



Mentoring in Nigerian University System: Challenges and Prospects

¹Walter C. Ndubuisi, & ²Veronica N. Ndubuisi

¹Department of Banking and Finance, University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri, Nigeria

²Department of Marketing, University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri

*Corresponding Author: walterndubuisi@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Background: Mentoring is theoretical in meaning and understanding, but most importantly, it has practical significance. Many universities offer one type of mentoring or the other. However, mentoring programme in Nigerian universities is very remote and has little or no research supports. It has challenges and barriers.

Objective: This study set out to explore the state of mentorship in the Nigerian university system, identify the basic challenges and proffer possible solutions.

Method: Sources for materials were multiple. ResearchGate was used for literature reviews and databases to explore formal and informal mentoring programmes in Nigerian university education system. References were existing academic and professional research works in the chosen area.

Results: Documented evidences show that mentorship is very important in the university system as it ensures smooth succession.

Conclusion: The conclusion of this study is that although there exist mentorship system in Nigerian universities, but the quality and quantity are not sufficient.

Unique Contributions: The study has provided fresh perspectives to the subject of mentorship in the Nigerian university system. It is hoped that this new insights will be beneficial to policymakers in the university system in the country, as well benefit and strengthen mentor-mentees relationship in the university academic community in Nigeria.

Recommendations: A formal policy paper on mentoring programme should be instituted in the Nigerian University System by Nigerian University Commission with strong institutional support for implementing the program, participation being mandatory and streamlined into the lecturer's contract with the University.

Key words: Mentoring, Management, Mentoring in Nigerian University System, Benefits and De-benefits, Challenges and Prospects.

INTRODUCTION

Mentoring vary in meaning and understanding; it is theoretical but most importantly, it has practical significance. Mentoring is based on several paradigms. The oldest explanation of the word "mentor" comes from the ancient Greek mythology, Mentor. As contained in Berinsterova (2020), Mentor was the name of the educator to whom Odysseus entrusted the care of his son, Telemachus. This brings to bear that mentoring is a perception of transfer of a particular set of values, skills and norms adopted by society. It is a perception which represents an interaction



between an experienced and a less experienced person for a purpose of a better life path relating to career, service and employment (Onyejelem. 2020). As in the work of Berinsterova (2020), the author transverses over mentoring to arrive at the three paradigms of mentoring identified. Drawing from this explanation, mentoring is an effective tool for influencing commitment and self-actualization, the combination of the paradigms being reflected in mentoring programs for children and the youth.

Exploring further, Berinsterova (2020) posited how mentoring programs are a part of educational mentoring process at all levels of education and this provides an opportunity for the youth to be supported by older, non-parental adults (Kupersmidth & Hussain, 2019. The third paradigm is a shift, a change of perspective from a one way to a reciprocal process. Mentoring therefore, points to a learning partnership of mentor and mentee that learn from each other, though superintended by the mentor. The present understanding of mentoring as socialization and result oriented stands a on tri-pond as technical, referral and normative. While technical refers to how one performs a particular task to achieve result, referral is the content of a specific role and interaction with the environment and normative is a socially expected behavior and attitude. Concluded Berinsterova (2020), these three aspects of mentoring paradigm can be understood in a psychosocial context as well as in the context of the study, service and employment.

Although mentoring descriptions vary (Asiegbu, Powel & Iroka, 2012), the meaning is however broadly agreed that mentoring is a learning and developmental relationship between two people. It depends on essential human qualities such as commitment, authenticity, trust, integrity and honesty. It involves the skills of listening, questioning, challenge and support (Nwafor, Oginyi, & Okwubunka, 2023).

Smith (2017) claimed in Berinsterova (2020) that mentoring in the system is remote as many universities offer one type of mentoring or the other. In the absence of knowledge, aptitude and practice in Nigerian universities, mentoring, has little or no research support. It is however, daunted that Nigerian universities have informal (natural) mentoring experience (Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006; Golden & Myseless, 2009). Nevertheless, Berinsterova (2020) asserted, that the informal approach has its place within the university system and its characteristics partially overlap. Natural mentoring in a university environment at least partially carries elements of institution.

