ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF NEWLY EMPLOYED LECTURERS THROUGH MENTORSHIP: A FOCUS ON UNIVERSITIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE - NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between mentorship and professional competence of newly employed lecturers in Universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. One research question was raised and one hypothesis formulated to guide the study. Survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of all academic staff of University of Calabar and Cross River State University of Science and Technology. The cluster random sampling technique and simple random sampling technique were used in selecting 220 lecturers from 10 faculties in the two universities in the study area. Researcher- designed instrument with four-point rating scale titled "mentoring and professional competence of newly employed lecturers' questionnaire" (MPCNELQ) was adopted to elicit responses from the respondents and to collect data. It had 24 items which were validated by two experts in measurements and evaluation. The trial test carried out using split-half method yielded reliability coefficients of 0.77 to 0.87. These figures confirmed that the instrument was reliable for use in realizing the research objectives. Mean and standard deviations were used to answer the research question while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to analyze data for the hypothesis which was tested at.05 level of significance. Results obtained revealed five areas of professional competence that could be enhanced through mentoring and that there was a significant relationship between mentoring and professional competence of newly employed lecturers. Based on this result, recommendations were made to enhance professional competence of newly employed lecturers in universities in Cross River State.

Key words: Enhancing, Professional Competence, Mentorship, Newly employed lecturers.

Introduction

University lecturers play a very significant role in the realisation of the goals and objectives of universities. They are employed to teach in faculties and departments based on their different areas of specialisation and job skills. Categories of lecturers in the university range from low

level to the top level namely; graduate assistants, assistant lecturers, lectures two, lecturers one, senior lecturers, associate professors/readers and professors.

However, what newly employed lecturers encounter in their first time at the university is invariably a new school culture and tradition which sometimes is different from their experiences and what they were taught in their previous institutions of learning (Duke, 2012). Most times, they appear to be isolated, helpless and in need of guidance regarding aspects of their new job and what is required of them by their new employers. Nwugie (2014) remarked that lecturers who are new to the university often discover that there are many responsibilities that become overwhelming and can translate into a daunting work load for them. Apart from teaching, the different categories of lecturers play a wide range of other roles in the university. Mgbekem (2000) enumerated the tasks of lecturers to include; teaching, research, administrative roles, membership in faculty and administrative committees and membership of senate.

It is apparent that the roles, functions, and attendant expectations for academic staff are extensive with complicated demands. Duke (2012) stated that University lecturers face rigorous workload in the area of teaching, research, students' evaluation, classroom management, mastery of subject matter, supervision of students' projects, participation in committees and community development. Most professors hold administrative positions as deans of faculties and heads of departments, senior lecturers are appointed to act as heads of departments or examination officers in their departments (Mgbekem 2004).Others in the lower cadres also play other various important roles. However, lecturers new to the university are expected to take over some of these duties from the older and more experienced colleagues who have spent years carrying out these tasks. This therefore calls for proper guidance, assistance and preparation of the newly employed lecturers by older and experienced ones through mentorship.

Ballet and Kelchtermans (2009) noted that in a changing society, there is need for continuous professional development since all teachers have to adapt to changes and face pressure to meet requirements from their employers. In line with university norms, lecturers are expected to be active researchers who publish the findings of their research works. This helps them to gain experience and progress steadily in their career. Ukim (2014) acknowledged that to improve the performance and competence of newly employed lecturers and for them to gain promotion into the higher cadre in the lecturership hierarchy, they need to be mentored by older and more experienced lecturers. Since professional development cannot happen by itself, it is therefore pertinent to state that by having a mentor, the isolated teacher may become less isolated, and learning 'the hard way' may become less hard (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009). Lecturers new to the university therefore need professional support in the form of mentoring.

Mentoring is an intense relationship in which a senior person (mentor) oversees the career development and psychosocial development of a less-experienced person(mentee). Mentors impart wisdom about the norms, values, and mores specific to the organization. It is a developmental, caring, sharing, and helping relationship where one person invests time, know-how, and effort in enhancing another person's growth, knowledge, and skills, and responds to critical needs in the life of that person in ways that prepare the individual for greater productivity or achievement in the future. According to Women's Engineering Society (2014), Mentoring is a powerful personal development and empowerment tool which is an effective way of helping

people to progress in their careers. According to them, it is a partnership between two people (mentor and mentee) normally working in a similar field or sharing similar experiences with a helpful relationship based upon mutual trust and respect.

