

## **ACADEMIC MENTORING-RELATIONSHIP: A NECESSITY FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA UNIVERSITIES**

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### **Abstract**

*Academic mentoring-relationship is a global trend of mentoring in the universities. It is a multidimensional teamwork between a student professional and an academic professional, with the primary goal centering at the nurturing of the student for proper development and improvement of the profession in the future. A mentor is that person who achieves a one-to-one developmental relationship with a student(mentee) for proper personal growth and empowerment. In this paper, the mentor is a university lecturer who through profound mentoring, and with higher proper teaching ethics, skills and values, assists the student (mentee) to develop necessary skills and knowledge in order to become a better graduate. This paper explains the meaning of mentoring relationship, academic mentoring-relationship and mentor's roles. It shows the benefits of mentoring relationship, its challenges and also presents some guidelines for effective mentoring. This paper also recommended the integration of mentoring in the secondary education curriculum in Nigeria. This is to enable individual-student interested in lecturing to understand the necessity of mentoring relationship, through which the students within that profession undergo effective and efficient training, in order to develop problem-solving skills.*

**Key words:** Mentor, Academic Mentoring Relationship, Mentoring Roles.

### **Introduction**

Academic mentoring-relationship has become a global tool for the sustainability and improvement of university education standard. Hence, it is among the improvement strategies for effective knowledge and skill acquisition among students. This increasingly global trend of mentoring relationship at its most necessity in universities, is a multidimensional teamwork between a student professional and an academic professional, with the primary goal centering at the nurturing of the student for proper development and improvement of the profession in the future. This is because evidence provided by recent studies proved that mentoring relationship has many advantages to the learners (mentees), lecturers (the mentors), the institution and by extension, the society. According to Aladejena, Aladejena and Ehindero (2006), mentoring-relationship has numerous benefits for both the mentee and mentor for it increases motivation as well as assist personal development of the mentees. To the mentee in particular, it helps him or her to know the culture and

political set up of his or her organization, develop skills, have access to resources and have increase clarity of goals and lower the attrition rates of new teachers. Nji and Agu (2015) assert that mentoring relationship is a ladder for greater improvement and achievement through good teacher-students relationship, especially for sustainability of quality education in both public and private academic institutions. This means that through effective academic mentoring-relationship between the lecturers and students, the goal of the education will be achieved in Nigeria universities. Meanwhile, this paper will be restricted to academic mentoring-relationship as a necessity for sustainable education in Nigeria universities.

### **Mentoring-Relationship**

Mentoring relationship is the most suitable relationship that would make positive impacts among the university students. It is the type of relationship that gives students the courage to do the things which they think they cannot do, a relationship which guides the student's professional development or even change the lifestyle positively. Mentoring can be a life-motivation relationship that inspires mutual growth, learning, and development. It makes positive impacts in student's life which can be informative, remarkable, profound, and appreciative. This is the reason mentoring relationship has the capacity to transform individuals, groups, organizations, and communities. Mentoring is a source of students' support, an avenue for more effective professional preparation and academic leadership. Mentoring is a term generally used to describe a relationship between a less experienced individual, called a mentee or protégé, and a more experienced individual known as mentor (Nji and Agu, 2015).

Traditionally, mentoring is viewed as a dyadic, face-to-face, long-term relationship between a supervisory adult and a novice student that fosters the mentee's professional, academic and personal development (Donaldson et al., 2000). According to Mellon Academic Mentoring Support Project (2014), a mentor is a trusted and experienced advisor who has a direct interest in the development and education of a less experienced individual. A mentor is a person who acts as a guide and an adviser. He/she is a role model, one that you can learn from, and one who is interested in passing on knowledge, experience, and inspiration for personal and vocational growth.

