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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES OF ACADEMIC ADVISING AT MADDA WALABU UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Academic advising is of paramount importance to students in higher learning institutions on setting their personal life, academic and career goals, that academic advisors shall fulfil. Based the Senate Legislation of Madda Walabu University, instructors are often assigned to shoulder the responsibility of academic advising, but it is rarely seen when they provide the service. This enquiry tries to assess the Practices and Challenges of Academic Advising services provided at Madda Walabu University. To this end, the study used both qualitative and quantitative approach of Descriptive survey type in nature. Interview and Questionnaire were the data collection instruments used to gather the primary data from the participants of this study. Accordingly, 107(25%) systematically selected 3rd year University students of 2016 academic year filled the 21 closed- ended item questionnaire, and eleven(11) randomly selected instructors (Directors, Teachers, and Department heads) from Eleven departments of the four randomly selected colleges were interviewed to get the necessary data for this study. The result obtained from the students' questionnaire and the interview result of the study show that academic advising is such a marginalized academic practice that received little or no attention at Madda Walabu University. It was revealed that advisees neither make regular contact with their advisors nor are the advisors themselves willing to devote their time and academic potentials for the betterment of their learners' advice. Most of the lecturers do not have the essentials skills in academic advising nor do they know how to help students exploit the available resources to achieve academic results. A wide-gap between advisors and advisees, poor motivation on part of the advisees seeking advising services, advisees' lack of self-confidence and inability to approach positively to their advisors, the unwillingness of advisors to offer advice services, lack of sufficient know-how and insufficient incentives given for advisors were the commonest challenges identified. Recommendations have also been forwarded to the concerned bodies for the betterment of the service provided in the University.

Keywords: Academic Advising, instructors' Roles; Practices and Challenges; Advisor and Advisees' Relationship.

Cite This Article: Banje Asefa Chibsa, Tesfaye Sura Ayana, and Ahmed Mahmud Hussein. (2019). “AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES OF ACADEMIC ADVISING AT MADDA WALABU UNIVERSITY.” *International Journal of Research - Granthaalayah*, 7(10), 205-220. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3523263>.

1. Introduction

Academic advising is an important and useful role that academic advisors shall fulfil. It does not only influences students’ academic and career choices, but can also play a critical role in creating and facilitating a productive academic culture among the teaching staff in departmental and university wide context. In addition, student advising is one important component of university instructors’ job. Cognizant of this fact, Article 47 of the Senate Legislation of Madda Walabu University (2007) stipulates that faculty members are assigned the responsibility of academic advising. In this Legislation are mentioned the criteria up on which instructors are to be assigned as advisors, roles of academic advisors, guidelines on students academic advising as well as objectives of academic advising. In relation to this, Pascarella (1991) states that faculty contact through advising and personal tutoring positively correlates to student retention and persistence toward degree completion, if that contact is deemed to be positive. Thus, a major component of student’s academic success revolves partly around advising.

An academic advising is an aspect of education quality tool which supplements the normal learning channel in higher education institutions. It is a support to students’ academic progress and success in the institutions which prepares students for career opportunities even beyond the campus life (Aalexich, 2002). Anderson (1997) describes it as “... a planning process that helps students to approach their education in an organized and meaningful way. The University of Michigan (2012) defines the term as “a process of information exchange that empowers students to realize their maximum educational potential.” Academic advising creates awareness for students on how to access accurate information about policies, procedures, support, services available and requirements; to help students: identify fields of study; select curricular and extra-curricular activities that enhance their educational experience, and establish meaningful positive relationships with the faculty, advisors, other staff, and fellow students. Counseling is specialized service requiring training in personality development and educational guidance is aimed at helping students in the process of their adjustment to self, to others and to circumstances (Gupta, 2007 and Vishala, 2008:4)

Stull (1997) characterizes advising as an ongoing and active process involving the students, advisors and the institution (the university, Colleges and Departments), 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.

It is also noted that advising contributes to overall student success. With regard to this, Habley (1993) states that faculty and administrators should recognize that students who formulate a sound educational or career plan based upon their interests, values and abilities will have an increased chance for academic success, satisfaction, and insistence. Similarly, Light (2001) established a relationship between academic advising and students’ academic growth and stated that good academic advising can have a profound impact on the academic growth of students. He also

observed that such interactions may help a student find his/her place within the university and may also give a more satisfying college experience.

