

MENTORSHIP AS A TOOL FOR ENTRENCHING SUSTAINED ACADEMIC STANDARD IN BENUE STATE UNIVERSITY, MAKURDI

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Abstract

This study was undertaken to explore the possible effect of mentoring on sustained academic standard in Benue State University, Makurdi. Mentorship was proxied by knowledge transfer, career support and corrective feedback. The survey design was adopted for the study and the population comprised 404 academic staff of Benue State University, Makurdi. The entire population also doubled as the sample. A structured five-point Likert like scale questionnaire was used in obtaining data for the study and the multiple linear regression was instrumental in the test of hypotheses with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The results indicated that knowledge transfer, career support and corrective feedback all have significant and positive effect on the sustainability of academic standards in Benue State University, Makurdi. The study therefore recommended among others that the management of Benue State University should provide an environment that encourages mentorship among senior and junior colleagues.

Keywords: Mentorship, Knowledge Transfer, career support, corrective feedback, academic standard

1. Introduction

Higher educational institutions are considered to be worth their works on the basis of consistent delivery of quality outputs. The Society has an implied contract with these institutions - The Society provides them with necessary support and expects in return the production of quality manpower needed for economic development. The assurances of these consistent delivery of qualitative education of the citizens depends on what the Institution's put in place to guarantee Knowledge Management. This Knowledge can be in form of tacit or explicit Knowledge (Minasi et al, 2022). Much attention is often given to tacit knowledge

because it cannot be easily transferred from one person to another. Talent knowledge is knowledge gained from experience overtime. Enhancing academic excellence in institutions of higher learning require the preservation of values that have proven to deliver Consistent results. Mentoring has proven to be one of the major tools for preserving values that have guaranteed academic excellence in universities and other Organizations alike.

Mentoring is a renowned pathway for producing dependable academic in higher institutions of learning. It is essentially a human capital development initiative that promotes career growth especially among young academics via a mutually beneficial relationship. In the past, mentoring was considered a natural thing among young and experience members of an organization. Older and more experienced colleagues were mandated to guide the younger ones on how to acquire the requisite knowledge, skills, self-confidence, and integrity to be successful in the academic career (Onyemaechi & Ikpeazu, 2019). In recent times however, organizations are more deliberate about mentorship such that they now attach younger colleagues to older ones upon employment. The idea is to help entrench a consistent level of excellence among organizations. In the university System for instance, a Graduate Assistant is attached to a Professor upon employment. The Professor tutors the Graduate Assistant on how to deliver lectures, grade scripts and supervise students. The understanding is that the Professor will in the process of working together with the Graduate assistant or any other younger colleague transfer knowledge (especially tacit knowledge), Values, skills to the younger person.

Mentoring has been considered by researchers as a well-established strategy adopted by educational institutions for competing favorably in today's academic environment (Ebisinkemefa & Lucky, 2022). It is a means of empowering lecturers and improving their productivity. Lecturers are saddled with the responsibility of transforming society via the impacting of Knowledge to the society. Considering the pivotal roles that lecturers play in society, it is expedient to facilitate their career advancement and provide an enabling environment for sustained quality knowledge dispensary. Mentoring can be achieved in the university system via Knowledge transfer, career support, role modeling and Corrective feedback among others.

2. Statement of the Problem

The strive to succeed in the global academic environment requites that higher educational institutions in Nigeria are at their best. The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has provided so many opportunities for well-established institution in developed nations to operate effectively from anywhere in the world. This has given rise to intense competition in the industry thus limiting the chances of success for institution in less developed nations. This new trend in educational development therefore requires management of higher institutions in Nigeria to create and maintain a Standard foundation for academic Staff enhancement to avert a possible decline in academic performance.

The Benue State University, Makurdi has over the years made a name for herself as one of the best State Universities in Nigeria. This Study therefore intends to ascertain the possible effect of mentoring on the entrenchment of sustained academic standard in Nigerian universities with emphasis on BSU, Makurdi; Again, Studies have shown that though mentoring is considered a veritable tool for enhancing excellence in the workplace, it is

hindered by a number of issues -Fear of losing control, fear of the unknown, lack of interests outside work, a strong sense of personal attachment to the organization.