A mentor is that person who achieves a one-to-one developmental relationship with a learner, and one whom the learner identifies as having enabled personal growth to take place. Layton and Australian (2002) asserted that mentoring occurs when a lecturer works with students to help them to change their practice for better. This simply mean that the mentor in this context must be a lecturer who through mentoring-relationship, with higher teaching skills, ethics and values, assists the students (learners) to develop necessary skills and knowledge, in order to become quality graduates in the society. In this context, mentoring is defined as an academic

professional relationship in which a well-trained lecturer (the mentor) assists the student (the mentee) in developing ability or capacity to acquire specific knowledge and skills that will enhance the student's professional, personal growth and empowerment. According to Ekechukwu and Horsfall (2015), mentoring is as old as human history, it has been acclaimed to be a strategy for equipping those involved with functional and sellable skills. This means that mentoring relationship aimed at exposing the lecturers to apply the most essential teaching ethics and values for quality academic achievement of the students in universities.

### **Academic Mentoring-Relationship in University**

Academic mentoring relationship is an effective strategy aimed at better academic performance among the students of tertiary education. This is to enable the students overcome challenges of poor relationship as a result of inadequate academic mentoring-relationship. This is supported by Ekechukwu and Horsfall (2015), who stated that academic mentoring in higher education is an innovation to empower and improve quality of teacher education. Mentoring relationship is a process which aimed at disposing lecturers to strive in order to improve acquisition of adequate proper knowledge and skills by the university students (mentees), through good rapport, trust, respect, objective questioning and constructive feedback. According to Mitchell (2014), mentoring relationship is a process for developing learners, and a mentor should play roles and adopt guidelines that will create an effective academic mentor-relationship which will facilitate learning and practices for proper knowledge and skills acquisition in university.

University is a tertiary institution where students study in order to obtain degree certificate. This means that it is higher education of learning. According to Kirigha and Neema- Abooki, (2008), a higher education institution has been defined as a community of scholars, not excluding other stakeholders, who work together to achieve the goals for setting up the institution. In university education, mentoring is a multi-dimensional process of guiding, teaching, influencing and supporting students. It is normal that a mentor (lecturer) leads, guides and advises students in the same profession with mutual trust and belief. Mentoring in university education is among the greatest force that can be used to bring about positive change. University education equips students to contribute their quotas for the economic growth of the nation. As a result, there is need for proper academic mentoring relationship anchored on effective mentoring theories between the university lecturers and students.

### **Theory of Mentoring**

The theory of mentoring reveals the importance of mentoring to both the mentor and the mentee for proper encouragement for collaborative efforts for effective mentoring relationship among professionals and would-be professionals. Constructivist theory and a five-factor model towards specific subject mentoring,

according to Hudson (2007), are proposed as ways to develop mentees' practices. Firstly, constructivist theory complements mentoring within field experiences (practicum/internship), as it can be used to build upon prior understandings towards developing the mentee's knowledge and skills for teaching.

Secondly, the picture that emerges from the literature shows five factors for mentoring, namely:

- (i) personal attributes that the mentor needs to exhibit for constructive dialogue;
- (ii) system requirements that focus on curriculum directives and policies;
- (iii) pedagogical knowledge for articulating effective teaching/learning;
- (iv) modelling of efficient and effective practice; and
- (v) feedback for the purposes of reflection for improving practice.

The implication of this theory to this paper is that studies have indicated that mentors in their roles as mentors will require specific mentoring strategies linked to these five factors to enable effective mentoring in specific subject areas. This could take reasonable care aimed at improving the mentor and mentee (student) relationship for efficient and effective learning and feedback.

### **The Mentoring Roles**

The concept of mentoring is simple, but successful implementation of the roles can be challenging. According to Michael (2015), the role of a mentor is to encourage the personal and professional development of a mentored through the sharing of knowledge, expertise and experience. The mentoring relationship is built on mutual trust, respect and communication, and involves both parties meeting regularly to exchange ideas, discuss progress and set goals for further development. The knowledge, advice, and resources a mentor shares depend on the format and goals of a specific mentoring relationship. Jones (2006) opined that a mentor may share with a coach (learner) information, as well as provide guidance, motivation, emotional support, and role modeling. A mentor may help with exploring careers, setting goals, developing contacts, and identifying resources. The mentor role may change as the needs of the coach change. Some mentoring relationships are part of structured programs that have specific expectations and guidelines, others are more informal.

