

## ACADEMIC MENTORING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A STRATEGY TO QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

Mentoring is as old as human history. It has been acclaimed to be a strategy for equipping those involved with functional and sellable skills. This paper is therefore aimed at x-raying the various ways academic mentoring can be used to improve Higher Education for quality assurance in Teacher Education in Nigeria. One of such ways is establishing academic mentor management committee within the education system to promote academic mentoring through all relevant education channels. This will aid growth in the profession and equally increase quality assurance in education. The authors are very sure that, our educational system having reached this level, should embrace the gains that will surely accrue from this timeless strategy for equipping our teachers with functional and sellable skills.

### INTRODUCTION

Academic mentoring in higher education is an innovation to empower and improve quality of teacher education. A higher education institution has been defined as a community of scholars, not excluding other stakeholders, who work together to achieve the goals for setting up the institution (Kirigha & Neema- Abooki, 2008).

Mentor has been adopted as a term, meaning someone who imparts wisdom to and shares knowledge with a less experienced colleague (Wikipedia). 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 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 perceive to have less (the mentee).

### Mentoring in Higher Education

Academic mentoring in the higher education is seen to favour educational administrators and students as well as would-be-teachers. During the last decade, academic mentoring has expanded and is found in most colleges and universities, frequently as a means to outreach, retain, and recruit students. Academic mentoring is used extensively in higher education for several reasons. Some of such reasons` include:

- Benefits attributed to classical mentoring (when an older adult mentors a younger person) can translate to peer monitoring relationships, mainly when the Academic mentor and the mentee have similar backgrounds;
- Mentoring has benefits at three levels, the Mentee, the Mentor and institutional ([www.ucd.ie/mentoring/mentoringpresentation](http://www.ucd.ie/mentoring/mentoringpresentation)).

**Mentee Benefits include:**

- Being given help to work out what they want from their career and how to make appropriate choices
- Obtaining opportunities to network and advice on how to grow those networks
- Increase in productivity across the academic spectrum and improved personal effectiveness in relation to managing available resources
- Support in managing relationships with other people
- Taking the opportunity to challenge their own thinking and that of the institution
- Gaining insight into how the institution's culture operates - its values and its objectives

**Mentor Benefits include:**

- Contact with new academic staff and familiarisation with current issues
- Additional learning they acquire from the experience
- Satisfaction from helping someone else and seeing them succeed
- Opportunity for reflective space and increased career satisfaction
- Intellectual challenge of working on issues which may take them into unfamiliar territory
- Opportunities for increased collaboration

**Benefits to teacher education**

- Increase the profile of the institution as an institution that places a high value on support and developing its academic staff
- Increase the reputation of the institution as a result of improved quality of research and teaching and learning methodologies
- Increase awareness of opportunities for growth
- Supports and feeds into succession planning.
- The lack of role models or volunteers forces administrators and student leasers to use students as peer mentors of other students-usually first year students, would-be-teachers, ethnic minorities, and women in order to guide, support, and instruct junior students;
- Academic/peer monitoring programs require a low budget for administration and/or development, they become a cheap alternative to support lecturers/teachers and weak students who are likely to fail.

Mentoring usually is regarded as the task of an experienced teacher to introduce a young teacher or student- teacher in his/her teaching practice. There are different models of how to perform this task effectively. Mentoring relationship can be viewed from different perspectives: not only the potential benefit to the young teacher, but also the professional development of the experienced teacher has to be taken into account. Mentoring could empower the continuous and lifelong development of teachers. The learning partnership of

the two persons embodies a considerable advantage to promote a single school's culture as well as the personal and professional growth (Dietlind & Lydia Van Andel, 2002).

### **Advantages of academic mentoring in our educational system**

Academic mentoring in our educational system can be of great advantage. Academic /Peer mentoring may help new students and would-be-teachers adapt to a new academic environment faster. The relationship between the mentor and mentee gives the mentee a sense of being connected to the larger community where they may otherwise feel lost. Mentors are chosen because they are academically successful and because they possess good professional background, mentors serve as positive role models for the students and would-be-teachers, guiding them towards academic and social success. Mentors provide support, advice, encouragement, and even friendship to students. Academic /Peer mentoring may improve students and would-be-teachers retention rates. Mentors also stand to benefit from the mentor/mentee relationship. Mentors develop friendships through their participation in mentoring programs and usually derive satisfaction from helping a younger student, and possibly shaping his or her life in a positive way in our educational system. Mentors may also be paid, and they may receive other benefits such as prioritized registration, course credit, and references.

