

Interventions that Universities can Undertake to Meet needs of Adult Learners through Mentoring and Academic Advising

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to establish interventions that universities can undertake to meet the needs of adult learners through Mentoring and Academic Advising. Respondents of the study were 320 adult learners attending classes during school holidays and fourteen academic advisors. Stratified and systematic random sampling techniques were used to collect data. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The study findings were that universities should organize for computer classes, set time outside the semester when students meet mentors, put in place a mentorship program targeting the Institutional Based Students, Mentoring and Academic Advising to be part of the formal responsibility of all academic staff, train all lecturers in Mentoring and Academic Advising, improve modes of communication by having more communications between students and administration, have more forums with the adult learners, have Face-to-face interactions, Avail mentors' contacts and Peer mentoring system.

Keywords: Academic Advising, Mentoring, Institutional-Based Students, Higher Education

1.0 Introduction

Given the rising enrolments of non-traditional students/adult learners in universities there is need to find out from mentors and adult what interventions can be undertaken by universities to help learners feel that they belong to the institutions of higher learning. This is due to the fact that many students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds spend less time in Higher Education Institutions than their peers due to commitments such as family and employment. This affects their understanding of higher education structure like registration, university regulations and other procedures due to time constraints and social-economic issues. This study intended to find out interventions that can improve on students' retention, involvement and persistence. This is because while higher education is important and increased access and attainment of university education are critical to the social-economic development of a country; this target cannot be realized unless it is accompanied by interventions which could contribute to quality learning outcomes. The adult learners in this study were Institutional Based Students (IBS) who attend residential sessions for tuition during three weeks of school holidays and work either full-time or part-time in their course of study and have families. This concern has generated the need to establish how universities are coping with this challenge as they continue to admit students from diverse backgrounds. Most of these students worked either full-time or part-time in their course of study and had families as shown by figure 1 where the child is looking forward to ask the father a question but the father is too busy on the computer maybe to beat deadlines on assignments or doing some research.



Figure 1: An Adult Learner with a young Child doing Assignments



In figure 2 a child wants to be on the mother's arms irrespective of whether the mother has assignment or not. A study by Githinji, Changach and Mwangi (2015) on frequency of interaction among advisors and adult learners found that non traditional students face barriers because institutions and policies continue to focus on traditional students. Also compared to traditional students, many more ALs have full-time jobs, spouses, and/or dependent children—in short, they are place-bound and busy people.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Was to establish interventions that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can undertake to improve learning outcomes of IBS.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

To establish from IBS the personal and professional issues that they need interventions in to improve the quality of Institutional Based Programmes (IBPs).

