

## **Mentor the Mentee for Academic Excellence: The Forgetting Value in Nigerian Universities**

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**Abst**3study explored the value of mentorship in Nigerian Universities. Mentorship is an academic norm that sustain value of academic excellence in the University system. Academic mentorship refers to the training, knowledge, skills, orientation, attitude, discipline, and ethic standard acquired by protege from senior academic toward achieving the core value of teaching, research and community service in the university. Academic mentor is senior academic who has obligation to share expertise knowledge of teaching, research and community service experience with junior academics for the purpose of guiding protege on career path, setting goals, developing contact and offer personal support toward attainment of academic excellence. So, he who call for academic mentorship, call for academic excellence. University is a collegial system for building Centre of academic excellence. Meanwhile, a number of factors have been observed as clogs on the wheels of academic progress in the university system which hindered mentorship on teaching and researches for the attainment of academic excellence in Nigeria. Incidentally, some university academic staff suffered with mentorship practices where preferred mentors sometimes decline protégés' requests for mentorships. Today, mentorship programme in Nigerian universities is declining and seems to collapsed the value of academic system because some of the newly employed academic staff were unconsciously idle to perform their obligation. They avoid classroom teaching, jettisoned academic research and publication, avoiding local and international conferences due to lack of sponsorship, engaged in sexual harassment and examination malpractice in the university. The study concluded that mentorship is an academic value established for attainment of academic excellence and integrity. Therefore, it is recommended among others that university management should implement mentorship policy and programme through seminars, workshops and conferences for training the junior academic towards achieving the academic excellence in teaching, research and community service.

**Keywords:** Mentor, Mentee, Mentorship, Academic Excellence and Value

## **Introduction**

Today, mentorship seems to be an essential instrument toward attaining academic excellence in Nigeria university. This is because mentorship has become a critical factor affecting university system toward achieving academic integrity. In academia, mentorship programme are designed for academic staff, non-academic staff and students. The mentorship programme for academic staff or lecturers majorly help to attained University Vision and Mission which anchored on the advancement of academic excellence through teaching, research and community service. In the University system, a mentor is a role model, an experienced person and professional expert who shares expertise knowledge and skills with a mentee or protégé about career path and provides leadership, guidance, motivation and emotional support to increase individual effectiveness and efficiency in organisation. According to Nnaji *et al.* (2015), mentor should be people-oriented, open-minded, flexible, empathetic, collaborative, willing to make time and space for productive discussions, establish an equitable relationship and so on. Mentoring is a one-on-one connection between an expert (Mentor) and a younger, less experienced individual (Protégé) with the goal of the mentor willingly committing time to teach, support, and encourage the protégé.

According to Popoola, Adesopo and Ajayi (2013), mentoring is the process whereby an experienced and highly empathic person called the mentor, assists and guides another individual called the protégé (whether male or female) in the development of their skills, knowledge and attitudes and their competence in the workplace. However, Olasupo (2011) opined 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. Generally, it has been agreed that mentoring is one of the easiest and most effective methods of assisting individuals to develop the required skill sets in different organizations (Olasupo, 2011; Olowookere, 2012; Okurame, 2008; Ojokuku and Sajuyigbe, 2015; Sola, 2018). The prevailing consensus in Nigeria is that the "younger generation" is to blame for the rapidly deteriorating academic quality that the nation once had in its educational system (Ndaguba et al., 2018).

In recent time, university education in Nigeria has been plague with some mentorship setback. The tripartite mandate of teaching, research and community service of university which are the

