Mentorship and University Lecturers' Professional Growth: Implication for Sustainable Educational Development in South-South Nigeria

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Abstract: *Survey data collected from 1132 university lecturers in south-south zone of Nigeria were analyzed to determine the influence of mentoring on their professional growth. The subjects, 673 males and 459 females were selected using the stratified random sampling technique. In the study, one question was answered using simple percentages and one null hypothesis tested using the Independent t-test. The findings showed that 63.8% of the subjects had the opportunity of being mentored professionally, while 36.2% have never been mentored. The findings have also revealed among others, that mentoring has a significant influence on lecturer's growth in the area of conference attendance, community service and research orientation. However, mentoring had no significant influence on the total publications of lecturers. It is recommended among others, that as an effort to facilitate sustainable educational development in south-south zone of Nigeria, academic mentoring should be institutionalized in the university system.*

Keywords: Mentorship, South-South, Universities, Nigeria

Introduction

The goal of education is to produce well integrated individuals who can adequately contribute to the social, economic, scientific and technological advancement of the country. In all societies, the peak of educational process is at the university level, where the instructional services are delivered by lecturers. A fresh recruit into the university, primarily goes into the teaching system with a Ph.D degree in his/her field of specialization. From that position, he/she climbs the slippery professorial ladder of teaching, carrying out research, publishing and undertaking community service and climaxing at the professorial chair. A smooth ride from lecturer to professor does not come the easy way for many. A high proportion of those who choose to teach at the university level, still serve and retire in the system without attaining the post of professor. Some are able to make it a few years before their retirement. Only the hard working and focused tend to make the professorial chair on record time. The truth is that, in the Nigerian university system, new and junior faculty members often get lost in the system due to the absence of institutionalized guidance in terms of clarity of their roles, responsibilities and performance expectations (Agunloye, 2013). Promotions and career growth prospects often progressively diminish leading to a feeling of discontentment, low morale and frustration, as well as financial and other losses.

Most often, when frustration sets in, they often lead to some lecturers being vulnerable to some unwholesome acts, in addition to teaching ineffectiveness and poor development of students. (Ajake, Amalu & Usang, 2009). In almost all universities, some lecturers hardly spend adequate time to prepare for their lectures, carry out quality research, attend conferences or even,

engage in any meaningful community service. This happens inspite of the efforts being made to ensure that universities in Nigeria do come up high in the ranking of universities internationally.

In a typical Nigerian university, an academic staff is employed and left on his/her own. There is neither orientation for newly recruited ones, not a system of mentorship to provide guidance or professional modeling system to help in the nurturing of needed academic culture. All a fresh entrant knows is that, he/she has to publish or perish (meaning that each needs publications to move from one position to another). The perspective in this paper is that university lecturers in Nigeria would get better adapted for professional growth if there is in existence an institutionalized system of mentorship. The central focus of mentoring is that learning through knowledge and skill acquisition, requires the sharing of responsibilities between the mentee and the mentor (Zachary, 2000).Mentoring is a process of consciously building a mutual relationship between junior and senior professional colleagues for the purpose of promoting personal and professional growth, principally of the junior one. The more experienced and skilled professional (mentor) guides and nurtures the less experienced colleague (Mentee). Thus, fostering professional growth and development of the mentee (Daresh, 2001).

The purpose of this study was two-fold: first, to establish the proportion of university teachers who have had opportunity to benefit from professional mentorship; Second, to determine the influence of mentorship on university lecturers' professional growth in areas of publications, conference attendance, community service, and research orientation.

Theoretical framework

This research is based on Bandura's (1977) theory which postulates that in observational learning, behaviour can be acquired, reinforced and maintained through modeling. In mentoring, as a social learning model, mentors and mentees must be synergistically aware of their mutual behaviour expectations (Razik & Swanson, 2010). In a social learning context, the use of both formal and informal organizational structures is very important. The formal organizational structure helps to shape the objectives for meeting required standards of performance for the organization. The informal structure focuses attention on observation of actions, norms, practices, values, and the general organizational and personal climate needed to support and enhance performance.

Various approaches can be used to establish mentoring programs. For example, Green (2010) classified mentoring approaches to include one-to-one mentoring, peer mentoring, team mentoring, group mentoring and e-mentoring. In one-to-one mentoring process, one mentor works with one mentee. In peer mentoring, a mentee works with one or more mentors who are peers in the profession. Team mentoring involves a team of two or more mentors working with one or more mentees. In group mentoring, one mentor works with a group of mentees. E-mentoring is the product of the virtual learning age; where mentoring is done using appropriate assistive technology and electronic social media.

