



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Perceived importance, role, satisfaction and challenges of academic advising among basic diploma nursing faculty in Oman: A mixed-method study

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### Abstract

**Background:** Faculty members are a core stone element in optimizing the effectiveness of academic advising, however, little is known about their perception of the goals of academic advising and their role as academic advisor.

**Aims:** This study examined in-depth the academic advising system in the Omani Ministry of Health (MOH) nursing institutes from the nursing faculty perspective.

**Design:** The study employed the mixed method research design of descriptive research.

**Results:** The faculty members believe that this experience is rewarding but they reported that the system failed to explicitly define their roles. Lack of training and guidance in the conduct of the advising were also mentioned as primary challenges. They are likewise challenged with workload, time, students' issues and the academic advising policy.

**Conclusion:** Academic advising policy requires a re-visit to maximize its benefit in optimizing the quality of education render to nursing students.

**Keywords:** Academic advising; Satisfaction; Role; importance; Nursing faculty; Oman

### 1. Introduction

Academic advising is considered a key element to promote seamless academic progression for the students. Since 1995, academic advising is increasingly mentioned in the research and literature as one of the core tools for improving the quality of services given to the students and the ultimate product of teaching which is producing a capable and productive staff. Academic advising is defined as “an ongoing and active process involving the student, adviser, 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” (Stull 1997).

In Oman, academic advising program has not been institutionalized as there has no agency in charge of its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. No rules and regulation have been formulated yet to laying the foundation for academic advising system in any higher education colleges or universities. However, each educational college or university either in public or private sector is mandated by Oman Accreditation Council to establish an academic advising system that ensures the ease transition of students into academic life (Quality Audit Manual, 2008).

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The Ministry of Health (MoH) represented by all health allied institutes that follows, launched a policy for academic advising in accordance with organizational regulation 167/2008. The purpose of the policy to ensure students receive appropriate guidance and support to facilitate their learning (policies and procedures, 2009). It clearly stated that at present the academic advisor's main responsibility is limited to help students whose performance and conduct is below the expected standard but if the curriculum expanded it will include other activities such as registration. This paper is an attempt to examine the perception of those faculty members toward their role as academic advisers and the academic advising goals. It also investigated the challenges they faced while they implement the academic advising role in their respective institutions.

Academic advising system is always investigated for its efficiency in many researches in countries like UK and Australia. According to Petress (1996), one of the essential four elements that affect faculty member self-perceptions of the ability to advise is how advisers interpret their advising role. Therefore, it is instigated as important issue to reveal how faculties interpret their advising role to examine their perception about academic advising role and goals. In addition, a greater understanding of the current perceptions of faculty toward academic advising should assist university educators in providing effective formal and informal professional development in the interest of both students and themselves.

According to the western literature (Alexitch 2010) the current system of academic advising is not working and students are not receiving the quality of advising required for academic success. If this to generalized, this situation mandates that institutions improve and investigate carefully its system of academic advising. Therefore, it is contemplated as important issue to reveal how faculty members interpret their advising role to examine their perception about academic advising.

In addition, a greater understanding of the current perceptions of faculty toward academic advising should assist university educators in providing effective formal and informal professional development in the interest of both students and themselves. Therefore, this research is valuable to highlight this issue and to explore this perception and challenges and recommend the strategies to alleviate hinders for effective academic advising. The academic advising system among MoH nursing institutes is still in its infancy stage, therefore, it is important to explore how the academic advising program of the institute are conducted to ascertain future directions and to provide inputs to policy making and institutional reforms.

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## 2. Literature Review

Academic advising has been regarded as an important academic service; yet, such practices have not been adequately institutionalized or espoused within academic reality. "Academic advising has the advantage of providing students with repeated one-on-one interactions across multiple years" (Pizzolato, 2008). The student-faculty relationship should be one where both the student and the advisor know personal information about the other. This relationship can provide many benefits to the student. The relationship between a student and their advisor can increase student development and increase academic success for the student.

Additionally, it is a point at which student behavior and institutionally controlled conditions meet to potentially influence student achievement. Kuh et al. (2005) referred to this intersection as student engagement. Quality academic advising can promote student engagement by initially and continuously serving as this point of connection (McGill, 2021). In addition to engaging with students, advisors can also encourage student involvement with powerful learning opportunities both in and out of the classroom. The advising process can help students to identify personal strengths and interests related to their educational and career goals (Drake, 2011). This knowledge may inform students' selection and pursuit of co-curricular activities that enhance their college experience. Literature in the academic advising field concludes that student engagement is enhanced through involvement with activities such as internships, undergraduate research (Bauer & Bennett, 2003), and service learning (Saad et al., 2017). Academic advising provides a ready opportunity for students to explore participation in co-curricular activities that align active engagement with personal aspirations and institutional retention goals.

