**Challenges of Mentoring in the 21st Century Amongst Staff and Students of Covenant University and University of Uyo**

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**Abstract**

*Those who sit on the shoulders of giants are apt to see farther that the giants. Such are likely to get more done at a faster speed with little stress. These profound statements succinctly capture the significance of Mentoring. Mentors are giants [established Talents] in their respective fields of endeavour. Mentees are potential Talents that need grooming, coaching, facilitation, motivation, encouragement, guidance to actualize their latent potentials. Mentoring eliminates wasted efforts and resources often experienced in the process of –re-inventing the wheel’. Mentoring is a powerful tool for expediting individual and national development. However, despite the potency of Mentoring, it has been realised over the years that in practice, Mentoring is easier said than done. Mentoring seems to be beclouded with a number of challenges; these are challenges that tend to erode its expected gains. One commonly reported challenge is that of Mentor’s availability. Observations in time past tend to reveal quite more. If left unattended, these challenges are apt to cripple the effectiveness of Mentoring. This, in turn, is apt to eventually affect national development. Using the survey design [questionnaire and interview precisely] this study ventured to ascertain the range of challenges in Mentoring relationships and proffer relevant recommendations for optimizing the gains of Mentoring*.

**Key words**: Mentoring, Mentor, Mentee, Talents, Giants, Development

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**Introduction**

According the American Psychological Association (2006), ‘a Mentoris an individual with expertise who can help develop the career of a mentee. A Mentor has two primary functions for the mentee. The career related function establishes the mentor as a coach who provides advice to enhance the mentee’s professional performance and development. The psychosocial function establishes the mentor as a role model and support system for the mentee. Both functions provide explicit and implicit lessons related to professional development as well as general work–life balance’.

Johnson and Huwe (2003)and Wikipedia (2014) posited that mentorship is a personal developmental relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. However, true mentoring is more than just answering occasional questions or providing ad hoc help. It is about an ongoing relationship of learning, dialogue, and challenge. The person in receipt of mentorship may be referred to as a *protégé* (male), a *protégée* (female), an *apprentice* or, in recent years, a *mentee***.**

For centuries and even to date, the predominant informal teaching, training and human development technique used has been *mentoring*. Daughters observe their mothers in the kitchen and in the course of dispensing various household chores while sons observer their fathers work in the farm or related occupations. Often, after a period of observation, parents allow their children to practically demonstrate what has been learnt in the course of observation. During such trial session, parents verbally, and occasional practically, offers corrections in gentle and loving manners. This continues until the child is perceived to have ‘mastered’ the skill to a level of operating independently. There were often no formal teaching or assessments. The whole exercise was often more like play scenarios. These seemingly ‘unserious’ teaching and learning exercises, which in reality were actually mentoring, proved quite effective in raising new breadwinners for the families. The emphases here are on *informal* and *practical*. There are great lessons to be learnt in these traditional mentoring approaches.

It appears life is designed to thrive on the wings of mentoring. Many great leaders are produced on the platform of Mentoring. Consequently, when mentoring is not properly done, for whatever reason, then individual, community and national catastrophe is imminent. This is no exaggeration.

**Statement of Problem**

The core problem that prompted this study is perceived dwindling level of quality mentoring in the African setting due largely to economic challenges, cultural diffusion and information explosion. Consequently, most Mentors tend to be too busy to offer their Mentees quality time for personal development. At other times, some other factors tend to creep in to negatively affect the Mentor-Mentee relationship, with the result that leadership succession is gradually being threatened. It is a problem that threatens the fabric of survival of families and nations. It is the pertinence of this problem that prompted this study.

**Statement of Objective**

The salient objectives of this study are to:

* find out if the proportion of people who ever had a Mentor.
* find out people’s understanding cum knowledge of the concept of Mentoring.
* ascertain the gender disparity of Mentors.
* find out the proportion of people still in active mentoring relationship.
* find out those who are still making effort to find Mentors.
* ascertain the range of challenges that are currently threatening mentoring relationship.

**Research Questions**

* What is the percentage of people who ever had a Mentor?
* How do people understanding the concept of Mentoring?
* What is the gender disparity amongst Mentors? Are there more female than male Mentors?
* What percentage of people still in active mentoring relationship?
* What percentage of people are still making effort to find Mentors?
* What are the range of challenges currently threatening mentoring relationship in Nigeria?

**Methodology**

The survey design was adopted for this study. The population for this study were staff and students of Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State and University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State , Nigeria. The sample were randomly selected. 30 persons [combination of staff and students] participated in the study. Data collection was made via observation, interview and use of questionnaire. Data was analysed qualitatively and with simple descriptive statistics – frequency count, percentage and charts.

