Original Research Article

Impact of Mentoring On Academic Performance among Undergraduate Students in the Department Of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Port Harcourt

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Abstract: This study examined the impact of mentoring on academic performance among undergraduate students in the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Port Harcourt. Four research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Population of the study comprised 581 undergraduate students in the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Port Harcourt out of which 116 representing 20% of the students were proportionately selected for the study. An instrument tagged "Questionnaire on Impact of Mentoring on Academic Performance among Undergraduate Students" (QIMAPUS) with r = 0.73 was used for data collection. Completed and retrieved 116 copies of the questionnaire were analyzed using mean statistics. Results showed among others that mentoring relationships provide undergraduate students the opportunities for fun and relief from daily stresses, serve as corrective therapy for undergraduate students' emotional experiences, help undergraduate students eliminate negative perceptions about issues, help remove stigmas that undergraduate students may possess, and provide undergraduate students with enjoyable experiences. The study, therefore, recommended among others that lecturers and superior officers (mentors) in the universities should encourage students who are willing to share their feelings and self-perceptions to actively engage themselves in mentoring relationships. Lecturers and superior officers (mentors) in the universities must be able to identify students' needs and provide the right support for them.
Keywords: Mentoring, Academic Performance, Undergraduate Students.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, a mentor has been defined as a trusted counselor or guide. Mentors have the ability to profoundly impact those with whom they are able to form emotional bonds. With as many students failing to graduate from university each year in Nigeria, it appears the time has come for lecturers to serve as mentors to our most troubled students. In a recent meta-analysis conducted to assess the impact of mentoring programmes, it was determined that mentoring is an effective intervention strategy in promoting developmental outcomes in the lives of young people (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011).

Mentoring can be summarized as the matching of a youth to a non-parental adult figure that can serve as a role model and provide support for that youth (Anastasia, Skinner, & Mundhenk, 2012). Lerner (2007) asserted the presence of adult mentors in the

community is the most important developmental asset associated with positive youth development. In the United States, approximately 25% of all youth and 50% of minority youth live in single-parent households (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). Tierney *et al.*, (2000) posited that the increase in single-parent families, combined with the breakdown of neighborhood socialization, and a growing need for parents, especially single parents, to work long hours outside the home, has resulted in a rising number of youths isolated from adults. This separation may lead to a reduction in positive contact opportunities between youth and adults, a situation that stimulates the escalating interest and research into mentoring programmes (Anastasia *et al.*, 2012).

Mentoring is a flexible approach to youth development in which youth often identified as being "at-risk" for poor outcomes (low income, living in single-parent homes) are paired with unrelated adult volunteers in the hope that a nurturing and encouraging relationship will cultivate that which serves to alleviate these risk conditions (Liang, Spencer, West, & Rappaport, 2013). Mentoring is being effectively delivered in a variety of settings (e.g., in communities, schools) with youth and has been shown to promote gains in emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes, including among higher-risk youth (Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). The extent of the benefits of mentoring, however, is moderate and remains virtually unaffected over the last decade even as the understanding of the determinants of higher quality mentoring relationships has drastically increased (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; DuBois *et al.*, 2011; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006).

The dynamics through which mentoring relationships can foster positive student development are unlikely to form without a strong, interpersonal connection built upon mutuality, trust, and empathy. A meaningful connection can only occur if the mentee is willing to share his or her feelings and self-perceptions and is actively engaged in the relationship. However, engagement does not happen instantaneously. The successful mentoring of students is most often predicated by a series of small wins that emerge sporadically over time. However, this does not mean that the relationship will be void of mundane moments, which might include boredom, humor, and even frustration. It should be noted that these moments can strengthen the connection during moments of vulnerability or share triumph in moments of accomplishment. To sum it up, at the crux of mentoring, relationship is the bond that forms between the mentee (student) and mentor.