major core value of academic institutions is sinking and diminishing. The culture of mentorship in Nigerian university system is gradually collapsing because of indecent character orchestrated by some academic stakeholders that include: lack of commitment to academic teaching and research, indecent dressing, sexual harassment, corruption and extortion. Incidentally, public university academic staff are facing several challenges including mentorship practices where preferred mentors sometimes decline protégés' requests for mentorships. Academic staff are categorized into senior academic staff (Professors; Associate Professors; and Senior Lecturers) and junior academic staff (Lecturer I; Lecturer II; Assistant Lecturers and Graduate Assistants). Some senior academics who ought to act as mentors to junior academics are hardly available and accessible. Many professors are either on sabbatical in other universities, on leave of absence, or are busy as adjunct lecturers, external examiners and consultants elsewhere. This creates a situation where the junior academic staff are left without mentors to whom they can relate in their area of specialization on teaching, research, and community service. The senior academics hurriedly attend to proteges when they are available; they are saddled with other university responsibilities such as Deanships, Directorates, Headships and other positions within the university that make it difficult for them to have a meaningful mentoring relationship with their protégés if they have any. Similarly, other factors like gender, age, qualification and work experience adversely affected mentorship practice. Gender bias is acknowledged as a significant obstacle in mentoring relationships since mentees may be wary of developing romantic ties with the mentor. perhaps, there's a chance that protege won't have many options for their desired gender.

### **Who is a Mentor?**

A mentor is an experienced person, wise and trustworthy professional in the university who provides help and advice, shares knowledge, skills and experience with a protégé over a period of time. Anyone who has a superior experience, maturity and knowledge than the mentee as well as the willingness and skills to serve as a model or someone who is more than an adviser is called a “Mentor”. Academically, a mentor should also be someone who understands the working ethics and condition of the academic environment with the ability to make mentee to get the best out of themselves as well as to avoid harmful distractions which academic environment presents. The relationship which the person with expertise knowledge provide in guiding the inexperienced person is called mentorship and the process needed to be is known as mentoring. However, mentor need to cultivate certain attributes like being attentive, candid,

helpful, supportive, emphatic, informative, inspirational, open-minded, respectful, proactive, rigorous and sincere with mentee.

### **Qualities of a Mentor**

Some of the qualities of mentor are elaborated below:

1. **A Mentor Should be Available:** Certainly, one of the most valuable commodities a mentor can offer is his or her time. Quality time with a mentor is paramount for junior academic to sustain value of academic excellence in the University system, but how can this process be optimized to ensure that the time protege and their mentors spend together is wholly productive? There must be mutual trust and respect, openness and companionship.
2. **A Mentor should be Attentive and Exhaustive:** A mentor should be attentive and listen to the junior academic being mentored. Maintaining continuous communication with a mentee can be an effective way of curbing the occasional unreliability found among protege because it allows for immediate accountability. While it may be somewhat time consuming, such attentiveness is especially worthwhile for the younger staff. To remain attentive, a mentor can employ multiple modes of communication, including email, phone calls, and even social media.
3. **A Mentor should be Accommodating and Understanding:** The Junior academic staff are under tremendous stress at times for a number of reasons. They may be giving so many courses to take, aside research, and community services. With all of this in mind, it is important for the mentor to maintain empathy for protege, and to be understanding and accommodating of the junior academic context. To understand this near perfectly, the mentor may sometimes need to reflect on his days as a mentee. He or she must be careful not to allow the mentee notice any sign of burdensomeness in him or her for a greater academic excellence.

### **The Nexus Between Academic Mentor and Mentee**

Academic mentorship is a one-to-one relationship that exists between the mentor and the protégé with the aim of the expert (Mentor) voluntarily giving time to teach, support and encourage a younger, less experienced person (Protégé)” (Inzer and Crawford, 2005). Mentor

is a noun and a relationship concept. The mentor may be older or younger than the person being mentored (the mentee or protégé). Wikipedia (2017) rightly pointed out mentorship as “a learning and development partnership between someone with vast or in-depth experience and knowledge (the mentor) and someone who wants to learn, build skills and knowledge while attaining his goals, be a male (mentee) or a female (protégé)” (Bozeman and Feeney, 2007). Within this framework, the following undertakings will be guiding the mentor-mentee relationships across the Nigerian University.