Research questions and hypothesis:

In the study, one research question was answered and one hypothesis tested. The research question answered: What proportion of University lecturers had benefited from professional mentorship?

Hypothesis Tested:

Professional mentorship does not significantly influence lecturers' professional growth in the area of publications, conference attendance, community service, and research orientation.

Review of Literature

The academic culture of university consists of teaching, research and community service in the context of the university's mission and purpose. Faculty workloads also include project supervision, teaching, field trip, teaching practice supervisions and community service. These additional responsibilities may range from minimal to several hours of involvement in an effort to complete the task assigned. Currently, in many developed countries, higher educational institutions have witnessed a climate of decreased funding, downsizing of faculty, increased workloads, and reduced availability of funding for academic development and research (Adam, 2002). These conditions impact all universities as scholars endeavor to remain solvent in the academy. The concepts of mentoring has changed dramatically in the past decade as downsizing, reorganization, and uncertainty become a part of the daily functioning of higher educational institution in the developed countries.

Nigeria as the most populous country in Africa with a population of over 170 million people (Nigeria National Population Commission, 2013), is ranked 31st in World GDP with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of $413.4 Billion and per capital income of $1,500 per month (Nigeria National Planning Commission, 2012). This explains why it is considered a developing country. Hence, there is limited funding for professional development for faculty and staff in universities. As in any university in the developed world, faculty performance and promotion in Nigerian universities are based on meeting acceptable performance in the area of teaching, research-scholarship and community service. New and junior faculty members have limited opportunities for research and professional development. Opportunities for funding are limited outside the occasional funding from the Federal Government of Nigeria and international organizations. These impose limitations on prospects for promotions for new and junior faculty member.

Bryant-Shanklin and Brumage (2011) defined mentoring as one-to-one relationship between a senior person and junior person, such as between a faculty member and a pre-service teacher candidate or practicing teacher. Sand, Parson and Duane (1991) define mentoring as formal relationship established to achieve career support, role modeling and encouragement. Bozeman and Feency (2007) define mentoring as a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social and psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career or professional development. It describes the process, by which a more experienced, and often older person, act as a guide, role model, and sponsor to a less experienced mentee. During the mentoring process, the mentor provides the mentee with appropriate and relevant knowledge; advice; challenge; counsel; and support about career opportunities, organizational strategies, policy and politics in the organization (Hughes, Ginneth & Curphy, 2012).

In recent years, the concept of mentoring has changed dramatically, particularly as downsizing, reorganization and uncertainties have invaded the educational system. The definition of mentorship as a one-to-one relationship between a faculty member and pre-service teacher candidates or practicing teachers has expanded to include relationships that extends

beyond the immediate parameters of the university (Goodyear, 2009). Currently, mentoring in some higher educational institutions includes research focus due to the change in faculty role from service-focused to research intensive institutions (Thomas, 2007).

McPartland (1985) describes the role of the mentor to include advising in respect of teaching, providing feedback, on research sponsorship and guiding on the strategies needed to navigate the terrain of the professional environment. Different types of mentors' roles include advisor, teacher, guide, parent, spiritual guru, gatekeeper, friend, or peer (Gadiner, Grogan & Enomoto, 2000).

The study conducted by Agunloye (2013) on the impact of mentoring program on faculty professional performance and growth of junior academic staff in a higher educational institution in a developing country(Nigeria), showed that mentoring programs produced gains in teaching, research – scholarship and service performance for the participants in the mentoring program.

Child-Trends (2008) found that youth participating in mentoring relationship experience a number of positive benefits. In terms of educational achievement, mentored youth had better attendance, a better chance of going on higher in education, a better attitude towards school and high educational growth. In terms of health and safety, mentoring appears to help prevent substance abuse and reduce some negative youth behaviours. On the social and emotional development front, taking part in mentoring promotes positive social attitude and relationship.