Academic advising can be seen as one of the systematic and structured services on the campus that facilitates lively interaction with the university administration (David and Cooper, 2001, Hamrick et al, (2002). Alexitch (2002) is also of the opinion that the interactions that students have with the academic staff members can increase the intrinsic value that students place on learning. She further stated that this contact may help the students in adjusting to the university climate, cope up with academic difficulties and progress towards academic programs and careers. According to Light (2001), students who interact with academic staff members will have fewer difficulties in orienting themselves towards the university curriculum. These ideas are popularly known as “Mattering Theory”, which states that students will succeed if they know that someone in the university cares about them (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002). Likewise, academic advisors can help students to feel confident and pragmatic in discussing academic goals or personal issues that may be affecting their success (Kadar, 2001), and the advising process provides an opportunity to guide students in setting and achieving their personal life, academic and career goals (welley et al, 2003).

There is a large body of research conducted on the various aspects of academic advising. Some of the several studies that highlight issues of practicing effective academic advising include the studies made by Milem et al (2000), Light (2001), Davis and Cooper (2001), Alexitch (2002), Hamrick, Evans & Schuh (2002), Kadar (2001), Brown (2003), Walters (2003), Whelley et al (2003), Vijaya (2007), *Skordoulis and Naqavi (2010) and others.*

In universities, advising services are delivered in a variety of ways. Studies in the field of psychology as well as teaching psychology at institutions of higher education ensure availability of specialists with required qualifications, and equating (or even comparing) advising to teaching raises a lot of questions-both for advisors who perform the teaching role and for professional staff who perform the academic advising role. Thus, Academic advising can have a profound impact on the academic growth of students (Mishira, 2007; Cooper, 2001; Alexitch, 2002 and Light, 2001). Research shows that University’s general role regarding academic advising is to: foster a campus community that promote student success; provide the resources and professional development necessary for exemplary academic advising. And it seeks input from advisors and students when considering and implementing policy and curricular changes; and recognize the value of excellence in academic advising. As to the University Senate Legislation (2009) Article 47 Sub-article 3, academic advisors have the following roles: interact with their assigned students on a regular basis, help students choose their program of study; understand the strengths and weaknesses of their group through continuous and regular monitoring of their academic performance; help these students develop personal academic goals or learning plans and facilitate their progress towards their goals.

Bandura (1971) demonstrated that behaviours are acquired by watching another (the model, teacher, parents, mentor, and friends) that performs the behaviour. Teachers’ attitudes directly affect student’s attitudes and teachers’ attitudes are, in turn, influenced by their culture and belief system (Ibid). Tinto (1993) identified that if students are not pleased with their educational experiences, they are likely not to graduate. According to Parcella (1981), advisors contact through

advising and personal tutoring positively correlates to student's retention and persistence toward degree completion, if that contact is deemed to be positive.

According to Boyer (1990), the use of faculty time is the single concern around which all other educational issues pivot. Arguably, the most often cited criterion for hiring university advisors is expertise in their subject matter. Whereas advisors are expected to be skilled in their specific subject matter field, they are generally not expected to enter the profession with expert advising skills. Often many of these advisors receive little or no preparation on guidance from their institutions to assist in their professional development needs in completing this expectation (Gordon et al, 2000). Boyer (1990) uses the term scholarship which is viewed in four categories: discovery, integration, application and teaching. He offers that each area is distinctive with unique advisors' expectations in each area, and he clearly defined advising as a component of teaching. Fundamental to Boyer (1990) model, the teaching profession involves the teacher's own knowledge and activity; and teachers must learn to effectively plan, assess, modify, and communicate if they are to be successful scholars in this area. The model suggests that faculty must practice scholarship in teaching /advising just as they would for the other three components of the model. To do so, however, requires that advisors: (1) be aware of their strengths and the weaknesses (2) have the opportunity to build on strengths and alleviate weaknesses and (3) possess a favourable attitude toward the task (Trigwell et al, 2004).