**Results & Discussion**

The chart in Fig. 1 showed that, out of the thirty [30] respondents for this study, 90% [27] affirmed they have had a Mentor. This is quite significant for this study, considering the topic and central objective. Only those who have had an experience with a Mentor will be useful for this study. Furthermore, that 90% of the sample saw the need to have a Mentor was a good sign for the nation’s development.

A number of staff and students were not having Mentors. Probed further, one of the respondents, a final year student, confidently repeated, ‘*I don’t need a Mentor*’. When asked to state the reason for such a stand, he said, ‘I don’t have the time’; Another student said she does not have a Mentor because, ‘*too many times, I have seen people who are held in high esteem or regarded as Mentor ‘material’ contradict who they show people to be, when others are not watching*’. The same female student went further to write, ‘*Mentoring is basically about showing someone else the way. I don’t trust anyone to show me the way without making mistakes’*; ‘*individuals are different. I could admire what someone else has achieved or is achieving but his/her personal methods may not work for me’*. Finally she wrote, ‘*I want to be my own Mentor’*.

From the result in Fig. 2, 50% felt Mentoring predominantly has to do with guidance; 20% felt it is more of tutoring and coaching; 16.67% felt it is teaching and counselling while 10% perceived it as role modelling. From submissions in literatures, it is apparent virtually all the respondents had a fairly good understanding of the concept of mentoring.

Out of the 30 persons who participated in this study, 66.67% [20] had Male Mentors while 40% [12] had female mentors. The implication of this is that it appears more Males tend to be perceived as having Mentor quality than female, perhaps within the scope of this study. This is worth further study for confirmation.

Fig. 4 shows those who are still in active mentoring relationship. Again this is significant for this study. Those who are in active mentoring relationship are apt to share more valid experiences in terms of challenges experienced in relating with their Mentors. For this, majority of the respondents [56.67%] reported they were in active mentoring relationship. This further suggest that quite a significant proportion of people still treasure the mentoring relationship. This is a good sign for national development prospects.

Figure 5 shows that a higher percentage of the sample were still making effort to get Mentor, while 33.33% or 1/3 of the sample had given up. While it is a good sign that a higher percentage were still making effort to get a Mentor, it is clearly a dangerous trend that one third of the sample, which likely represents the larger population of Literates in Nigeria, are becoming despondent on the need to have a Mentor. This is not unlikely to have a link with the challenges they have experienced in mentoring relationship in time past, considering 90% of the same sample previously indicated that had had been in a mentoring relationship.

**Table 1: Challenges Experienced in Mentoring Relationship**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Not Available; Travelling** | **Not available; Difficult to see even when around** | **Difficulty in observing my Mentor at close range** | **Does not deeply care about my development** | **Treats me like a slave** | **Don’t know how to relate with my Mentor** | **Hardly respond to my mail** | **My Mentor's gender was the challenge** |
| YES | 26.67 | 20.00 | 16.67 | 16.67 | 3.33 | 20.00 | 23.33 | 6.67 |
| NO | 20.00 | 13.33 | 13.33 | 10.00 | 30.00 | 16.67 | 13.33 | 23.33 |

The most prevalent challenge experienced in the mentoring relationship that was reported in this study was non-availability of Mentors due to travels [26.67%], followed by refusal to respond to Mentees mail [23.33%], non-availability even when around, because it was often difficult to see the Mentor [20%] and not knowing how to relate or connect with the Mentor [20%]. A tangible percentage further reported that they found it difficult to observe their Mentors at close range [16.67%] while some felt the Mentors do no really care about their development [16.67%]. These are quite interesting findings which have been in the domain of speculation for quite some time now. This study, therefore, is partly lending support to the speculation that though the mentoring relationship is quite significant to personal and national development, it appears to be entangled with challenges that may end up crippling the indispensible relationship.

**Recommendations & Conclusion**

Based on the significance of mentoring, It is strongly recommended that more enlightenment campaigns and sensitization seminars be conducted to enhance the knowledge of prospective and current Mentors and Mentee on how to productively and efficiently handle the mentoring relationship. From findings made in this study, there are clear mentoring issues demanding urgent attention. Examples of such pertinent issues are Mentor’s integrity and availability. On the part of the Mentees, it is the danger of becoming a leech or parasite on the Mentors. It is expected that these pertinent issues will be urgently addressed by the relevant mentoring specialists and government agencies.

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