This is the state of mentoring program in Nigerian universities. It is not integrated into any recognized system or evaluated for its positive or negative consequences on the system. The lack of knowledge, aptitude and application of mentoring practice constitute the gap that necessitated this study.

Objective of the Study

Drawing a clue from Berinsterova (2020), the major objective of the study is to explore the effect of the state of knowledge in the field of mentoring of university students. It is expected to explore the position of the mentor and the mentee in relation to the university, their characteristics and the nature of mentoring relationship without employing the method of analysis which is on the border of systematic review and scope review studies.



Research Questions

Complementing the ideas of Knippelmeyer & Torracco, 2007, this study is aimed at exploring the research related study to Faculty Mentoring programme in higher education, a developmental learning ground. The research questions developed in line with the objective are meant to guide the study. These questions are wrapped up to:

- (i) What are the benefits of mentoring programs?
- (ii) What are the barriers in developing mentoring program line with the ojectivems in higher education? How can they be overcome?
- (iii) How can theory guide the implementation of mentoring in higher education?
- (iv) What is the best practice approach in mentoring?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Mentoring

The concept of mentoring is the emergence of direct and indirect mode of learning and its various components, forms, and benefits hereafter called mentoring. It is built on the concept of how higher education institutions can support the development of mentoring programs and how they can successfully be implemented on the basis of the theory of informal or incidental learning. Arguing further, they posited that multiple angles of research have been conducted regarding mentoring but only one angle has been examined within the realm of higher education, a developmental learning ground. Many would argue that the purpose of higher education is to enhance learning, inquiry and development for individuals in the society (Knippelmeyer & Torracco, 2007).

Management and Mentoring

Management science has strong epistemological foundations of human behavior in every activity of human race. It has been generated largely from numerous knowledge sources and dynamic trends of human history. It is seen therefore, that its importance to society and organisations is felt, perceived and real because of its relevance to everyday life (Duke II, 2022). He opined that once we wake up in the morning and immediately after the morning prayers, we begin to draw on the basic principles of management in making decisions on what activity to perform and brings on board consciously or unconsciously the management principles of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling, coordinating and evaluating. Hence management is not just a mere theoretical phenomenon but a concept that everyone can feel, touch and live it (Duke II, 2022). Transferring knowledge from one person to another through social interactions is an act of mentoring which could be through formal or informal and it sits at the front and centre of management faculty. In so doing, the knowledge transferred helps to transform people, society, organisations and individuals into more competent and productive resources (Duke, Igwe, Tapang & Usang, 2022 and Duke II, 2022).



Types of mentoring

Nature of Mentoring: Mentoring has three paradigms of approach. It has been established that the first is defined and perceived as a transfer of values, skills and norms known and adopted by the society that culminate to positive youth development where the word positive is translated as adaptive and engaging in satisfactory relationships, beneficial activities and fulfilment of development tasks. The second version of mentoring paradigm relates to management issues that represents an interaction of an experienced and a less-experienced person. Hence, mentoring is an effective tool for influencing commitment and self-fulfilling (Levinson, Darrow. Levinson and McKee, 1978). And this is in support of Fletcher & Muller (2012) and Rhodes, Stams, Card, Burton, Schwartz, Skyes, Kanchewa, Kupersmidt & Hussain (2019) in their contribution where Keller & Pryce (2010) posit that mutuality of a mentoring relationship brings an opportunity for social learning for mentor and mentee alike and also fulfils the need of generative process which is one of the important developmental tasks of adulthood.

