

A Survey of Mentoring Functions in Career Development as Perceived by Academic Staff in Colleges of Education in Sokoto State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study analyzed the mentoring functions of academic staff in Colleges of Education Sokoto State. Four mentoring functions (role modeling, observation and feedback, professional development plans and informal contact) were identified in the literature. A previous questionnaire was used to measure the extent to which lecturers practiced each mentoring function. The instrument was divided into two sections: A and B. Section A focus on the respondents' personal data such as Rank, Educational Qualification and Department. Section B consists of twenty (20) items 5 questions for each of the four mentoring functions. Findings indicated that lecturers in colleges of education were practicing the mentoring functions. The results of this study indicated that lecturers are less likely to practice those functions that are part of the professional setting or are as a result of a more structured relationship and supervisory direction. This study has implications for lecturers' professional training and development. Because of the impact mentoring has on the psychosocial and career development of teachers in colleges of education, it is imperative that higher institutions in Sokoto address each of the four functions of mentoring.

Keywords: Mentoring Function, Career Development, Academic Staff, Colleges of Education.

Introduction

Teaching as a social practice, is an essential aspect of human life. It is a means of fostering the skills of social interaction, interpersonal relationship and effective communication which enhance the attainment of professional and personal development. Research evidences has revealed that success in job performance depends on several personal as well as interpersonal relationships between two or more people, usually an experienced and less experienced person. Maele and Houtte (2012) asserted that in school settings teachers are dependent on their interactions with many other school members to achieve their teaching goals. Mentoring could empower the continuous and lifelong development of teachers. The learning partnership of the two persons embodies a considerable advantage to promote a single school's culture as well as the personal and professional growth (Fischer & Andel, 2002).

Mentorship is an important training and development tool for upward professional advancement in an organization. It is a fundamental form of human development where one person invests time, energy and technical know-how in assisting the growth and ability of another person. Ayinde (2011) defines it as a complex, interactive process occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise, which incorporate interpersonal or psychosocial development, career or educational development and socialization function of relationship. He describes this one to one relationship as developmental process, which proceeds through a series of stages that help to determine both the conditions affecting and the outcomes of the process.

In the academic setting which is the focus of this study, Olasupo (2011) states that an academic mentor is usually a senior faculty member who guides a junior faculty member by way of advice, guidance, support and other relevant means in matters connected to the attainment of academic success; the protégé, on the other hand, is the junior faculty member who is the beneficiary of the mentorship. Moorhead and Girffins (2004) maintain that mentoring helps the mentee develop and advance through their career, while the mentor can gain extra skills and understanding from the partnership and organization stands to benefit immensely from successful mentoring relationship.

Generally Mentoring is regarded as a professional development activity that closely matches peoples' needs. Mentoring creates an environment which is supportive, non-judgmental and non-competitive. It fosters trust, facilitates the sharing of information and is based on a foundation of mutual respect. The relationship promoted movement from some degree of dependence to independence and individuation (Olowookere, 2012; Okurame, 2008; Ojokuku & Sajuyigbe, 2015; Sola, 2018).

The foregoing indicates that studies have been conducted on the role of mentoring in enhancing employees' performance. However, there are still prospect for research on mentoring in tertiary institutions, especially as a basis for enhancing the performance of young academics in Sokoto State. The colleges of education in Sokoto State, beside Shehu Shagari College of education which was established in 1975, are all recently established. This implies that their level of growth and survival depends on the performance of their academic staff. Academic mentorship is one of the best training practices in ensuring human capital development in the education sector (Rosemary & Millie, 2015; Eyitayo, Bamidele & Aremu, 2015; Ukaegbu, Alex-Nmencha, & Horsfall, 2015). Hence, this study assessed academic mentorship functions as perceived by academic staff in colleges of education in Sokoto State.

Mentoring can be either formal (i.e. institution instigated) or informal (i.e. occurring spontaneously). Formal mentoring is essentially a task or an assignment and is typically perceived as such, whereas the informal relationship is a choice. The two types of mentoring are complimentary not mutually exclusive. Informal mentoring provides a valuable alternative due to the spontaneous nature of the relationship (Mohtady et al 2019) According to them the absence of clear guidelines or a formal assignment may create uncertainty about mentors and protégés' roles and expectations and about who should take

the lead. In addition, restriction of time and resources for both students and teaching staff has hindered the implementation of formal mentoring programs.

There are distinct differences between formal and informal mentoring relationships that may impact the mentor's functions and the career outcomes of the relationship. These differences involve the way the relationship is initiated, the structure of the relationship, and the processes involved in the relationship.