In higher education tutorial settings, the benefits of academic/peer mentoring programs also extend to class tutors. Using grounded theory techniques, Outhred & Chester (2010) found that five themes underlie their experiences: role exploration, sharing responsibility, regulation of the peer-tutored groups, harnessing the peer tutors' role, and community. The focus of mentoring is to develop the whole person and so the techniques are broad and require wisdom in order to be used appropriately (Outhred & Chester, 2010).

Different techniques may be used by mentors according to the situation and the mindset of the mentee, and the techniques used in modern organization can be found in ancient education systems, from the Socratic technique of harvesting to the accompaniment method of learning used in the apprenticeship of itinerant cathedral builders during the middle ages mentors who are leaders are advised to look for "teachable moments" in order to "expand or realize the potentialities of the people in the organizations they lead" and underline that personal credibility is as essential to quality mentoring as skill (Daloz, 1990). Academic mentoring provides sequential, guided discussion and fosters student reflection about individual educational and career path issues. Research, teaching and learning are accomplished through mentoring. The role of teachers in higher education extends past the responsibility of passing along information. The process by which teachers are educated is the subject of political discussion in many countries, reflecting both the value attached by societies and cultures to the preparation of young people for life, and the fact that higher education systems consume significant financial resources.

However, the degree of political control over Teacher Education (TE) varies. Where TE is entirely in the hands of universities, the state may have no direct control whatever over what or how new teachers are taught using teaching methods that would be deemed inappropriate if they used the same methods in schools, or teachers being taught by persons with little or no hands-on experience of teaching in real classrooms. In other systems, TE may be the subject of detailed prescription (e.g. the state may specify the skills that all teachers must possess, or it may specify the content of TE courses). Academic mentoring aims to give broad overview of the basic principles of mentoring.

Mentoring in education, aims at developing a younger person's strength by pairing him/her with an older volunteer, sometimes from a similar background, acting as a positive role model. It is often characterized as aiming to build confidence and competency, or to develop flexibility and character, Mentorship helps in nurturing younger people to a greater height in their chosen career. Mentorship according to Ukaegbu, Alex-Nmecha and Horsfall (2014) is the act of training someone so that the person can equally grow. In their view, mentoring is a powerful development and empowerment tool. It is a partnership between two people (mentor and mentee). A mentor is someone that helps, supports, and gives guidance to another person (mentee). It can be an older person mentoring a youth. Mentoring for trainee teachers was introduced in 2007 ([www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)). It is part of the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) where student teachers interact and learn from experienced older teachers (mentors).

Academic mentoring in higher education is a unique academic control, enhancing process that is organized around a set of questions relating to educational milestones, and builds upon answers considered in previous terms to help students acquire skills and attitudes that promote their intellectual and personal development. Students confer with academic mentors on key questions and challenges that shape their educational experiences, from adjusting to college life to choosing a major defining and fulfilling educational goals, and transitioning toward graduate education or professional practice.

The purpose of academic mentoring in higher education is to support the professional development of academics in their careers and promote excellence in teaching and learning, research and academic leadership. Generally, mentoring will be made available to support those in the early stages of their career. Academic mentoring is confidential and entirely voluntary and is a partnership built upon trust and mutual respect ([www.ucd.ie/mentor](http://www.ucd.ie/mentor)).

Academic mentoring provides sequential, guided discussion and fosters student reflection about individual educational and career path issues. Research shows that guided discussions of issues that impact students' sense of control over their academic outcomes enhance overall student success ([www.ucd.ie/mentor](http://www.ucd.ie/mentor)). For instance, academic mentoring helps students to:

- More successfully navigate the transition into college
- Define educational goals and make full use of campus and community resources during college
- Identify and prepare for broader educational and/or career options after college.

### **Teaching methods used in academic mentoring**

Collins, Brown, and Newman (1989) developed six teaching methods and claim these methods help students attain cognitive and metacognitive strategies for “using, managing, and discovering knowledge”. They are modeling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation and reflection which are designed to help novices with awareness of problem-solving strategies and execution similar to that of an expert. The final step (exploration) intends to guide the novice towards independence and the ability to solve and identify problems within the domain on their own. The authors note, however, that this is not an exhaustive list of methods and that the successful execution of these methods is highly dependent on the domain.

