

**MENTORING: A NEW PARADIGM FOR IMPROVING AND SUSTAINING
THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF BUSINESS EDUCATION**

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Abstract

This paper has among other things examined mentoring as a new paradigm for improving and sustaining the teaching and learning of Business Education. The paper examined the concept and types of mentoring. The types of mentoring x-rayed in this work include the face-to-face, one to one, group, peer, telephone and e-mentoring. The benefits of mentoring to the mentor, mentee and the organization, as well as the role of mentoring in improving and sustaining the teaching and learning of business education were also examined. The paper also examined the challenges encountered in the course of mentoring. Based on the findings, conclusion was made. Finally, the paper recommended among other things that the goals and objectives behind any mentoring programme should be explicitly stated in order to ensure proper accomplishment and that older members of Business Education should be awake to their responsibility in ensuring that younger employees/educators are well trained and exposed to the nitty-gritty in the profession.

Keywords: Mentoring, Relationship, Business Education, Lecturing, Teaching and Learning.

Introduction

Teaching is the main academic activity and primary responsibility which academic staff of university need to perform in order to produce candidates who will be worthy in character and sound judgment in the society. This task demands university academic staff to be innovative, creative, market driven and thoughtful in performing their duties. In order to guarantee institutional effectiveness, highly qualified and competent teachers or lecturers are expected to be employed (Abiodun-Oyebanji & Oyediji, 2022).

Teacher quality is a key determinant of student learning outcomes, and teachers will play key roles in closing the gap between poor and good quality education, by maximizing the benefits of learning in every classroom for every student. (Muraya & Wairimu, 2020). The rapidly changing landscape of higher education in Africa has led to the unimaginable apathy. That is to say that senior academia and the management staff of

universities should embark on the process of meaningful professional initiation of new entrants into the culture of teaching, research, scholarly and publishing. The emotional preparedness desired by the newly recruited lecturers in order to find themselves suitable in the academic environment requires adequate guidance (mentor) with regard to what to do, how to do it and when to do it.

Mentoring is very complex. It is interpreted in different ways by different people and intentions of mentoring in particular context are implicit and explicit. Mentoring provides the mentee with an opportunity to think about career options and progress constructively. In some organizations, mentoring is used to ensure that long-tenured employees nearing retirement pass on the experience-based knowledge they have acquired over the course of their careers to the mid-career employees who will eventually take over from them (Iyoha & Igbinedion, 2022). The entire process of skills attraction and retention of the highly skilled business educators that will help to chart the direction of realizing this noble objective is contingent on knowledge management via mentoring in Nigerian universities. Again, “when mentoring focuses on the transfer of knowledge, it becomes a channel to give employees the hard skills they need to succeed in their current roles and prepare them to assume more advanced responsibilities over time.

Klinge (2015) explained that possession of skill is to demonstrate the habit of acting, thinking or behaving in a specific activity, which has become so natural to the individual through repetition or practice such that it becomes automatic. Central in the definition is the idea that skill could be regarded as ability, (an outcome of learning) to practice an act to the point of perfection. Skill development is basic to all forms of education, knowledge, learning and professional training. The primary goal of the business education programme is to provide individuals with the necessary skills, abilities, insight, and competencies to achieve a specified goal in the competitive business world, allowing them to become self-sufficient and self-reliant (Iyoha & Igbinedion, 2022).

Business education remains an integral aspect of education which primarily aims at developing the competencies (knowledge, attitude and skill) of the learners or practitioners towards optimum service delivery. Supporting this assertion, Edokpolor and Egabri (2017) opine that the goals of Business Education incorporate preparing students for specific career in office occupations; equipping students with the requisite skills for job creation and entrepreneurship; and exposing students with knowledge about business, including a good blend of computer technology, which incorporates Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Business education involves the development of appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes and understanding required to fit into chosen occupation or occupations. It therefore implies that business education has a major role to play in properly equipping the learners with the needed business and education competencies which are invaluable in ensuring greater productivity of Business educators/teachers. For business educators to fully function very well both in instructional delivery and in research, there is need for some level of exposure or guidance by a more experienced or knowledgeable business educator who will assume the role of a mentor. This will enable the newly employed business educators tap into the intelligence, skills and expertise of senior and experienced staff in order to create a greater knowledge base.

Concept of Mentoring

Mentoring is a relationship that is established between a more senior individual (mentor) and a lesser skilled or experienced individual (protégé), primarily using communications that is intended to develop and grow the skills, knowledge, confidence, and cultural understanding of the protégé to help him or her succeed, whilst also assisting in the development of the mentor (Single & Muller in Ibeme, 2020). According to Ekechukwu and Horsfall in Iyoha and Igbinedion (2022), mentoring is the process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career or professional development. Mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less experience (the mentee).