### **The Mentor:**

1. Provides direction for the mentee's research project, including the project's design and scope, pertinent literature and information sources, research methodologies and procedures, and data analysis techniques, as well as general guidance for the mentee's academic development.
2. Has a duty to make themselves available to the mentee.
3. Is going to be ready for meetings with the mentee.
4. Has constant access to the most recent research in his or her field.
5. Will be expecting written work as mutually discussed and returning it with comments within the stated time range.
6. Will offer suggestions that will assist the mentee become a better writer. Referrals for linguistic advice on technical writing components like referencing as well as on certain discipline-specific needs may be included in this. The mentor does not have to carefully edit manuscripts or provide advice on language or style issues.
7. Will assist the mentee in the research process and the creation of a research report, dissertation, or thesis. It should be possible to have a sufficient, courteous dialogue about the suggestions given in each instance.
8. Will see to it that the mentee has the chance to present work at appropriate national and international conferences, as well as postgraduate and staff (Departmental and Faculty) seminars
9. Will support and sponsor the mentee as necessary with the publication of research articles.
10. May sponsor the mentee financially for the publication of research articles.

**The Mentee:**

1. Commits to working independently while receiving mentorship. This entails doing a lot of reading to make sure the literature relevant to his or her chosen field of study is fully covered.
2. Is required to schedule meetings with the mentor and will schedule these meetings well in advance.
3. Will carefully consider how to maximize the benefits of contact sessions with the mentor by organizing what they hope to accomplish there.
4. Must send the mentor written material for review and discussion well before a scheduled meeting. At the beginning of the research study, the mentor and student should agree on the type and frequency of written work.
5. Commits to submitting written work that is largely free of grammatical, punctuation, and spelling issues. The mentee is accountable for the final research report, dissertation, or thesis's accuracy of language, overall structure, and content.
6. Agrees to take the mentor's advice and to engage in conversation about his or her proposals. In the end, the mentee is accountable for the caliber and presentation of the work as well as for moving forward academically.
7. Should always make an effort, within reason, to keep his or her attention on his or her study topic and academic career in order to work within the predetermined time frame.
8. Will prepare presentations at conferences and seminars and submit the materials for the mentor's input.
9. Commits to publishing articles that have been revised in response to mentor criticism.
10. A commitment not to put the mentor under undue pressure to submit work for review before the supervisor is confident that the quality has reached an appropriate level (LASU Mentorship Guidelines, 2022).

**Mentorship and Academic Excellence in Nigerian University**

Universities in Nigeria are usually concerned with maximizing academic competencies and skills in order to stay within or ahead of the competition. The kind of talents required to accomplish institutional goals and objectives often demand that academic institutions provide mentoring programs. Therefore, mentorship is a critical ingredient to academic excellence that can be used to improve intellectual capacity of mentees in the Nigerian university system. Altbach and Salmi (2011) posited that in making a world class research, modern universities are great opportunity for the creative process of scholars to seek new ideas and spirit of free

research which mentorship plays a significant role in this regard. Since mentoring is a unique academic enhancing process upon which protégées acquire skills, knowledge, expertise, experience and refined attitudes, it is undoubtedly an effective form of education that adds values to personal, intellectual and professional development of the mentee. Mentoring is a valuable process in educational reform for academics (Genser, 1996). It is used by senior academics as a key professional development strategy to enhance teaching and academic excellence (Mtetwa and Thomson, 2000). Mentoring creates a sense of collegiality and enables less experienced academics to have the peace of mind, self-discipline, and sharing skills with others (Dantonio, 2001). A number of studies (Karanja and Gukingu, 2014; Crisp and Cruz, 2009; Jekielek and Moore, 2002; Thomson and Kelly-Vance, 2001; Campbell and Campbell, 1997) have shown that mentorship has positive and significant effect on academic performance, experience and productivity of mentees and thus enhanced academic excellence in Nigerian university system. However, academic excellence is a proven ability to work, produce and excel in academic activities. It can be identified by obtaining better scores and higher performance in academics. It is also considered to be the highest development of intellectual capacity and skills and employment for human beings. Academic excellence also hinges on the need and desire for higher levels of education to tackle some technologically demanding professions (Peretomode and Ikoya, 2019).