Stull (1997) characterized academic advising 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. This could have a negative effect on an institution and its institutional programme. Gordon (1995) reported that advisors contact plays a significant role in student attitudes toward the university. Habley (1993) noted that advising contributes to overall Student success, and faculty and administrators should recognize that students who formulate a sound educational or career plan based up on their interests, Values and abilities will have an increased chance for academic success, satisfaction and perseverance, and academic advising is the most significant mechanism available in university for aiding this process. Habley (1993).

The result of poor advising may even threaten the financial security of some institutions. Tinto (1993) reported that more students actually leave universities before completing a degree rather than graduate. This loss of students translates into a substantial monetary loss and threatens fiscal stability of institutions (Farren and Vowell, 1996). Thus, the universities need this information if they are to understand areas of expertise and deficiency in preparation.

It is clearly indicated in Alexitch (2002) that academic advising helps students a lot to "cope-up-with academic difficulties and progress towards academic programs and careers" (p.5). Hence, the task of academic advising seeks the commitment of Colleges, Departments, the academic staff, and the increased awareness and attention of the advisees. However, some factors may influence academic advising service. Petress (1996) found out that there are four major factors that affect an advisor's self-perceptions of his/her ability to advice: how advisors interpret their advising role; training and/or guidance provided to advisors; expectations of administrators and colleagues for advisors: and exemplary advisors. As Petress (1996), the factors that affect the advising task are how the advisors interpret their advising roles, training and/or guidance provided to advisers,

expectations of administrators and colleagues for advisors and recognitions and rewards available for competent and exemplary advising. Generally, the perception of the faculty administration and instructors, the awareness of the students about advising, experience and the skill of instructors in advising, recognition and motivation available for committed advisers and facilities available affect a lot the task of advising.

The Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation Number 650/2009 Article 32 Sub-Article 1a states that one of the responsibilities of an academic staff is rendering academic advising. With the same token, contrary to roles and responsibilities of staffs in the Madda Walabu University Senate Legislation ((2009), academic advising, being very important for students, seems to be underutilized by the advisors, Colleges and the students. This had been observed through experience of the researchers while they were working as staff members in the university. However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study has been carried out on the practices and challenges of academic advising at Madda Walabu University. As experiences show, the current task of academic advising seems to be insufficient at Madda Walabu University and students are not receiving the type of advising required for academic success. Advisers are rarely seen contacting their advisees and vice versa. Hence, this could have a profound negative impact on the students' academic achievement.

The current study, therefore, tried to assess the practices and the challenges of academic advising at Madda Walabu University. Thus, this research specifically aimed at finding out the extent to which academic advising is being practiced in the Colleges; identifying factors influencing the practices of academic advising; and examining the roles of academic advising in enhancing learners' academic performance.

2. Materials and Methods

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate the practices and the challenges of academic advising at Madda Walabu University. To this end, a qualitative and quantitative method of a descriptive survey type was employed to describe and interpret the practices, challenges, beliefs and attitudes held by instructors on academic advising and the effects of academic advising on students' academic performance (Patton, 1990).

Samples and Sampling Techniques

The population of the study was Madda Walabu University instructors and college Directors and 3rd year students of the 2016 academic year. The research setting was selected because the researchers are part of the problem under the study so that the problem really exists, and are familiar with the university community. Multi-stage sampling techniques were employed in the study. First, simple random sampling was employed to select the four Colleges of the university from eleven colleges. Then, the convenient sampling technique was used to take the available instructors and College Directors of the four Colleges for the interview. Accordingly, eleven instructors and college Deans from eleven Departments of the four Colleges: College of Social sciences and Humanities, College of Natural sciences, College of Agriculture and College of Mathematical Science took part in the interview held. Similarly, to get more reliable data from different angles, 3rd year students of 2016 academic year of the university are the subjects. To this

end, after the decisions on the number of student participants have made systematic sampling technique was utilized to select the subjects from eleven departments. Accordingly, students' lists were taken from the university Alumni registrar and student were selected from eleven departments. Thus, 25% of the students (107 3rd year students of 2016 academic year) were participated to fill in questionnaire. Then, questionnaires were designed, pilot tested, distributed and filled by 107 students in face-to-face so as to minimize or avoid ambiguities and avoid problems in returning rate.