Thus, mentoring business educators in universities can loosely be described as the responsibility or task of an experienced business educator in guiding another member of staff (business educator) who is less experienced by way of sharing his expertise, knowledge and wisdom as social capitals and invaluable assets (Okute & Olom, 2021). Mentoring is a helpful learning bond that is created between a caring individual who shares information, skills and wisdom with another individual who is new in the workplace. Learning from a mentor could be a brilliant strategy for improving skills of students especially in Business Education. This is because mentor takes the responsibility to train and support young people to become skilful just like the mentor himself. The mentor goes extra length to help the students avoid initial mistakes that has been made and corrected by the mentor.

Mentoring can also be seen as a two-way process of dialoguing and planning, helping some people acquire expected competency and skills for a job or employment that can sustain and stabilize their economic level (Stewart et al, 2021). Within mentoring relationships, mentees develop and learn through conversations with more experienced mentors who share knowledge and skills that can be incorporated into their thinking and practice. Enwere and Nwaorgu (2018) saw mentoring as a professional activity, a trusted relationship, a meaningful commitment. Mentoring is a system of semi-structured guidance whereby one person shares their knowledge, skills and experience to assist others to progress in their own lives and careers. Mentors need to be readily accessible and prepared to offer help as the need arises within agreed bounds.

In other words, mentoring is a professional relationship in which an experienced person (the mentor) assists another (the mentee) in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance the less experienced person's professional and personal growth. The act of mentoring has become popular, despite the difficulty to clearly define due to the subjective nature of the personal relationships of those involved in mentoring. It is a partnership between two people (mentor and mentee) normally working in a similar field or sharing similar experiences. Furthermore, mentoring is a relevant concept to be used in the sense that it is directed towards facilitation of learning skills and competencies, career and behaviour related functions in the individual personal development (Njoku & Nwachukwu, 2017).

Although there is no single definition of mentoring, however, it has been described as a powerful developmental and empowerment tool. There is a shared understanding that mentoring is a process in which a person who is experienced, wise, and

trusted guides an inexperienced individual. Mentoring is quite different from giving advice, or sharing of personal experience in a particular area or situation. It is about motivating and empowering the other people to identify their own issues and goals, and helping them to find ways of resolving or reaching them, not by doing it for them, or expecting them to do it in a particular way, but by understanding and respecting different ways of working.

A mentor is required to bring about the accomplishment of the mentoring process. Mentors serve as guides who help mentees to find the right direction and who can help them to develop solutions to career issues. Mentors rely upon having had similar experiences to gain an empathy with the mentee and an understanding of their issues. A mentor is therefore someone who helps another person through an important transition such as coping with a new situation like a new job or a major change in personal circumstances or in career development or personal growth.

History of Mentoring

Mentoring originated from Homer's epic poem titled 'The Odyssey'. In the poem, Odysseus, King of Ithaca went to fight in the Trojan War and entrusted the care of his kingdom to Mentor, who served as the teacher of Odysseus' son, Telemachus (Ahmad, 2019). It should be noted that the role of mentors is recognized across all areas of society. From the responsibility accepted by Mentor for the son of Odysseus in Greek mythology, through the pre-industrial guilds and later apprenticeships in industrial trades, the idea of a more experienced individual assisting the transmission of knowledge and skills has become culturally embedded. The corporate business world has developed systems of mentoring which are integral to the induction and supported development of new company employees. In recent years such practices have spread to the wider community.

It should be noted that mentoring provides developmental opportunities for mentors as well as great personal satisfaction. Being a mentor can improve one's leadership skills and enable him/her to learn from alternative approaches and different ways of thinking. It can be challenging, inspiring and enlightening with an end product of touching lives today for tomorrow's posterity. Mentoring allows the mentee to explore new ideas in confidence. It is a chance to look more closely at yourself, your issues, opportunities and what you want in life. Mentoring is about becoming more self-aware, taking responsibility for your life and directing your life in the direction you decide, rather than leaving it to chance. Mentoring is used in many settings. It is most common in business, politics and used extensively in educational settings, especially with "at risk" students. It is the basic principle behind the creation of succession lines and career path progression in the academia and businesses.

