

## **An Analysis of Mentoring Relationships Among Teachers: A Case Study of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The study examined mentoring among eight pairs of university academics in Nigeria. A descriptive survey was used to assess the mentoring process among sixteen lecturers (ten males and six females). Data from a questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics. The results indicate that mentoring among university academics operates mostly in an informal and unstructured manner. Data also show that most mentoring relationships were channeled towards research and publication, while a negligible part is focused on classroom teaching. Most relationships were initiated and sustained by proximity, and academic related activities. Multiple and same same-gender mentoring were found to be more common and more successful than single and cross-gender mentoring. The implications of these findings for reiterating the use of mentoring as the core for partnership relationship in initial and continuing teacher education and training are discussed.

**Key Words:** mentoring, workplace learning, mentor, mentee, behaviourism

### **Introduction**

An analysis of the major functions of lecturers within the university system is characterized substantially by a network of personal and institutional relationships both among lecturers and between lecturers and other workers. Within this network of relationships is located a rather informal unstructured and almost invisible process of peer professional support called mentoring – a process where one person (a mentor) offers help, guidance, advise (counsels) and support to facilitate the learning and (professional) development of another person (mentee or protégée).

The mentor is usually an experienced, knowledgeable, respected, competent and professionally mature person who guides and provides opportunities for the professional growth of protégée(s) by identifying situations and events, which contribute knowledge, experience and values to the life of the protégée. Mentors should possess good interpersonal skills, be conversant with adult education principles, be able to empathize with the circumstances of the mentee and capable of initiating and fostering learning beyond transmission to incorporate transactional and transformational processes (Carter

and Francis, 2000; Kajs, Alaniz, Willman, Maier, Brott and Gomez, 2001; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; and New South Wales Department of Education and Training, NSW, 2005).

Mentoring has many advantages to the mentee or learners, the mentor and the organization. To the mentee, it helps to know the culture and political set up of their organization, develop skills, have access to resources and have increase clarity of goals and lower the attrition rates of new teachers. The advantages that accrue to the mentor include getting assistance in tasks to be done, increased satisfaction, increased motivation as well as assisting personal development. The institution also benefits, as there is increase productivity, more effective management and faster induction of new colleagues (Freeman, 1998; Lewis and Carter, 1999, Spuhler and Zetler, 1994; Sweeny, 2001; and Solis, 2004).

Mentoring has been identified as a source of peer support and a framework for more effective professional preparation and academic leadership (Daresh, 1996). Such peer mentoring offers support for students and teachers to assist them in adapting to university life, understanding the expectations at the university and coping with the demands of work and involves the support of more experienced and trained colleagues or peer mentors (UMass, 2003; and University of Western Sydney, 2004).

Mentoring can be informal, unplanned or formal planned and systematic. It can be same-gender or cross-gender. According to Smith and Paris (1995), mentoring has been found to arise in various ways: fifteen per cent of mentoring relationships are initiated and sustained by consultancy, seminar/conferences and workshop activities. Rather than age and status, the physical location of mentors in relation to mentees appeared to have considerable bearing on the formation of effective mentoring relationships (Carter and Francis, 2000). According to Noe (1988) and Wilbur (1987), the origin of mentoring can be related to the two-dimensional scale of Career Guide Scale and the Information Source Scale. A friendship and psychosocial scale has also been reported by Barnet (1996).

Mentoring has been the focus of much attention in recent literature on initial teacher education, induction and approaches to professional development of teachers (Carter and Francis, 2000). In spite of this importance, the concept and processes of mentoring have not served as the foci of systematic research in the Nigerian university system. The purpose of the present study therefore is to examine mentoring relationships among senior and junior academic staff in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

The university is one of the 36 federal government owned universities in Nigeria and represents a typical well-established and government-funded university. It is comparatively big and single campus covering a large expanse of land. It has thirteen faculties with a student population of about 40,000 students.

Accordingly, the objectives of the study are to:

- (a) analyse the nature of mentoring relationships among selected academic staff members in four departments,

- (b) relate the mentoring relationships to the administrative and academic growth and development of both mentors and mentees within the context of teaching, research and community service,
- (c) examine both same-and cross-gender as well as single and multiple mentoring relationships among lecturers in professional teacher education and training,
- (d) determine the advantages and disadvantages of mentoring in teacher education
- (e) identify the personal qualities and skills required for successful professional mentoring in teacher education,
- (f) reiterate the framework for using mentoring as the core for partnership relationships in initial and continuing teacher education and training.