**Modeling:** Modeling is when an expert, usually a teacher, within the cognitive domain or subject area, demonstrates a task explicitly so that novices usually students can experience

and build a conceptual model of the task at hand. For example, a mathematics teacher might write out explicit steps and work through a problem aloud, demonstrating her heuristics and procedural knowledge.

**Coaching:** Coaching involves, observing novice task performance and offering feedback and hint to sculpt the novice's performance to that of an expert's.

**Scaffolding:** Instructional scaffolding is the act of putting into place strategies and methods to support the student's learning. These supports can be teaching manipulative, activities and group work.

The teacher may have to execute parts of the task that the student is not yet able to do. This requires the teacher to have the skill to analyze and assess student abilities in the moment.

**Articulation:** Articulation includes "any method of getting students to articulate their knowledge, reasoning, or problem-solving process in a domain". Three types of articulation are inquiry teaching, thinking aloud, and critical student role. Through inquiry teaching (Collis & Stevens, 1982), teachers ask students a series of questions that allows them to refine and restate their learned knowledge and to form explicit conceptual models. Thinking aloud requires students to articulate their thoughts while solving problems. Students assuming a critical role monitor others in cooperative activities and draw conclusions based on the problem-solving activities. Articulation is described by McLellan (1994) as consisting of two aspects: separating component knowledge and skills to learn them more effectively and more common verbalizing or demonstrating knowledge and thinking processes in order to expose and clarify them.

**Reflection:** Reflection allows students to "compare their own problems-solving processes with those of an expert, another student, and ultimately, an internal cognitive model of expertise". A technique for reflection could be to examine the past performances of both expert and novice and to highlight similarities and differences. The goal of reflection is for students to look back and analyze their performances with a desire for understanding and improvement towards the behaviour of an expert.

**Exploration:** Exploration involves giving students room to problem solve on their own and teaching students' exploration strategies. Exploration allows the student to frame interesting problems within the domain for themselves and then take the initiative to solve these problems.

### Strategies for Mentoring Student Teachers

According to teaching Strategies (2013), Student teachers could be prone to mistakes or errors in judgment and benefit greatly from the guidance of an experienced teacher. Their mentor can give them helpful feedback and guide them toward the best and most effective teaching methods. For student mentor teacher, here are some tips for being the very best mentor:

- Present demonstration lesson plans featuring a variety of teaching strategies. Discuss them afterward.
- Allow the student teacher to develop and prepare original teaching plans.
- Provide oral and written feedback regularly.
- Plan effective learning assessment with your student teacher.

- Provide feedback on their classroom presence, i.e. how they navigate the classroom, their style of expression, having a professional appearance and demeanor, etc.
- Provide guidance in the use and care for the school's supplies and materials.
- Guide the student teacher in helping students with special needs.
- Implement collaborative teaching where you take turns instructing with the student teacher.

### **Quality of teacher education and academic mentoring**

Quality is used to mean fitness of purpose (Okebukola, 2002). It is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated needs. Teacher education refers to the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school and wider community. Although ideally it should be conceived of, and organized as, a seamless continuum teacher education is often divided into these stages (www.ehow.com).

- Initial teacher training /education (a pre-service course before entering the classroom as a fully responsible teacher).
- Induction (the process of providing training and support during the first few years of teaching or the first year in a particular school);
- Teachers' development or continuing professional development (CPD) (an in-service process for practicing teachers).

Teacher education refers to the process by which a person attains education or training in an institution of learning in order to become a teacher. Teacher education equips pre- and in-service teachers with the professional knowledge and skills necessary to educate others in general or specialized subjects. The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and think critically (Martin Luther King Jnr). Academic mentoring plays an intensive role in education to bring about quality in a teacher. When a less experienced teacher is been taught by an experienced teacher, it signifies mentorship especially when there is a follow-up on the part of the mentor and/or mentee.

Mentoring in teacher education is a strategy of individual and institutional support, realized in a learning-partnership of two persons and aiming at professional development of school teachers (Fischer & Ansel, 2002). Maynard and Furlong (1994, reported in Zanting 1998) identified three basic models of mentoring: the apprenticeship model, the competency model, and the reflective model. They claimed that these three models should be successively applied in teacher education. Academic mentoring in teacher education will result to quality in the teaching profession. Mentoring happens in teacher education in different settings serving different purposes. Traditionally, the mentor is an elder experienced school teacher who takes care for a young, inexperienced teacher or a student teacher in order to help him/her learn how to teach. The relationship between the two is a matter of pre-service teacher education or induction (Fischer & Ansel, 2002).