Instruments of Data Collection

Taking the instruments' respective purposes into consideration, two instruments were utilized: interview and questionnaire. No single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective (Patton, 1990).

Interview: As the main objective of this study was to investigate the practices and challenges of academic advising, interview is a principal tool for the study. Singh (2006) suggests that interview is a relatively better instrument to provide information about practices, challenges, beliefs, attitudes and anticipations. Therefore, in-depth interview was made to: find out the extent to which the university instructors devote their time on academic advising, examine the university instructors espoused beliefs and attitudes towards academic advising, and investigate the challenges (if any) that may face instructors in devising academic advising. Thus, semi-structured interview was made with instructors and College Directors from four Colleges: thus, eleven randomly selected instructors attended the interview. To minimize personal bias and make it anonymous the codes, I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, I6 and I7 was given to instructor interviewees, and D1, D2, D3 and D4 were used for the four college directors. The responses of each interviewee were recorded to make it convenient to be repeatedly heard for transcription and discussion. Finally, the data obtained through interview was analyzed qualitatively in narrative mode under different themes.

Questionnaire: To cross-check the information obtained through interview, a questionnaire was set, piloted and employed as supportive instruments to answer the following specific objectives of the study, to what extent an academic advising is being practiced in the university, identify the attitude of students and instructors to academic advising, and find-out the role of academic advisors in students' academic growth. To this effect, the 21 item, closed-ended questionnaire was administered to the 107 systematically selected 3rd year students of the eleven departments. The questionnaire was distributed face-to-face so that it was filled and returned with 100% returning rate.

Data Analysis Techniques

This study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Thus, the data gathered through teachers' interview was analyzed qualitatively in that it provides richness to data qualitatively and the responses obtained from students' questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively using figures and percentages.

3. Results and Discussions

Analysis of Data obtained from Students' Questionnaire

The Questionnaire administered to the students consists of four thematic areas each with various questions. Hence, results of data obtained from the students' questionnaire was presented, analyzed and interpreted as follows.

Academic Advising and its Practices

Table 1: the concept and extent of academic advising is being practiced at MWU

No	Item	Responses					
		yes		No		NR	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
1	I know what academic advising is.	65	60.75	38	35.51	4	30.74
2	I have an academic advisor from my department instructors	66	61.68	38	35.51	3	2.8
3	I regularly contact my academic advisor	36	33.62	67	62.62	1	0.93
4	I and my advisor have an agreed on schedule for academic advising	37	34.58	69	64.49	1	0.93
5	I think I am getting adequate help and guidance concerning my academic and personal life from my academic advisor	34	31.78	69	64.49	4	3.74
6	I have gotten any orientation on how to get academic advising service	37	34.58	65	60.75	5	4.67

As can be seen from Table 1, it depicts that the majority (60.75%) of the students know what academic advising is whereas some (35.51%) of them do not know what academic advising is. In the same Table, Item 2 reads that the majority (61.68%) of the respondents have got academic advisor while some (35.51%) of them replied they don't have academic advisor at all. The majority (about 63%) of the learners have no contact with their academic advisors where only some (about 34%) of them make regular contact with their advisors. The table again shows that the large number of the students admitted that they do not have an agreed on schedule for academic advising but only some (about 35%) of them confirmed that they have an agreed on schedule for academic advising with their advisor. Finally, about 32% of the learners get the required support on their life matters from their advisors and the majority (about 64%) of them do not receive the required help from their advisors. In a similar fashion, item 6 of the same table depicts that only some (about 35%) of the students were given orientation about academic advising service whereas the majority (about 61%) of them did not get any orientation about the service.

In general, on the above Table shows that the majority of the students know academic advising and have academic advisors assigned to them where still some students have no awareness about the service and have no advisors assigned to them. In addition to this the data shows that, except some of the students the majority of the learners do not regularly contact their advisors, do not have scheduled advising services and do not get adequate advising services on their life matters.