Informal mentoring relationships develop on the basis of mutual identification and the fulfillment of career needs. Mentors select mentees who are viewed as younger versions of themselves, and the relationship provides mentors with a sense of contribution to future generations (Erikson, 1963 cited in Ragins and Mcferlin 1999). This mutual identification leads to the often-cited intensity of the informal relationship and the parallels drawn between mentoring and parent-child relationships.

According to Kram, 1985) Members of informal mentoring relationships select partners they enjoy working with and often report a mutual attraction or chemistry that sparks the development of the relationship. In contrast, members of formal mentoring relationships are typically assigned to one another by a program coordinator on the basis of application forms submitted by the potential mentor and mentee. In many cases, the mentor and mentee do not even meet until after the match has been made. Thus, in contrast to informal relationships, identification, role modeling, and interpersonal comfort do not play a role in the development of formal relationships. It is therefore reasonable to expect that the psychosocial functions of role modeling, friendship, and counseling may be less in formal than informal mentoring relationships. Formal mentoring relationships are also less likely to be founded on mutual perceptions of competency and respect.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of mentoring reveals the importance of mentoring to both the mentor and the mentee for effective mentoring relationship among professionals and would-be professionals. Early mentoring researchers identified a wide range of mentoring functions, or roles, a mentor should practice (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Kram, 1980). Kram (1985) described mentoring functions as "essential characteristics that differentiate developmental relationships from other relationships". She further explained that a mentoring relationship with the correct mentoring functions has the potential to enhance career development and psychosocial development of both individuals. A mentoring relationship that only provides a few functions is characterized by Kram (1983) as having little intimacy and weak interpersonal bonds" and is viewed as detrimental to both career and psychosocial development.

According to Kram (1985) mentors can provide five specific career development functions: sponsoring promotions and lateral moves (sponsorship); coaching the protege (coaching); protecting the protege from adverse forces (protection); providing challenging assignments (challenging assignments); and increasing the protege's exposure and visibility (exposure).

Psychosocial functions compose the second broad category of mentor functions. These behaviors address interpersonal aspects of the mentoring relationship and enhance the protégé's sense of competence, self-efficacy, and professional and personal development. Kram's (1985) model has been criticized for its lack of relevance to education (Fowler & O'Gorman, 2005). They repeated Kram's qualitative work and found that Kram's model indeed lacked a learning facilitator component, a function that focuses on meta-skills, self-reflection, and collaborative learning. As a result, the authors concluded that Kram's model was not acceptable for mentoring in education.

Brzoska, Jones, Mahaffy, Miller, and Mychals (1987) developed a mentoring model for educational settings which included Kram's career and psychosocial functions. The model contained six mentor functions: 1) informal contact, 2) role modeling, 3) direct assistance, 4) demonstration, 5) observation and feedback, and 6) professional development planning assistance. This model was however found useful to this study because of its relevance to the academic settings which is the focus of this study.

Statement of the Problem

An examination of some Nigerian Colleges of Education revealed quite a number of problems hindering the effective performance strategies of academic staff in the country. This is because the struggle for young scholars to develop in the Nigerian academic scene is laden with many challenges, worries, and concerns. Research evidence has revealed that newcomers to a professional calling confront various developmental challenges that can be effectively handled through positive mentoring relationships (Kram, 1985). According to (Sanusi 2013 cited in Ebisinkemefa and Lucky 2022), Lecturers are the educational workforce in college and are also a group of workers with the responsibility to perform a difficult task because they must improve their performance in four areas: education and teaching, research, community service, and encouraging components to lecturer's activities. It is the product of their efforts that are carried out to ensure students' academic excellence in the learning environments. Thus, as this trend evolves continuously, there is a need to improve their performance through mentoring to aid the growth and development of the institutions and the society.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to determine the mentoring functions practiced by academic staff in colleges of education Sokoto State. Specifically, the study determined:

1. The perceived role model functions practiced by academic staff in colleges of education Sokoto state
2. The perceived observation and feedback functions being practiced by academic staff of Sokoto state colleges of education.
3. The perceived professional Development Assistance function being practiced by academic staff of Sokoto State colleges of education.

4. The perceived informal contact function practiced by academic staff of Sokoto state colleges of education.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceived role model functions being practiced by academic staff of Sokoto State colleges of education?
2. What are the perceived observation and feedback functions being practiced by academic staff of Sokoto State colleges of education?
3. What are the perceived Professional development assistance functions being practiced by academic staff of Sokoto State colleges of education?
4. What are the perceived Informal contact functions being practiced by academic staff of colleges of education of Sokoto state colleges of education?