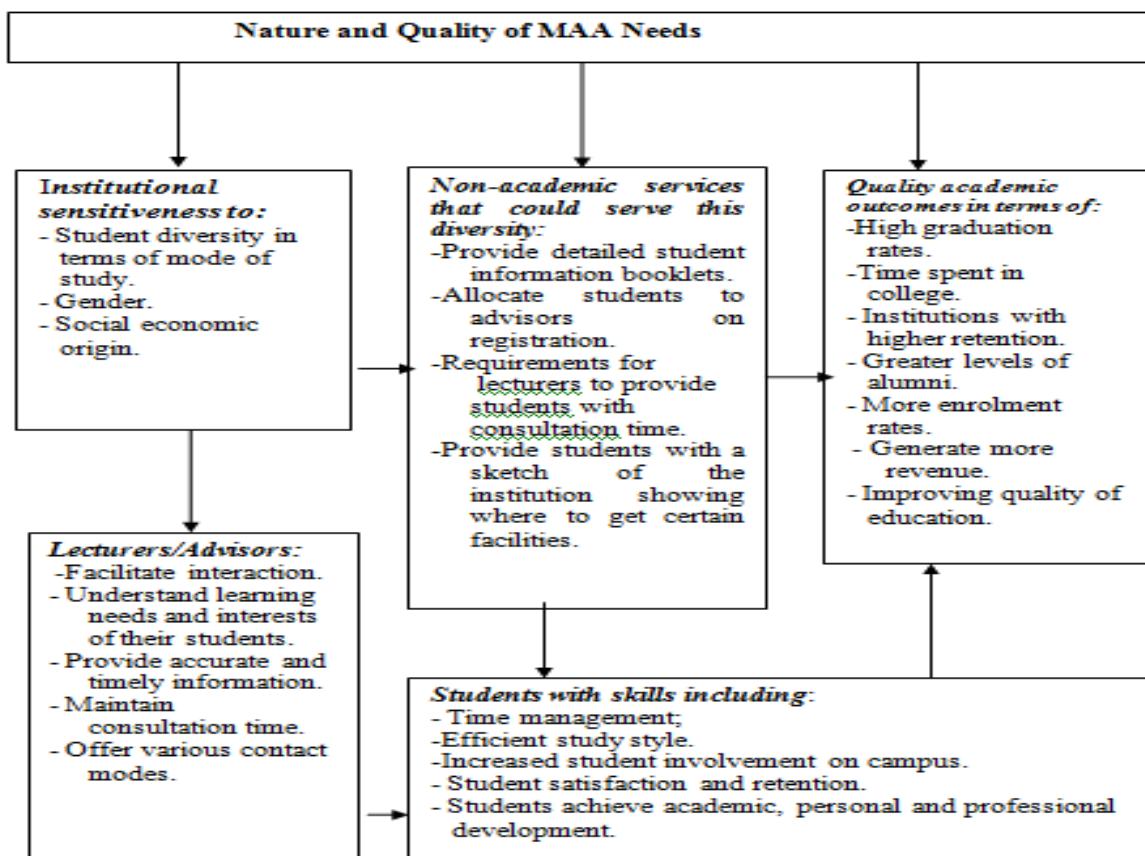
1.3 Significance of Study

The study was significant in spelling out how adopting Mentoring and Academic Advising (MAA) policy by the institutions of higher learning could improve the quality of their diversified programmes with the increasing number of students.

1.4 Theoretic Framework Social Support Theory

This study was guided by social support Theory by Williams, Barclay and Schmied (2004) and adult learning theory. Social support theory was used to partially explain the success of student mentoring. If support is lacking, coping might be absent and the individual might give up. It suggests that the more effective 'helpers' are those who have successfully navigated stressful circumstances similar to their 'helpees' (Thoits, 1995).The theory posits that if support is available, coping might be more rational and effective. Adult Learning Theory was applicable to the IBS since they had spent less time at the institutions, and most had stayed away from academic environments for a long time and so they needed to explore and discover interventions in the university to cope with demands of academic life. Social support range from students personal issues to broad issues that emanate from academic culture of the institutions. These circumstances create stressful situations for students and may lead to attrition as they try to collaborate with academic and non-academic interests. Hence, if IBS are supported and engaged to explore and discover the interventions in the institutions, they will be motivated, satisfied, feel recognized, have a sense of belonging and be transformed and persist to the end and increase student retention and high rates of graduation.

1.5 Conceptual Framework



2.0 Related Literature

A study by Mary (2011) established a high competition especially among sub-top universities and colleges. In line with the literature (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982), the community college in this study offered virtually everything for everyone and even students without a GED were able to attend the college. The universities also used practices that tried to break down the barriers that prevented adults from enrolling such as flexible and student friendly, mode of delivery and mentoring services.

The study suggests that for IBS to access and complete university programmes there need to be facilities that can break down barriers, extensive information about the programme and especially regarding the possible solutions for the expected barriers. Further, the facilities need to be clearly visible to the right target audience through selected recruitment. Various studies (see for example, Bonwell & Eison, 1991, Githinji, 2013, Lareau, 1996, Ender 1994, Wyckoff 1999) suggest seven aspects related to organization of mentoring programmes and pedagogy that institution should take into account to enhance the quality of academic advising and mentoring. These are: Providing strong incentives and rewards for advisors to engage in high-quality advising: Strengthening advisor orientation, training, and development as critical components of the institution's faculty/staff development program: Assessing and evaluating the quality of academic advisement: Maintaining advisee-to-advisor ratios that are small enough to enable delivery of personalized advising: Providing strong incentives for students to meet regularly with their advisors: Identifying highly effective advisors and "front loading" them to work with first-year students, particularly first-year students who may be "at risk" for attrition: Including advising effectiveness as one criterion for recruiting and selecting new lecturers:

