Mentoring among Academic Staff of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Eyitayo Rufus Ifedayo Afolabi[1], Bamidele Abiodun Faleye[2] & Aremu Margaret Adeola

Abstract

The study examined the perception of mentoring (and its nature) by academic staff of the Obafemi Awolowo University. Being a survey, the population included all academic staff in the university. Purposive sampling was used to select 200 academic staff from the 13 faculties in the university. An instrument titled 'Academic Staff Mentoring Questionnaire' was used for data collection. Results showed that 86.5% of academic staff was involved in mentoring relationship and 93.5% of academic staff had a favourable perception of mentoring. The study concluded that most academic staff in the university were involved in mentoring relationship and perceived mentoring as a veritable means of academic development.

Keywords: Mentoring, mentoring relationships, academic mentoring, academic staff mentoring questionnaire

Introduction

Mentoring is not a new concept in academic circles but it has recently been revived in Nigerian universities as there is a growing concern about raising academic standards and a desire for Nigerian universities to compete favourably with their counterparts in other parts of the world. The management of the institutions are therefore under increased pressure to create opportunities for professional guidance and development of their academic staff to avert a slide in academic performance. One way to maintain academic standards and performance is mentoring - a training and development relationship that enhance an individual's professional growth (Kram, 1985; McCall, Lombardo & Morrison, 1998). Mentoring relationships can be informal or formal. Informal mentoring relationships are those which evolve naturally from shared admiration, aspiration, values and interest (Kram, 1983, 1985; Sullivan, 1992). In informal mentoring relationships, mentors and mentees choose with whom he or she may want to work. Formal mentoring are formed through a planned matching or assignment of mentors and protégés (the younger and the less experience in the union) by the organisation (Ragings & Cotton, 1999). The association between mentoring and the career development of protégés is made possible because mentors provide two broad categories of function – career development and psychosocial functions (Kram, 1985). Career development functions are mentor activities, which facilitate protégé advancement in an organisation while psychosocial functions are those which address the inter-personal and emotional aspect of the relationship (Raggins and Curtain, 1999). Typical career development functions include challenging work assignment, visibility to management and sponsorship, exposure and protection (Fagenson, 1989) psychosocial functions comprise role-modelling, friendship, counselling and acceptance. These functions enhance a protégé's identity, work role effectiveness, career advancement, self-confidence and address other inter-personal concerns of the relationship (Burke, 1984; Raggins and Curtain, 1999). The pursuit of development by young scholars in the Nigerian academic terrain is not without challenges, fears and anxieties. Indeed, literature suggests that youthful entrants into the adult workplace encounter a variety of developmental tasks that are effectively facilitated by good mentor relationship (Kram, 1985).

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[1] Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.
[2] Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Email: bamidelefaleye@yahoo.com

Mentoring is regarded as one of the best tools for "reducing stress for novice teachers, orientation to curriculum and promoting the creation of better norms of collegiality and collaboration" (Sweeney, 2004). It helps in the resolution of challenges and predicament, making it more likely that an individual attain his/her career goals and growth. The benefit of mentoring is based on a developmental social learning perspective which posits that behaviour is learned in interaction with others especially when they serve as models (Baldwin, 1992). In this regard, mentoring is especially valuable for the transmission of positive attitudes as mentors provide invaluable information on the mission and philosophies of the organisation, help employees cope with career stress and give proper orientation towards workplace values (Gilley & Boughton, 1996; Murray, 1995; Payne, 2006). In addition, mentoring afford the transfer of skills which protégés can apply in diverse professional circumstances, promotes productive use of knowledge, clarity of goals and roles, career success, career growth, salary increases and promotions, career and job satisfaction (Payne, 2006). Mentoring relationships are also useful even to the senior partner in the union, as it provides an opportunity for them to develop a base of technical support and power which can be readily summoned in the future (Hunt and Michael, 1983). Being recognised as the mentor of a successful protégé enhances the reputation of the senior academic/partner among his/her peers.