In education, mentoring is a complex and multi-dimensional process of guiding, teaching, influencing and supporting a beginning or new teacher. Internationally, a mentor in a school is understood as a more experienced colleague who supports new teachers in the first phase of the profession (Harrison, Dymoke and Pell, 2006). It is generally accepted that a mentor teacher leads, guides and advises another teacher more junior in experience in a work situation characterized by mutual trust and belief. Typically, mentoring programs pair novice teachers with more experienced teachers who can ably explain school policies, regulations and procedures; share methods, materials and other resources; help solve problems in teaching, learning and research; provide personal and professional support; and guide the growth of the new teacher through reflection, collaboration, and shared inquiry (Hobson, et al 2009). Traditionally, the mentor is an experienced lecturer who takes care of a young, inexperienced lecturer in order to help him/her learn all about his job requirements. Harrison, et al (2006) emphasized that novice workers require emotional, social and educative support to be successful. This is because as one begins a career, he/she has certain personal goals and expectations which must be achieved alongside that of his/her organisation. In this 21st century characterised by changes in different facets of the society, university lecturers have to learn new techniques and methods of carrying out their functions. This therefore makes it imperative that the lecturer who is new to the university system be attached to a more experienced senior colleague for proper guidance and tutelage

However Ukim (2013) observed that in recent years, the great importance that universities attached to mentoring as one of the effective means of enhancing job competence of new academics is fast diminishing. Akogu (2010) remarked that mentoring is a very important aspect of skills enhancement still being neglected in Nigerian universities. Ukim (2013) remarked that most lecturers across various universities in Nigeria perform unsatisfactorily in their job requirements owing to poor or total lack of organised formal mentoring programmes in their various institutions. Efforts by few universities to institute formal mentorship programmes have not yielded fruitful results because of lack of proper planning, implementation and lack of commitment on the part of university Administrators and other more experienced Academics in the higher hierarchy (Akogu, 2010).

As new lecturers enter the profession, the development of effective mentoring program could provide an invaluable opportunity to socialize them into the dynamics of the field. Most lecturers, however, are informally socialized into the profession through informal mentoring, Unem (2014) advocates a formal mentoring for new lecturers in the university. Murray (2006) described formal mentoring to include the designing of structured mentoring programmes which are tied to business goals with measurable results and conducting periodic evaluations to ensure achievement of these goals. Informal mentoring on the other hand are those relationships that develop between the mentor and mentee on their own, usually not tied to professional goals, have no tracking system for mentoring relationships and no training or structured support. Formal Mentoring programs that use experienced lecturers such as professors and senior lecturers to support and assist novice lecturers during their beginning years as university

lecturers is critical given the diverse demands placed on universities in today's technologically advancing world.

According to University of Bradford (2014), having been assigned a mentor within the first three months after the arrival at the University, the newly employed academic staff will be required, in negotiation with his/her Head of Department and Mentor to draw up a Professional Development Plan to cover the period of probation or temporary appointment, up to a maximum of three years. The intention is that by the end of this period, the newly employed lecturer will have developed skills and competencies in terms of teaching and scholarship, knowledge transfer, research with a good understanding of students and their needs.

Moreover, to achieve the aims of mentoring, Ukim (2013) advocated that certain criteria should be taken into consideration when planning the mentoring programme. Among the tasks that schools must deal with in starting a mentoring program include; selecting and training individuals to serve as mentors; matching mentors with protégés, and setting goals and expectations for both the mentor and mentee. In establishing good matches between mentor and mentee, Akogu (2010) opined that consideration should be given to gender and personal goals of the mentee to ensure it matches with that of the mentor.

Hoy and Spero (2005) reported that the most frequently mentioned characteristic of effective mentors is a willingness to nurture another person. Therefore, mentors should be people-oriented, open-minded, flexible, empathetic, and collaborative. New Lecturers' expectations of mentors include: willingness to make time and space for productive discussions, willingness to establish an equitable relationship, willingness to share experiences and knowledge, willingness to act as a sounding-board on a broad range of issues, an experienced practitioner with knowledge based on inside and outside the University and clear communication (University of Bradford, 2014).

Myles (2002) sees Mentoring as a relationship where the mentor and the mentee share experiences which bring about great benefits to novice teachers. Armstrong (2011) in a study found out that mentoring impacts positively on career success through more promotions, mobility, higher income and career satisfaction. He maintained that through mentoring, new teachers perceived increased confidence in their abilities and had the opportunity to ask critical questions concerning aspects of their jobs in complete confidence. Fischer and Andel (2002) added that Mentoring can play a critical role in continually improving the professional knowledge and skills that teachers need to instruct and prepare students for the next century. The mentor may also facilitate the mentorship program by connecting the new lecturer to other experienced lecturers in the same area of specialty both within and outside their institution for collaboration and networking possibilities in research and other areas (Akogu, 2013). Mentoring therefore seems to be a common solution and one of several strategies that may be deployed in order to support beginning lecturers in their professional career development.