In South Africa, MAA at Temple University was done in the School of Communications and Theatre Advising Centre as a part of student affairs. The primary goal of advising was to provide ongoing support for new freshmen and first semester transfer students. This was essential in making sure that students were on the right track and were taking the appropriate courses for their majors and giving guidance in study abroad programmes for those who had an adventurous nature. The programme also encouraged all first-year students to see an academic advisor, not only when it was time to register for classes, but whenever they had a question concerning their programme or about the university. The programme also supported first-year students through freshman seminar. This one-credit course covered such topics as time management, study skills, test-taking strategies and other academic success tips. It also discussed Temple's support services such as financial aid, career development, counselling services, and student health services (Temple University, website). This study looked at the MAA of first year students while our study sought to find out what services were available for first to fourth year IBS in the university. In the same university, students made appointments with an academic advisor mainly to register, check progress and grades, consultation on intra-university transfer and other personal concerns. This study sought to establish from the IBS if similar issues, like the ones reported in the study formed part of the reasons why they required and sought for MAA services.

In setting up the scheme, which was geared towards adult students who studied on campus or in the community on a part-time basis, the department sought to provide a totally supportive learner-centred environment for students by working closely with tutors and community venue partners to ensure that the diverse needs of students were met. This meant providing help with childcare, with funding issues, and support for students with disabilities, flexibility in timetabling to cater for students with caring responsibilities. There was therefore need for an impartial educational advice and guidance, a specific preparatory programme offered on campus and in community venues, and extensive study skills support. Yorke (2001) highlighted that roughly two-thirds of all university dropouts happen throughout or by the end of the first-year in university. Research suggests that effective transition and induction in the first six weeks of the term are fundamental factors in promoting student success. Ensuring confidence with the rigours of academic life and developing a peer community are achieved. This finding concurs with a study by Githinji Felicity (2013) which suggests that universities should hold a session with students the first day or during the first week of students' arrival.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 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 enables the researcher to investigate and describe the current phenomenon within its context. In this study, the phenomenon that was explored was MAA needs of IBS, enrolled in the SoE at the University. The approach was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to describe situations, perceptions, opinions, attitudes and the general demographic information that are currently affecting MAA needs of IBS in university that required interventions. The researcher was able to draw attention and conclusions from diverse perspectives from a synthesis of the results and placed the focus on the students' own perceptions while exploring the complexities and meanings of their experiences (Liamputpong & Ezzy, 2005).

3.2 Study Locale

One of Kenya's public universities was purposively sampled as the locale for the study. At the time of this study, the university had 2,631 undergraduate students enrolled in various IBPs. The university offers a range of services and programmes. The following are some of the services that have a direct link with mentorship and academic areas:

a) Mentoring Programme

The university had a mentoring programme that helped to nurture the students in order to make the right decisions and career choices. The programme targeted regular undergraduate students in regular mode of learning. The mentoring programme involved staff to students' mentorship, students to students nurture and mentorship programme, countrywide mentorship visits to secondary schools and the Growing Leaders Programme Initiative. The main aim of the latter was to nurture leaders out of students.

b) Counselling Services

The university also had counselling services for students. These services were offered free of charge to students and staff. The office dealt with both individuals and groups as need may arise. Willing students were encouraged to join the peer counselling group who were of great help when dealing with fellow students.

c) Dean of Students Office

Issues regarding student welfare were handled by the Dean of Students who was mandated to oversee most of the personal and socio-economic affairs of students in both Main and Satellite Campuses. The office co-ordinated several welfare activities and services such as counselling, games and sports, matters of faith, students governance, students with special needs, registration of clubs and societies among others.

d) Chaplaincy

Matters of faith were coordinated by chaplains for the Protestant, Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist students and an Imam for the Muslims. Students were expected to liaise with their respective leaders in order to know when and where to go for worship or spiritual counselling. It could therefore be argued that despite the higher enrolment ratios, and the fact that the mentoring programme was operational at the university at the time of the study it only targeted regular students only and therefore leaving out the IBS. This showed that universities were not adequately providing interventions that would assist IBS navigate their university life and improve on the academic and professional studies.

3.3 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. The target population for the study included all students enrolled in the IBP at the University. The IBS in the university constituted the universe sample. These informants were critical to the investigation since they provided most of the insightful, analytical, and specific information from which the study based its findings and recommendations on interventions on MAA.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

3.4.1 Selection of the University: Sampling Procedure

Ideally, the study should have involved all the campuses of the University however, the campuses and the regional centres were widespread throughout the country and application of research instruments was likely to pose administrative and financial problems. Therefore, the main campus was purposively sampled for the study because it had an established directorate for student mentoring services and a diverse majority of the IBS. Further, the main campus was picked because besides the existence of the mentoring unit, it had the largest teacher education institution. Interventions on MAA would therefore form part of the critical component of teacher preparation. This was even more important when dealing with a population of serving teachers as this study did.