Bryant-Shanklin and Brumage (2011), found that mentoring benefited both participants. The mentee receive assistance and guidance and the mentor is able to leave a legacy as well as gain from the mentee's own experiences. Kram (1985) indicated that mentoring fosters a culture of scholarship at less intensive research universities. In a study by Johnston and McCormack (1997), all participants reported positive perception of the mentoring experience. One of the benefits of mentoring programme is mentees' acquisition of desired research skill. Where mentorship is in practice, mentees are able to acquire, the necessary writing skills to obtain grants and disseminate research information. Mullen and Hutinger (2008) found that the dynamics of mentorship also provide opportunities for greater involvement by university faculty and students in relevant research and leadership affiliations. By and large, mentoring provides substance for career growth and benefits both for the mentor and mentee (Pompper & Adams, 2006). Thus, a mentor's behavior can positively or negatively affect the mentee's career and professional growth. (Thomas, 2001; Girves, Zepada & Gwathmey, 2005; Ragin & Kram, 2007).

Methodology

This was a survey research in which data were collected from lecturers in universities in south-south zone of Nigeria. The subjects totaled 1132 (673 males and 459 females). They were selected using the stratified random sampling technique. The subjects who included professors, readers, senior lecturers, lecturer I, lecturer II, assistant lecturers and graduate assistants were selected from 6 universities in the zone. They ranged in age from 25 years to 64 years. They were all Nigerians from various states of the country.

The data collected involved the use of a questionnaire titled, University Teachers Opinion Questionnaire (UTOQ). The questionnaire elicited from the respondents, their demographic

information, whether or not they have had professional mentors, the extent that they have related with their mentors in areas of lecture attendance, carrying research projects, publication, conference attendance and so on. The questionnaire also elicited information on number of publications, conference attendance and the extent of involvement in community service, as well as research orientation. The data generated were analysed using simple percentages to answer the one research question, and the t-test statistics used in testing the hypothesis. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Result

The results are presented in two tables. Table I shows the extent of mentoring while Table 2 shows the extent mentoring influences the professional growth of lecturers.

The results of data analysis showed that 63.8% of the 1132 respondents reported that they have mentors, while the rest (36.2%) reported not having mentors. In enquiring into the frequency which the respondents relate with their mentors, in the past five years in various task situations the responses were very revealing. As is shown in Table 1, in the past five years 22.71% of these who had mentors have never gone to observe their mentors teach. 36.29% have done so between one and three times, while 41% have watched their mentors lecture for more than four times.

Table I identified the work that mentee had done with their professional mentors as presented in order of their frequencies of occurrence and simple percentages.

Table I
Frequency and simple percentages showing level of Interaction between mentee and their professional mentor. N = 722

S/No	Activities in the past five with mentor	Never	1-3 times	4 times & Above
1	Observe mentor teaching	164(22.71%)	262(36.29%)	296(41%)
2	Work with him/her to prepare for lectures	210(29.09%)	226(31.30%)	286(39.61%)
3	Co-teach a course with him/her	162(22.44%)	322(44.60%)	238(32.96%)
4	Work with him/her on a research project	102(14.13%)	364(50.42%)	256(35.46%)
5	Work with him/her on a book	274(37.95%)	306(42.38%)	142(19.67%)
6	Co-author published article with him/her	152(21.05%)	386(53.46%)	184(25.48%)
7	Discuss your academic problem with him/her	67(9.28%)	237(32.83%)	418(57.89%)
8	Discuss your personal problem with him/her	162(22.44%)	256(35.46%)	304(42.11%)
9	Attended conference with him/her	231(31.99%)	291(40.30%)	200(27.70%)
10	Work with him/her on externally sponsored research project	372(51.52%)	230(31.86%)	120(16.62%)

The Bar charts in figure 1 further illustrates in pictorial form (for greater appreciation) the proportions of the lecturers who never interacted with their mentors in different situations, those who have done so between one and three times and those who have done so more than four times in the past five years.

