

EMPOWERING UNDERGRADUATES IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION THROUGH MENTORING

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Abstract

The study investigated empowering undergraduates through mentoring strategies in vocational education. Two research questions were posed to guide the study while one hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. A total of 26 lecturers and 293 final year students totaling 319 were studied out of 1061 population. The instrument for the study was the use of questionnaire, with a four point likert scale ranging from highly applied to not applied. 6 lecturers and 20 students validated the instrument and a reliability test using test-retest method yielded a correlation of 0.89 and 0.87. Mean rating was used to answer the research questions while z-test was used to test the hypothesis. Findings revealed that mentoring strategies are not applied in vocational education for teaching and learning. The paper concludes that if mentoring strategies are applied, students will have access to tools that can adjust their attention span and provide valuable and immediate feedback for literacy enhancement. The paper recommends that mentors should be encouraged to attend more training to enhance their skills.

Key Words - Mentoring, Strategies, Vocational Education, Empowering, Undergraduates

Introduction

Mentoring 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 adhoc help. It is all about an ongoing relationship of learning, dialogue and challenge. According to Allen, Eby and Lentz, (2006), mentoring is a 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 formal communication, usually face to face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who has greater relevant knowledge, wisdom or experience (the mentor) and a person who has less knowledge (the protégé) (Pompa 2012).

According to Schelee (2000), mentoring involves putting yourself into multiple roles to improve a younger person's life. According to Wong (2007) the process of mentoring may be viewed under three models; the apprentice, competency and reflective models. In the apprentice model, the mentee observes and learns. In the competency model, the mentor gives the mentee systematic feedback about performance and progress. In the reflective model, the mentor helps the mentee become a reflective practitioner. According to him, mentoring can be formal or informal. Formal mentor relationships are usually organized in the work place where an organization matches mentors to mentees for developing careers. Informal mentor relationships usually occur spontaneously and are largely psychosocial. They help to enhance the mentee's self esteem and confidence by providing emotional support and discovery of common interest.

According to Robert and Richard (2010) there are four partway to mentoring;

- What begins the process? Attraction
- How does it move forward? – Relationship
- What is required for growth in mentee? – Responsiveness (mentee and Accountability (mentor)
- What is the purpose of mentoring? – Empowerment

Mentoring Characteristics

- Takes place outside of a line manager – employee relationship at the mutual consent of a mentee.
- Is career-focused
- Relationship is personal – a mentor provides both professional and personal support
- Relationship crosses job boundaries
- Relationship may be initiated by a mentor or created through a match initiated by the organization

Tips/Methods for Developing Effective Mentoring

- Establish the relationship: key relationship must be sought out and cultivated. Mentoring has a better chance for empowerment when a relationship is clearly established.
- Joint agreement: By spelling out the expectations, unfulfilled expectations and disappointments can be avoided
- Determine how often you will meet
- Determine the nature of the accountability – Agree together on how the accountability will be set up and monitored
- Clarify the level of confidentiality that is needed
- Set up clear lines of communication – Discuss when, how often and by what means you will interact

- Evaluation – from time to time evaluate the process. This will help ensure that the relationship is meeting the needs of the mentee and not a burden for the mentor.
- Maintain flexibility adaptability to fit the current mentoring situation.

Mentoring Strategies

- **Aligning Instructional-support Efforts** – Think of instructional support as a communal tree that is suppose to be watered once a week. One of a mentor's chief jobs is to help a new lecturer close the "knowing-doing gap" by learning to apply knowledge of best practices to daily classroom routines. (Cindy, 2004)
- **Partnering with Head of Department** – when mentoring programs partner extensively with administrators or heads of departments. However, they provide an entry point for addressing issues like training or guidance necessary to help fill critical knowledge gaps.
- **Finding the Right Colleagues to be Mentors** – This is since quanon of a high-quality instructional mentoring programmes. The mentor's effectiveness ultimately determine to what extent programmes will support new colleague in helping the younger ones including the students in the department.

Mentoring Techniques

- **Accompanying** – making a commitment in a caring way, which involves taking part in the learning process side by side with the learner.
- **Sowing** – mentors are often confronted with the difficulty of preparing the learner before he/she is ready to change. Sowing is necessary when you know that what you say may not be understood even acceptable to learners at first but will make sense and have value to the mentee when the situation requires it.
- **Catalyzing** –, when change reaches a critical level of pressure, learning can escalate. Here the mentor chooses to plunge the learner right into change, provoking a different way of thinking, a change in identity or a re-ordering of values.
- **Showing** – This is making something understandable or using your own example to demonstrate a skill or activity. You show what you are talking about, you show by your own behaviour.
- **Harvesting** – Here, the mentor focuses on "picking the ripe fruit", it is usually used to create awareness of what was learned by experienced and draw conclusions.

Statement of problems

The major purpose of this study is to find out the application of mentoring strategies in vocational education. The study specially intends to;

- 1) Determine the extent of application of mentoring strategies for empowering our undergraduates

- 2) Determine the ways mentoring strategies can help to empower our undergraduates.

Research Questions

- 1) What ways have the application of mentoring strategies in vocational education improved the programme?
- 2) How has the application of mentoring strategies helped both students and lecturers in vocational education?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses was formulated for the purpose of the study:
There is no significant difference in the mean rating of lecturers and students as regard to their application of mentoring strategies in vocational education.