3.4.2 Sampling of Schools

School of Education at the University was purposively sampled for the study. This purpose selection was based on the fact that the school had the highest enrolment of IBS at the time of the study.

The justification for the choice of Bachelor of Education IBS was because the SoE had the largest number of students in university IBP. For example, in the year 2011, all undergraduate IBS enrolled in the university were 2,641(100%) as shown in Table 1. Out of these, SoE had a total of 2,321(88%) students in all the education degree programmes compared to 320 (22%) students from other schools. Table 1 shows a summary of the number of IBS in the SoE studying various degree programmes and years of study.

Table 1: Institutional Based Students in School of Education

Bachelor of Education Degree Programme	Year of Study					TOTAL
	2011	2010	2009	2008		
	First Years	Second Years	Third Years	Fourth Years		
Bachelor of Education (Arts)	379	329	443	305	1456	
Bachelor of Education (Science)	83	70	86	70	309	
Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)	91	79	83	69	322	
Bachelor of Education (Special Education)	54	45	72	55	226	
Bachelor of Education (Home/Economics)	1	4	2	1	8	
Total Number of Students in Institutional-Based Education Programme	608	527	686	500	2,321	

Source: The University Student Finance (2012)

3.4.3 Sampling of Students

According to Gay (2009), for a descriptive research, a sample of 10 per cent of the population is considered minimum. For the purpose of this study, the researcher sampled 320 (13.8%) IBS out of the 2,321(100%) students enrolled in the SoE. The sample was arrived at through a process of systematic random selection. The researcher got the sample by first assigning numbers to the IBS as they enrolled for their April 2012 programme. Secondly, students were stratified according to year of study and gender. Stratified random sampling was used to place students into different strata according to gender and years of study. These two characteristics were thought to influence students' perceptions of the issues under investigation. While social science tells us that gender influences the manner different genders perceive and discuss social reality, length of stay in an institution also plays a part in the manner individuals learn the way and culture and how an institution operates. The justification for using stratified sampling technique was that it was appropriate because the population from which the sample was drawn did not constitute a homogenous group. In stratified sampling, the population is divided along some characteristics before the sampling simple is done (Yates, David & Daren, 2008). In this study, the year of study and gender of the students were the most important characteristics to be considered.

The final 10% was arrived at through systematic random sampling. Systematic random sampling is a method of selecting number of units from a population such that characteristics within the population have an equal chance of being drawn (Castillo, 2009). The justification of using this method was because it spreads the sample more evenly over the population, it is easier to conduct than a simple random sample and it may also be more precise. One has to only select a single random integer across the interval size (Castillo, 2009). The systematic random sampling was therefore, used to sample 320 (13.8%) of the IBS from each stratum to participate in the study as follows: the interval referred to as (k) was obtained through dividing the total number of units (N) by the sample size (n) to get the interval from which a random integer was used to start things off (Castillo, 2009). For example in this study, to get the interval size, the total number of IBS in the SoE which was 2,321 (N) was divided by the sample size which was 320 (n) giving an interval of 7(k). After getting the interval, we chose a random starting point, that is, any random integer from 1 to 7 could be used. Therefore, in this study 4 was selected as the integer to begin the sampling process and so the researcher sampled students who had been assigned numbers by circling numbers four(4), 11, 18, 25, 32, 39 and every 7th interval from the different years of study.