"Academic advising has moved toward providing guidance to students that focuses on meeting their learning and developmental needs" (Pizzolato, 2008). In every institution, there are many professors and advisors with whom students might have interactions; however, it is the meetings with one's faculty advisor that increases student development. In college, students are exposed to a variety of faculty or adjunct-faculty members for different courses, but course instructors often do not know students well enough or see them frequently enough to attend to each student's specific developmental needs (Houdyshell et al., 2018). Although these continuous interactions with various

faculty members do not hinder student development, faculty advisers can help a student grow academically and personally because of the professional relationship between the student and adviser.

The faculty adviser has many roles and responsibilities when it comes to advising students. Advisers are expected to share their knowledge of major and degree requirements, help students schedule their courses, and generally facilitate progress to degree in a timely manner (Ismail et al. 2021). Students' Satisfaction towards Academic Advising Service.). The ultimate goal of an adviser and for the institution is to see students graduate; however, there is a long road that must be traveled in order to reach that goal. The goal in advising is not to increase or decrease a particular rate, such as decreasing the dropout rate and increasing graduation rate; rather, the goal in advising is to create a relationship with the student so that the student is getting the most out of their education (McGill, 2021).

Numerous articles discussed and investigated the academic advising in many sides such as models for advising, characteristics of effective academic advisor and the effectiveness of the system. When viewed as an educational process and done well, academic advising plays a critical role in connecting students with learning opportunities to foster and support their engagement, success, and the attainment of key learning outcomes. Viewing academic advising as an educational process moves it from a paradigm of teaching that focuses on information or inputs to a paradigm of learning that focuses on outcomes for student learning. In this way, academic advising supports key institutional conditions that have been identified with promoting student success. Such conditions include setting high expectations, providing support, offering feedback, and facilitating involvement in learning through frequent student contact with faculty and staff (Chan et al. 2019). As a strategy, academic advising holds the potential to address these key conditions for student success particularly when it is approached as a process grounded in teaching and learning. The case for the power of academic advising in supporting student success has been made over and over again in the literature, but perhaps not clearly enough, particularly in relationship to supporting institutional goals for persistence toward graduation and the achievement of key learning outcomes.

Tinto's (2007) model identifies institutional features as contributors to student attrition. Whereas previous efforts to pinpoint factors affecting student retention and success focused solely on student characteristics, he considered the relationship between the higher education and the student as a defining element of student achievement. The model identified five conditions needed to establish a supportive college environment: expectation, advice, support, involvement, and learning. Research into these conditions has tended to support his assertions. For example, an extensive review of literature related to campus-based retention initiatives conducted by Patton et al. (2006) found moderate support for the assertion that student-faculty interaction can improve student persistence. However, the authors highlighted a need for additional research related to the positive impact of faculty contact on student success and retention. Hawthorne &

Young (2010) provided additional support for the importance of faculty-student connections by demonstrating that satisfaction with instructors and satisfaction with faculty support significantly influenced overall satisfaction with the college environment; this, in turn, contributed to student intentions to complete a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree.

While faculty-student interactions are related to students' academic goals and outcomes, student development is influenced by a variety of overlapping institutional efforts outside of course-related connections with faculty (White 2020). Therefore, researching additional educational elements that cohesively link the overall academic experience may inform institutional actions that facilitate development of supportive environments for students. One area in which an institution can formally implement quality exchanges between students and the academic environment is through the academic advising process (Habley, 2004). In its statement of core values in academic advising, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA, 2004) supported a holistic approach to advising that includes both understanding the institution and the needs of its students. Afshar (2009) added that academic advising can help students to shape meaningful learning experiences, thus encouraging achievement of educational, career, and life goals. Also, Tinto (2007) contended that students are more likely to thrive, persist, and complete degrees in environments that provide clear and consistent information

about institutional expectations and requirements. Academic advisers can interpret institutional expectations and convey them to students in practical terms that illuminate paths to degree completion, thereby meeting student and institutional goals. Without quality advising, students may master course content, yet still be at risk of dropping out if they “fail to develop adequate academic self- confidence, academic goals, institutional commitment, achievement motivation, and social support and involvement” (Lotkowski et al., 2004).

Skordoulis (2010) argued that the faculties' role complex and it gets even more complex as they are required to meet the expectations in many areas such as teaching, research, and service and certainly as academic advisers. Habley (2004) asserted that the quality of interaction between a student and a concerned individual on campus, often through academic advising, is a key contributor to college retention. However, the influence of academic advising on student achievement has been largely overshadowed by attempts to assess student satisfaction with the advising process (Campbell and Nutt, 2008).

According to Kelley (2008), the assessment of academic advising is not as advanced as that of classroom learning. Historically, measurement of advising outcomes focused on student satisfaction with the advisor or advising system rather than on student success. Although student satisfaction is important (Propp & Rhodes, 2006), evaluating the effectiveness of advising efforts requires significantly more than gauging student satisfaction. Hemwall and Trachte (2003) suggested that viewing advising as a learning process allows assessment of specific outcomes that can be linked to student achievement. Thus, investigating the relationship between advising and student achievement can reveal how advising helps students develop the skills and knowledge necessary for success.