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised all the 774 lecturers in the two colleges of Educations in Sokoto State: Shehu Shagari College of Education and Biga College of Education. Through simple random sampling, 256 senior categories of lecturers (chief lecturers, principal lecturers and senior lecturers) from both institutions formed the sample of this study. Purposive and stratified random sampling techniques were used in selecting the sample. It was purposive because only those who fall within the senior category were included in the study. The stratification was based on schools and departments.

The Questionnaire was the research instrument used for data collection. The instrument was divided into two sections: A and B. Section A focus on the respondents' personal data such as Rank, Educational Qualification and Department. Section B consists of twenty (20) items 5 questions for each of the four mentoring functions adapted from Brzoska et al (1987) model. The model contains six mentor functions, but only four of the models was adapted for use in this study. These include: designed to answer the research questions. The instrument was based on four-point likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). In order to ensure the validity of the instrument, the researcher submitted the three copies of the instrument along with the research questions to three experts, in the department of educational foundations Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Their observations and suggestions were incorporated into the instrument to give it face and content validity.

The instrument was trial tested with fifty (50) lecturers from Adamu Augie College of Education (AACOE) Kebbi State, which is not part of the study area. To estimate its reliability, the test-retest method was adopted, the instrument was administered twice within an interval of four (4) weeks. A reliability estimate was calculated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.76 and was considered high enough to ascertain its reliability.

The instrument was administered by the researcher with the aid of two research assistants.

Table 1: Respondent demographics

Status	Frequency	Percentage
Rank		
Chief Lecturers	30	11.7
Principal Lecturers	90	35.1
Senior Lecturers	120	46.9
Instructors	16	6.3
Total	256	100
Qualification		
Ph.D	26	10.2
Masters	134	52.3
First Degree	96	37.5
Total	256	100
SCHOOLS		
Education	95	37.1
Sciences	81	31.6
Art &SOS	45	17.6
ECCE	35	13.7
Total	256	100

Source: Fieldwork 2023

The majority of the respondents were senior lecturers (46.9%), principal lecturers (35.1%), and chief lecturers (11.7%) remaining respondents were instructors (6.3%) The table also revealed that (52.3%) of the respondents were Masters Degree holders (37.5%) of the respondents were first degree holders while only (10.3%) constitute the chief lecturers. Majority of the Respondents come from the school of education (37.1%) followed by the school of sciences (31.6%), school of Arts and social sciences (17.6%) and school of early childhood care and primary education (13.7%).

Results

Research Question 1: What are the perceived Role model functions being practiced by academic staff in colleges of education Sokoto State?

Table 2: Mean scores and standard deviation of perceived role model functions being practiced by academic staff in colleges of education Sokoto state.

Role model function items	Mean	SD
<i>As a mentor I</i>		
Function		
Model the work behavior I expect my subordinate to imitate.	3.47	0.69
Display professionalism while on the job.	3.10	0.68

Exhibit commitment to my subordinates' career growth and development.	2.17	0.62
Demonstrate realistic ways of solving problems.	3.30	0.61
Believe my subordinates will strive to be like me if they strive hard.	3.11	0.66

Source: Researchers Fieldwork 2023

In Table 2, in order to answer the research question, respondents were asked to identify the extent to which they practiced each mentor function item based on 4 point Likert type scale format of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points, Agree (A) 3 points, Disagree (D) 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point. Respondents rated themselves on five statements of role model mentoring functions: (Table 1). The role modeling function item, which states that "As a mentor, I display professionalism while on the job," received the highest mean value ($\mu = 3.45$; $SD = .69$), while the role model function item, which states that "As a mentor, I exhibit commitment to my subordinates' career growth and development" received the lowest mean score value ($\mu = 2.17$; $SD = 0.62$.)

Research Question 2: What are the perceived observation and feedback functions being practiced by academic staff of Sokoto state colleges of education?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of the perceived observation and feedback functions being practiced by academic staff of Sokoto state Colleges of Education.

Observation and Feedback function items		
<i>As a mentor I . . .</i>		
Function	Mean	SD
Convey feelings of respect for my subordinates as individuals.	2.96	0.66
Encourage my subordinates to explore alternatives rather than just providing solutions.	3.04	0.69
Provide suggestions concerning current problems my subordinates encounter.	2.50	0.79
Provide my subordinates with objective feedback by citing specific examples.	3.12	0.70
Encourage my subordinates to try new ways of behaving on the job.	2.73	0.77

Source: Researchers Fieldwork 2023

In table 3, in order to determine the extent to which the observation and feedback functions items were being practiced, the respondents were asked to state the extent to which they practice the observation and feedback functions. The item which states that "As a mentor, I provide my subordinates with objective feedback by citing specific examples" received the highest mean value of ($\mu = 3.12$, $SD = 0.70$) while the item which states that "As a mentor, I

provide suggestions concerning current problems my subordinates encounter” received the lowest mean value of ($\mu=2.50$, $SD=0.79$).