Mentoring relationship disposes the mentor to carry out the expected roles with ease. It is important that the mentor helps the coaches and work with them, rather than prescribing what they should do (Jones, 2006). The mentor will take on the form of a critical friend. A critical mentor will ask questions, provide feedback, critique work and look at problems from another perspective. A friendly approach helps the coach appreciate the mentor's directives for optimization of knowledge and

skills. The mentoring role, which is tied to the level of relationship that exists between the mentor and the coach, solely depends on the provision of the feedback.

In mentor-coach relationship, feedback needs to be open, honest and robust. As a result, effective feedback must have certain attributes which include that feedback must come from a credible and qualified source, that it has meaning to the coach, addresses something the coach can change, and that it is confidential and timely. Mentors need to focus on asking questions and helping the coach to learn from their experiences. By providing constructive feedback, an alternative view point, and a sense of accountability through which a mentor can help their coach to improve their effectiveness and enjoy their coaching role even more.

According to Mitchell (2014), there are number of roles which the mentor may take on, which include the following:

**Parent figure:** the mentor, with enormous coaching experiences helps the coach (learner) by giving proper advice, react peacefully and friendly in answering questions and solving problems.

**Supporting the system:** The mentor provides the coach with essential and updated basic knowledge and skills to help the coach develop qualitatively in the field.

**Colleague:** as a result of profession uniformity, the mentor share ideas and provide professional advice to the coach (learner).

**Scaffolder:** the mentor shares with the coach different routines that can help the upgrading of experiences.

**Nurturer:** the mentor provides opportunities and challenges that will enable the coach grow.

**Encourager:** the mentor strengthens the coach through challenges that will enhance learning and affirmation of their values.

**Counsellor:** the mentor helps the coach move forward against challenges through application of skills in problem solving, and acting as a sounding board.

### **Guidelines for Effective Mentoring**

The following guides can assist in the mentor/coaches relationship. The guidelines will help in development of the mentoring programme and the mentor's role within it.

The mentoring process is based on reflective practice, developing it in the mentored coach relationship and using it throughout the mentoring process. The

mentor should disposed self to the roles of the mentor to guide the students, through questioning rather than telling them what to do.

In mentoring process, the mentor should ask more questions, probing for further detail, and point the coach towards ways of thinking which they had not considered relevant. The purpose of mentoring relationship aims at helping the coach to improve in practices, by acting as a more capable other, and the mentor have to imbibe by that during mentoring process. The mentoring process should be based on promoting learning within the proper contextual environment, i.e. coaching practice.

There must exist between the mentor and the student a cordial relationship which aims at achieving the set goal of developing potential skills in the profession. In mentoring process, the mentor, through observation of mentoring roles during coaching practice, discovers and acquires more coaching knowledge and skills.

### **Benefits of mentoring relationship**

Studies have indicated some benefits of mentoring relationship. Jekielek, Moore and Hair (2002), Mentor (2009), Carvel, Dubois, Karcher, Keller and Rhodes (2009) and Michael (2015) indicated that mentoring relationship is beneficial to both the mentor and the mentee (learner) in the following ways:

The mentoring relationship exposes the mentored to new ideas, skills and ways of thinking. It provides advice on development of strength and overcoming of weakness. It engages, retains and develops both the mentors and the mentored for the betterment of their future and society at large. It provides the mentor the opportunity to reflect on their own goals and practices, as it extends their professional development records. It helps mentor develop their personal leadership and coaching styles. It also exposes mentor to fresh perspectives, ideas and approaches about in coaching fields. It enhances self-esteem and self-confident. It decreases the likelihood of initiating drug and alcohol use. It improves behaviour. It improves healthier relationship and lifestyle choices. It also improve interpersonal skills. Meanwhile, mentoring has specific benefits at three levels such as: the Mentee, the Mentor and institutional benefits. ([www.ucd.ie/mentoring/mentoringpresentation](http://www.ucd.ie/mentoring/mentoringpresentation)).