A number of research proved that there is correlation between students' retention and academic advising. While there is a general agreement that academic advising is very important for the overall functioning of the university and the students, there is little agreement and there are concerns regarding the nature of academic advising and who should perform it. Results of a survey conducted by the American College Testing (ACT) program and NACADA (Lotkowski et al., 2004) indicated that many postsecondary institutions do not capitalize on the benefits of quality advising to improve student achievement. In fact, the survey identified few colleges with structured programs to promote advising as a way to help students stay in school. Although the literature indicates that academic advising supports student success, Campbell and Nutt (2008) posited that the case may not be made explicitly enough especially as it relates to goal achievement. In a study conducted by Dillon and Fischer (2000), student perceptions of the characteristics and functions of academic advisors were explored by surveying faculty advisers from a Minnesota college. Faculty based their responses on ranking what they thought to be effective characteristics of an advisor (Harrison, 2009). Of their responses, the top characteristics associated with being an effective advisor were knowledgeable, available, communication, advocacy, authenticity, accountability, and approachable.

Faculty perceptions of advising indicated that these characteristics were necessary in their role of being an advisor to increase student development and guide students in the desired track. Not only did this study provided insight to what faculty advisers view as important in advising students, but also a workshop conducted by Marques (2005) found the top five best practices for faculty advising to be: (1) advisers should be involved in and knowledgeable of the student's position and program; (2) they should be attuned to the student's personal well-being in the learning environment; (3) they should be available to the student in a multitude of ways; (4) they should be honest with the learners; and (5) they should develop and maintain a peer-to-peer relationship with the learner.

These five best practices to academic advising should be employed by every faculty adviser to ensure that each student has the opportunity to attend college in a supportive environment that enhances learning and development. The faculty advisor will be the one constant person throughout the course of a student's college career and knows more than anyone else the needs of the student (Choate & Granello, 2006). In addition, the adviser can also tailor advising methods to match the developmental needs of an advisee and can also interact with other program faculty, when necessary, to ensure the optimal learning environment for that student.

Despite the fact that there are many roles assigned to a faculty adviser and as much work and effort that goes into advising a student, there should be just as much work for the student to be willing to develop academically and personally. Academic advising can be viewed as the responsibility of the advisor to make contact with the student; however, it is just as much the student's responsibility to seek advising to further their academic success. Pascarelli and Terenzini (2005) have found in past research that the quality of effort or involvement students make in meeting the requirements of their formal academic program has an impact on their self-ratings of growth in career-related competencies and skills. Students must make an effort in furthering their academic career and ensuring that they are on the path to degree completion.

Thomas (2003) looked at the academic advising effectiveness for the Omani students in Sultan Qaboos University using a semi structured group discussion in the commerce college. It was found out there is no single recipe for academic advising but faculty must be oriented with the developmental needs of the students and with the evidence of learning and growth. The needs for faculty to be brought into congruence with maximizing their growth in fulfilling the academic advising role themselves so they can effectively and individually approach each advisee was emphasized. In the Arabic context, Arabic students can be molded as long as this molding will not go against their religious beliefs and it does

respect their cultural values. On other hand, he argued that sometimes academic advising role as caring, counseling and person who discuss the personal issues for his advisee might conflicts with his fundamental role with the faculty which are teaching and researching. The reason for that as one of faculty interviewed said that the values of the academic advising is not transportable unless it gets consensus in all universities and colleges worldwide. The study concluded that though Oman growth steadily accelerating to achieve Omanization and globalization, still Omani students doesn't know the importance of role and the contribution that they might put to accelerate the wheel of development in Oman.

Several threads run through the literature cited. It is evident that advisers are expected to gain an appreciation for the different attitudes, situations, and backgrounds of the students coming to them. A satisfactory academic advising experience involves both a grasp of immediate needs and an ability to help students see the big picture in terms of their careers and academic future. Collaboration between departments and even other institutions, such as high schools and the use of advising technology may ease some of the burdens of the academic advisers.

Collectively, the research studies suggest that one size does not fit all--some students may expect and need a great deal of personal time and attention. Others may simply need accurate information about courses but may be able to take care of much of the registration process themselves. Each student's situation is different. Nothing can replace people skills – the ability to listen and offer non-judgmental guidance, and the ability to ask the right questions –in order to help students reach a full understanding of their educational and career options. It is along this light that this study was conducted to ascertain the faculty members' perception as regards academic advising system in the Ministry of health nursing institutes.

This paper seeks to shed light to the roles the academic advisors have to fulfill and identify what are those skills the task requires. For the reason that in the job description of the nursing faculty in MOH, the role of the instructor does not clearly include academic advising, it is deemed necessary to define the practice of academic advising to provide basis for policy making of the ministry.

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### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1. Design**

A mixed method study was used in this descriptive study. This design will ensure that understanding is improved by integrating different ways of knowing (Bryman 2008). In this paper, this type of research gave complete and depth answers for the questions asked by employing convergent design to compare findings. The researcher gathered qualitative data through a survey given to the respondents that solicited their perceptions towards academic advising using Likert scale. Qualitative data were also gathered based on their answers to open-ended questions and from the focus- group discussions. The two types of data provided validation for each other and also create a solid foundation for drawing conclusions about the intervention done through triangulation.