Qualities of an Ideal Mentor

Mentoring is a complex and dynamic relational and developmental undertaking that may be assumed voluntarily or assigned. Whether mentoring occurs formally or informally, Klinge (2015) identifies an array of attributes that must be possessed by a mentor which include the following:

1. **Willingness to share skills, knowledge, and expertise:** A good mentor is willing to teach what he/she knows and accept the mentee where they currently are in their professional development. Good mentors can remember what it was like just starting out in the field. The mentor does not take the mentoring relationship lightly and understands that good mentoring requires time and commitment and is willing to continually share information and their ongoing support with the mentee.
2. **Demonstrates a positive attitude and acts as a positive role model:** A good mentor exhibits the personal attributes it takes to be successful in the field. By showing the mentee what it takes to be productive and successful, they are demonstrating the specific behaviors and actions required to succeed in the field.
3. **Takes a personal interest in the mentoring relationship:** Good mentors do not take their responsibility as a mentor lightly. They feel invested in the success of the mentee. Usually this requires someone who is knowledgeable, compassionate, and possesses the attributes of a good teacher or trainer. Excellent communication skills are also required. A good mentor is committed to helping their mentees find success and gratification in their chosen profession. Overall good mentoring requires empowering the mentee to develop their own strengths, beliefs, and personal attributes.
4. **Exhibits enthusiasm in the field:** A mentor who does not exhibit enthusiasm about his/her job will ultimately not make a good mentor. Enthusiasm is catching and new employees want to feel as if their job has meaning and the potential to create a good life.
5. **Values ongoing learning and growth in the field:** Mentors are in a position to illustrate how the field is growing and changing and that even after many years there are still new things to learn. Anyone that feels stagnant in their current position will not make a good mentor. When starting out in a new career, people want to feel that the time and energy they spend learning will be rewarded and will ultimately provide them with career satisfaction. Good mentors are committed and are open to experimenting and learning practices that are new to the field. They continually read professional journals and may even write articles on subjects where they have developed some expertise. They are excited to share their knowledge with new people entering the field and take their role seriously in teaching their knowledge to others. They may choose to teach or attend classes to further develop their knowledge and skills. They enjoy taking workshops and attending professional conferences provided through their membership in professional associations.
6. **Provides guidance and constructive feedback:** One of the key responsibilities of a good mentor is to provide guidance and constructive feedback to their mentee. This is where the mentee will most likely grow the most by identifying their current strengths and weaknesses and learning how to use these to make themselves successful in the field. A good mentor possesses excellent communication skills and is able to adjust their communication to the personality style of the mentee. A good mentor will also provide the mentee with challenges that will foster professional development and a feeling of accomplishment in learning the field.

7. **Respected by colleagues and employees in all levels of the organization:** Ideally mentees look up to their mentors and can see themselves filling the mentor's role in the future. Mentees want to follow someone who is well respected by colleagues and co-workers and whose contribution in the field is appreciated.
8. **Sets and meets ongoing personal and professional goals:** A good mentor continually sets a good example by showing how his/her personal habits are reflected by personal and professional goals and overall personal success.
9. **Values the opinions and initiatives of others:** A mentor who values others is also someone who works well in a team environment and is willing to share his/her success. A good mentor appreciates the ongoing effort of the mentee and empowers him/her through positive feedback and reinforcement.
10. **Motivates others by setting a good example:** A good mentor uses certain inherent or acquired qualities to ensure that the mentee gains confidence and independence as a result of mentoring and is eventually able to go forward independently.

Types of Mentoring

Dudman et al, in Oguejiofor and Umeh (2017) identified four types of mentoring relationships to include the following:

1. **Face-to-face, One –to-one mentoring.** The majority of mentoring is done face-to-face and usually on one to one basis. This allows the mentor to focus 100% on the challenges and issues of the individual mentee. The advantage of the individual mentoring is that the mentor can gather enormous information from both verbal and non-verbal communication. This is most suitable for new entrants into business.
2. **Face-to-face group mentoring (peer mentoring).** This type is becoming more popular in enterprise mentoring and it is often delivered as action learning sets. In this format, a small group of between six and eight business owners come together to discuss their challenges and issues. The group acts as a sounding board, taking on the role of peer mentors to help its individual members examine their issues from different perspectives. The advantages of this type of mentoring are that the group of peers can provide a number of different experiences and view points to help and support its members.
3. **Telephone mentoring.** Telephone mentoring is usually part of a blended mentoring approach used in tandem with face-to-face mentoring. It is provided on a one-to-one basis, and has the advantage of being focused on the mentee's specific issues. This method is also extremely flexible.
4. **E-mentoring.** Like telephone mentoring, e-mentoring is often part of a blended mentoring approach but it can also be used on its own. It is provided on a one-to-one basis and has the advantage of being able to focus on specific issues. The mentee can also provide a lot more written information than with other types of mentoring, which may allow the mentor more time to assimilate the information before deciding on potential options for a course of action. The above type of mentoring could be selected by a mentor or could be arranged depending on the need.