### **Challenges of Mentorship in Nigerian University**

Mentorship is systematic process where experienced or knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. The main goal of mentorship is to help mentee understand the nitty-gritty parts of their jobs well on time in order to facilitate personal, career and professional growth necessary for high professional commitment (Ojeaga and Okolocha, 2019). Mentorship as an academic value process which involves training, counseling and guidance of protégé with the aimed of sharing expertise knowledge toward achieving academic excellence in university. Most successful mentorships often develop into friendships with both mentor and mentee and provide support to each other. Mentorship plays a vital role in achieving academic excellence, therefore, there are numerous challenges bedeviled with academic mentorship in Nigerian public universities which caused setback in achieving academic excellence. As regards of this, prominent mentoring challenges among Nigerian university academics and non-academics include victimization, instant gratification, gender-based bias, work life imbalance and incivility. These are explained below:

1. **Victimization:** The act of victimizing is a strong challenge of mentorship in Nigerian university which caused the action of selecting an individual or group of individuals for unjust treatment. Victimization in the academic environment can be committed by both supervisor and supervisee or mentor and protege. This may be in form of minor abuses, denial of promotion, demotion, bearing false witness or false accusation and so on. In public university setting, victimization may include alienation of some colleagues because of their allegiance to certain senior academics, high tendency of a protégé becoming a target by other senior colleagues who are opposed to the mentor, fear of sexual harassment between male (mentor) and female (mentee), as well as fear of being branded as the ‘mentor’s boy or girl’ by peers and other faculty members. Some mentors may overawe the junior academic, treat him as a mere ‘errand boy or girl’ and fail to impart any knowledge to him or her. This act of superiority may make the protégé feel resentful and begin to avoid the mentor since he or she cannot perceive any benefit from the relationship. To bound to breed this problem, there must be a mentoring style that is purely hierarchic in Nigerian University.
2. **The Culture of Instant Gratification:** Another challenge of mentorship in Nigerian university is instant gratification. This is the desire to experience pleasure or fulfillment without delay or deferment. Instant gratification behaviours can be detrimental by reprogramming individual mindsets and cause distraction from more meaningful and rewarding pursuits. The culture of instant gratification can lead to destructive financial, social, and health outcomes. Some junior academics especially in public universities in Nigeria lack interest in anything that will not immediately yield financial gains for them. As a result of this, Agbonifoh and Idubor (2016) assert that some mentors or senior colleagues are unwilling to introduce protégés to lucrative aspects of the job such as consultancy, research grant, book writing, adjunct lecturing among others. To deal with the challenge of instant gratification confronting mentorship in Nigerian public university, participants in the mentoring exercise should be committed to their roles and responsibilities (Al-Makhamreh and Stockley, 2020).
3. **Gender-Based Bias:** Gender-based bias in the Nigerian university system is also one of the most crucial issues to be addressed. It is the predisposition to prefer one gender over another. According to Bailey (2019), "gender bias is a form of unconscious bias, or implicit bias, which occurs when one individual unconsciously attributes certain

attitudes and stereotypes to another person or group of people". It entails discriminatory practices against individuals in the workplace because of gender differences. Gender bias is a serious challenge in a mentoring relationship as mentees may be afraid of being romantically linked to the mentor in a different gender mentoring relationship, and also, it is a tough challenge that can't be tackled alone, but with mentoring from those who have been through it before, mentees can become more confident and equipped to be able to fight against gender bias and succeed in academic environment. It is also possible that preferred gender may be scarce for proteges to select from. There is also a high tendency for mentoring relationship to become too personal for either the mentor or the mentee.