#### **3.2. Sample and sampling procedure**

The study was conducted in all MOH nursing institutes that run a basic diploma nursing curriculum in 2013. Purposively sampled respondents were employees include Omani and non-Omani faculty members working in various nursing institutes in Oman's Ministry of Health. Inclusion criteria were: male or female, Omani or non-Omani, undergraduate nursing faculties regardless of their working experience & qualification and specialization, working in any nursing institutes who have been assigned with academic advising schedules.

A total of 90 purposively sampled respondents participated in the survey and 6 faculty members formed part of the focus group. A considerably large portion (44.7 %) of the respondents have been in service for more than 9 years, and majority of them are female (67%). As regards their occupations, the respondents greatly vary from being Tutors, Assistant Tutors, Senior Clinical Instructor, Clinical Instructors, Clinical Teacher Trainer, Instructor B, Senior Trainer A, Senior Trainer B, Senior Trainer H, Senior Trainer D, English language Teacher and Science Teacher.

#### **3.3. Data collection measurements and tools**

The study made use of a scientifically validated questionnaire (Advisor Survey &Cuseo 2003). The pilot study was carried out on 12 nursing faculty members from six MOH nursing institutes (10%). Omani and non-Omani faculty were included in the pilot study. This faculty was excluded from the present study. The questionnaire items were modified based on the pilot study findings and faculty report.

The questionnaires were distributed to the subjects who matched the inclusion criteria. In addition, focus group discussion was used to explore the challenges encountered by the faculty members. Both quantitative and qualitative data were subjected to triangulation to scientifically interpret the findings and results of the study (Beck 2012, Bryman 2008).

For the quantitative part, the questionnaire used was divided into Section 1, 2, 3, 4 adopted from authors Debate (2010) titled "Community college faculty perceptions and behaviors related to academic advising". Modifications were made on the questionnaire before and after the pilot testing. A 4-point Likert-type scale questionnaire used to measure faculty participants' perceptions and attitude regarding the goals of effective academic advising.

The fifth section is adopted with modification from: Academic Advisement Program Evaluation (Advisor Survey) by Cuseo (2003). Demographic questions were included with open-ended and short-answer options. The instrument evaluated for face and content validity by a panel consisting of faculty, administrators and piloted using faculty in positions similar to those in the sample.

Focus group discussion was also employed as a method to collect data regarding the challenges faced by the respondents. Each focus group consisted of six faculty members (2 male, 4 female) from four regions in Oman. Accordingly, the focus group discussion was repeated four times until saturation of data achieved. Nine questions were included in the focus group protocol allowing the possibility of probing. The conversation was audio-taped; a facilitator and a scribe were appointed for each focus group. Braun and Clarke (2007) in their papers about the usage of focus group argued that focus group offers an accessible and theoretically-flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data.

### **3.4. Procedure**

Before sending the questionnaire to the participants, the questionnaire was piloted and was evaluated against content and face validity using (10%) of the sample. Necessary modifications were made before the questionnaires were sent to various institutes where target respondents were teaching. The researcher contacted each research committee chairperson and personally handed them the questionnaire for distribution to the other faculty members. Each questionnaire was attached with consent form for voluntary participation of the subjects. In addition, participants' information sheet was also attached that gives them detailed information about the study, how the data will be handled and how they can approach the researcher if they have concerns. The research committee chairpersons were tasked to address any doubt or inquiry as regards the questionnaire and also requested them to retrieve the questionnaires to ensure a high respondent rate. The respondent rate was (78.3%).

Then, invitation letters were sent to the participants of the focus group explicating the purpose of the focus group discussion and giving them the place, date and the time of the meeting. The participants to the focused group discussion were purposively selected to ensure that the sample is a representation of the entire population of the faculty members in any nursing institutes such as: male and female, various subjects, various years' levels (first, second, third, foundation), and Omani and non-Omani faculty.

### **3.5. Ethical Considerations**

The study was approved by the Research Ethical Review and Approval Committee (RERAC). In the study, informed consents were sought before the actual participation in both the survey and the focused group discussion. Participants' information Sheet was attached to the informed consent. It emphasized the volunteer participation of each subject and that they have the right to decline from participation or to withdraw at any time. The study includes no harm for the subject dignity, rights, and safety. After data collection and retrieval, the data gathered were kept safely in one specified computer owned by the researcher and the data were shared only between the 2 researchers. The data file was kept for further analysis until the study is completed.