Developmental Relationship Mentoring: The combination of first and second paradigms of mentoring measures a set of values, skills and norms adopted from the society at the first instance plus the second which is a change of perspective from one way to a reciprocal process of management mainly related to career and employment (Berinsterova, 2020). But the current understanding of mentoring points to a learning partnership. In this way, both the mentors and the mentees learn from and teach one another.

This paradigm reversed mentoring as a type of developmental relationship characterized by reciprocal learning and focuses on goal attainment. This was made explicit in Morrison & Vancouver (2000) that in connection with socialization that there are three types of information that are provided by mentoring:

Technical – how to perform some behaviour, achieve a goal to accomplish a task,

Referent - the content of a specific role and interaction with the environment, and

Normative - socially expected behaviour and attitudes

Psychological Mentoring: Reviewing several works on mentoring, Berinsterova (2020) found that psychological explanations of mentoring relationships are most often based on the theory of attachment and the theory of social learning (Van-Dam, Smit, Wildschut, Branje, Rhodes, Assink, & Stams 2018). The mentor acts as a secondary attachment person that provides a different positive close relationship (Fraley, Vicary, Brumbaugh & Roisman, 2011). Mentors also serve as role models and they have responsibility to behave in a manner that will benefit the mentees (Duke II, 2022; Harvey, Napier, Moeller & Williams, 2010). Learning experience is all about self-efficacy embodying personal performance (mastery experience), persuasion (social encouragement) and physiological/affective state (positive/negative emotions linked with performing certain tasks (Ahn, Bong & Km 2017; Lent & Brown, 2013 and Lent, Ireland, Penn, Morris & Sappington, 2017). In his summary, Berinsterova (2020) concluded that the interpretation of theoretical concepts corresponds to the understanding of mentoring as an asymmetrical relationship between a more and a less experienced mentor and mentee and vice versa.



Informal Learning: It has been noted that informal and incidental learning is at the heart of adult education because of its learner-centred lessons that can be learned from its experience (Onyejelem, 2023). They however added that informal and incidental learning can be intentionally encouraged to occur with an organization and that higher education institutions could encourage such for faculty development. Consequently, they included popular examples of informal learning to include mentoring, coaching, networking and self-directed learning.

Tri-component Mentoring Patronage

This is concerned with the Tri-component attitude of mentoring model and its relationship with consumer (mentee) patronage. It consists of three components (Howard & Sheth, 1969):

1. Conative Patronage – Response tendencies
2. Cognitive Patronage – awareness, knowledge and belief
3. Affective patronage – Feelings and emotions

Conative Patronage: The conative component reflects behavioral tendencies toward the attitude object which is frequently treated as an expression mentee intention to accept. The intention scale is used to assess the willingness of the mentee to absorb the idea. Hence, the conative component is concerned with the tendency that an individual undertakes a specific action or behavior in a particular way towards an attitude object (Asiegbu, Powei & Iroka, 2012).

Cognitive Component: The cognitive component refers to the knowledge, beliefs and opinion a person has about the attitude object that influence his likeness or like of the product. It is about the mentee information and knowledge and knowledge about an attitude object. According to Asiegbu and others (2012), cognition component is a person's knowledge and perceptions that are acquired by a combination of direct experience with the attitude object and related information from various sources. This knowledge and resulting perception take the form of beliefs.

Affect Patronage: The affect component of an attitude is a reflection of feeling, an evaluation of emotion regarding attitude object. Affect is a technical term for positive or negative feelings of a consumer about an attitude object. Researchers treat these emotions and feelings as evaluative in nature. Thus they capture an individual's direct assessment of the attitude object as extent to which the individual rates the attitude object as "favorable, "good" or "bad" with evaluative scale.