In the educational sector, especially the University System, there is a supposed regard for seniority. However, most often younger colleagues are not disposed to working under a Senior colleague's tutelage. This new trend threatens the sustainability of academic excellence in higher educational institutions in Nigeria. This study therefore attempts to ascertain the possible effect of mentoring on sustained academic excellence of higher educational institutions in Nigeria and Benue State University, Makurdi.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Mentorship

A mentor as defined by Arogundade (2013) is a person that encourages holistic growth of a subordinate via sharing of knowledge and experience accumulated overtime. The understanding is that haven put in So many years into a particular job or organization; a person should have acquired considerable level of insights both on and off-the Job. Mentoring is therefore, the process by which persons of superior ranks and ages instruct, counsel, guide and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of persons who are either new to an organization or of lower ranks. The essence of mentoring in most instances is to ensure continuity of excellence. Most organizations today are encouraging the practice of mentoring because it promotes the values and standards of the organization. Mentoring could also substitute for training thus saving the organization the huge cost associated with training. Mentorship is considered very critical in the university system. This is because as citadels of learning, it is expected that the highest of standards should be maintained and societal values projected.

Mentorship entails learning and development relationship between someone considered to have a good wealth of experience and Knowledge (mentor) and Someone who is ready and willing to build knowledge and insights in a particular field (Mentee) (Peretomode & Ikoya, 2019). The idea is that for a successful mentorship relationship both the mentor and the mentee must be willing to cooperate with one another. The mentor must be willing to share knowledge and experience with younger colleagues for the benefit of the organization. The mentee on the other hand must be willing to be under the tutelage of a more experienced person to learn. It is in this light that the University system is designed such that a graduate assistant is usually attached to professor upon employment. The graduate assistant who is a novice in the system is expected to learn the ropes from the professor. The professor who is regarded as a beacon of knowledge and experience in research, teaching and communication transfers the values of the system to the younger colleague (Udom et al, 2020).

Mentoring relationships can be classified into formal and informal relationship. The formal relationship is one in which the organization is structured to support such. For instance, the relationship between Professor and a graduate assistant in a university set-up. The University management in this case is deliberate about this pairing. Informal mentorship on the other hand is a situation where a mentee considers a senior person a role model thus intends to under Study. In this regard, a mentor/mentee relationship cut cross various fields. Mentorship programs centre around communication and support. Though there are so many dimensions of mentoring. For the purpose of this paper however, mentoring Shall be discussed around knowledge transfer, Career support, role modeling and Corrective feedback. The choice of these dimensions is hinged on the peculiarities of the university system.

3.2 Knowledge Transfer

Knowledge is considered a major strategic resource that guarantees sustainable competitive advantage among firms in today's turbulent and dynamic business environment (Wichey & Akpana, 2023). The knowledge in an organization facilitates production and/or service thus giving value to the organization. Knowledge can therefore be regarded as information in action through the process of continuous data/information collection and analysis. Data collected and analyzed provides the basis for effective business decision making. Organizational knowledge can be in the form of work-related experiences, technical Know-how, expertise and best practices that have been acquired over time. Employees of organization's require this knowledge to be productive in their responsibilities. Knowledge is broadly classified into two kinds Explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge.

Explicit knowledge is knowledge which is acquired and stored in forms that can easily be transferred from one person to another within an organization (Onyemaechi & Ikpeazu, 2019). For instance, Lecture notes prepared by a Professor for a particular course unit can be transferred to a younger Colleague for use in the course of lecturing. Again, a template designed for research by a group of professors can be used by younger colleagues for application in the course of their research works.