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## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Demographic Data**

The characteristics of the sample were as it shown in Table 1, 2 & 3:

**Table 1** Years of Experience

Category	Years of Experience	%
<1	1	1.1
1-3 years	9	9.6
4-6 years	14	14.9
7-9 years	22	23.4
≥ 10	43	51
Total	94	100

**Table 2** Gender

Gender	No	%
Male	12	12.8
Female	82	87.2
Total	94	100

**Table 3** Participants' Designations

Designation	No.	%
Tutor	25	26.6
Assistant tutor	21	22.3
Senior clinical instructor	5	8.5
Clinical instructor	5	7.4
Clinical teacher trainer	3	3.2
Instructor B	7	7.4
Senior trainer A	10	22.3
Senior trainer B	5	10.6
Senior trainer H	4	4.3
Senior trainer D	1	1
English language Teacher	7	7.7
Science teacher	1	1

N=94

Majority of the participants were female (87.2%). 51% of the sample has ≥ 10 years of experience and only one case was below 1 year of experience. This variety of years of experience played a role in portraying the full picture from diverse perspectives. Amazingly, there was a variety of different classification of designation.

#### 4.2. Perception of the importance, role and satisfaction with academic advising role

The current study looked into the perceived achievement of the academic advising goals. Table 4 presents the respondents' perception on the achievement of the different goals of academic advising. The composite mean value of 2.73 connotes that the respondents agree that the goals of academic advising are well achieved.

**Table 4** Respondents' Perception on Achievement of Academic Advising Goals

Goals	Mean	Rank	Verbal Interpretation
Assisting students in self-understanding and self-acceptance	3.5	1	Very important
Assisting students in considering their life goals	3.3	6	Very important
Assisting students in developing an educational plan	3.36	4	Very important
Assisting students in developing decision- making skills	3.46	2	Very important
Providing accurate information about the institution	3.41	3	Very important
Referring students to institutional/ community support services	3.06	8	Important
Assisting students in evaluating/ reevaluating progress	3.35	5	Very important
Providing information about students to the academic community	3.12	7	Important

N=94

The goal that got the highest mean 3.18 is the one that pertains to providing the students with accurate information about the institution followed by the goal of assisting the students in self-understanding and self-acceptance with a mean value of 2.84; both translate into well achieved goals. Of all the identified goals of academic advising, only the goal of referring students to institutional or community support services was perceived to be poorly achieved with a mean value of 2.29, the lowest value obtained.

The study also looked into the perceptions of the faculty members on the perceived importance of academic these academic advising goals. Table 5 below shows the mean value for each goal.

**Table 5** Perceptions on the Importance of Academic Advising Goals

Goals	Mean	Rank	Verbal Interpretation
Assisting students in self-understanding and self-acceptance	3.5	1	Very important
Assisting students in considering their life goals	3.3	6	Very important
Assisting students in developing an educational plan	3.36	4	Very important
Assisting students in developing decision- making skills	3.46	2	Very important
Providing accurate information about the institution	3.41	3	Very important
Referring students to institutional/ community support services	3.06	8	Important
Assisting students in evaluating/ reevaluating progress	3.35	5	Very important
N=94			

N=94

The goal of academic advising that ranked 1 and got the highest mean value of 3.50 is in assisting the students in self-understanding and self-acceptance that is regarded as very important. The other goals that were perceived to be very important are in assisting students in considering their life goals in assisting students in developing an educational plan, assisting students in developing decision-making skills and in providing accurate information about the institution and in evaluating and re-evaluating progress of the students. The two lowest mean values of 3.12 and 3.06 were on providing information about students to the academic community and in referring students to institutional community support services, respectively.

Table 6 below shows the perception of the faculty members as regards the academic advising as part of their role as teachers. The composite mean value of 3.03 means that the faculty members regard the academic advising activities as a usual part of their role as teachers. The goal that was perceived to be definitely a role as a teacher is in providing accurate information about the institution which got the highest mean value of 3.27. All the other academic advising activities or goals are considered to be usual roles except referring students to institutional/ community support services which was designated to be rarely their role.



**Table 6** Academic Advising Goals as Part of Faculty Members' Role

Goals	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Assisting students in self-understanding and self-acceptance	3.1	Usually, a role
Assisting students in considering their life goals	3	Usually, a role
Assisting students in developing an educational plan	3.03	Usually, a role
Assisting students in developing decision-making skills	3.18	Usually, a role
Providing accurate information about the institution	3.27	Definitely a role
Referring students to institutional/ community support	2.51	Rarely a role
N=94		

N=94

The study also surveyed the number of students the academic advisers assisted in terms of each academic advising goal as shown on Table 7 below.

**Table 7** Number of Students Advised in Terms of Each Goal

Goals	Mean	Rank
Assisting students in self-understanding and self-acceptance	3.07	2
Assisting students in considering their life goals	2.84	3
Assisting students in developing an educational plan	2.64	6
Assisting students in developing decision- making skills	2.81	4
Providing accurate information about the institution	3.21	1
Referring students to institutional/ community support services	2.24	8
Assisting students in evaluating/ reevaluating progress	2.73	5
Providing information about students to the academic community	2.72	7
N=94		

N=94

The composite values as reflected on the table mean that the faculty members regard the academic advising activities or goals as the common reasons why students sought for consultation. The greatest number of students consulted the faculty members to be provided accurate information about the institution which got the highest mean value of 3.21. All the other academic advising activities or goals were found to be the common reasons for seeking advise except in referring students to institutional/ community support services which was found to be rare with the lowest mean value of 2.24.