Mentoring in Higher Education

Tierney (1998) in his work which provides frame work for higher education culture includes but not limited to six major components known as EMSISL: Environment, Mission, Socialization, Information, Strategy, and Leadership. But the study is concerned with socialization element which represents one aspect in which mentoring can contribute additional information in higher education mentoring program. Within this framework, socialization takes into account answering such questions as: "How do members become socialized? How is it articulated? What do we need to know to survive/excel in this organization (higher education)?" Answers to such questions build up a foundation in which mentoring seeks to provide solutions (Knippelmeyer & Torracco, 2007). Hence, they versed that understanding the three dimensional model (system/organization,



individual and organizational goal/perspective) in terms of moves an individual can make within an organization and the types of boundaries that exist within the organization can apply to those entering into mentoring relationships in higher education.

In a setting where individuals work alone and where many resources are shared (Knippelmeyer & Torraco, 2007), “such as secretaries and ample space, there is a constant battle for individuals to acclaim themselves to within the culture of higher education”. They continued “as one professor questions the ‘do your own thing’ concept, he notes that this often causes those in academe to struggle with their own needs and demands of the career which leaves less time available to assist others”. Discontent with the development, Wright & Wright (1978) posit that young faculty is supposed to be independent because many times they don’t know what they are doing in the areas of teaching, committee functions, supervision of students, and sole authorships and yet there is very little support. In a way, it is sink or swim (Wright & Wright 1987).

Another motive to develop mentoring faculty in academy is for investment purposes. A drawback to this for example is a typical academic budgets often reserved around 90 per cent of the funds for faculty salaries to the detriment of staff development and net asset return (Knippelmeyer & Torraco (2007). An obvious need has been identified (Duke II 2022), yet little has been done to meet the challenge. A case in hand is Nigeria university system where mentoring, growth and development are near zero in preference to university budgets commanding 90 percent of salaries.

Mentoring in Nigerian Universities

“Global competition in the ranking of universities, rapid technological changes, constrained resources, inadequate infrastructure, and incessant industrial conflicts amongst other challenges, now compel universities to seek ways of doing more with less (buying less with more); especially using their human resources” (Duke II, 2022). Citing Turnbull (2010) in Duke II (2022), Duke posits how research publications and grants increasingly determine the standing of universities and the growing pressure on academics across disciplines to demonstrate higher levels of scholarly productivity. Duke narrates the underperformance in world ranking which presents a problem that warrants immediate research and practical attention in Nigerian universities. According to him, the 2022 results of Times Higher Education (THE) only three Nigerian institutions featured in 400-800th category among the world’s best 1,000 universities (THE, 2022). The central tendency of his study (Duke II, 2022) is to find solution to the problem by establishing a formal mentoring mechanism under which mentors and protégés are linked together in order to enhance the rapid and impactful development and advancement of younger academics.

Therefore, mentoring can be operationalized by matching new academics with appropriate mentors in relationship in which specific goals and outcomes are developed, tracked and monitored. It enhances professional growth and career development.. Hence, mentoring holds the key to “fast-tracking the transformation of early-stage academics into top quality professionals and resources that could facilitate higher ranking for the university through superior teaching, research and services output” (Duke II, 2022).

Mentoring in Nigerian universities, empirical research evidence shows that mentoring relationships in Nigerian universities are informal and mentoring is more widespread in federal



government owned universities than state and privately-owned ones (Duke & Oben-Etchi, 2022). It is also found that psychosocial support and apprenticeship contribute more significantly to the positive effect of mentoring relationships in Nigerian universities than other factors. Although there are many important dimensions of mentoring, instrumental support and role-modeling have insignificant negative and positive effects respectively on the productivity of academics in Nigerian universities (Duke & Oben-Etchi, 2022).

The poor outing of the Nigerian universities especially the public sector universities in the 2025 Manchester Summit of THE was as a result of poor funding associated with mentoring in provision of essential facilities, infrastructure staff development and welfare. The recommended percent of university funding by UNESCO is 22 percent but Nigeria hardly meets up with eight percent of its GDP. ..