Factors Affecting the Practice of Academic Advising

Table 2: Factors affecting the practice of Academic Advising at MWU

No	Item	Responses					
		yes		No		NR	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
7	I have an awareness about academic advising service	58	54.21	43	40.19	6	5.61
8	I think it is necessary to regularly (weekly) contact my academic advisor	50	46.73	55	51.40	2	1.87
9	I think my regular contact with my adviser wastes my time and my adviser's time	28	26.17	75	70.09	4	3.74
10	My academic adviser is willing to give me the necessary help and guidance	50	46.73	54	50.47	3	2.8

The data on the above table reveals that more than half (about 54%) of the learners have an awareness about academic advising whereas a considerable number of them haven't got awareness about academic advising. According to item 8 of this table, about 51% of the respondents disagreed with the importance of regularly contacting their advisor even though some (about 47%) of them agreed with the necessity of making regular contact with their academic advisor will not take their time, but only few (about 26%) of them are of the opinion that it is time-consuming. Finally, when the advisees are asked to whether their assigned instructors for advising purpose are willing enough to provide the service or not, most (about 70%) of the respondents reported that their academic advisors are not willing to give them the necessary help and guidance where still a significant number (about 47%) of them confirmed that their advisors give them appropriate advising service.

To sum up, the data in Table 2 shows that even though the majority of the students did not receive any orientation about academic advising, more than half of them still have awareness about the service. On the other hand, from the data it can be inferred that about half of respondents regularly contact with their advisor while a significant number of students believed in the necessity of a regular contact of an academic advisor. In the same way, most (about 70%) of the students believe that having a regular contact with an academic advisor will take time. Similarly, the data reveals that advisors of about half of the respondents are less willing to help whereas advisors of some of the students are willing to help in academic advising.

Attitudes and Services towards Academic Advising

Table 3: Students' perceptions/ Attitude to their Academic Advisor and advising service

No	Item	Responses					
		Yes		No		NR	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
11	I think I have got a special benefit as a result of the academic advice I get from my adviser	34	31.78	71	66.35	0	0

12	There is a significant improvement I have seen in my academic performance as a result of the advice I get from my Academic adviser	51	47.67	52	48.6	0	0
13	My academic advisor is knowledgeable about my plan of study	67	62.62	35	32.71	5	4.67
14	My academic advisor is interested in my success	72	67.29	31	28.97	4	3.74
15	My academic advisor has a good communication skill	64	59.81	38	35.51	5	4.67
16	my academic advisor is knowledgeable about campus resources and services	62	57.94	37	34.58	8	7.48
17	My academic advisor is available for meeting	37	34.58	64	59.81	6	5.61
18	My academic advisor gives me sufficient time during our meetings	38	35.51	63	58.88	6	5.61
19	My academic advisor encourages involvement in campus activities	52	48.60	51	47.66	4	3.74
20	My academic advisor is prepared in advance for academic advising appointment	54	50.47	47	43.93	6	5.61
21	When I communicate with my academic advisor, I feel I have been helped	60	56.07	44	41.12	3	2.80

As it can be observed from the above table 34(31.78%) have got a special benefit out of the academic advice they got from their advisors. 71(66.35%) of the respondents, however, believed that they haven't got a special benefit from the academic advice and 2 (1.87%) of the respondents restrained from responding to this question. From the written responses of students and from their data itself it is possible to say that students in this study paper haven't got special benefit out of the academic advice.

It can also be observed from the table that 52(48.6%) of the respondents felt that there isn't a significant improvement in their academic performance as a result of their advisors. 4(3.74%) of the respondents, however, restrained themselves from responding to this question. The above to the students' attitude to the knowledge and skills of their advisors, the majority (62.62%) of the respondents replied that their academic advisors know/be aware of students' plan of study, whereas 32.71% replied that their academic advisors have no information about their plan of study. Five students (4.67%) did say nothing on the issue. This shows that even though the majority of the instructors follow and contact their advisees regularly, on how to study their lessons, still some advisors do not care about students' plan of study and success.

The result of Item No 15 shows that slightly more than one third of the respondents replied that their advisors lack good communication skills while 59.81% replied that they have good communication skills. The rest 4.67% has said nothing on the issue. From this, one can easily deduce that some of the advisors might be experienced in academic advising skills or they might have got any training related to academic advising. But, there should be training or orientation for those advisors who do not have the skills of communication, because these advisors might be newly employed teachers or have got no any training in the university in general and on how to advise students in particular.