Table 8 below presents the respondents' perception on academic advising as an experience, its effectiveness, students' preparedness during meeting and role during the meeting.

**Table 8** Faculty Members' Perception on Institution's Academic Advising

Areas	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Being Academic Advisor as a Rewarding Experience	2.97	Moderately rewarding
Effectiveness of Academic Advising Process	2.85	Moderately effective
Students' preparedness during meeting	2.35	Unprepared
Students' active role during meeting	2.65	Moderately active

N=94

The teacher respondents consider the role of being an academic adviser as a moderately rewarding experience based on the mean value of 2.97. They also described that the academic advising process they conducted were moderately effective. However, they indicate that there were unprepared during the meeting with the students and that the student were moderately active during the meeting.

### 4.3. Challenges

The focus group discussion was used to identify the challenges encountered by the academic advisors in the conduct of academic advising with the students. Based on the thematic analysis done, four important elements about the challenges faced by the academic advisors emerged: workload, inadequate or lack of training; students' issues, and the ambiguity of the academic advising policy.

#### 4.3.1. Faculty Workload

There was a general consensus among the academic advisors that workload and lack of time is the foremost challenge for them which hinders effective advising role. When the institutes were visited for the focus group in four different regions, the variation in the number of staff, students and resources among those institutes were noticed. All respondents are engaged with various commitments and responsibilities that they have to accomplish during the working hours.

One participant exclaimed

"The curriculum designed in a way that there is a specific hour for each course. Then if you are in the particular group where you need more hours to do in clinical, lab session and theory then you end up just trying to find the time we have schedule already timing for academic advising but then you have to give some student more than others. So you can follow them up. So if you are the advisor for the student they you need additional time. Sometime after office hour if the student is available or would agree. Extra effort"

Another participant put it this way

"Another challenge is the time. There must be a way to determine how much load the faculty get so she get enough time for academic advising and how many students should be enough for faculty to take"

Furthermore, one respondent said

"we are really much back with the clinical and class teaching and all, so in the case what happen the students are posted, for example is teaching and doing lab and going to clinical with students, so students who need advising from group A and I am going clinical with group B, so days are different, it is not possible to see them and meet all of them "

#### 4.3.2. Inadequate or Lack of Training for Teacher- Advisors

All the participants (100%) agreed that the lack of preparatory training for academic advising tasks is one of the important challenges that hinder effective academic advising. The participant clearly expressed their concern regarding the need for such training. They claimed that they were just given a 1- day workshop on academic advising. They were one in asking themselves as to whether they are carrying out their duties as academic advisors correctly and effectively. The following were the remarks of the respondents:

"I agree with No.19,there was no formal training of who to be an academic advisor except I have remember that we go one session regarding advising role and advising process, that is it".

"first of all, to be frank you know this academic advising need skills, So far I haven't got any special skill in counseling, it just I mean ,you know something related to psychology .So at present and honestly speaking , nobody is qualify for counseling because we do not have got any specialty in counseling".

"It is not easy for any teacher to told you are academic advising she should be ready for it physically, psychologically .it is draining .A student how is really failing and you are trying to help him. You will be trapped in the emotional side of it .you end up bring this in to her head so that training is not mainly about techniques and methods. It is also about distressing the advisor herself."

#### 4.3.3. *Students' Issues*

As regards students' initiatives and compliance to session's appointments, academic advisors also claimed that students' attitude toward the academic advising is one of the challenges frequently faced by them. Even if the advisor finds the time for academic advising, the advisee does not show up in the appointment time. According to the participants, the students seem not to realize the importance and the impact of the academic advising session in their academic goals and performance. Many advisors asked to give the students routinely workshop about how they can benefit from the academic advisors to attain their academic plan objectives. One faculty adviser said:

"Unfortunately, I did not achieve this goal because the main (stressed the word) problem here, we are following the students. Students they are not coming to us, even for the first meeting I was just roaming around going up and down searching for the students and I want them to gather and I gave them a letter with date and time. This is the problem. Also I remember that maybe one (stressing the word one) I met them at the corridor and then I told that I am your adviser and then we will be in touch if you have any problem or your encounter anything please come to me, only one students show up the following days even not the same day, seeking for help about her GPA."

Another advisor exclaimed

"first academic advising is mandatory for the teachers, not compulsory for the students but it is for the academic advisors compulsory, so the students are not really motivated to come and meet that academic advisors".

In terms of students' awareness about academic advising, the study shows that the participants believe that the students are not able to take the maximum benefit from the academic advising session because most students showed no interest in coming for the advising. The students seem not to be aware on how to actively participate in the process of academic planning geared towards overall success and completion of their study.

These findings are deduced from the following responses

"Generally I am approachable yes, but we are busy with other commitment sometimes because these students are not coming to take appointment. This is the problem with orientation for academic advising.