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Harris and Wiggans (1993), mentoring is based on the workplace learning model of teacher professional development, in which case mentoring offers the opportunity to integrate theoretical and practical elements in the experience of the individual and to enable the development of relevant knowledge bases and practical skills. According to Carter and Francis (2000), the emergence of mentoring as a professional learning strategy can be attributed to the convergence of economic policy and workplace learning theory. Mentoring held legitimacy as a professional learning strategy and at the same time appeared to offer a cost 'solution' in training and development of teachers.

Mentoring as a workplace learning strategy can be viewed and understood in terms of three domains of perspective transformation proposed by Marsick and Watkins (1990). These three domains, which are different types and processes of learning, are: instrumental learning, which is job focused and is aimed at skill development or improving individual productivity; dialogic learning, which includes learning about the organisation and one's relationship to it; and self-reflective learning which seeks to extend one's understanding of oneself in the workplace through confidence and competence, dealing with issues of authority and changes in personal values or beliefs and one's orientation toward the job.

Behaviourism as a learning theory and its impact on development of effective mentoring also serves as a theoretical framework for this study (Peel, 2005). Behaviourism can be defined as an approach to psychology, which argues that the only appropriate subject matter for scientific psychological investigation is observable, measurable behaviour, (Rober, 1985). An integration of behavioural and cognitive psychology principles is reflected in Bandura's (1986) social learning theory which views learning as a continuous dynamic and reciprocal interaction between individuals which in turn affects their attributes, values and behaviour. A concrete example of Bandura's (1977) work is behaviour or role modeling which uses techniques such as goal – getting to help people acquire the characteristics of a competent role model (Peel, 2005).

Mentoring can also be based on the action learning model which is a developmental process that extends over time where learning takes place from action or concrete experiences as well as taking action as a result of this learning, (Zuber-Skerrit, 2001, cited

by Vaartjes, 2005). This is based on the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed and created from within and for a particular group and context.

## **Methodology**

A descriptive qualitative survey method was used in the study. One pair of academic members of staff was purposively selected from each of eight departments in the Faculty of Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Selection was based on identified mentoring relationships within the contexts of traditional university functions of teaching, research and community service. Demographic variables and the mentoring profile of the 16 purposively selected lecturers (ten males and six females) were collected through a researcher designed and validated questionnaire, the Mentor-Protégée Questionnaire (MPQ).

The MPQ consists of open-ended questions which were sub-divided into two sections: A (demographic information) and B (mentoring activities). The questionnaire was also designed to obtain information on desirable qualities which attract protégées to their mentors, how the mentoring relationships were set up, the advantages and disadvantages of such relationships, activities on which the relationships are focused upon and whether or not the relationships are formal/informal, same gender/cross-gender and simple/multiple and the mechanisms of mentoring.

Data analysis was carried out by scoring the number of respondents for each alternative of the responses given. The total number for each response was then calculated and subjected to descriptive statistics (percentage number of responses over total number of respondents which is 16).

## **Results**

The results showed that seven out of eight pairs of mentoring relationships studied are mainly informal, unstructured with only one formal and structured. Protégées came to be associated with their mentors through various ways. These include: four out of eight pairs who formed from working together for conference, workshop, seminar, project or as co-teachers of the same course; three pairs from the student-supervisor relationship and one pair from a teacher-student relationship.

Analysis of the 16 respondents indicate some advantages that can be derived from the relationships to include: mentors serving as confidant (14 out of 16; 87.50%); assistance for promotion (12 out of 16; 75.00%); assistance in writing research papers (12 out of 16; 75.00%); making social connections (10 out of 16; 62.50%); protection from victimization (8 out of 16; 50.0%) and opportunities for external jobs (5 out of 16; 31.25%). The disadvantages identified by the protégées include: inheriting the mentee's enemies (11 out of 16; 68.75%); dividing the faculty into political camps (10 out of 16; 62.50%); overprotection of mentee (9 out of 16; 56.25%) and maintaining the statue-quo (7 out of 16; 43.75%).