Be that as it may, an array of reasons has been shown to increase a student's risk of dropping out or not performing well in school. This includes high rates of absenteeism, low levels of school engagement, low parental education, work or household responsibilities, problematic or noncompliant behaviour, and attending a school with lower achievement scores. Students who drop out or not performing well in school are unlikely to possess the minimum skills and credentials necessary to function in today's increasingly complex society and technology-dependent workplace. An established sense of belonging comes about as the result of positive relationships and connections a student makes with peers and adults within the school environment.

In recent years, heightened awareness has transpired in fostering the resilience and competence of students. One of the most consistent findings in the literature is that positive supportive relationships with adults are associated with beneficial outcomes for students. Furthermore, relationships between teachers and students early in school have long-term effects on students' academic and behavioral outcomes. Educators must provide non-academic services to fully serve their students. Staff members must wear many hats to build the necessary skills and confidence in students to help them succeed. It is based on the foregoing that this study tends to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. How can mentoring relationships promote the social and emotional well-being of the undergraduate students?
2. How does mentoring influence the cognitive development processes of undergraduate students?
3. What are the contributions of mentoring to undergraduate students' positive identity development?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of this study comprised 581 undergraduate students in the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Port Harcourt. Proportionate sampling technique was used to select 116 respondents from the total population. This formed 20% of the total undergraduate students for 2017/2018 academic session in the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Port Harcourt. A 15-item self-developed research instrument tagged "Questionnaire on Impact of Mentoring on Academic Performance among Undergraduate Students" (QIMAPUS) was used for data collection. The research instrument was divided into Sections A and B. Section 'A' dealt with the demographic data of the respondents, while Section 'B' elicits information on variables that were captured in the research questions generated to guide the study. The questionnaire was designed on a modified four-point Likert rating scale. The numerical rating of responses in the questionnaire was scored thus: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The instrument with a reliability

index of 0.73 went through construct, content and face validation before becoming a working document for data collection. Data collected were analyzed with mean statistics. Criterion mean for taking decision was 2.5 (4+3+2+1 divided by 4 = 2.5). All items whose values are below 2.5 were rejected while those above 2.5 were accepted.

RESULTS
The findings from the field are presented below.

Research Question 1: How can mentoring relationships promote the social and emotional well-being of the undergraduate students?

Table 1: Response analysis on how mentoring relationships promotes the social and emotional well-being of the undergraduate students

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	Total	X	Decision
1.	Mentoring relationships provide undergraduate students the opportunities for fun and relief from daily stresses	62 (248)	45 (135)	4 (8)	5 (5)	116 (396)	3.41	Agree
2.	Mentoring relationships serve as corrective therapy for undergraduate students' emotional experiences	48 (192)	53 (159)	2 (4)	3 (3)	116 (358)	3.08	Agree
3.	Mentoring relationships help undergraduate students eliminate negative perceptions about issues	37 (148)	66 (198)	2 (4)	1 (1)	116 (351)	3.02	Agree
4.	Mentoring relationships help remove stigmas that undergraduate students may possess	80 (320)	28 (84)	6 (12)	2 (2)	116 (418)	3.60	Agree
5.	Mentoring relationships provide undergraduate students with enjoyable experiences	41 (164)	59 (177)	11 (22)	5 (5)	116 (368)	3.17	Agree
Grand Mean							**3.25**	

Table 1 shows that for item 1-5, respondents weighted responses recorded mean scores of 3.41, 3.08, 3.02, 3.60, and 3.17, which are all greater than the criterion mean of 2.5 and imply positive response. Respondent mean scores on all the items on the research question gave a grand mean score of 3.25, which is also greater than the criterion mean of 2.5 and implies that mentoring relationships provide undergraduate students the opportunities for fun and relief from daily stresses, serve as corrective therapy for undergraduate students' emotional experiences, help undergraduate students eliminate negative perceptions about issues, help remove stigmas that undergraduate students may possess, and provide undergraduate students with enjoyable experiences.

Research Question 2: How does mentoring influence the cognitive development processes of undergraduate students?