This data also reveals that more than half of the respondents (57.94%) replied that their academic advisors have knowledge about campus resources and service so that they help students (advisees) what and how to use campus resources effectively. But, some advisors (34.58%) have no knowledge and awareness about campus resources and services. This may be due to lack of knowledge about the services rendered in campus or lack of follow up activities whether they attend on different meetings and services hours. So it is better if these advisors know and give enough service for their advisees on how to use campus resources effectively.

Another item of the table also assesses whether advisors give sufficient time for advising services or not. Accordingly, 35.51% of respondents replied that their advisors give enough and reasonable time while they contact their advisees. Whereas a large number of respondents (58.88%) said that they don't give the necessary and enough time during their meetings. The rest (5.61%) said nothing on the issue. This might show that the majority of the advisors in the campus didn't give due consideration for academic advising so that an appropriate time is not allocated for advising services which, in turn, has its own negative impact on students achievement.

The last item asks whether students have developed confidence on their advisors academic advising service. Accordingly, the majority, (56%) of the respondents replied that they felt that they have been helped by advisors when they communicate their problems with them. In contrast, 41.12% respondents said that they don't think that they have been helped. Few respondents (2.8%) didn't identify whether they have been helped or not. This also has a direct impact on students' success because according to mattering theory, students become successful if they think that there is someone who cares for their success and achievement in campus.

Analysis of Data from Instructors' Interview

Interview was the main tool for this study. It was intended to collect/ elicit the relevant information regarding the duties and responsibilities of the Team Leaders and College Directors of Madda Walabu University. So the responses obtained from the in-depth interview made with eleven participants are analyzed through narrations as follows.

The Interviewees were asked to mention their main roles as College Directors and/department heads in general. Even though participants explained their main roles in different ways, there was a general consensus on their responses. Most of the respondents mentioned that the main roles of the team leaders are, organizing and coordinating activities in the department, writing semester and annual plans and reports, guiding the teaching learning team, preparing meetings and responding to letters from different bodies, ensuring the teaching learning process and community service, following up the duties and responsibilities of teachers in the team, teaching and advising students are some of their roles. However, three respondents never said a word about the possible roles they can play in academic advising which gives a clue that this area is receiving little or no attention.

Teacher interviewees were also asked whether academic advising is being implemented properly or not. All of the interviewed College Directors replied that academic advising is to some extent practiced in their respective Colleges, even though there are many impediments. Concerning the issue, three department heads (I1, I4 and I5) said "No, Not at all" and they went on giving possible reasons why this is so. Lack of willingness on the part of most lecturers; students do not

communicate with their respective advisors; teachers' and students' knowledge gap concerning the role of academic advising, etc. are some reasons pointed out. Most importantly, what was highly stressed by interviewees was lack of sufficient rooms/offices/ for advisors is the main problem that discouraged teachers not to help and advice their students. The last Interviewee (I7) justified that "the role of team leader is quite diminished since there is not enough incentive, and everybody is discouraged on that".

When teacher interviewees were asked to reflect their beliefs on the roles of instructors in academic advising, all of them responded to the question in similar fashion. Accordingly, all of them said that advisors can play a great role in changing student's life in general and in their academic success in particular. The first and the fifth interviewees pointed out that the rich experiences that lecturers have is, itself, a resource for the learners; academic advisors also help their advisees when they face social, economic and academic problems; and the pieces of advice that advisors give to learners can also be used by the latter life, i.e. after graduation. The third interviewee elaborated that advisors can play pivotal roles in directing and making awareness about the problems that may face students in campus life and the consequences of hardworking. One College director stressed that:

Usually we assign 5 to 6 students to an advisor aiming that instructors would lead their advisees to better efficiency; they can tell (advise) them many things; even how to think. I mean, their study, their use of time, their effectiveness in academic life and will improve their better of yesterday (personal interview with D4)

So, it can be easily deduced from the above responses that almost all of the department heads and College Directors have at least know-how of academic advising and what for. They reflected as advisors are core participants in academic advising and can shape students social, academic and financial problems.