Benefits of Mentoring

The benefits of mentoring to the mentor, the mentee and the organization are highlighted below according to Enwere and Nwaorgu (2018).

To the mentor

- i. Improves awareness of own learning gaps
- ii. Develops ability to give and take criticism
- iii. Develops up-to-date organisational and professional knowledge
- iv. Offers networking opportunities
- v. Improves leadership, organisational and communication skills
- vi. Develops ability to challenge, stimulate and reflect
- vii. Raises profile within organisation
- viii. Increases job satisfaction
- ix. Offers opportunity to pass on knowledge, experience
- x. Provides stimulation
- xi. May offer career advancement opportunities

To the mentee

- i. Develops learning, analytical and reflective skills
- ii. Develops organisational and professional knowledge
- iii. Develops political awareness
- iv. Develops own practice
- v. Develops or reinforces self-confidence and willingness to take risks
- vi. Develops ability to accept criticism
- vii. Supports through transition
- viii. May accelerate professional development
- ix. Develops autonomy and independence
- x. Increases maturity
- xi. Broadens horizons
- xii. Increases job satisfaction
- xiii. Reduces reality shock
- xiv. Offers opportunities for effective role modelling
- xv. Encourages on-going learning and developing and identifying learning opportunities in the working situation
- xvi. Facilitates peer relationships
- xvii. Offers individualised one-to-one teaching and opportunities for experimental learning
- xviii. Offers help with problem solving

To the organization:

- i. Widening of skills base and competencies in line with the organisation's strategic goals
- ii. Increased staff morale and job satisfaction
- iii. Reduction in the service/education gap
- iv. Alternative to external training, more cost effective personal development programme
- v. Develops habits of trust and confidentiality
- vi. Gives senior management a more informed view of the organisation's talent
- vii. Use of succession planning
- viii. Helps achieve mission/vision
- ix. Develops a mature management population

- x. Improved quality of service through increased competence and confidence of supported practitioners
- xi. Improves teamwork and co-operation

Roles of Mentoring in Improving and Sustaining the Teaching and Learning of Business Education

There is no doubt that mentoring plays obvious roles in enhancing the productivity of employers and business education lecturers in particular. Some of the roles of mentoring in improving and sustaining the teaching and learning of business education are examined below according to Anyanwu and Abe (2023).

Mentoring guides novice business educators on the appropriate methods of preparing lecture notes and assists them in gathering information about best practices, observe the new teachers' classes and provide feedback: The beginning business educators reflect on these practices and apply what they have learned in their future classes. Mentoring plays crucial role in ensuring the rapid blending of beginning business educators into the teaching profession and how to use instructional materials as well as how to engage the learners actively in instructional delivery.

Mentoring also helps to identify and correct gaps in generic skills and knowledge: Since the core skills possessed by business educators are low, there will be a need for mentoring to take care of these deficiencies. This can be achieved by assigning the less experienced business educators to more experienced business educators who will from time to time expose the less experienced business educators to the skills in the discipline.

Mentoring equally plays a major role in updating the competencies (that is, knowledge, attitude and skills) of beginning or subordinate business educators. This assertion is in consonance with Humberd and Rouse (2016) who observed that mentoring leads to increased spirits of the mentored lecturers leading to job satisfaction, increased competency for the mentored lecturers, and increased commitment from the mentored lecturers as perceived benefits of mentoring beginning business education lecturers.

Mentoring equally increases the confidence of the mentee business educator: Novice business educators who experience the positive mentoring period by having all necessary elements in place will be able to start their career with increased confidence, commitment and enthusiasm. It can help beginning teachers to adapt to the school climate and culture. Mentoring also provide support and advice to beginning teachers with proper training and encouragement, beginning teachers will greatly benefit from the experience and advice mentoring has to offer.

Mentoring helps in creating smooth transition from school to work: Business education undergraduates are made to compulsorily participate in Teaching Practice (TP) exercise before graduation and those in the Polytechnics (Office Technology and Management) students are equally exposed to Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES). During the period of Teaching Practice (TP), the student teacher is attached to a school-based professional teacher who will assume the role of a mentor and supervise and guide, counsel and direct the activities of the student teacher. Upon completion of this exercise/graduation, the teacher/office manager will be able to enter into the world of work.