Tacit knowledge on the other hand is knowledge which is informal so to speak. It is usually acquired through experience and often difficult to express and share. Tacit knowledge is gained through personal insights, intuition and personal skills. It is the knowledge that gives an employee edge over others. Employee most often don't feel comfortable sharing this knowledge for the fear of the unknown. However, this knowledge can be shared or transferred through personal relationships among colleagues. This is similar to coaching. The sustainability of the distinctive core competence of an organization is function of knowledge transfer. The implies that organizations that intend to retain competitive advantage must continually create an enabling environment for knowledge transfer. The university System which thrives on knowledge must therefore encourage mentorship.

3.3 Career Support

Career support centers around the issues of progression and development both in the workplace and personal Life. Greenhaus et al (2018) opines that career can best be described as " the pattern of work-related experiences that span the course of One's life. The career path for academics in the University system is clear cut - The entry level for first degree holders is Graduate Assistant, those that come in with a second degree are placed as Assistant Lecturers or Lecturer II based on experience and publications while those with doctoral degrees without experience are placed at Lecturer II. Lecturers are expected to perform three (3) basic duties viz; Teaching, research and Community Service and these forms the basis for assessment in career progression. Senior colleagues therefore, mentor younger ones (mentees) to be actively involved in research so as to turn-in high quality publications in reputable Journals, attend and participant in conferences as well as apply for grants.

The management of Nigerian universities need to come to terms with the fact that career support for their workforce is Sacrosanct. This helps to attract and retain a motivated work force that guarantees results. Good enough TET Fund has been doing very well in terms of

sponsorship of research in the Country. Therefore, mentors of young academics can encourage them to take advantage of the opportunity and develop their careers.

3.4 Corrective Feedback

Feedback on task is often very essential towards the success of the task. It focuses on the process underlying the task and facilitates an effective accomplishment of the task. Corrective feedback thus centers on detecting and correcting errors in the process of performing a task (Ebisinkemefa & Lucky, 2022). The Understanding is that mentees by their nature are novices' in particular task therefore require guidance on how best to deliver on their jobs. The mentor gives corrective feedback not only to identify the defects or how poorly a task is performed but also recommend better ways of doing the Job. This implies that the mentor gives holistic feedback that revolves around personal attributes of the mentee, task-related information, strategies to improve commitment to task and a better understanding of the job. In the academic environment, corrective feedback is essential for entrenching consistent performance levels. Senior academics must therefore coach younger academics on how best to uphold the core values of the academic- system - Excellence, hard work and integrity.

Academic Performance

Performance is generally determined by the extent to which an organization is able to achieve her predetermined goals and objectives. In the academia, employees are expected to perform in the three (3) major areas of teaching, research and community service. Working around these three major areas requires excellence, hard work and integrity. Performance in this regard centers around quality of teaching and learning which dovetails into quality output (graduates) as well as timeliness in turning out these graduates. Furthermore, quantity and quality of research output also determines the level of academic standards upheld by the institution. This is why the promotion of academics is tied to the number and quality of publications in reputable Journals as well as conferences attended. The rating of universities is therefore hinged on the quality of graduands turned-out and the number and quality of research undertaken by individual lecturers in the Institutions. In this paper therefore, academic performance Standard will be measured by work quality, level of output and timeliness of delivery.

3.5 Mentorship and Academic Performance

Academic performance as determined by the standard of academic activities is not an accident. It is the result of deliberate efforts by members of staff. Mentoring is therefore vital in entrenching a consistent level of performance over a period of time. As new members are recruited into an institution, it behooves on the older ones to tutor them on best practices adopted by the Institution overtime that have made them Standout. Several Studies have attempted to establish the possible effect of mentoring on performance. For instance, Ebisinkemefa and Lucky (2022) did a Study on academic mentorship and lecturers' performance of tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State and found that academic mentoring drives lecturers' performance and that improved skills, intelligence and quality of delivery of lessons that demonstrates lecturers' performance follows from academic mentoring. Udom, Okoedion and Okolie (2020) in their study of university of Benin, sought to determine the impact of mentorship on students' academic excellence. The result of the study indicated that there is a positive and significant relationship between mentorship and academic performance.