Item four of semi-structured question assesses the teachers' awareness on functions of academic advising. Accordingly, the responses gained from all interviewees are summarized as follows.

Academic advising: helps students to become successful in their studies and personal, builds their confidence, prepares students to overcome the challenges/problems and makes students be all-rounded, Increases quality of education, Serves as additional orientation for newly enrolled campus students on their duties and responsibilities in campus, is one way of pinning out their problem, Eases students' stress that results from academic, social and personal problems, Helps learners achieve better grades and are aware of how to study their lessons.

Teacher interviewees were also asked to identify their roles of participants of academic advising. Accordingly, majority of them clearly forwarded the main roles of advisees, advisors and leaders / College Directors/ in academic advising. Two interviewees (D3 and I5) pointed out that advisees should make regular contact with their advisors and consult him/her on their academic difficulties. And students should put into action the academic advising tips they obtain from their advisors. Another interviewed teacher (I3) added that students should openly communicate with their advisors and respect the consultation hours so as to get the necessary help from their respective advisors. Finally, it is said that they should be able to identify (know) the relationship they can

make and minimize the gap between advisees and their advisors. The team leaders on their part should notify the advisors and follow up their roles closely so as to check and regulate the relationship. One interviewee (I6) emphasized that department heads and/ College Directors should create awareness for both advisors and advisees and should create an opportunity which advisee's can be beneficiaries from their advisors as well as should know the important roles academic advising plays in the university students' life. "As one of the main participants of academic advising, advisor should make students be aware of the role academic advising plays, and help their advisees in both social and academic problems."

Two College Directors (D1 and D3) also stated that College Directors, in collaboration with department heads, can play the roles of: giving orientation on the importance of Academic advising, following-up and monitoring proper implementation, Providing the necessary advise, support and encouragement for the advisors and advisees. Only few of interviewed (I1 and I6) advisors unable to clearly identify the roles each of the participants of academic advising plays and this is a clue to say that there is a knowledge gap still in this area.

- As to the question raised to assess the problems that arise if the students are not given proper academic advising, the interviewees forwarded the following consequence of improper academic advising: Alteration rate and/academic dismissal will increase; a gap between advisors and advisees will be widen; students won't share their academic, social and economic problems that will have a negative impact on their life; it will be difficult to produce a competent skillful as well as psychologically self-confident graduates; students will suffer from stress; and it increases complaining between and among advisors and students.
- With regard to the problems that hinder the proper implementation of Academic advising in their College, almost their responses were the same. The respondents said: lack of sufficient rooms for advising purpose, advisors are not willing to approach their advisees in a friendly manner, students are not willing to contact their advisors; teachers are not well-versed-in the theories and practices of academic advising; this area is not given due consideration from different level managers so that no follow-up, some advisors are discouraged since advising in general and academic advising in particular has no any incentives; etc are some of the problems of improper implementations of academic advising.
- At the end the interviewees were made to gather possible solutions concerning the challenges of academic advising. Accordingly, the responses of all the interviewees were summarized as follows: Advisors have to be reasonably given fixed rooms and have their own fixed time schedule for advising; Teachers should take the burden and the responsibility to help learners to give awareness on how to use resources, schedule their time, overcome academic difficulties, roommate difficulties, stress etc.; Training should be given for all participants of academic advising in general and newly hired instructors in particular to develop the knowledge and culture of academic advising in the university; Students should regularly contact their advisors and openly discuss their problems with their advisors; The participants of academic advising, all of them, should be supervised whether they are properly carrying out their roles or not; There should be a joint agreement with managerial bodies and instructors to develop the culture of academic advising;