"Really I was not able to help the students to assess their needs because they are not interested at all, they do not understand what is the role of adviser, all, and the advising process, so this is the major problem here I think, they need first of all to orient them, students, session all of them about, to keep it as mandatory or all rest and orienting them about what is advising process what is advisor role so they will be able and then they can understand it, so they can go ahead and know how they can approach others and get advice from others."

Advisors clearly pointed out that students' perception of the importance of academic advising is indeed a challenge to them. This can be explained with the fact that more enhancement should be done to orient the students on the real essence of academic advising. Students are aware that academic advising is not systemically integrated with their academic requirement, and for that reason, they tend to ignore it and see it as not an essential function. Also, if the students did not see the link between their academic performance and the academic advising, they neglect attending the meetings. Accordingly, a more structured, systematic way of delivery to the academic advising is needed in order to ensure students' compliance to their academic advising appointments.

#### 4.3.4. *Academic advising policy*

The respondents claim that academic advising policy is not clear and not comprehensive. They reported that the focus of the academic advising according to the advisors is the poorly performing students in academics. However, when they carry out the academic advising, they tackle various issues with the students and sometime even emotional and psychological issues. The challenge is how this fits into the policy or even in the documentation part. The existing policy also lacks flexibility as it limits their work to certain specific procedure which has to be accomplished and done. The following are the remarks of the respondents along this line:

"It is not explained, it is template to be filled, does not give more to the students"

"Policy is good but it gives us limitation and restriction"

"Policy tight as to certain procedure most of the time"

#### 4.3.5. Feasibility in the current stage

The study reveals that participants are worried about the policy in term of its feasibility to the current transitional stage from diploma in nursing to bachelor degree. The documentation is seen as too time consuming. The respondents clearly stated that the policy needs to be reviewed and to practically incorporate in the bachelor system and overall requirements.

"It is not a challenge it is a bunch of paper work only because you have to record in a specific format I mean it doesn't add anything to the teacher, I mean sometimes informal one is better than sitting and writing it .Most of the advising session we don't record it why because if we are recording every word and ask students come and sign, students will lose the trust on us."

#### 4.3.6. Advisor-student ratio

The participants pointed out that the number of advisees assigned to each teacher is another challenge that they have to deal with. The number of the students can go up to 10 students. Considering the lack of time and the faculty workload, the advisors cannot keep up with the requirement of academic advising for all of these advisees. Sometimes, they do not manage to meet the students individually because of their commitment to teachings, committees and other corollary duties. They are one in suggesting that the preferred and practical ratio is 1 advisor to 8 students.

#### 4.3.7. Venue for Advising

The participants commented on the fact that there is no designated place to carry out the academic advising activities. They reported that academic advising should not be done in the office of the faculty considering that it is a time that is allotted solely to the students. For this, it supposed to be given in a room with privacy and free from the teaching climate. One respondent even complained:

"Where I can do it, if my officemate is in the office, where is the place to do the advising?"

#### 4.3.8. Evaluation, feedback, and follow-up.

The participants expressed their worries about the fact that they are doing their best in giving the academic advising sessions but there is no expert to check and balance the conduct of their academic advising. There is no mechanism in place to monitor and evaluate the extent, quality and effectiveness of such activities. Advisors wanted to know whether what they are doing in term of advising students is right or not. Sometimes, they need guidelines on difficult and complicated issue but there is no professional personnel whom they can rely on nor a council in charge of referrals. Participants are one in proposing for institutionalization of department with specialized people as counselor to support the academic advising process as whole. They suggested:

"We need more training with the presence of specialized counselor"

"Department with specialized people as counselor"

#### 4.3.9. Referral System

The participants reported that they do not refer students to community services or any other facilities which is a limitation in the academic advising policy. Sometimes the need to do so arises as the nature of students' problem are not limited to the academic, but can be emotional and too personal and private, therefore deemed necessary for referral to a more suitable agency. The challenge is that there is no mechanism on referral that is in place in the current setup.

For the participants, the academic advising policy itself was a challenge. The policy was unclear as it does not specify the frequency of academic advising should be done. It is also limited to students with poor academic performance. The advising policy itself denotes that it is to be expanded later .However; the transitional period mandated that students should be advised in more comprehensive manner than what the current policy is doing. The participants also added that the policy needs to be reviewed and refinements have to be made to make it more relevant and effective. The policy also has no comprehensive statement of policy regarding the delivery of academic advising. Comparing what the Ministry of Health nursing institutes have, with what is available in other nursing college in Oman that follows the Ministry of higher education, it is important to define the practice of advising to put forward a more effective system of academic advising. It also highlighted the role of the academic adviser as

These findings support the claim of Bosler and Levin (1999) that important roles of academic advisers are to provide information on institutional policies and procedures, that include academics (administrative, curricular, support, and grievance related), availability, career planning, ethics, and student growth and development.