Furthermore, Wickey and Akpana (2023) investigated the effect of mentoring on employee productivity in organizations. They found that mentoring programs play an important role in employee performance and are enhanced through knowledge transfer and career development. Relatively, in a study of selected small and medium scale enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria, Odunayo (2022) Investigated the effect of mentoring on employee performance. The Study found that through apprenticeship training, the employees are able to improve their productivity; coaching enhances employee commitment and that through employee orientation, employees are able to improve their citizenship behavior in the organization. Haji, Chacha and Gwahula (2022) examined mentoring practices and employee performance in local government authority in Tanzania. The results indicated that mentoring practice such as acceptance, sponsorship, delegation and relationship had positive contribution in the model of employee performance at the same in local government authorities. Again, Li, Jin, Liao, Yin and Zhang (2023) conducted a study on the impact of mentoring relationships on innovation performance of post-90s employees: A dual-path model of cognition and affect. The Study found that the black box of mentoring relationships in the process of influencing the innovative performance of post-90s employees, an area that has received limited research attention.

3.6 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Social Learning theory. The Social Learning theory was propounded by George Homans in 1958 and popularized by Bandura (1997). The major tenet of the theory is that learning could be very challenging if people are to rely strictly on their own efforts. It therefore becomes imperative for younger persons to tap from the knowledge and experience of older persons. The Social exchange theory provides the conceptual basis for understanding the process through which mentoring is initiated and sustained. This theory further argues that ideas are developed and careers more enhanced when one learns from the behaviors of those before him/her. In the academic environment, standards are very high and these standards can only be sustained via mentoring. The idea is that young academics should avail themselves to be mentored in order to enhance their knowledge and experience. This practice will impact in the younger colleagues the requisite norms and values that the system upholds and ultimately improve their performance.

4. Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The study used a survey design because it is best suited to ascertain the extent of the effect of the independent variable (Mentoring) on the dependent variable (sustained academic standard). The population Shall comprise a hundred staff on the professorial cadre and a hundred between the ranks of Graduate Assistant and Assistant Lecturer which totals 200 participants. The Study shall adopt a simple random sampling where all participants will be given an opportunity to participate in the study. Data Shall be collected via a well-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire Shall be shared on the academic staff online common room and the first one hundred copies returned from each of the categories of staff chosen for the study shall be considered. The data collected from the respondents were presented and analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequencies tables and simple percentages. Multiple linear regression was used to determine the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25.

5. Results

Prior to data analysis, a reliability test was conducted using a sample collected from 30 employees of the Benue State University, Makurdi.

Table 1: Reliability Test Result

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Knowledge transfer	0.926	6
Career support	0.904	6
Corrective feedback	0.918	6
Sustained academic standard	0.910	5

Source: Author's Computation from SPSS Output, 2024.

Reliability of the instrument was conducted using test-retest method. A pilot study was conducted on 30 employees of Benue State University, Makurdi. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to assess the internal consistency reliability of each measuring instrument. The results show that the reliability of the factors as measured by Cronbach's alpha, are all above 0.70, which confirms the internal consistency of the items in a variable.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Variable	Mean	Standard Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Knowledge transfer	4.29	.781	1.697	2.879
Career support	4.30	.726	1.935	3.117
Corrective feedback	4.27	.831	1.842	3.648
Sustained academic standard	4.64	.904	1.726	4.129

Source: Authors' Computation from SPSS Output, 2024

Table 2 provides the means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis for the mentoring and sustained academic standard variables. Table 2 shows that JES career support to the organization obtained the highest mean score ($M = 4.30$; $SD = 0.726$), followed by knowledge transfer to the organization ($M = 4.29$; $SD = 0.781$), while the lowest mean score was obtained on the Corrective feedback to the organization sub-scale ($M = 4.27$; $SD = 0.831$). The skewness and kurtosis values for the JES ranged between 1.697 and 1.935 for skewness and 2.879 and 3.648 for kurtosis, thereby not falling within the -1 and +1 normality range recommended for these coefficients. The mean and standard deviation scores for sustained academic standard were high ($M = 4.64$; $SD = 0.904$). The skewness and kurtosis values for sustained academic standard were 1.726 and 4.129, respectively.