METHOD

The study was an ethnographic research. It was a qualitative description of every-day life and practice of the subject of study. It also made use of library sources to generate data. ResearchGate was used to gather materials for literature reviews.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Several works were reviewed. One was Knippelmeyer & Torracco (2007). In their work, entitled “Mentoring as a Developmental Tool for Higher Education”, Knippelmeyer & Torracco (2007) have documented benefit derivatives from mentorship in university system as follows:

General Benefits: Often mentoring programs are considered because of the general positive effect they have on those involved. Usually the protégés in mentoring relationships often experience a multitude of benefits namely, improved self-confidence, and increased availability of advice and relevant information, an opportunity for encouraged reflection on practice, additional personal support, improved effectiveness, an awareness of culture, politics, and philosophy of the organization, and access to a confidant for concerns or ideas (Wright & Wright, 1987).

Specific Benefits: Within the university system, mentoring can address specific benefits such as career development, networking, professional development, and personal identity characteristics. Mentors can address and offer guidance on the development of writing, research and analytical skills. Further, working on research collectively and collaboratively and co-authoring publications can assist a protégé in learning the trials and tribulations of academic research. Mentors inviting their protégés to learned conferences allow networking to take place. Thus, the vague norms within the system can be best explained by a mentor to a protégé when gaining socialization through professional development (Knippelmeyer & Torracco, 2007).

Forward/backward Benefits: In the university system of higher education, protégés who were mentored believed that that their positive socialization into higher education of learning is as a result of their mentors’ qualities for: (a) they are knowledgeable about the culture and expectations within their institutions, (b) they are well respected members of the academy and are viewed as



outstanding researchers and scholars, (c) they are supportive and accessible to the protégé and (d) they share a similar philosophical orientation with the protégés (Knippelmeyer & Torraco, 2007).

It is believed that protégés are the only beneficiaries in mentoring relationships; the mentors very often also are backward beneficiaries. They reap rewards in these relationship, for much assistance could be received mutually from the protégé for multiple responsibilities. Additionally, the mentor is able to make use of his accumulated experiences to enhance the experience of the mentee (Ragins & Scandura, 1999). The mentor is further accessed to the following benefits: (a) a revived view of his role, (b) enhanced job satisfaction, (c) self-reflection, (d) additional professional relationships, (e) peer recognition and (f) a proactive role is taken in regard to learning and development.

Characteristic Surface Benefits: While identifying the benefits as they apply within the higher institutions of learning, the followings are brought to surface: (a) professional and career development, (b) networking and (c) personal identity characteristic. It is also observed that mentor's scholarly thinking is rejuvenated or provocatively stimulated. Hence, academic knowledge and experience according to Wright & Wright (1987) are passed on, which involve research and teaching skills and knowledge.

Costless Benefits: In addition, even universities may observe benefits from investing in mentoring programs. Firstly, the costs associated with mentoring are often less in comparison with other types of employee development interventions (Gibb, 1999). Equal to this and above, universities may notice increased commitment and productivity throughout the university and decreased turnover among employees as well as the ability to attract or recruit faculty who desire this developmental opportunity in academia. Other institutional benefits include more profound and mutual interaction among colleagues, greater communication and increased networking and collaboration (Duke II, 2022).

Other benefits: Other benefits associated with mentoring are: (a) when mentored by very experienced academics, novice educators tend to be more productive as a result of the socialization exposure to a deeper and wider breadth of academic roles by the mentor (Duke II, 2022); (b) they publish more, obtain more grants, and get promoted more quickly (Nick, Delahoyde, Prato, Mitchell, Ortiz,, Ottley, Young, Canon, et al, 2012); (c) Mentoring leads to elevated professional identity and more seamless transitioning into the academic environment; (d) with the mentored faculty developing networks, experiencing higher self-awareness, self- confidence and personal and professional growth; (e) mentoring is linked with higher career satisfaction and increased organizational and departmental or organizational morale, and (f) universities that sponsor formal faculty mentoring programs usually enjoy higher retention rates and lower turnover (Duke II, 2022).