Secondly, the researcher counted all the 7th number and circled it to get the actual sample size of the study. In this case, therefore, first-year students who were 608 in number gave a sample size of 82, second-year students who were 527 gave a sample of 74, third-year students who were 686 gave a sample of 95 students and fourth-year students who were 500 students gave a sample of 69 students. Gender stratification that was done according to year of study was as follows; eighty-two (82) first-year students comprised 43 males and 39 females, 74 second-year students had 34 males and 40 females, 95 third-year students consisted of 38 males and 57 females. Finally, 69 fourth-year students had 46 males 23 females making a total sample of 320 IBS sampled from the School of Education. This information is shown in Figure 4

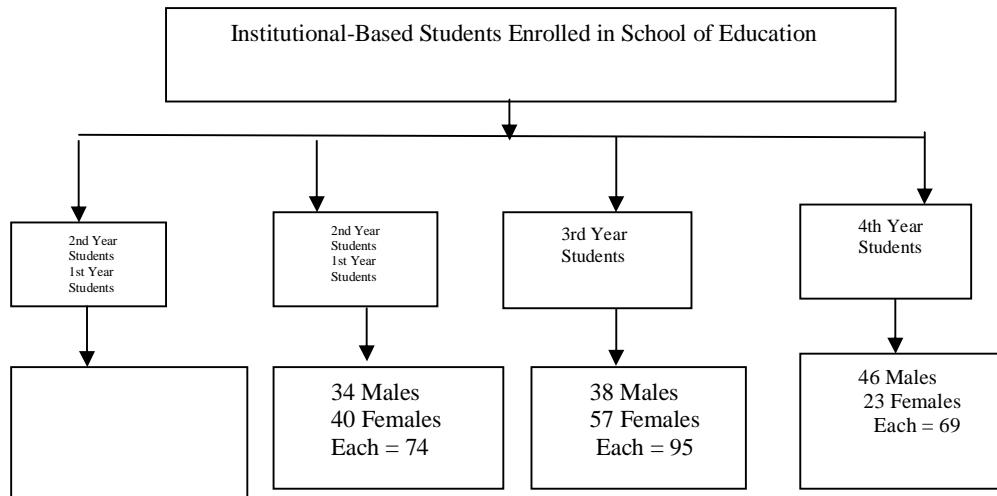


Figure 4: Schematic Representations of the Stratification of IBS in Bachelor of Education N=320

3.4.4 Sampling of Lecturers

The University had a total of nine hundred and nineteen (919) members of the teaching staff at various grades at the time of this study. Of these one hundred and forty-five lecturers (145) were serving in the SoE and spread across all the seven departments. These seven departments were: Educational Psychology, Educational Management Policy and Curriculum Studies, Educational Communication and Technology, Educational Foundations, Library and Information Science, Early Childhood Studies and Special Education. The researcher targeted lecturers from the SoE who were serving as mentors with the directorate of mentoring. As has been discussed elsewhere in this study, the mentoring unit at the University was not catering for IBS at the time of the study. However, the researcher targeted the lecturers who were serving as mentors for two reasons. First, as a consequence of their serving as mentors for the regular students, the lecturers must have developed a wide perspective regarding the place of mentoring in academic institutions and in meeting the demands of various groups of students within the institutions. Second, and most importantly, these lecturers also taught IBS, besides teaching and mentoring regular students they were in a position to guide the study on interventions that universities could undertake to improve on the overall academic. The assumption was that in the course of teaching IBS, the lecturers could have encountered issues affecting the students which attracted their attention as mentors and needed interventions related to MAA. Besides, IBS in need of MAA might have been informally seeking the help and support of these lecturers, not as mentors but members of the academic staff. Lecturers serving as mentors were therefore targeted as key informants in this study. Table 3.4 shows the distribution of the teaching staff in the School of Education by gender.

Table 3.4: Teaching Staff per Department and Gender in School of Education

Departments	Academic Staff		Total
	Male	Female	
1 Early Childhood Studies	5	10	15
2 Education Management Policy and Curriculum Studies	22	14	40
3 Educational Communication and Technology	21	14	35
4 Educational Foundations	15	6	21
5 Educational Psychology	8	6	14
6 Library and Information Science	5	4	9
7 Special Education	6	9	15
Total	82	63	145

Source: University Personnel Data Office (2012)

The researcher purposively sampled the academic mentors from the seven departments in the SoE who were assigned this responsibility of mentoring students. The researcher visited all the departments in the SoE and with the help of the Heads of Departments (HoDs) purposively sampled teaching staff who were identified as mentors. There were 50 lecturers serving as mentors from the SoE. The researcher sampled approximately 10% of the teaching staff identified as mentors. This was an average of about two mentors in every department and taking care of gender balance where possible. This made a total of fourteen mentors from the SoE. The information that was sought from the mentors ranged from policy awareness, what it states and the challenges they encountered in MAA of students. This information was meant to assist the researcher on how MAA was being conducted in the University.