Table 3: Regression Model

Variable	Standardized Coefficients		Statistics		
			Collinearity		VIF
	Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance	
Knowledge transfer	.419	5.281	.000	.727	1.375
Career support	.536	7.755	.006	.913	1.095
Corrective feedback	.544	9.635	.000	.783	1.278

R	.979
R Square	.958
Adjusted R Square	.930
Durbin-Watson	1.648
ANOVA F Statistic	270.322
Sig.	.000

Predictors: (Constant), Corrective feedback, career support, Knowledge transfer

Dependent Variable: Sustained academic standard

Source: Author's Computation from SPSS Output, 2024.

The regression model was tested using multicollinearity; variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance (TOL). The VIF for all the parameters was found to be less than 4, suggesting that there was multicollinearity problem, and thus, the difference contributed by each independent variable was significant. All the variables explained a 95.8% variation in sustained academic standard. It illustrates that the independent variables significantly predicted the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.958$). Also, the coefficient of determination was significant as evidenced by an F ratio of 270.322 with a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05 . It was supported by a change of R of 97.9% ($R = .979$), indicating that there is a significant relationship between mentoring dimensions (knowledge transfer, career support, and corrective feedback) and sustained academic standard.

5.1 Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis one states that Mentoring (Knowledge transfer) has no significant effect on sustained academic standard in Benue State University, Makurdi. The result presented in Table 6 revealed that Knowledge transfer have a positive and significant effect on sustained academic standard with a beta value of $(\beta) = 0.419$; $T = 5.281$; p -value = 0.000, which is less than $p = 0.05$. Therefore, the study rejects the null hypothesis (H_01).

The second hypothesis states that Mentoring (Career support) has no significant effect on sustained academic standard in Benue State University, Makurdi. The result indicated that the career support has a positive and significant effect on the work engagement of employees with a beta value of $(\beta) = 0.536$; $T = 7.775$; p -value = 0.006, which is less than $p = 0.05$. The null hypothesis (H_02) was therefore rejected.

The test of hypothesis three (H_03) is indicated that corrective feedback has a positive and significant effect on sustained academic standard in Benue State University, Makurdi with a beta value of $(\beta) = 0.544$; $T = 9.635$; p -value = 0.000, which is less than $p = 0.05$. The null hypothesis which states that mentoring (corrective feedback) has no significant effect on sustained academic standard in Benue State University, Makurdi was thus rejected.

5.2 Findings

Results of the study demonstrated the extent to which mentoring dimensions have positively and significantly affected sustained academic standard in Benue State University, Makurdi. The study indicated a positive and significant effect of knowledge transfer on sustained

academic standard. The result is in agreement with the works of Lee *et al.*, (2014) and Mitchell *et al.*, (2021), who established a significant relationship between Knowledge transfer and work engagement and the performance of employees. Reitz (2014) also reported that employees with a more significant and intensity of connections are less likely to make a turnover decision that may break or rearrange the Knowledge transfer.

The findings of the study further revealed that career support has a positive and significant effect on sustained academic standard. The work of Lee *et al.*, (2014) found a substantial relationship between the career support of employees on the job and their performance. In line with the result, Lee *et al.*, (2014) emphasized the importance of employee corrective feedback in enhancing job performance and work engagement. This is supported by Smitha, Rohini, Kirupa, and Sivakumar (2017), who averred that Corrective feedback discourages employees from leaving the organization.

6. Conclusion

The study explored the effect of mentoring on sustained academic standard in Benue State University, Makurdi. The findings of the study demonstrated a significant relationship between mentoring (Knowledge transfer, career support and corrective feedback) and sustained academic standard. The study concludes that Mentoring constructs positively affect the performance of employees working in Benue State University, Makurdi.

7. Recommendations

The study recommends that the management of Benue State University, Makurdi should provide an environment that encourages mentorship among senior and junior colleagues. Provide opportunities for social interactions and personal development to enhance sustained academic standard. Also, management of Benue State University, Makurdi should provide employees with resources and always encourage them to work collaboratively to achieve positive outcomes.

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