**Table1: Numbers and Percentage Responses to Mentor- Protégé Questionnaire**

1. Description of mentoring relationship by respondents		N o	%
a	Informal unstructured	14	87.5 0
b	Formal structured	2	12.5 0
(2) Advantages derived by protégés from the relationship:			
a	Serving as confidant	14	87.5 0
b	Assistance for promotion	12	75.0 0
c	Assistance in writing research papers	12	75.0 0
d	Making social connections	10	62.5 0
e	Protection from victimization	8	50.0 0
f	Opportunities for external job	5	31.2 5
g	Opportunities for funding/access to resources	4	25.0 0
(3) Disadvantages of the relationship to the protégés:			
a	Inheriting the mentor's enemies	11	68.7 5
b	Dividing the faculty into political camps	10	62.5 0
c	Overprotection by the mentor	9	56.2 5
d	Maintaining the status-quo	7	43.7 5
(4) How they became associated with each other			
a	As supervisor-student	6	37.5 0
b	As co-teachers of the same course	4	25.0 0
c	When assisting in a research project	2	12.5 0
d	After working together for a conference/workshop/seminars	2	12.5 0
e	As teacher-student	2	12.5 0
(5) Activities on which the relationships are focused on			
a	publications	13	81.2 5
b	research	13	81.2 5
c	Effective professional practice		31.2

		5	5
d	service to the community	4	25.0 0
e	classroom teaching	3	18.7 5
f	in-depth assistance with the curriculum	3	18.7 5

Data  
shows  
that  
most

(6) Traits that attract protégées in their mentors		N	%	
a	hard work	14	87.50	
b	influential in and/or outside the community	12	75.00	
c	enterprising	12	75.00	
d	persistence	11	68.75	
e	tactfulness	11	68.75	
f	dedication to duty	11	68.75	
g	Friendly and approachable	10	62.50	
h	patience	9	56.25	
i	high intelligence	7	43.75	
(7). Access to counselling about mentoring roles in academic relationships at the start of career.				
a	Yes	3	18.75	
b	No	13	81.25	
(8). Number of protégée to the same mentor				
a	One	7	43.75	
b	2 or more	9	56.25	
(9) The more successful, one mentee or 2 or more mentees to a mentor				
a	One (single)	4	25.00	
b	2 or more (multiple)	12	75.00	
10. Which will be more successful?				
A	Same gender	10	62.50	
b	Cross-gender	6	37.50	
(11) Gender and Mentoring Activities.		Mean Duration (Years)	Occurrence No %	
A	Male- mentor – male protégée MMMP	7	35	37.25
B	Female-mentor-female protégée FMFP	4	2	25.00
c	Male-mentor – female protégée MMFP	6	2	25.00
d	Female-mentor-male protégée FMMP	3	1	12.50

activities of the mentoring relationship identified by the 16 respondents are related to research (13 out of 16; 81.25%); publications (13 out of 16; 81.25%); and less are related to classroom teaching (3 out of 16; 18.75%). Other activities on which such relationships are based are: effective professional practice (5 out of 16; 31.25%); service to the community (4 out of 16; 25.00%); and in depth assistance with the curriculum (3 out of 16; 18.75%).

In the analysis of gender effect on mentoring relationship, the occurrence of male mentor-male protégée, MMMP has the highest occurrence of 3 out of 8, followed by female mentor – female protégée, FMFP and male mentor-female protégée MMFP both of which have 2 out of 8; while female mentor-male protégée FMMP has the least occurrence of only 1 out of 8. The mean duration of mentorship of MMMP is seven years, FMFP six years, MMFP four years and FMMP three years. 12 out of 16 (75.00%) agreed that multiple relationships of two or more protégées to one mentor would be more successful than single relationship of one protégée to a mentor. Also, 10 out of 16 (62.50%) believe that same gender relationships will be more successful than cross-gender relationships (see Table 1).

13 out of the 16 respondents (81.25%) did not have any type of counselling about the role or advantages of mentoring in academic development at the start of their career while only three (18.75%) claim to have had one form of counselling. Eight different traits were identified by the 16 respondents that attracted them to their mentors, these include: hard work (14 out of 16; 85.2%); influential in and/or outside the community and enterprising (12 out of 16; 75.00%); persistence, tactfulness and dedication to duty (11 out of 16; 68.75%); being friendly and approachable (10 out of 16; 62.50%); patience (9 out of 16; 56.25%) and high intelligence (7 out of 16; 43.75%) (see Table 1).

