaching, or even teaching. Hence, this study investigates the roles of academic advisors on future career development in Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education Owerri, Imo State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the roles of academic advisors on future career development in Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education Owerri, Imo State. Specifically, the study seeks to;

1. Outline the importance of academic advisors on career development.
2. Investigate the extent to which academic advisors connect with students in career development.
3. Determine the various challenges faced by academic advisors in career development.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the importance of academic advisors on career development at Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education?
2. To what extent do academic advisors connect with students in career development at Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education?

3. What are the challenges faced by academic advisors at Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education?

Method

The research design for the study is a descriptive survey design. Nworgu, (2015) described descriptive research as a research method that tries to describe and interpret appropriate situations. This design enabled the researchers to obtain opinions from the respondents on the role of academic advisors for future career development. The population of the study consists of all academic staff of AIFUE Owerri from seven faculty; giving a total of seven hundred and fifty (750) staff. A total of 266 respondents were adopted for this study using the Taro Yamane sampling technique. Thirty-eight (38) respondents were chosen from each faculty making a total of 266 respondents. Additionally, the formula is easy to use and understand, making it accessible to researchers with varying levels of statistical expertise. Careful consideration was made to protect their identity as their names were not included in the questionnaire.

Instrumentation

The instrument for this study was a structured Questionnaire on The Role of Academic Advisors on Future Career Development (**QRAAFCD**). The instrument was divided in two - sections A and B. Section A contained the demographic data of the respondents while section B consisted of items built on clusters with response options for the clusters in the following format: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points, Agree (A) = 3 points, Disagree (D) = 2 points, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point, and of a Very High Extent (VHE) 4points, High Extent (HE) 3points, Low Extent (LE) 2ponints, Very Low Extent (VLE) 1point. The instrument was validated by experts in Guidance and Counseling and Measurement and Evaluation. To test the reliability of the instrument, the test-re-test method of an interval of two weeks was

administered to 30 academic advisors from Imo State University (IMSU). The two scores were correlated using Cronbach Alpha Reliability method and a score value of 0.76 index was obtained. The instrument was administered to 266 respondents by the researchers and with the help of the research assistants whom they carefully trained on how to fill the questionnaire; they were able to collect all from the respondents.

Results

Research Question One: What is the importance of academic advisors on career development at Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education?

Table 1: Mean ratings of the respondents on the importance of academic advisorson career development.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	\bar{X}	Decision
1	Explore career potentials of students	255	8	2	1	266	3.9	Accepted
2	Plan appropriate course schedules	237	14	10	5	266	3.8	Accepted
3	Provide academic assistance	245	15	4	2	266	3.9	Accepted
4	Share knowledge, experience and insight	241	15	5	5	266	3.8	Accepted
5	Evaluate educational and career options	220	24	12	10	266	3.7	Accepted
6	Identify program requirements	186	58	13	9	266	3.6	Accepted
7	Research range of career options (job opportunities)	217	29	12	8	266	3.7	Accepted
8	Provide accurate information about policies, procedures and requirements	207	41	10	8	266	3.7	Accepted
9	Refers students to university's resources and services	227	26	8	5	266	3.8	Accepted
10	Boost future employees motivation and productivity	219	28	11	8	266	3.7	Accepted
11	Helps students through their educational journey and the university system	215	30	15	6	266	3.7	Accepted
12	Help students understand the difference between a major and a minor	221	33	8	4	266	3.8	Accepted

13	Help students understand the requirements for graduating in vocational schools	206	41	9	10	266	3.7	Accepted
14	Help students make practical academic plans and decisions	207	44	13	2	266	3.7	Accepted
15	Create positive working relationships between students, staff and faculty	91	15	75	85	266	2.4	Rejected

Table 1 gives the result of data analyzed on the importance of academic advisors on career development. The result of the data in the table revealed the mean scores, thus; 3.9, 3.8, 3.9, 3.8, 3.7, 3.6, 3.7, 3.7, 3.8, 3.7, 3.7, 3.8, 3.7, 3.7, and 2.4 respectively. The result highlighted on the table shows that the respondents accepted all the importance of career advisors enlisted in the items column; except item number 15 which was rejected.

Research Question Two: To what extent can academic advisors connect with students in career development at Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education?

Table 2: Mean of the respondents on the extent to which academic advisors connect with students in career development.

S/N	Items	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	N	\bar{X}	Decision
1	Create positive working relationship between students and career staff	225	29	10	2	266	3.8	Accepted
2	Render counseling services and vocational education	182	48	32	4	266	3.5	Accepted
3	Conduct skills acquisition programs	205	55	4	2	266	3.7	Accepted
4	Explore students' potentials through staff awareness activities	166	65	25	10	266	3.5	Accepted
5	Guide in research and career decision process	166	68	22	10	266	3.5	Accepted
6	Develop students' career management skills	155	48	41	22	266	3.3	Accepted
7	Provide mentorship and consultancy	186	58	13	9	266	3.6	Accepted

Results in Table 2 indicated the extent academic advisors connect with students in career development with mean scores of 3.8, 3.5, 3.7, 3.5, 3.5, 3.3 and 3.6. And item number 1 has the highest score among all the items.