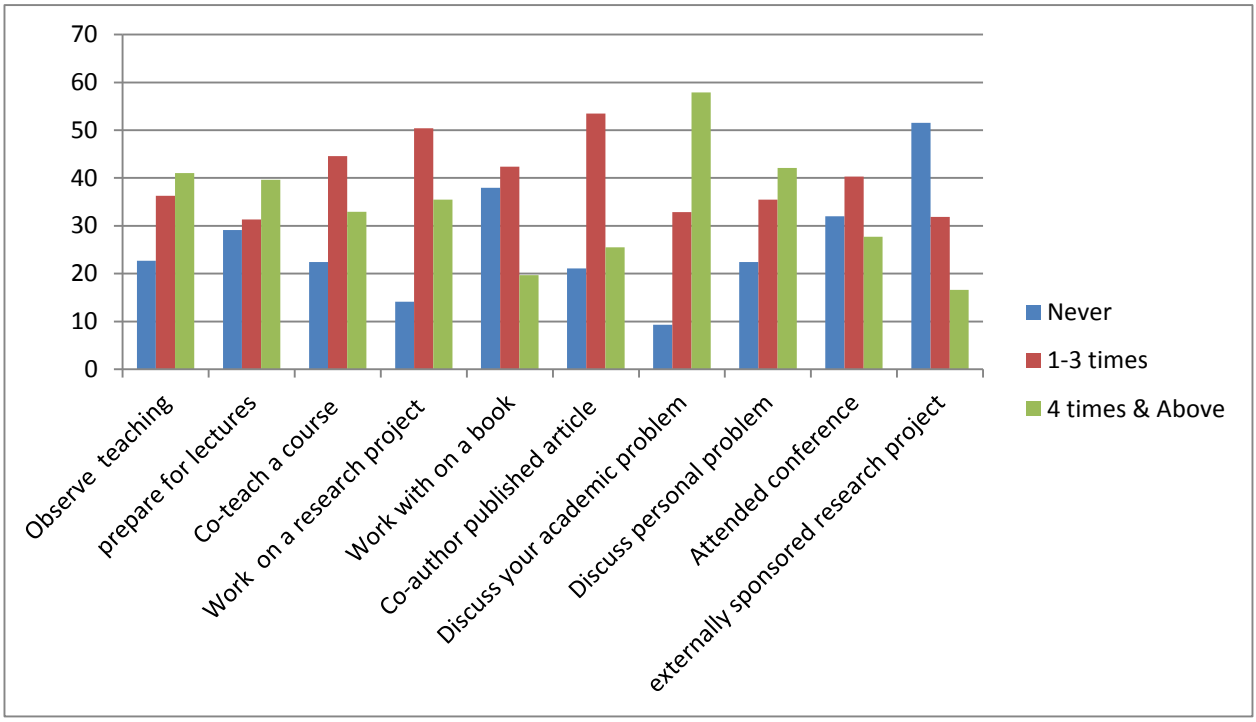

Figure 1: Bar chart of interaction between mentees and their professional mentors

The next section deals with the influence of mentorship on professional growth in the area of number of publications, conference attendance, and community service and research orientation. The Independent t-test statistics was used in testing the hypothesis. This is presented in Table II.

Table II

Independent t-test analysis of the influence of mentorship on professional growth

Professional growth Through:	Have you mentor	n	X	s.d	t
Publications:	Have mentor	722	8.07	5.42	-1.382
	Have no mentor	410	8.56	6.24	
Number of Conferences attended:	Have mentor	722	5.61	4.21	9.555*
	Have no mentor	410	3.24	3.62	
Community Service:	Have mentor	722	31.86	12.78	8.102*
	Have no mentor	410	25.35	13.40	
Research Orientation:	Have mentor	722	42.20	7.29	12.963*
	Have no mentor	410	35.48	10.03	

*Significant at 0.05 level; df = 1130; critical t. = 1.960

As presented in Table II, the result of the independent t-test analysis revealed that the mean scores of respondents who had mentors are significantly greater than the ones of those without mentors in conference attendance ($t = 9.55$, $P < .05$); community service ($t = 8.10$, $P < .05$) and research orientation ($t = 12.96$, $P < .05$). The results also show that the mean scores of those who had mentors and those without do not differ significantly in publications ($t = -1.38$, $P > .05$). By implication, the results show that mentorship significantly positively influences all aspects of lecturers' growth except in respect of publications. Although mentorship does not significantly influence publications it needs to be noted that the average score in publication tilts higher in the study in favour of those without mentors.