Research Question 3: What are the perceived professional development assistance function being practiced by academic staff?

Table 4: Mean scores and standard deviation of perceived professional development assistance functions being practiced by academic staff.

Professional Development Assistance Function Items		
<i>As a mentor I</i>		
Function	Mean	SD
Provide my subordinates with support regarding their performances.	2.96	0.66
Provide my subordinates with assistance on how to solve problems they may face on the job.	2.74	0.72
Give assignments that present opportunities to learn new skills.	2.99	0.77
Speak highly of my subordinates’ abilities and skills to others.	2.73	0.70
Help my subordinates clarify their career goals.	2.94	0.75

Source: Researchers Fieldwork 2023

Table 4 revealed the mean scores and standard deviations of the extent to which professional development and assistance function is being practiced by academic staff in Sokoto state. According to the respondents’ responses the item which states that as a mentor I. give assignments that present opportunities to learn new skills. Received the highest mean value of ($\mu=3.41$ and $SD=0.73$), while the item which states that I speak highly of my subordinates’ abilities and skills to others received the lowest mean value of ($\mu=2.73$ and $SD=0.70$).

Research Question 4: What are the perceived informal contact functions being practiced by academic staff?

Table 5: Mean scores and standard deviation of perceived Informal contact functions being practiced by academic staff.

Informal contact function items		
<i>As a mentor I . . .</i>		
Function	Mean	SD
Keep feelings and doubts my subordinates have shared with me in strict confidence.	3.27	0.77
Am easy to approach when my subordinates have questions.	3.04	0.69

Show interest in my subordinates' activities outside of work (e.g., academics, extracurricular activities, etc.).	3.50	0.79
Am available outside of working hours for help.	3.10	0.72
Interact with my subordinates socially outside of work.	3.00	0.76

Source: Researchers Fieldwork 2023

In Table 5, the item on the informal contact function that states that I interact with my subordinates socially outside of work, received the highest rating of ($\mu=3.50$ $SD=0.79$) while the item that states that I show interest in my subordinates' activities outside of work of received the lowest value of ($\mu=3.00$, $SD=0.76$)

Discussions of Findings

The first research question of this study sought to determine the perceived role model functions being practiced by academic staff in colleges of education Sokoto State of Nigeria. From the findings in Table 2, it was shown that The role modeling function item, which states that "As a mentor, I display professionalism while on the job," received the highest mean value ($\mu = 3.45$; $SD = .69$), while the role model function item, which states that "As a mentor, I exhibit commitment to my subordinates' career growth and development" received the lowest mean score value (mean = 2.17; $SD= 0.62$.) this finding was supported by that of Weng et al(2010) who found a significant positive relationship between role modeling function and organizational commitment of new nurses. Although it could be argued that the findings of Weng et al was for Nurses in Taiwan's hospitals, yet it is an indication that for teacher in Sokoto state colleges of education the reverse is not the case. This finding was also supported by Malik et al who found that. The mentor may see one's self in the protégé and the protégé may wish to emulate the mentor's qualities. The findings also confirmed the assertions of (Kram1985, Scandura and Williams 2001, Raabe, Beehr 2003) who found that Role modeling is behaving and acting in a way that others can emulate; a role model displays appropriate attitudes, values, and behaviors to learn and follow.

Research question two sought to determine perceived observation and feedback functions being practiced by academic staff in colleges of education in Sokoto state of Nigeria. Even though all the items on the observation and feedback functions (namely; feelings of respect, encouragement, providing suggestions to problem, providing objective feedback and encouraging new ways of behaving to subordinates) were unanimously linked to academic mentoring. As shown in the research corrective feedback was indicated as addresses the way mentees monitor, direct, and regulate actions toward learning goals and implies a measure of autonomy, self-control, self-discipline, and self-direction. This finding was supported by the work of Ebisinkemefa and Lucky (2022) who established that a positive relationship exists between corrective feedback and lecturers' performance. It was revealed that through feedback received from mentors, young academic staff becomes aware of their performance and areas they need to adjust. It was revealed that through

feedback, these mentees improve their skills. This finding also corroborates the notion that teachers give direct feedback not because they think it is a good idea but because it allows them to meet the requirements of mentees (Hooman 2018 cited in Ebisinkemefa and Lucky, 2022).