In organisational context, mentoring is often viewed as a Training and Development (T&D) programme that can be used to increase a group's and/or individual potentials to carry out particular duties and responsibilities, to familiarise with new techniques and care for all aspects of the mentees (Hanford & Ehrich, 2006; Long, 2002). Mentoring is also viewed as integral to learning in the workplace, to receiving career help, and for development and psychosocial support (Cummings and Worley, 2009; Long, 2002). Along with the opportunity to receive recognition and respect from peers for making a contribution to the development of a youth talent, internal satisfaction is a potential by-product for the mentor. In a mentoring relationship, protégés and mentors both win, resulting in long term benefit for society at large (Burstahler & Crohneim, 2001). Sweeney (2003) talks about expanding the definition and purpose of mentoring, and he viewed it as creating a more professional culture, where staff are continually learning on the job, where collaboration and openness are the norm. Traditionally, what distinguishes an adviser from a mentor is that the mentor focuses on career advancement for a longer time and at a higher and more committed level than the adviser. Role models can be critical to the academic and career development of young people. The role model serves as an object admiration, emulation and respect. The An individual's identification and connection with a role model, even when it is short-term, can have long lasting impacts. Role models have distinctly different levels of involvement than as compared to mentors and advisers. There is a continuum of support offered by the role model ranging from those who have no intent of being a role model with minimal interaction to those who are fully aware and commit time to being a role model. For example, some popular celebrities may be vaguely aware of being a role model, but commit no time or energy to the relationship, while a teacher may be fully aware that a role model is one setting positive examples for their students and committing time and energy to build the relationship.

A formal mentoring program is often viewed as the structured and coordinated relationship between mentor and mentee, using standard norms, continuous action plans, time frame, and particular objectives (Bahniuk & Hill, 1998; Hansford, et. al. 2003; Noe, et. al, 2002). Specifically, the mentoring programme has salient characteristic, first, the mentor is defined as a more knowledgeable and experienced person (e.g. a senior staff) whereas the mentee is defined as a less knowledgeable and less experienced person (e.g. junior staff) (Noe, et. al. 2002). Second, mentors should serve as role models, teachers, sponsors, encouragers, counsellors, and can be a friend to the mentees in order to increase the individual's new knowledge, update skills and imbibe positive attitudes (Kram, 1985; Anderson and Shannon, 1988). Third, they are regularly assigned to encourage group and/or individual activities within a defined period of time (Ritchie and Genonin, 1999). Originally, a mentor is referred to as an influential individual with advanced experience and knowledge who provides support and mobility to their protégés careers (Fagenson, 1989; Noe, 1988). Mentoring has also been defined as a process in which an individual has regular dialogue with, and receives advice from a more experienced member of the organisation on a range of issues relating to the individual's job and career development. For instance, employees with a mentor support gain more promotions, higher incomes and more work satisfaction than employees without a mentor (Bow and Scandura, 1999; Ragins, et. al., 2000). Formal mentoring relationship usually develops through the assignment of members of the relationships by a third party (Murray, 1991). Mentoring programs vary in length and structure such as informal mentoring is unstructured and usually last for many years. In contrast, the duration for formal mentoring will be usually shorter e.g. less than a year and in a relationship both parties have signed a contract. Also, other factors that determine mentoring relationships are mentor, gender, and seniority of mentor and protégé, and goals to be achieved. Formal mentoring programs are purposively developed, monitored and evaluated by the management in terms of expectations and goal attainment.

Informal mentoring relationship is spontaneously formed through people getting to know each other in the work environment. The difference in the status of the relationship between formal and informal mentoring relationship is that the communication in informal relationship is less formal as the name denotes. There is still a hierarchy of status in this relationship but the communication is less formal. The pairing in an informal relationship is often the result of both the mentor and the protégé selecting personal qualities that mirror the qualities they would like to emulate. The co-mentoring or peer mentoring relationship has been a recent development in literature (Jipson & Parley, 2000). Co-mentoring recognises the contribution that each person brings to the relationship and it is based on reciprocal benefit. In this relationship, the status of each person is equal and the communication pathway is one of reciprocity with each person mutually benefitting from the relationship. The ability to collaborate and share was seen as providing opportunities to strengthen personal and professional skills. The relationship here should be a friendship of peers rather than a hierarchical relationship and that communication was dialogue rather than the transmission of organisational information. Within the relationship, the individuals act as partners often complementing each other's knowledge and skills. The mentee can be a catalyst for the mentor's professional development and for stimulating the mentor's personal self-reflection and providing an impetus for professional development. Young and Perrewe (2004) emphasise that the perceived value of mentoring in the organisation can be made clear through all types of communication mechanisms, including formal policy, reward systems and recognition for participation. The Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria is a conventional university established in 1962 by the Western Regional government of Nigeria. It is regarded as one of the first generation of universities established in Nigeria (others include University of Ibadan, Ibadan; University of Lagos, Lagos; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; University of Nigeria, Nsukka and University of Benin). The university has 13 academic faculties with a total of 1,072 academic members of staff as at the time of collecting data for this study. The broad objective of this study was to examine the dynamic relationship among academic staff of Obafemi Awolowo University with a view to promoting mentoring and providing an understanding of its utility value in an academic community. Specifically, the study was conducted to

i. examine perception of mentoring by academic staff in the university;
ii. ascertain the form and extent of mentoring relationship among academic staff in the university;
iii. examine how existing mentoring relationship were initiated;
iv. identify the challenges experienced by protégés and senior academic staff in mentoring relationships, and;
v. examine the influence of job status and years of service on the perception of mentoring by academic staff.