Table 2: Response analysis on how mentoring influence the cognitive development processes of undergraduate students

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	Total	X	Decision
6.	Mentoring influences the cognitive development processes of undergraduate students by introducing them to new opportunities for learning	51 (204)	45 (135)	12 (24)	8 (8)	116 (371)	3.19	Agree
7.	Mentoring influences the cognitive development processes of undergraduate students through establishment of scholarly challenge	24 (96)	61 (183)	14 (28)	7 (7)	116 (314)	2.70	Agree
8.	Mentoring influences the cognitive development processes of undergraduate students through guidance	76 (304)	39 (117)	1 (2)	- -	116 (423)	3.64	Agree
9.	Mentoring influences the cognitive development processes of undergraduate students through advancement of academic success	30 (120)	56 (168)	9 (18)	11 (11)	116 (317)	2.73	Agree
10.	Mentoring influences the cognitive development processes of undergraduate students by improving their self-esteem	62 (248)	38 (114)	10 (20)	6 (6)	116 (388)	3.34	Agree
Grand Mean							**3.12**	

Table 2 shows that respondents weighted responses on items 6-10 with mean scores of 3.19, 2.70, 3.64, 2.73, and 3.34 respectively are all positive responses because they are all greater than the criterion mean of 2.5. The table also shows that analysis of all the weighted mean gave a grand mean score of 3.12, which is equally greater than the criterion mean of 2.5 and this implies that mentoring influence the cognitive development processes of undergraduate students by introducing them to new opportunities for learning, establishment of scholarly challenge, guidance, advancement of academic success.

Research Question 3: What are the contributions of mentoring to undergraduate students' positive identity development?

Table 3: Response analysis on the contributions of mentoring to undergraduate students' positive identity development

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	Total	X	Decision
11.	Mentoring help undergraduate students to identify their goals and establish a sense of direction	83 (332)	21 (63)	10 (20)	2 (2)	116 (417)	3.59	Agree
12.	Mentoring provide undergraduate students the opportunities for discovering unique talents in them	70 (280)	36 (108)	7 (14)	3 (3)	116 (405)	3.49	Agree
13.	Mentoring increases undergraduate students' social and academic confidence	47 (188)	55 (165)	13 (26)	1 (1)	116 (380)	3.27	Agree
14.	Mentoring rebuilds undergraduate students' pattern of making decisions	21 (84)	88 (264)	5 (10)	2 (2)	116 (360)	3.10	Agree
15.	Mentoring assist undergraduate students to gain valuable insight into the next stage of their university career	35 (140)	59 (177)	18 (36)	4 (4)	116 (357)	3.07	Agree
Grand Mean							3.30	

Table 3 shows that respondents weighted responses on items 11-15 with mean scores of 3.59, 3.49, 3.27, 3.10, and 3.07 respectively are all positive responses because they are all greater than the criterion mean of 2.5. The table also shows that analysis of all the weighted mean scores gave a grand mean score of 3.30, which is equally greater than the criterion mean of 2.5 and implies that mentoring help undergraduate students to identify their goals and establish a sense of direction, provides them opportunities for discovering unique talents in them, increases their social and academic confidence, rebuilds their pattern of making decisions, and assist them to gain valuable insight into the next stage of their university career.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding of this study reveals that mentoring relationships provide undergraduate students the opportunities for fun and relief from daily stresses, serve as corrective therapy for undergraduate students' emotional experiences, help undergraduate students eliminate negative perceptions about issues, help remove stigmas that undergraduate students may possess, and provide undergraduate students with enjoyable experiences. This finding is in line with the study by Rhodes (2005) which suggests that the social and recreational interactions within the mentoring relationship may provide the youth with enjoyable experiences, especially those who face disadvantaged and challenging circumstances. He further says that in certain situations, mentors may function as a secondary attachment figure, providing a solid foundation from which youth can make key social and cognitive gains. The finding also confirms DuBois and Karcher (2005) who affirmed that mentoring relationships may alleviate the obstacles in everyday interactions for youth by promoting improved communication and emotional regulation.