Research question three focused on professional development assistance functions being practiced by academic staff in colleges of education Sokoto State of Nigeria. This research pointed out that collaborative learning improves lecturers' performance; and that respondents believe that their performance progresses when their mentors involve them, and shares ideas with them. The results demonstrate that learning from superiors and that brainstorming from the encouragement of mentors helped them improve their lecturing skills. This finding is in agreement with Semiyu et al (2018) who affirm that shared experience is a function mentor-mentee collaboration; and that shared experience makes both parties learn and develop professional knowledge and skills in processes. Thus, mentoring aids in building relationships, sharing ideas and developing shared understandings.

Lastly, research question four sought to discover the Informal contact function as practiced by academic staff in colleges of education Sokoto state. as shown in this research study, the informal mentoring is a natural component of relationships that occur in the workplace, as well as in social, professional activities. Informal mentoring occurs in a relationship between two people where one gains insight, knowledge, wisdom, friendship, and support from the other. Either person may initiate the mentoring relationship, the mentor to help the other, the protégé to gain wisdom from a trusted person. Inzer and Crawford (2005) found that mentoring relationships develop because protégés and mentors readily identify with each other. For the protégé's (Nemanick, 2000) found that in informal mentoring, People tend to relate more readily and positively to peer assistance than to supervisory direction. Mentoring provides a non-threatening environment for learning and growth to occur. Cotton and Ragins (1999) found that informal organizational mentoring is more beneficial than formal mentoring. Informal mentors provided higher amounts of several types of career development functions, including coaching, providing challenging assignments, or increasing protégés exposure and visibility. Informal mentors were more likely to engage in positive psychosocial activities such as counseling, facilitating social interactions, role modeling, and providing friendship.

From the findings and discussion of this study it is evident that colleges of education in Sokoto state are practicing the four functions of the mentoring process identify in this study. This finding appeared to be consistent with the work of Wolfe, Retallick, Martin, & Steiner (2008) who found that each mentor function had a composite score greater than 2.50 indicating respondents practiced these functions "often". The mentoring functions that received the highest ratings were those that occur in informal settings as well as those that are most directly related psychological and social support in the form of acceptance, and confirmation, friendship and role modeling. This is in agreement with the findings of Inzer and Crawford (2005) which affirm that Informal mentors were more likely to engage

in positive psychosocial activities such as counseling, facilitating social interactions, role modeling, and providing friendship. This is also in line with the findings of Cotton and Ragins (1999) found that informal organizational mentoring is more beneficial than formal mentoring. Informal mentors provided higher amounts of several types of career development functions, including coaching, providing challenging assignments, or increasing protégés exposure and visibility.

Nemanick (2000) suggests that formal mentoring is more likely to be less effective than informal mentoring suggest that informal mentoring is a strong and valuable tool for developing an employee. It occurs in a relationship that is voluntarily formed by both persons. It is friendship first, learning and career second and third.

Further research is needed to determine the cause of lower means value for professional development assistance function. Colleges of education in Sokoto state should use these findings to further enhance the mentoring process. Two areas of focus for professional development should be direct assistance. The results of this study indicate that lecturers are less likely to practice those functions that are part of the professional setting or are a result of a more structured relationship and supervisory direction.

Conclusion

The result of the study showed that mentors role exists among academic staff of Sokoto colleges of educations almost every profession considered mentoring relationship as an excellent route towards ensuring growth of the juniors within the profession. Investing into mentoring programs should become a strategies priority for the higher institutions in Sokoto State. This can go a long way in reducing the short coming experience by the institution in terms of human resource capacity building needed for achievement of its vision.

Recommendations

1. In order to achieve maximum benefits from mentoring relationship there is the need for individuals interested in mentoring to consult experts in this fields as this will enable them undergo effective training.
2. There is need to introduce effective formal mentoring programs for junior academic staff members.
3. There is the need for effective formal mentoring programs to be used to help staff members with work performance improvement feedback.
4. There is the urgent need for colleges to develop mentoring programs that is well thought out and implemented, with adequate resources.
5. There is the need for newly employed lecturers to willingly seek advice and guidance from experienced lecturers at all time (Informal mentoring) as it boosts their academic development.
6. There is also the need for the various management of the colleges to create an institutional award for distinguished mentors in annual staff programs.

7. Finally, there is also the need for the various managements to track the progress of mentorship of staff through the provision of information about career experiences of young staff.

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