The population for this study comprised academic staff of the university which was categorized into senior, middle and junior academic staff. From these categories, 20% of 1,072 of all staff were purposively selected as study sample. Those that were accessible (available) to the researchers were included in the study. The instrument for the study was 56 – item questionnaire, divided into six sections. These were Section A (Personal data) Section B (mentoring relationship), Section C (functions of mentoring) Section D (challenges of mentoring by mentors) and Section F (Challenges experienced by mentees). Respondents were to indicate their level of agreement to Sections D, E, and F the response types, ranged from "Strongly Agree" to Strongly Disagree". Section E, item I-XI required Yes or No response and were scored 1 and 0 respectively. The instrument was ascertained to have content and construct validity using expert judgement. Also, test-retest reliability was carried out by administering the instrument on 30 lectures in the faculties with three weeks interval. The test-retest on ASMQ yielded a reliability co-efficient of 0.97 which was found to be significant ($p < 0.05$). The questionnaire was administered by two fieldwork assistants. The survey was carried out in the academic environment of the university. The researcher visited lecturer's offices several times to distribute and retrieve the questionnaires given to them. The survey lasted for up to six weeks.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does mentoring exist among academic staff in Obafemi Awolowo University?

In order to understand the involvement of mentoring relationship under study, respondents responses to items 7 drawn (Section B of ASMQ) were subjected to a percentages analysis. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Proportion of Obafemi Awolowo University Staff involved in Mentoring

S/N	ITEMS			FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1.	Are you in any Mentoring Relationship		Yes	173	86.5
			No	27	13.5
			Total	**200**	**100.0**
2.			Junior Colleagues	88	44.0
	If Yes, with what cadre of staff?		Middle Cadre	16	8.0
			Senior Colleague	78	39.0
			No response	18	9.0
			Total	**2000**	**100**
3.	Is there real mentoring opportunities for you in this University? (in other faculties)		Yes	46	23
			No	21	10.5
			Total	**67**	**33.5**
4.	Is there real mentoring opportunities for you? (within the Faculty)		Yes	51	25.5
			No	25	12.5
			Total	76	38.0
	Is there real mentoring opportunities for you? (in the Department)		Yes	170	85.0
			No	21	10.5
			Total	191	95.5
5.	How many people are you currently mentoring?		1	51	25.5
			2	45	22.5
			3	7	3.5
			4	4	2.0
			5	3	2.5
			No response	90	45
			Total	**200**	**100**
6.	Have you had a mentor yourself?		Yes	168	84
			No	32	16
			Total	200	100
7.	Will you regard the relationship as helpful or successful		Yes	170	85
			No	10	5
			No response	20	10
			Total	**200**	**100**

From Table 1, it can be seen that most of the respondents (86.5%) indicated that they were involved in one mentoring relationship or the other, only 13.5% claimed that they were not involved. 44% of the respondents claimed that the relationship was with Junior Colleague, 88% had mentoring relationship with middle cadre staff ad 39% of the respondents had mentoring relationship with Senior colleagues. The table also indicated that most of the respondents really had intra-department mentoring opportunities, as the percentages (95.5%) of those who attempted the item was higher than those who attempted the A (33.59) and B (38.0%). Sub-item and moreso, those who answered 'Yes' were more in percentages (85%) than those who declined (10.5%). Most of the respondents were currently mentoring 1 or 2 other staff members total of (45%) while 2.5% of the respondents were mentoring up to five other members. Furthermore, 84% of the staff claimed that they had experienced mentoring before while 85% of the respondents regarded the relationship as helpful or successful. Considering the proportion of those who claimed to be involved in mentoring relationship in comparison with those above the Graduate Assistant/Assistant lecturer cadre, as well as other experiences that are related, it can be concluded that mentoring relationships exist in Obafemi Awolowo.

Research Question 2: What is the respondents' perception of mentoring as a developmental tool?