Research Question Three: What are the challenges faced by academic advisors at Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education?

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Table 3: Mean ratings of the respondents on the challenges faced by academic advisors

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	\bar{X}	Decision
1	Poor curriculum design (career courses not captured in curriculum)	166	65	25	10	266	3.5	Accepted
2	Low levels of academic performance	219	28	11	8	266	3.7	Accepted
3	Students personal challenges (disabilities)	237	14	10	5	266	3.8	Accepted
4	Lack of research and ICT centre	245	15	4	2	266	3.9	Accepted
5	Absence of incentives and motivation	221	33	8	4	266	3.8	Accepted
6	Poor school/college management	219	28	11	8	266	3.7	Accepted
7	Poorly equipped library (resources and services centre)	207	44	13	2	266	3.7	Accepted

The result in Table 3 items showed the challenges faced by academic advisors with mean scores of 3.5, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.8, 3.7 and 3.7. In summary, the Table shows that respondents accepted the entire items provided.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study were discussed in line with the research questions as follows.

The finding of the study on the importance of academic advisors on career development revealed that most respondents who participated in the research questionnaire accepted that exploring the career potentials of students, providing academic assistance, planning appropriate course schedules, and sharing knowledge, experience and insight are the most relevant importance of academic advisors in the career development of students in Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri. The highest of respondents strongly agreed to the above items on the questionnaire while very few of them disagreed. The findings were in line with the findings of Miller (2022) who found that academic advisors appeal to student's emotions to promote their academic well-being, using different strategies, such as

ideas, concepts, and tactics. In most cases, they use student's testimonials to present factual evidence that could be beneficial to their education. Also in consonance with the finding is the work of Gugu & Francois (2021) who found that academic advisors provide students with relevant information that facilitates learning opportunities, success and attainment of key learning outcomes.

The findings of the study also revealed the extent academic advisors connect with students in career development by creating positive working relationships between students and career staff, render counseling services and vocational education, developing career management skills of students and exploring students' potentials through self-awareness activities in Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education. The findings were related with those of Hallas (2020) who conducted a study on the extent academic advisors can connect with students in career development in State college learning communities which aimed to determine if community college students in differing learning communities had different perceptions of their career and academic needs and whether students in different learning communities perceived their career and academic advisors as meeting these needs. This is true of the fact that academic advisors engage students in career management skills so that they become versatile and adapt to any career they find themselves in the future. They guide students on career choice-making to enable them to make the most appropriate career choice since different students are better off in specific career areas than others. Hence, the findings support the need for colleges to investigate the different advising needs of students within various learning institutions, as well as investigate the needs of minority students in learning communities. It is in the best interest of an institution to understand student needs so that academic advising may be tailored to meet these needs.

The findings also identified the possible challenges faced by academic advisors as: low level of academic capability, poor curriculum design, absence of incentives and motivation, are some of the challenges faced by academic advisors. Poor curriculum design and poorly equipped library are the highest challenge faced by academic advisors in Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education. Despite the above discussed challenges faced by academic advisors, findings also revealed that students experienced personal challenges and poor school/college management. Therefore, it is recommended that the government should improve the success of its innovation of career development by integrating technology in academic advising solutions to the curriculum of schools/colleges by considering a holistic approach that recognizes the multifaceted challenges identified. The above findings were in agreement with Mangundu (2022) who conducted a research on Analysis of Challenges to Academic Advising during Emergency Remote Teaching which recommended experience in using ICTs in formal learning environments, frequency of use of ICTs for academic advising and respondents' ICT.

Conclusion

The above analysis and interpretations and the information from related literature, imply that the importance of academic advisors in future career development is numerous with a lot of advantages attached. Academic advisors connect with students in career development in diverse ways ranging from guidance, counseling, self-awareness and career management. However, academic advisors are faced with some challenges which are impediments to the successful career advising process in schools/colleges.

Career development is directly linked to the goals and objectives set by an individual. It starts with self-actualization and self-assessment of one's interests and capabilities. The interests are then matched with the available career options. The

advisor needs to train students' to acquire the skills needed for the career path chosen by him. Every employee working in an organization is looking for career development which moves in the right direction. A career should be planned in a way that it moves forward. The above statements justify the rationale for the engagement of academic advisors in educational institutions in Nigeria precisely at Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education.

Recommendations

In the light of the results of this present study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should design an educational policy that accommodates compulsory courses in academic advising to Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education. More so, the Ministry of Education needs to review the curriculum of schools and make improvements to accommodate career/skills acquisition activities.
2. School authorities should offer enough time for interaction and contact between the student and his academic advisors, and give advisors more authority and flexibility in dealing with rules and regulations of academic advising.
3. Academic advisers should concentrate on students as the core of the advising process and encourage them to exercise more responsibility in the process of academic advising.

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