This particular findings on the faculty workload as a challenge in academic advising support the claim of Skordoulis (2010) that workload of faculty is indeed a challenge for effective academic advising. Some other literature, even identified that academic advising not accurately specify as a role for faculty in spite of its important in the real time. Gerald and Thomas (1980) investigated to which academic advising is decried as an official faculty responsibility by examining the current collective bargaining agreement and institutional documents. Findings suggest specification of duties required of faculty advisors is generally neglected in all for of agreements.

Furthermore, Skordoulis (2010) argued that the faculties' role complex and it gets even more complex as they are required to meet the expectations in many areas such as teaching, research, and service and certainly as academic advisors. As reported in her article, According to Boyer (1990), the use of faculty time is the single concern around which all other educational issues pivot. This exactly portrayed the condition in the nursing institutes. Faculty members surveyed expressed that they are torn between performing their duties and responsibilities in class, lab and clinical teaching, committees, research and other responsibilities and further confounded by their job as advisors.

It is important then to stipulate the academic advising role in the job description of the faculty. Incentives and merit system can be devised so as to reward highly performing teachers in academic advising. There was a strong suggestion aired to look into the possibility faculty workload percentage and de-loading of faculty members engaged in academic advising to attain the maximum benefit from the academic advising.

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## 5. Discussion

The findings of the current study support the identified expected outcome of good quality academic advising in the study of Cusao (2007) that include student satisfaction, academic and career planning, as well as goal-setting in general. Current study shows that most students, enter college without having made final decisions about majors and careers and with little preparation and knowledge about the institution they are in especially the freshmen. For this, providing assistance in decision making, goal setting and counseling be part of the academic advising experience.

These findings all support the findings of the current study that the academic advising has its most minimal role in the aspect of referral to support services. This particular finding is a good area for improvement since according to Nutt (2003) academic advisors are often the source of information about campus resources and support services for their advisees and good advisors will refer their advisees to specific sources of support when they perceive there is a need for that support.

The teacher respondents consider the role of being an academic adviser as a moderately rewarding experience. This finding conforms to that of Gregory (2002) that claims that academic advising is rewarding because a teacher is given the chance to teach and counsel to bring about good to the students left under his care.

There was a general consensus among the academic advisors that workload and lack of time is the foremost challenge for them which hinders effective advising role.

### *Limitations*

The study is limited to faculty members' point of views. The students' perspective need to be solicited to see clearer and complete picture of academic advising in the institutes. Being an initial study on the challenges of academic advising, the qualitative findings of the current study are not enough for generalization. In addition, it does not include all the MoHEIs such as foundation center, OSNI and even from other fields such as Institute of Health Science as it covered only the Nursing Institutes.

### *Recommendations*

Based on the foregoing findings and conclusions and taking into consideration the transitional stage from diploma to Bachelor degree, the following recommendation are set. Decision makers must redefine the roles of academic advisors have to fulfill. Needs assessment has to be conducted aimed at identifying the skills needed by the faculty members which shall be the basis for capacity building and training for them. Monitoring and evaluation aspects of the process have to be given equal emphasis to ensure sustainability and address issues on project delivery and process flaws. This

will necessitate the drafting of monitoring and evaluation tool that clearly spells out all deliverables and accountabilities an advisor has relative to the job. Well-equipped personnel have to be designated to oversee the conduct of academic advising. In the job description of the nursing faculty in MoHEIs, it is not clearly stated as role of the academic. It has to be specified and clearly incorporated in the job description. If the academic advisors are to be added as an important activity in the MoH polices, those engaged in the advising also have to be given recognition or incentives for their significant contribution. The policy in general has to be reviewed and expanded to suit to the demands of the current state.

Faculty also assert they need training. This finding conforms with what the literature pointed out that the academic advising sessions is not to be conducted randomly without training or its purpose and effectiveness will vanish gradually (O'Neil, 1997). One of the models proposed was the developmental academic advising model by Margaret in 1993. This model views the students from the context of their whole life setting. Dyabrough (2002) described the engagement model for effective academic advising with undergraduate college students and student organization.

Currently, the conduct of academic advising in the nursing institutes of Oman remains a great deal to hurdle. Many of the participants attended only one day training in academic advising a long time ago. Then it was their own personal efforts to figure out how to go about academic advising. In fact, if the training is espoused and incorporated with the academic advising policy, it might shorten the time needed for preparation and the effort put in the academic advising sessions. Participants clearly identified the lack of training as a strong weakness in the academic advising system.

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## 6. Conclusion

Based on the foregoing conclusions from both quantitative and qualitative data, academic advising is regarded rewarding experience especially if it is espoused in an efficient and logical system. Faculty members understand their role, goals and the importance of academic advising and are they are able to blend it with their teaching roles. The current policy and system need to be revisited in order that it could be refined and be made relevant and tailored fit the demands and peculiarities of the institutes and its members. The faculty members believe that this experience is rewarding but they reported that the system failed to explicitly define their roles. Lack of training and guidance in the conduct of the advising were also mentioned as primary challenges. They are likewise challenged with workload, time, students' issues and the academic advising policy. The participants are one in putting forward that ample support, resources, tools, and assistance are needed to maximize to hone their potentials and maximize the gains students can get from academic advising.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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