To address this research question, Section C of the questionnaire was analyzed using simple percentages analysis. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Perception of Mentoring as a Developmental Tool

Perception	Frequency	Percent
Unfavourable Perception	0	0.0
Indifferent	13	6.5
Favourable Perception	187	93.5
Total	**200**	**100.0**

From Table 2, it can be seen that none of the respondents have an unfavourable perception towards mentoring as a developmental tool, only 6.5 percent were indifferent while 93.5% of the respondents were found to have a favourable perception towards mentoring as a developmental tool.

Research Question 3: What are the barriers or challenges experienced by academics in course of mentoring other staff members?

To answer this research question 3, three approaches were adopted. The barriers or challenges experienced by mentors were investigated on one hand and those experienced by mentee were explored on the other. Also, problems confronted in the course of the initiation of mentoring relationship were also examined. Hence, Sections D, E and F of the questionnaire were given a descriptive analysis and the results were as presented in Tables 4, 5 and 6.

Table 3: Challenges Experienced by Mentors

S/N	Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	RSI	Rank
1.	Laziness and unresponsive attitude of mentees.	56	137	3	4	0	0.845	2
2.	Self-withdrawal of junior members	87	97	4	10	1	0.856	1
3.	Pressure of administrative duties	52	127	8	11	2	0.816	4
4.	Lack of trust	83	87	5	20	3	0.821	3
5.	Lack of material resources	59	109	7	24	1	0.801	7
6.	Lack of a formal structure to foster mentoring	76	79	13	27	3	0.792	8
7.	Arrogance or pride	61	100	8	26	4	0.785	9
8.	Over estimate of personal ability	65	102	11	20	1	0.807	6
9.	Patronizing disposition of mentor	53	120	15	12	0	0.814	5
10.	Overbearing attitude of mentors	39	118	20	22	1	0.772	10

Table 3 shows a set of problems presented to the respondents to be identified as problem that may have confronted them in course of their mentoring relationship with their mentees. It can be seen that respondents identified "self-withdrawal of Junior members" as the most prevalent problems they confronted in the course of their mentoring relationship with the highest RSI value of 0.856, other very prevalent problems identified by the respondents were "Laziness and unresponsive attitude of mentee" and "Lack of trust" with RSI values of 0.845 and 0.821 respectively. However they considered the 'over bearing attitude of mentors" the least prevalent barriers they confront while mentoring their mentees. Furthermore, the study explored the problems on their part and also experience during the mentoring relationship. To achieve this, Section F of the questionnaire was given a descriptive analysis and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Challenges Experienced by Mentees

S/N	Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	RS	I	Rank
1.	Inability to measure up to a mentor	23	159	4	8	6	0.7	85	4
2.	Inadequate attention from mentor.	58	114	12	13	3	0.8	11	2
3.	Fear of being alienated by peers	48	115	6	26	5	0.7	75	5
4.	Balancing conviction with expectation of a mentor	69	97	17	14	3	8.0	15	1
5.	Concern of being persecuted by other senior colleagues opposed to the mentor	59	103	13	21	2	0.	79	3
6.	Inadequate opportunities to speak freely about one's idea	69	77	19	31	2	0.7	74	6
7.	Fear of being branded as "anointed"	49	101	14	28	7	0.7	54	7
8.	Pressure of deadlines	45	104	15	31	5	0.7	53	8
9.	Fear of being derogatively referred to by peers	22	119	16	36	7	0.7	13	9

"Balancing Conviction with expectation of a mentor" with the RSI value of 0.815. Other barriers or challenges identified included "Inadequate attention from mentor". They had RSI values of 0.811 and 0.790 respectively. However, they identified "fear of being derogatively referred to by peers" as the least prevalent problem with RSI value of 0.713. From Table 4, it can be seen that the most prevalent problem identified by the respondents included Also, the problems involved in the initiation of mentoring relationship were also examined. To achieve this, the Section E of the questionnaire was also subjected to a descriptive analysis and the results are presented in Table 6.