Discussion

The study revealed that lecturers who had professional mentoring were higher in number than those who were not opportuned to have professional mentoring. Looking at the overall interaction between the mentee and their professional mentors in the area of observing their mentors while teaching and preparation of lectures, it was quite revealing because the level of interaction was high. This could be because this area is a very important domain in every university in Nigeria. In addition, during the early years in the academia, teaching skills are stressed in the evaluation process since new and junior faculty members may not be confirmed and regularized within three years of employment if they do not perform well. The interactions with their professional mentors were generally high and consistent across all the areas investigated. Though a large proportion of the lecturers said they had professional mentors, it is surprising that some of them never had adequate interaction with them. This calls for serious concern. The findings further revealed that mentoring significantly influences lecturer's professional growth in the areas of conference attendance, community service and research orientation. These findings are in line with findings of Agunloye (2013); that mentoring programmes promotes teaching, research-scholarship and community service. Bryant-Shanklin and Brumage (2011) found that mentoring benefited both participants. The mentee received assistance and guidance and the mentor is able to leave a legacy as well as gain from mentee's own experience. Child-Trend (2008) found that youths who participate in mentoring relationship experience a number of positive benefits in terms of educational achievement and higher educational growth. This was also supported by Hughes, Ginneth and Curphy (2012) who indicated that professional mentoring provides the mentee with appropriate relevant knowledge, support career opportunities, organizational strategies and overall professional growth.

However, surprisingly, lecturers who were not mentored tended to have more publications than those who were mentored. It contradicts the findings of Agunloye (2013) that the priority of mentees was highly skewed towards presentations and publications. The contrast in this area could be because of the issue of "publish or perish" slogan all over the universities in Nigeria. So many lecturers publish with or without mentors because publishing enhances their promotions. So, what matters to them is to publish, but the question now is whether their publications were as much of high quality as the publications of those with mentors. This is a further area of research.

Limitations

Some of the limitations of this study are worthy of note. The total population of the study was all lecturers in south-south universities. The total number of subjects used were 1500 lecturers, out of which 1132 (76.47%) questionnaires were correctly filled. This gave attrition rate of 24.53%. One is not sure if the result would have been different had all subjects selected returned correctly completed copies of the questionnaire.

Conclusion

The findings have provided evidence for potency of mentorship in facilitating university lecturers' professional growth. From there, the implications for sustainability of educational development of the south-south zone of Nigeria.

However, a high proportion of the respondents never had the opportunity of having mentors, and among those who had mentors, a significant number never had worked with their mentors on externally sponsored research project; book writing and conference attendance. There are other areas that necessarily mentees should work with their mentors for growth that noticeable proportion of the subjects never had the opportunity of doing. One could deduce from the results that since mentorship is not institutionalized, thus not officially enforced, its practice is streamlined; therefore the bond between each mentor and mentee is loose. In that case, the benefits accrued would depend on the strength and direction of their mutual cooperation.

The results show that the areas where mentorship appears most robust adjudged by frequency of respondents having four (4) or more interactions with their mentors are in the discussions of academic problems, discussion of personal problems, observing mentors teach, working with mentors on lecture preparation and working with mentors on research projects.

It is a matter of serious concern, that a substantial percentage of lecturers neither have mentor-mentee relationship nor have a robust opportunity to frequently interact with their mentors for shared experiences in critical professional activities. Where mentorship is not stressed, it is not possible to ensure transfer of experience and skills from older to younger generations in the academia. And if such transfer is not assured, then continuity in some aspects of the university culture and more importantly, sustainability of higher educational development may be endangered.

The findings also show that mentorship aids lecturer's growth in area of conference attendance, community service and research orientation. These areas along with publications are emphasized in the promotion of lecturers. One can see from this that mentorship has the potential of speeding up individual lecturer's rise along the slippery academic ladder. And of course, having promotion as at when due, gives one a sense of job satisfaction, air of self worth and achievement; while the reverse brings about ego depletion, low morale and frustration which merely serves to undermine the wellness of the system, thus a treat to sustainable development. Although mentorship does not significantly influence publications, one observe that number of publication tilted highly in favor of respondents without mentors. This appears illogical. However, quality of published items and the reputation of the journals used were not considered in the study. Suffice it to say that, a fair conclusion of the role of mentorship in promoting growth in publication would be ascertain when both the quality and quantity of what are published are put into consideration in further study.

Mentorship as practiced in universities in south-south Nigeria is not all-inclusive. That is perhaps the case, because it is not institutionalized. The findings that its facilitates lecturers' professional growth is varying areas serves to define its importance, thus urges it being viewed as a "method of choice" for assurance of sustainable educational development in the south-south zone of Nigeria. During one's early years in the academia, he or she needs the benefits of institutionalized modeling. He or she needs guidance and direction for enriched and focused scholarly endeavors. The mastery of knowledge and skill in pedagogy by young academics should not be taken for granted in every profession - teaching inclusive; the practice of mentorship should be embraced as a potent factor in ensuring sustainable educational development.

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