Incentives should be given for academic advisors and team leaders so as to reinforce or encourage them do their best regarding academic advising.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Regardless of its advantages, academic advising at Madda Walabu University is such a marginalized academic practice that received little or no attention by the concerned bodies. Even though the students know the importance of academic advising, quite few of them neither make regular contact with their advisors nor are the advisors themselves willing to devote their time and academic potentials for the betterment of their learners. Most of the lecturers do not have the essentials skills in academic advising nor do they know how to help students exploit the available resources so as to make the learner achieve more academic results. The students also lack the self-confidence to communicate freely with their academic advisors. To make the matter worse, advisors do not approach their advisers in a positive, caring and friendly way. The commonest academic advising problems at Madda Walabu University are: lack of sufficient separate room for advising, the unwillingness of advisers to offer advice, poor motivation of advisees seek advising services, wide-gap between advisors and advisees, lack of sufficient know-how of advising on the part of advisors and no incentives given for advisors. The respondents agreed that given the paramount roles academic advising plays in students' academic life, if this service continues to be poorly provided; academic dismissals, poor grades, anxiety and lack of directions as to what to do to succeed academically, socially and individually will result. Thus, the following recommendations have been reached based on the findings.

- A thorough training, orientation and direction shall be given to the advisors and advisees, especially at the start of academic years so as to make the most out of the academic advising services.
- Advisors' and advisees' attitudes towards academic advising need to be changed positively in order to minimize communication problems, possible complaints, and lack of initiative to actively participate in the academic advising practice.
- The university should see to it that the academic advising service is being properly run there by providing sufficient rooms for advisors, giving incentives for advisors, and if necessary, supervising the service to check its implementation and take proper actions.
- Given its advantages, academic advising service be promoted, rewarded and be made part and parcel of the duties and responsibilities of academic advisors: ach College/department shall follow-up and checks the implementation of the academic advising practice.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Madda walabu University management for their Ethical clearance, and material and financial support that contributed a lot for the successful accomplishment of this paper. We would also like to thank staffs and students of 2016 academic year, who have participated in providing the necessary data for this study.

Appendices**Appendix-A****Madda Walabu University****College of social sciences and Humanities****Questionnaire to Students****Dear Student,**

This questionnaire is designed to assess the challenges and the practices of academic advising at Madda Walabu University. It is one of the instruments the researchers use to gather the necessary data for this study. Thus, you are kindly requested to give the required information, since your contribution is highly important for the success of this research. The researchers would like to assure you that all the responses you give will be kept confidential and is used only for the research purpose. *You don't need to write your name!*

Thank you in advance!

Instruction: Respond to the following questions by putting a tick-mark () under the “Yes” or “No” column.

No	Item	Responses		
		Yes	No	NR
1	I know what academic advising is.			
2	I have an academic advisor from my department instructors			
3	I regularly contact my academic advisor			
4	I and my advisor have an agreed on schedule for academic advising			
5	I think I am getting adequate help and guidance concerning my academic and personal life from my academic advisor			
6	I have gotten any orientation on how to get academic advising service			
7	I have an awareness about academic advising service			
8	I think it is necessary to regularly (weekly) contact my academic advisor			
9	I think my regular contact with my adviser wastes my time and my adviser's time			
10	My academic adviser is willing to give me the necessary help and guidance			
11	I think I have got a special benefit as a result of the academic advice I get from my adviser			
12	There is a significant improvement I have seen in my academic performance as a result of the advice I get from my Academic adviser			
13	My academic advisor is knowledgeable about my plan of study			
14	My academic advisor is interested in my success			
15	My academic advisor has a good communication skill			
16	my academic advisor is knowledgeable about campus resources and services			
17	My academic advisor is available for meeting			
18	My academic advisor gives me sufficient time during our meetings			
19	My academic advisor encourages involvement in campus activities			

20	My academic advisor is prepared in advance for academic advising appointment			
21	When I communicate with my academic advisor, I feel I have been helped			
22	What are the strong sides of Academic advising at this University?			
23	What should be improved in the university concerning academic advising?			

Appendix-B

Madda Walabu University

College of social sciences and Humanities

Interview Questions for school Directors, Department heads and Instructors

- 1) List your main roles in the university as college director/ Department Head/Instructor?
- 2) In your opinion, what do you think are the roles of lecturers in academic advising?
- 3) What are the functions of academic advising?
- 4) What do you think are the advisees' roles in academic advising?
- 5) What are the problems that can arise if the students are not given proper academic advising?
- 6) What do you suggest to be the solutions for the problems you mentioned under question No. 5.
- 7) What suggestions do you have for academic advising at this university?

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