Barriers to Mentoring in Universities

Knippelmeyer & Torraco, (2007) further recognize the most barriers that inhibit the progress of mentorship as non-availability of mentors but only to a few individuals who are on the fast track for promotion. If voluntary participation in formal programmes are allowed, this will help to alleviate the short-change of some potential protégés. Overwhelming number of potential mentors



or mentees very often note the drawback that the time and energy such relationships involve. However, the benefits often outweigh the costs in terms of time and energy because it is actually accomplished (Knippelmeyer & Torracco, 2007). In the contrary, mentors may feel that if they develop their mentees to their highest potential, they may be replaced by the up- and-coming mentees. Rather, mentors and mentees should consider this as a development tool for their succession planning. Still many potential mentors according to Knippelmeyer & Torracco, (2007) “endure the feelings of being pulled in too many directions in needing to prepare and teach classes, publish, serve on committees, advise students and other campus responsibilities”. In this way they do not feel the opportunity of serving as a mentor, whereas the benefits to acting as a mentor may actually assist in the overwhelming responsibilities.

Knippelmeyer & Torracco (2007) catalogued other barriers to mentoring that include Fury (1979): (a) “the mentor may lose power or influence”; (b) the protégé may be limited to one person’s perspective, (c) the mentor could leave the institution, (d) the male mentor may want to abuse the favour of female mentee and (e) the mentee could become attached to a poor mentor”. However, if at the end whether a mentor or mentee the mentoring relationship suffers, mentoring may prove to be trying (Wright & Wright, 1987).

A potential drawbacks and barriers to formal mentoring relationships can act as impediments to the mentoring program according to Duke II (2022) and they include: (a) insufficient resources – mentors, time and space; inappropriate matching process (Eby, Butts, Durley & Regins, 2010); lack of organizational support for the mentoring program – not providing time and facilities for mentoring activities and training for mentors; cultural factors – power-distance and individualism that are not supportive of learning (Kochan, Searby, George & Edge, 2015); insecure mentors, age/generational gap and lack of trust and openness to diversity (Doerwald, Scheibe & Van Yperen, 2017)

Challenges and prospects to Mentoring

Responsibilities can be taken by individuals and institutions to overcome barriers by being proactive from the onset. This action or approach by individuals and institutions can convert seeming challenges into opportunities. Individuals, both in the mentor and protégé capacities, need to assess if mentoring is appropriate in their own situation. If this is found to be a leeway, viable steps can be taken to ensure a more positive experience.

As posited in the same Knippelmeyer & Torracco (2007), if mentors are to benefit as desired, they need to understand what is actually required or expected of their role in the interpersonal relationship. One must be committed mental and morally, and in terms of time, be prepared to listen and encourage, develop a plan with the mentee that can be monitored, adjudged or adjusted, share personal and professional experiences, offer opportunities and be able to personally grow and develop. And in terms of personal qualities, mentors must be exposed, espouse to intelligence and integrity, professional knowledge and skills, enthusiasm and a professional image.

CONCLUSION



Based on the result of the study on mentoring in Nigerian University System, mentoring faculty is nothing to write about. It is at the lowest edge of preparation as there is no course curriculum or program on faculty mentoring until the recent time. The awareness has been created and the system has awakened from academic slumber. From the findings, it is recommended that a formal mentoring program be instituted in the Nigerian university system. Strong institutional support should be provided for implementing the program; participation in the program should be mandatory and should be mainstreamed into the employee's contract with the university, and the Registry Division of the university should mid-wife the mentoring program in line with Human Resource Management program that will be responsible for the practical aspect of the curriculum. This should be delineated with proper funding.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest

Authors' Contributions

Walter C. Ndubuisi conceived the study, including the design and wrote the initial manuscript. Veronica N. Ndubuisi joined in collating the data, analysis and interpretation. All the authors read and approved the final manuscript for publication in its currency and are responsible for the contents and similarity index.

Availability of data and materials.

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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