4. **Work-Life Imbalance:** Work-life balance entails fair allocation of time for both work and other aspects of life which include family and personal-related issues. Talukder, Vickers and Khan (2018) identified the benefits of work-life balance to include an increase in efficiency and productivity, decline in staff absenteeism, illness and stress, motivated workforce and higher retention of workforce. Despite these benefits, work-life imbalance which is the inability to fairly allocate time for work and other activities serve as a challenge in a mentoring relationship as mentors may be too engaged thereby unable to pay adequate attention to the mentoring needs of proteges. Especially in the Nigerian public university setting, what other people may say about a perceived cordial relationship between mentor and protégé may prevent some mentors from spending quality time with their proteges.
5. **Incivility:** Incivility in the Nigerian university leads to deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the mentor or protege. This can be described as bad behaviour characterised by rudeness, discourteous behaviours, as well as lack of regards or consideration toward others in the organization (Gabriel et al., 2018). Some senior academics who ought to act as mentors to junior academics are hardly available and accessible. Many professors are either on sabbatical in other universities, leave of absence, or are busy as adjunct lecturers, external examiners and consultants elsewhere. This creates a situation where the junior academics are left without mentors to who they can relate with. The senior academics hastily and reluctantly attend to their proteges when they are available; they are encumbered with other administrative responsibilities such as Deanships, Headships and Directorates positions within the university that

make it difficult for them to have a meaningful mentoring relationship with their protégés if they have any. Examples of incivility include making nasty and demeaning comments about junior academic, cutting people off while they are yet speaking, browbeating, undermining protege credibility in the presence of student and christened junior colleague as their housemaid. In a mentoring relationship in Nigerian public university, incivility may include lack of freedom and opportunities for the protégé to freely speak about his ideas and feelings, a lack of reverence and respect by junior academics for the expertise and person of the mentor, rebuffing or disdaining the attempts of other individuals and so on.

### **Panacea for Academic Mentorship in Nigerian University**

It would be wrong to jettisoned mentorship programme in Nigerian university. Incidentally, mentorship value has been declining particularly in Nigerian public university system. The method in which it exists doesn't appear to have any definite context, scope, significance and impact anymore. The study puts forward the following way forward to combating mentorship challenges in Nigeria public universities:

1. Nigerian Universities and other tertiary institutions should promote an atmosphere of organizational harmony where senior faculty members will seek the growth of junior academic staff for the advancement of the educational system and academic excellence.
2. The compensation packages of academics should be appreciably enhanced to curb the worrisome culture of instant gratification that promotes corruption and other questionable acts among academics.
3. More females' senior academics should be encouraged to not only seek higher-level academic positions within the university, they should also be urged to take up mentoring of junior academics by making themselves more available to address the problem of gender-based bias in mentorship.
4. Mentors must keep their pride in check and remind themselves that this relationship is about the mentee, not the mentor. Mentees should remind themselves that it is they who want the experience. They should make their own decisions and remember that their mentors are basically for support and feedback.
5. As education is the best legacy. Mentors and mentees can share information about this program with peers and other important people. All these activities require time and commitment.

## **Conclusion**

Mentor the Mentee for academic excellence has to do with a relationship that exist between the experienced and the less experienced personnel in the Nigerian university system. Mentorship is an important concept and valuable. Although, it might not serve as a solution to all, it is no doubt a very promising value for achieving academic excellence in Nigerian public university. The forgetting values of mentorship in the Nigeria public universities is that; mentors are not to train people to remain under their tutelage forever, but to gain academic freedom when matured in academic. One other thing is that mentorship is neither authoritative nor exhaustive; just like a mentor can't force his decisions on his mentee Osezua & Agbalajobi (2016), posit that one important avenue through which academic excellence can be maintained and sustained is through academic mentoring. There is therefore be a need to embrace mentor-mentee relationships in Nigerian Universities system for academic excellence. The study concluded that mentorship practice requires humility, civility and tolerance. However, the benefits and usefulness of mentorship toward achieving academic excellence cannot be forget and it should therefore be encouraged and embedded as part of the culture of Nigerian university.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the critical issues discussed and the way forward above, the following recommendations are made:

1. The university management should implement mentorship policy and programme through seminars, workshops and conferences for training the junior academic towards achieving the academic excellence in teaching, research and community service.
2. The University governing council should make it a policy for every senior academic to have junior academics to mentor for the survival of system from collapsing.
3. Government should fund mentorship programme in public university and provide necessary resources needed for mentor and to mentees succeed in their academic careers.
4. Senior academic mentor should protect the mentee from mistakes or principal errors, and also allow the protege to learn from his or her experiences and mistakes.

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