Methodology

Survey research design was used to gather information from students and lecturers as regards empowering undergraduates through mentoring strategies. The population of the study was 1,061, made up of 86 lecturers and 975 final year students in three Colleges of Education in Delta State.

- College of Physical Education, Mosogar,
- College of Education, Agbor and
- College of Education, Warri.

Simple random technique was used to sample 26 lecturers and 293 students. Data for the study was collected through the use of questionnaire. Two sets of questionnaires, one for the lecturers and another for the students were used to collect data from the three institutions. Each of the questionnaires contained 15 items with Part A and B. Part A was for demographic information of the respondents with three questions while part B contained four point scale of Highly Applied, Applied, Moderately Applied and Not Applied. The questionnaire was validated by six lecturers and twenty students, other than those used for the study. Test re-test method was used to test the reliability of the items and a reliability coefficient of 0.89 and 0.87 were obtained for lecturers and students respectively. Mean rating was used to analyze the research questions while z-test was used to test the research hypothesis.

Analysis of Data

Table 1 - Lecturer's View on Application of Mentoring Strategies in Vocational Education Improvement (N = 26 and Mid Point = 2.50)

S/N	Item	NA	A	MA	NA	X	Remark
1	Leadership role is exhibited while mentoring others.	5	5	10	6	2.35	Not Applied
2	Language and notion of drawing upon a community of mentors.	-	10	9	7	2.12	Not Applied
3	Interaction with other Departmental Head/staff member	10	10	4	2	2.15	Not Applied
4	Differentiated learning	3	7	11	5	2.31	Not Applied
5	Partnering with Head of Departments and Transitions	4	12	7	3	2.77	Applied
6	Taking control and discipline	6	13	5	2	2.88	Applied
	Total mean					14.58	
	Grand					2.43	

Table 1 shows that lecturer view on application of mentoring strategies in vocational education, the first four items in the table indicated not applied, while the fifth and sixth items were indicated as applied based on the mean responses of the respondents.

Table 2 - Student's view on Application of mentoring strategies in vocational education improvement (N = 293, mid point = 2.50)

S/N	Item	HA	A	MA	NA	X	Remark
1.	Allowed to experience practice	24	50	79	140	1.86	Not Applied
2.	Reflection on practices	54	59	80	100	2.23	Not Applied
3.	Communication to produce good result	50	53	70	120	2.11	Not Applied
4.	Task expectations	96	100	43	54	2.81	Applied
5.	Latent skills and talents are developed into useful behaviours	110	70	63	50	2.82	Applied
6.	Route success by giving advice teaching and becoming friendly	50	60	70	133	2.23	Not Applied
	Total Mean					14.06	
	Grand Mean					2.34	

Table 2 shows students view on application of mentoring strategies in vocational education. Items four and five were accepted as applied by the respondents, while other items indicated not applied.

Z-test of difference between lecturers and students view on application of mentoring strategies.

Respondents	Mean	SD	N	Df	Cri Error	Z-cal	Z-crit	Remark
Lecturers	28.40	3.69	26	317	100	1.90	1.96	Accepted
Students	22.56	3.79	293					

Since the calculated z-value of 1.90 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance, the hypothesis is therefore accepted that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of lecturers and students on the application of mentoring strategies in vocational education.

Discussion of Findings

The findings show that lecturers and students were of the view that mentoring strategies were not applied in vocational education. This finding is in agreement with Borgmann (2006), who portrays that mentoring strategies often raise new ethical questions. Thomas (2004), depicts that mentoring can empower lecturers and students in ways that were never even dreamed of five years ago, and that the difficult thing is that most some sort of a learning curve and adjustment period both within and outside the classroom setting during which productivity will not be at its peak.

In line with the views of Thomas and Borgmann, Bozeman and Feeney (2007), demonstrated that a good mentor must commit the time, have the patience and willingness to provide one with their insights and get one started on the right track. This insights can be designed to help students to complete their studies successfully and also assist new lecturers in the department by giving them insights on the right track. The researchers therefore elucidated that if mentoring strategies like student context, differentiated learning, mentor modeling of practice, allowing mentee to experience practices and techniques such as accompanying, sowing, catalyzing, showing and harvesting are effectively applied in vocational education, the department will be better than what it is at present.

Conclusion

When mentoring strategies are applied, students have access to tools that can adjust their attention span and provide valuable and immediate feedback for literacy enhancement. Mentoring strategies if used in classroom teaching assist students in education, environment, media, decision support and ultimately empowerment. For our society to move along with the changing world in terms

of technology and otherwise, mentoring of our undergraduates students becomes very vital.

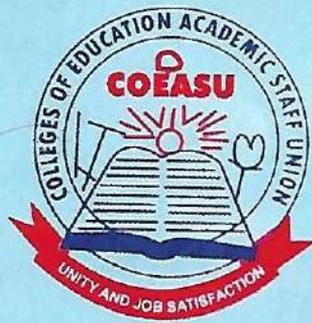
Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were put forward by the researchers;

- 1) Mentoring strategies and techniques should developed to assist students and new teachers in vocational education by encouraging greater participation of the programmes.
- 2) Given the need for development of skills for mentors, research should be conducted to determine the specific skills needed for mentors.
- 3) Mentors when selected should be encouraged to attend training such as seminars, workshops, conferences in order to add to the wealth of experience and enhance their skills of mentoring.
- 4) For our undergraduates to escape unemployment in our society they need empowerment through mentoring and establishment of skill acquisition centres in institutions of higher learning.

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