Table 5: Barriers in Initiating Mentoring Relationships

S/N	Items	Yes	No	RSI	Rank
1.	Mentoring is usually initiated by the mentor	141	59	0.93	5
2.	Mentoring relationship often develops naturally	172	28	0.918	1
3.	I was assertive in pursuing interaction with my mentor	167	33	0.893	2
4.	I volunteered to help my mentor with one of his or her research projects	127	73	0.875	9
5.	I did not do anything specific to initiate a relationship	157	43	0.853	3
6.	My mentor asked me if he or she could mentor me	137	63	0.843	6
7.	I was assigned to my mentor formally by my department	128	72	0.83	8
8.	I told my mentor that I wanted to emulate his or her work ethics	132	68	0.82	7
9.	I am yet to decide on this issue of mentoring	119	81	0.818	11
10.	I don't have a mentor	150	50	0.808	4
11.	I warmed myself into the arms of my mentor	123	77	0.798	10

From Table 5, the respondents identified "inadequate attention from mentor" as the most prevalent problem in course of initiating mentoring relationship. Other problems identified by the respondents in course of initiating mentoring relationship included "I was assertive in pursing interacting with my mentor" and I did not do anything specific to initiate a relationship" with RSI value of .893 and 0.853.

Research Hypothesis I: This hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in the perception of the respondents on the basis of their job status.

To test this hypothesis, the perception scores of the respondents was subjected to test of difference via Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), the results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Influence of Job Status on Mentoring Relationship

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	171.863	4	42.966	1.256	.289
Within Groups	6672.292	195	34.217		
Total	**6844.155**	**199**			

From Table 6, it can be seen that the F-value obtained was 1.256 at p=0.289. Since the p-value did not attain the 0.05 significance threshold, the hypothesis cannot be rejected, hence the hypothesis is accepted and it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in the perception of the respondents on the basis of their job status or that their job status does not influence their perception of mentoring relationships. Another major finding of this study is that a no-significant difference was found between the perception of respondents on the basis of their job status. This implies that there was no difference between the perception of the respondents on the basis of their job status. This study has found that perception of the respondents on the basis of their job status does not influence the perception of mentoring relationship. This was supported by Ragins and Cotton (1999), they found that mentoring relationship is highly beneficial by providing career development aid and facilitating the mentees advancement in the organization.

Research Hypothesis 2: This hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in the perception of the respondents on the basis of their years of service.

To test this hypothesis, the perception scores of the respondent was subjected to test of difference via Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), using years of service as the differentiating variable. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Influence of Years of Services on Mentoring Relationship

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	75.638	4	18.909	.543	.703
Within Groups	6768.517	195	34.710		
Total	**6844.155**	**199**			

From the Table 7, it can be seen that the F-value obtained was 0.545 at p=0.703. Since the p value did not attain the 0.05 significance threshold, the hypothesis cannot be rejected, hence the hypothesis is accepted and it was concluded that there is no significant difference in the perception of the respondents on the basis of their years of experience or that the number of years of experience that the respondents possess does not influence their perception of mentoring relationships. One of the finding of this study is that a non-significant difference was found between the perceptions of the respondents on the basis of their years of service. This implies that there was no significant difference between the perceptions of respondent on the basis of their years of service. This was supported by , who found that mentoring involves an intense caring relationship in which persons with more experience work with less experienced person to promote both professional and personal development. Findings from this study revealed that there exists mentoring relationship among academic staff of Obafemi Awolowo University. From the percentage analysis of the data, 88% had mentoring relationship with middle cadre, while 44% had the relationship with junior cadre and 39% of the respondents had the relationship with senior colleague. The findings the existing relationship were formed through preliminary contacts between junior, middle and senior academic staff, indicated a prospect for fostering mentoring in the faculty and in the department. These existing relationships are in line with Kram's (1985) two categories, career and psychosocial function. Findings also revealed that respondent's perception of mentoring as a developmental tool. Majority of the respondents indicated that mentoring opportunities abound and that mentoring is valuable and acknowledged the need to help faculty members develop through is. Some also reported that their relationship had been a crucial component of academic development.   (Ragins, Cotton & Miller, 2000). This findings also corroborate the conclusion of Aladejana, Aladejana and Ehindero (2006) and implies a tendency for mentor to enjoy in carrier development function which facilitate an academic advancement. Also, the findings from this study revealed no significant difference in the perception of the respondents on the basis of their job status. It was discovered that academic staffs who are senior members share resources and utilize mentoring opportunities by making personal decisions and conscious effort to establish a link with a potential mentee.

In conclusion, the study also revealed that academic staff that had experienced mentoring before regarded the relationship helpful or successful in respect of their years of service, sex and job status. Since mentoring evolves naturally from share values, aspirations and interest. This assertion was strongly supported by (Kram, 1983, 1985; Sullivan, 1992). Consistent with this conclusion, the result of this study showed that mentoring relationship exists among academic staffs of Nigerian Universities.

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