### **Mentee Benefits include:**

Being given help to work out what they want from their career and how to make appropriate choices. Obtaining opportunities to network and advice on how to grow those networks. Increase in productivity across the academic spectrum and improved personal effectiveness in relation to managing available resources. Support in managing relationships with other people. Taking the opportunity to challenge their own thinking and that of the institution. Gaining insight into how the institution's culture operates - its values and its objectives

### **Mentor Benefits include:**

Contact with new academic staff and familiarization with current issues. Additional learning they acquire from the experience. Satisfaction from helping someone else and seeing them succeed. Opportunity for reflective space and increased career satisfaction.☐

Intellectual challenge of working on issues which may take them into unfamiliar territory. Opportunities for increased collaboration

### **Benefits to university education**

Increase the profile of the institution as an institution that places a high value on support and developing its academic staff. Increase the reputation of the institution as a result of improved quality of research and teaching and learning methodologies. Increase awareness of opportunities for growth. Supports and feeds into succession planning.

The lack of role models or volunteers forces administrators and student leaders to use students as peer mentors of other students-usually first year students, would-be teachers, ethnic minorities, and women in order to guide, support, and instruct junior students.

Academic/peer monitoring programs require a low budget for administration and/or development, they become a cheap alternative to support lecturers/teachers and weak students who are likely to fail.

### **Challenges to Effective Mentoring Relationship**

Mentoring relationship is not dependent on personality, but rather on tasks and activities that the mentor and coaches do together, and it is most beneficial to both individuals involved and the society. Though, below are major challenges to effective Mentoring relationship.

**Lack of Trust:** Effective mentoring relationship depends solely on trust and effort from both the mentor and coaches, and this will welcome the opportunity for effective learning experiences irrespective of individual differences. Mentoring partners with similar backgrounds may easily perceive each other as trustworthy and predictable since they share many commonalities. In a cross-gender or cross-cultural mentoring relationship, there could be a lack of comfort due to the uncertainty of the other person's culture, experiences, values, and behaviors. Lack of trust between a mentor and coach could hamper effective learning experiences

**Poor Communication:** For effective mentoring relationship, the challenges of poor communication hinders the rate in which the set goal is achieved. As a result, there is utmost need for the mentor and coach feel comfortable with one another in order to be able to address with more ease the personal and professional challenges that may arise. Poor communication can make mentoring relationships become fragile, and

thus participants may be less willing or able to discuss sensitive issues. Efficient conversations centered on safe topics such as professional goals, meeting schedules, professional associations to join and functions to attend, and basic departmental, school, and university structure promote mentoring relationships. There other challenges which include being innovative, supports from relevant agencies and government and adjusting to new learning experiences

### **Recommendations**

It is therefore recommended that:

In order to achieve maximum benefits from mentoring relationship, individuals interested in coaching work should consult and take experts in coaching field as mentors. This is to enable them undergo effective and efficient training, in order to develop expert-problem-solving skills in the field in Nigeria.

Nigeria government through ministry of sports should encourage coaching work in Nigeria, by providing incentives, organize seminars, and proper financial assistance for professional coaches. This will encourage young coaches to strive to undergo more training where the senior colleagues (mentors) will make positive impact in developing potential skills among them.

In Nigeria, mentoring relationship should be encouraged and propagated. This can be achieved through highlighting and getting people informed of the benefits of mentoring. It should also be considered relevant by government to be integrated in secondary education curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

In virtually every profession imaginable. Mentoring-relationship is considered an excellent route toward ensuring not only a profession's vitality, but also growth of the juniors within that profession. The increasing global trend towards mentoring relationship in various fields/descriptions makes great impact in knowledge acquisition and development of potential skills among different groups of people, including the students in Nigeria. The mentor role may change as the needs of the students' change, purposively to develop effective and efficient feedback and practices.

A mentor is that person who achieves a one-to-one developmental relationship with a learner, and one whom the learner identifies as having enabled personal growth to take place. This means that the mentor in this context must be a lecturer who through profound mentoring outstanding and with higher skills and values, assists the learners to develop necessary skills and knowledge in order to become better students in the society.

Mentoring relationship disposes the mentor to carry out the expected roles with ease, hence, it is built on mutual trust, respect and communication, and involves both parties meeting regularly to exchange ideas, discuss progress and set goals for



further development. It aims at transformation of learners into expertise in order to dispose them to assist others to develop such expert-problem- solving skills in the coaching field, including those in Nigeria.

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