## **Discussion**

The study found that the mentoring relationships that take place among university lecturers are usually informal and unstructured. Mentees identified some advantages in the relationship, such as: serving as confidant; assistance in writing research papers; promotion; making social connections, opportunities for funding and/or external jobs and protection from victimization. This agrees with earlier reports of NSW (2005) that mentors can serve three broad functions of career, psychosocial and educative. These findings also point to the fact that mentoring if properly channeled, can serve as cost-effective workplace learning for professional development as identified by Harris and Wiggans (1993) and Carter and Francis (2000).

However, some disadvantages of such relationship were identified and include overprotection by the mentor, dividing the faculty into political camps, maintaining the status quo and inheriting the mentor's enemies. It should be noted therefore that if mentoring relationships are not well conducted, they can lead to disunity and lack of cooperation in the faculty and this can ultimately affect the smooth functioning of the institution.

It was confirmed from this study that most of the mentoring relationships are initiated and sustained by academically related activities like postgraduate supervision, research and conferences. Most activities of the mentoring relationships were channeled towards research and publication with very few focused on actual classroom teaching. Activities like assistance with the curriculum, professional practice and service to the community are also sometimes involved. The ultimate result of these mentoring activities will most likely be improvement in the professional development of the teachers. When the quality of the teachers improves, it is expected that their output in terms of training students will improve and thus there will be improved student learning. This is indeed workplace learning as well as action learning propounded by Harris and Wiggans (1993); Marsick and Watkins (1990) and Vaartjes (2005). All the mentors and mentees were found to be closely connected by physical location as found earlier by Carter and Francis (2000).

Multiple mentoring relationships which involve one mentor to more than one mentee were found to be more common and believed to be more successful than single (one mentor, one mentee) mentoring among teachers in the faculty. Also same gender mentoring was believed to be more likely to succeed than cross gender mentoring. This agrees with the findings of Carter and Francis (2000). Female staff members establish and sustain mentoring/protégée relationship with female staff members more than with male members. Males however establish a sustainable mentoring relationship with both male and female staff members. Female/female and male/male mentoring relationships were found to be long-lived while male/female and female/male relationships were generally short-lived.

The fact that most males do not accept females as their mentors might not be unconnected with the cultural stereotype in Nigeria that recognizes men as the boss and females as subordinate to males. This cultural stereotype sees leadership positions as mainly masculine, thus paramount rulers, district heads, community leaders and even family leaders are expected to be males. With this societal prejudice, it often becomes difficult for many males to want females as their peer mentors. It was also found that individuals involved in multiple and/or same-gender mentoring are involved in more productive research and enjoy enhanced academic promotion than individuals in single and cross-gender mentoring.

Also, the study revealed that there was lack of appropriate counselling services at the initial professional teacher education level. Most of these teachers are not aware of the advantages that they can derive from mentoring and how it can serve as a cost effective means of training. It must also be recognized that a lot of advantages derivable from mentoring are concerned with guidance and support, which teachers will benefit immensely from if they are effectively involved in it.

The traits in mentors which protégées identified as attractive to them include hard work, intelligence, dedication to work, patience, source of security and ability to provide professional support, being friendly and approachable, persistence, tactfulness, foresight, being influential in attracting research grants, and being enterprising. These factors are in line with those identified for a good mentor by Carter and Francis (2000); Kajs *et al* (2001) and Zeus and Skiffington (2002). These attributes may make mentees see their mentors as

their role models and can influence their behaviour as propounded in behaviourism (Peel, 2005). Surprisingly, it was observed that contrary to expectations, the protégées did not identify specific traits related to good classroom teaching given the primary traditional functions of lecturers of teaching, research and community service. This finding can be interpreted as reflecting the structure of reward system in the university system in which teaching is less rewarded than research or community service.

This study found mentoring to be a multiple three-dimensional structure involving friendship, psychosocial and security/support. The results are contrary to the two-dimensional scales reported by Barnett (1996) involving only friendship and psychosocial functions and that by Noe, (1988) and Wilbur, (1987) involving career guidance and information sourcing. The security/support framework is a novel finding of this study and should provide a useful dimension for further research on mentoring.

The present study is limited to the Faculty of Education in a university in Nigeria and to only four departments; the study can be replicated using more universities and a higher number of academic members. The findings can be used as a basis for which mentoring can be used as a complementary process for staff development and support for newly recruited young academic members. It is recommended that mentoring can be used as a framework for using mentoring as the core for partnership relationships in initial and continuing teacher education and training and that there is the need to provide adequate guidance and counselling in relation to mentoring provision.

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