According to UNESCO (2005), teacher education institutions "serve as key change agents in transforming education and society". These institutions train pre-or in-service teachers, providing them with the knowledge as well as the professional skills they need in order to become effective transmitters of knowledge. In this sense, teachers are professionals of learning and knowledge. Often, teacher education programs have a particular goal, mission

statement and focus. Teacher education program is designed specifically to place highly qualified teachers in urban public schools. Its goal is to help increase educational opportunity and quality at all levels. Its mission is also to train teachers towards pedagogy that helps students acquire critical thinking, independent learning skills and technology competence.

Teacher education generally comprises only the learning and training acquired in a formal educational institution. It does not typically refer to informal processes of learning or training that may occur as part of a teacher's job or career. Feedback on the performance of teachers is integral to state and private education procedures, but takes many different forms. Teacher education programs vary from country to country. At the undergraduate level, programs often require three to five years of study consisting of content courses such as literature and history; methods courses; and practice teaching. Content courses prepare students for general teaching or for teaching in specialized academic fields or in specialized nonacademic fields such as art, physical education, educational media, music, or home economics (Education, 2011). Creating a productive learning environment to empower and improve quality of teacher education is one of the helpful ways to increase quality assurance in education (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010).

Teaching methods are procedures used to help the learner. College methods courses acquaint the teacher with instructional theory and materials, the preparation of lesson plans, the use of technology and educational media such as projectors and teaching machines, and similar "how-to-do-it" activities.

### **Quality assurance in education and academic mentoring**

Quality assurance is a process put in place to improve and ensure that standard is conformed with for best result or outcomes (Ibiam & Ahunanya, 2013). Quality assurance involves the assessment of academic performance at different levels in any educational system.

Assuring the quality of educational provision is a fundamental aspect of gaining and maintaining credibility of programmes, institutions and national systems of higher education worldwide. Quality in education relates to the quality of the work undertaken by a teacher, which has significant effects upon his or her pupils or students (Anderson, 2009). Further, those who pay teachers' salaries, whether through tax or through school fees wish to be assured that they are receiving value for money. Ways to measure the quality of work of individual teachers, of schools, or of education systems as a whole, are therefore often sought. Teacher salary is not related to the perceived quality of his or her work. Some, however, have systems to identify the 'best-performing' teachers, and increase their remuneration accordingly. Elsewhere, assessments of teacher performance may be undertaken with a view to identifying teachers' needs for additional training or development, or, in extreme cases, to identify those teachers that should be required to leave the profession. In some countries, teachers are required to re-apply periodically for their license to teach, and in so doing, to prove that they still have the requisite skills.

### **Implications for Educators**

- There is need for innovation to increase quality assurance in education. One of the reasons for low of quality in our education system is a shortage of teaching staff.
- There is need for establishing academic mentor management committee within the education system. Older colleagues should mentor the younger ones (mentee) to aid

growth in the profession. This will promote academic mentoring through all relevant education channels which will equally increase quality assurance in education.

- Funding of teacher education should be of paramount importance. Government should ensure that she keeps her duty alive by funding education system adequately to empower and improve the quality of teacher education.
- Teachers should be motivated through enhanced salary package and good condition of service. They should be encouraged through sponsorship to conferences, seminars, and workshops and also participating in professional associations. This will enable teachers to be well mentored and also know how to practice some of the skills of teaching.
- To achieve quality of teacher education in Nigeria, quality assurance agents (inspectors) need to do effective inspection of schools to modify or improve the existing services or products.
- Teacher education can bring a whole new level of service to the end users or improve internal processes to make for effective educational system.

## CONCLUSION

Academic mentoring has to do with the one-on one training of personnel to enhance performance in workplaces. Classroom training is sometimes poorly coordinated with practical learning on the job.

Nevertheless, creating a productive learning environment to empower and improve quality of teacher education is one of the helpful ways to increase quality assurance in education. Hence, academic mentoring is a sure way for higher education to empower and improve quality of teacher education in Nigeria and should be highly recognized and even rewarded where possible. Our higher education set-up should as matter of urgency include academic mentorship in her programme to increase and sustain growth and development of the system. This will enable trained and qualified replacement of educators in the system.

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