3.5 Instruments for Data Collection

The research instruments that were used are: Questionnaires for students and mentors, Focus group discussion for the students and Interview schedule for mentors and administrators

3.6 Ethical Consideration

The researcher, with the help of two research assistants, took steps to fulfil the required ethical procedures in research work. First, official permission was sought to undertake the study. Consequently a research permit was obtained from the National Council of Science and Technology (NCST).

4.0 Results

Suggestions from IBS on interventions to be undertaken by the university to improve and address their learning and welfare needs included: Organize for computer classes, set time outside the semester when students meet mentors, put in place a mentorship program targeting the IBS, make MAA part of the formal responsibility of all academic staff, train all lecturers in MAA, hold a session with them the first day or during the first week of students arrival. This was further strengthened during interviews when one mentor said that:

“The best thing is to meet with the students’ immediately they are admitted to the university. When they register for the first semester, just as we have matriculation for the regular students”.

Further monitor the programme to ensure all students are mentored, have a way of evaluating and mentoring the mentees because they can give a suggestion of what can be done, setting structured and non-structured information desks, mentoring office where students are allocated mentors, having occasional sessions on academic success with them, giving matriculation to students, and giving lecturers incentives, giving student manuals and lecture notes, as suggested during interviews that:

“Though we do a bit of mentoring as lecturers and chairpersons of departments, there should be a special booklet for the IBS to know the services that are available”.

Making an effort to reach students at their work stations (for those who are working) was also suggested, motivate lecturers with incentives, recognition and rewards, university should liaise with employers/government for longer holidays, consider mentoring as a unit which was supported by IBS in FGDs where students said, “I think they can incorporate one lesson for mentoring into the timetable for IBS”.

To improve on their academic performance and need for mentoring as an intervention to help them improve the IBS requested the university to identify and help failing students to improve, improve e-learning to increase student-lecturer interaction, create awareness of the programme through circulars, preferred time to be set aside for mentoring was evening hours when IBS are not attending lectures, organize a Friday or Saturday to meet them and encourage them, lectures to be through e-learning to create time for mentoring, grouping and allocating students a particular mentor, mentors be assigned according to their field of specialization, sending motivational messages regularly, creating mentoring unit for IBS, integration and infusion in UCUs (university common units), follow-up activities to ensure all mentors do their work, identify failing students and giving them make-up CATs, use of notice boards and allow forums where students air their views. On Communication the IBS reported that there should be improved modes of communication which included: More forums of communication communicate the service effectively, avail mentors' contacts, more communications between students and administration, telephone usage for communication, follow-ups every year, make use of class representatives to pass information and increase number of notice boards. Further the IBS suggested methods of Mentoring which universities could use to improve and address their learning and welfare needs and these were: Face-to-face, mentoring personnel of each department, peer mentoring system, mentors to discuss examination results with students and meet them anywhere in the university compound including under trees. One student pointed out that

"There is also fear of lecturer-student to be very close. Therefore, lecturers are not supposed to meet students after 5.00 pm. It should be given time and lecturers being encouraged".

Concerning Students' Welfare the IBS suggested that: Lectures be more practical than examination oriented, reduce number of students per room when mentoring, involving students in decision-making and treating regular students and IBS equally, as commented by a mentor that: "We should also have it for the IBS because what we are trying to do is to induct them to the university programme, university education and what it means. Further the IBS suggested that there should be housing for nursing mothers, reduce school fees, allocate adequate funds for mentorship and take them out so that they can see how the other mentoring programmes are done, how successful they are. On incentive the IBS had the following suggestions: Issue certificates to mentees to encourage others to join, awarding best performed students, friendly learning environment, release examination results on time, easy access to examination results and returning examination booklets for student mistake identification. During interviews one mentor supported these views by noting that: "There should be remuneration or a good token and probably earn points at the time of an interview and should be recognized as a document for promotion". For the administration the IBS felt that they should: Employ sign interpreters for the deaf and consultation with student representatives before making major decisions. Further on what the administration should do was noted during interviews when one mentor suggested that: "Mentoring should begin immediately students report as 1st years and be taken through the advising programme until they get to 4th year".

Conclusion

Despite evidence in the literature of the need to prioritize MAA services for non-traditional students, the university had not put in place adequate interventions for IBS.

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