Mentoring and coaching in education often have the dual aims of personal support and professional learning because the protégés are being helped to assimilate into new roles or responsibilities as well as to develop employment-related skills (Kutsyuruba & Godden, 2019).

Challenges of Mentoring

The following are the common challenges to mentoring relationships in Nigeria according to Odili and Ona (2017).

- i. Time restraints: This is the flipside of the above challenge. In this case, either the mentor or mentee wants to meet more frequently than the program requires. This is most likely to happen at the beginning of the relationship. Maintaining such an aggressive meeting schedule usually proves impossible over time.
- ii. Unrealistic expectations of mentors: Unrealistic expectations and assumptions can wreak havoc on a mentoring relationship. Overloading the mentee with information and expecting the mentee to become the mentor's clone are two examples of unrealistic expectations that can have a negative impact on the relationship. Conversely, the mentee may expect the mentor to provide more support and direction than is reasonable under the circumstances.
- iii. Time differentials, availability/scheduling: All mentoring pairs face this challenge. Both mentors and mentees have commitments and responsibilities, both of which serve as convenient excuses for postponing a mentoring meeting. However, mentors and mentees must also remember their commitment to the program and to each other. Failing to meet as scheduled or frequent postponements will quickly erode the foundation of your relationship
- iv. Ineffective mentoring pairs: A pair may not work out for a variety of reasons. It could be due to lack of commitment on the part of one of the parties or learning styles that do not match or a change in job assignments.
- v. Over-Dependence: A potential challenge in a mentoring relationship is the mentee becoming overly dependent on their mentor. Messaging for every question they have, and taking up time beyond the agreed session or time commitment. This can lead to disgruntled mentors and may prevent the mentoring program's success.
- vi. Poor Communication: Another common mentoring challenge is poor communication. This could be about expectations, goals, intentions, issues, or simply a busy schedule. Clear communication helps to keep the mentoring relationship flowing, and creates a stronger bond between mentor and mentee. It is hard to develop a proper mentoring relationship when communication is lacking.
- vii. Personality boundaries: Personality issues and boundaries between the mentor and the mentee during mentoring processes is another big challenge in the course of mentoring. This usually occurs when the mentee feels more important than the mentor.

- viii. Competition and conflicting roles: Mentor's own sense of security may be threatened by an ambitious mentee who might compete for future positions after transferring all his skills and knowledge to the mentee.

Conclusion

Examining the concept of mentoring as a paradigm for improving and sustaining the teaching of business education provides greater understanding of its importance in today's academic relevance. Mentoring is an invaluable tool for the future of business education and should be highly regarded as a way to promote learning; a mechanism critical to the future of the profession. Mentoring must be recognized and supported by management of tertiary institutions and heads of departments of business education and other related programmes as a critical succession planning strategy to nurture and groom new business education lecturers.

As observed from the discussion, the efficacy of mentoring in ensuring the improvement and sustenance of the teaching of business education lies on the quality of the mentor and the process of mentoring as anything short of this will not give the expected result. The mentor must be an example of what he encourages others to be. The institution has a role to play in terms of providing enabling environment for both the mentor and his mentee.

The improvement and sustenance of business education programme is dependent on the business education teachers. As such, the recruitment of business educators in any tertiary institution should be guided by the seemingly overwhelming expectation and responsibilities of the programme. Business education as a programme of study needs to continue to ensure that the profession successfully rises to meet the challenges and needs of the contemporary world. Business education needs to commit to and embrace the concept of mentoring to provide new professionals with supportive environments, in which they can grow and flourish.

Recommendations

Based on the detailed examination of this topic, the following recommendations were made:

1. The goals and objectives behind any mentoring programme should be explicitly stated in order to ensure proper accomplishment.
2. Older members of the profession should be awake to their responsibility in ensuring that younger employees/educators are well trained and exposed to the nitty-gritty in the profession.
3. All stakeholders should strive to be computer literate as this will afford them the opportunity to actually benefit from a mentoring programme either as a mentor or as a mentee.
4. There should be regular seminars, workshops and conferences organized by the tertiary institutions in order for less experienced business educators to benefit from the wealth of knowledge and experiences of older/experienced business educators.
5. Business Educations Departments should organize compulsory induction training for their newly employed staff/educators as this will go a long way in boosting their productivity.
6. Mentoring should be recognized and supported by management of tertiary institutions and heads of departments of Business Education and other related programmes

as a critical succession planning strategy to nurture and groom new business education lecturers.

7. The management of different academic institutions should ensure that newly appointed lecturers are fully aware of the benefits of institutional mentoring as the exercise will be futile if the new lecturers refuse mentorship.

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