The finding also shows that mentoring influences the cognitive development processes of undergraduate students by introducing them to new opportunities for learning, establishment of scholarly challenges, guidance, advancement of academic success, and improving their self-esteem. The finding, therefore, corroborates the study by Rhodes (2002) that mentoring relationships may influence the cognitive development processes of youth through several mechanisms, including being introduced to new opportunities for learning, establishment of scholarly challenge and guidance, and advancement of academic success. This viewpoint is further supported by developmental theorists as they suggest that social interactions are a critical factor in expediting these cognitive changes (DuBois & Karcher, 2005). The finding further states that mentors may give mentee motivation to broaden their intellectual capability by assisting them in extending their thoughts. In addition to the scaffolding provided by the mentor, the relational qualities of the mentoring relationship may also contribute to the youth's cognitive abilities (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Research from the educational literature accentuates the social nature of learning, illustrating that positive perceptions of teacher-student relationships are directly related to increases in motivation academic proficiency and achievement, school value, level of engagement, and behavioral adjustment (Reddy, Rhodes, & Mulhall, 2003). Therefore, it is plausible that a mentor in a relationship built upon trust could authenticate and support the youth's existing intellectual interests or inspire curiosity and influence learning in new areas.

On a final note, the finding reveals that mentoring help undergraduate students to identify their goals and establish a sense of direction, provides them opportunities for discovering unique talents in them, increases their social and academic confidence, rebuilds their pattern of making decisions, and assists them to gain valuable insight into the next stage of their university career. According to Grossman and Rhodes (2002), youth who were involved in mentoring relationships that exceeded a year or longer reported progress in academic, psychosocial, and behavioural outcomes; whereas those students whose mentoring

relationships failed to last a year obtained fewer positive effects. Skiba and Wu (2004) supported this stance by asserting that commitment to the relationship may be the most critical component of effective mentoring. In addition, DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) suggested that mentors with educational backgrounds may have an advantage in promoting outcomes such as college attendance and decreasing the risk of drug use. Furthermore, social support from teachers and school faculty has been directly related to increased levels of academic achievement (Leidenfrost, Strassnig, Schutz, Carbon, & Schabmann, 2014).

CONCLUSION

Mentoring is an eminently practiced relationship within institutions and organizations. There is however no evidence of a formal structure in which the process is undertaken. This leaves many institutions and organizations with no clear-cut guidelines on how mentoring should be undertaken. However, indicators of mentoring support include provision of resources and financial aid, mobilizing of students, helping students realize themselves, initiation of student-lecturer relations in the academia, provision of supervision roles, establishing goals for mentorship, having meeting with students to ensure the goals are met and evaluation of mentorship. The results of mentorship include harmonious relationships, better behaviour, improved academics and enhancing quick settling among students. Mentoring was found to be important components in education. Mentorship in the academia were found to help students formulate solutions to their problems, identify caused of their problems, and facilitate discussion between students and lecturers. Such important virtues created through mentorship could therefore have facilitated enhancement of academic performance among students. Other results of mentorship included studying together, sharing academic/family challenges and advising each other. It can therefore be concluded that mentorship involved not only sharing academic issues but also personal issues that involved family matters. Mentorship elicited strong relationship with academic performance. Therefore, evidence from majority of students respondents indicates that mentorship will help them improve their academic performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion from this study, it is recommended that:

1. Lecturers and superior officers (mentors) in the universities should encourage students who are willing to share their feelings and self-perceptions to actively engage themselves in mentoring relationship.
2. Lecturers and superior officers (mentors) in the universities must be able to identify student's needs and provide the right support for them.
3. Mentors must always be ready to introduce the students to new opportunities for learning as

these will help improve their cognitive skills and reasoning capacity.
4. Universities should start offering support programmes, especially mentoring programmes focusing on supporting first-year students and assisting them during the transition from school to the university.

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