Statement of the Problem

University lecturers play a very significant role in the realisation of university goals and objectives. Considering the numerous tasks performed by lecturers and their role expectations, newly employed lecturers need to be guided and assisted by senior and more experienced lecturers in order to enable them acquire the needed skills, remain active, grow on the job and

be able to handle various tasks in their departments, faculties and the university in general. However, it is unfortunate that many Universities in Nigeria and Universities in Cross River State in particular have not been able to establish or maintain proper formal mentorship programmes for lecturers newly employed into the University system. While many lecturers have not progressed in their jobs because of their inability to meet the required number of research and publications, some others are unable to effectively handle assigned tasks such as programme coordination, examination officers, teaching, students' evaluation and project supervision. Others are unable to assess and benefit from various research grants and other international scholarships. All these problems are as a result of lack of formal mentoring of newly employed lecturers by experienced ones. University management have also not given priority attention to mentoring new lecturers in their various institutions. This has hampered academic staff progress as well as the quality of teaching and learning in universities. The problem of the study has posed a question therefore on how mentorship can serve to enhance professional competence of newly employed academic staff in Universities in Cross River State of Nigeria?

Research Question
1. What are the benefits of mentoring to newly employed lecturers in Universities in Cross River State.

Research Hypothesis
1. There is no significant relationship between mentorship and professional competence of newly employed lecturers in Universities in Cross River State.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The study area was Cross River State located in the South-South geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. Cross River State has 18 Local government areas with Calabar as the capital city. Educationally, the State has two public universities, namely: University of Calabar, which is a Federal University and Cross River State University of Science and Technology, a State University. The population of the study comprised all the 1,920 academic staff in University of Calabar and 998 academic staff in Cross River State University of science and technology which gave a total of 2,918 lecturers. The academic staffs were made up of lecturers of varying ranks from assistant lecturers up to cadre of professors.

Multistage sampling procedure was used for this study. The cluster sampling technique and simple random sampling technique were used. Firstly, the clustering was based on faculties in the study schools. At the second stage, simple random sampling technique was used to draw 5 faculties each from the two universities under study. At the third stage, the simple random sampling technique was also used in selecting academic staff from each of the 10 faculties.

The number of academic staff drawn from UNICAL was 130 while that of CRUTECH was 90. This gave a sample of 220 academic staff that was used for this study. The breakdown of the number of academic staff sampled in the respective faculties in UNICAL were: education-35, social science-25, management science-25, science-23 and Arts-22 while that of CRUTECH

were education-23, communication technology -7, science-22, engeneering-20, faculty of environmental science-18.

Researchers'- designed instrument with four-point rating scale titled "Mentoring and professional competence of newly employed lecturers' questionnaire (MPCNELQ) was adopted to elicit responses from the respondents and to collect data. It had three sections-A, B and C. Section A sought information on demographic variables while section B which contained 10 items sought information on benefits of mentoring to newly employed lecturers. Section C contained 18 items structured on a modified four- point Likert scale of strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and strongly Disagree (SD) on the relationship between mentoring and professional competence of newly employed lecturers. For positively skewed items in the instrument, SA was assigned 4 points, A=3 points, D=2 points and SD=1 point while for negatively skewed items, the values were assigned in reverse order. The instrument was face-validated by two experts in Test and Measurement in the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar. The reliability of the instrument was established using test- retest that yielded 0.77 to 0.87 respectively. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. A midpoint of 2.5 was adopted as criterion mean. Thus, any mean score that ranged from 2.50 and above was positive while the mean below 2.50 was negative. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to analyze data for the hypothesis which was tested at.05 level of significance.

Data analysis and results
TABLE 1:
Responses on areas of professional competence of lecturers that could be enhanced through mentoring

Items	N	X	SD
Effective research skills	220	3.46	0.59
Effective teaching skills	220	3.33	0.47
Supervision and evaluation of students	220	2.95	0.41
Interpersonal relationship between colleagues and students	220	3.76	0.43
Effective Communication skills	220	3.62	0.49
Management of students' academic records	220	2.94	0.42
Mastery of subject matter	220	3.71	0.45
Techniques in Proposal writing	220	2.99	0.59
Techniques of classroom management	220	3.00	0.00
Best use of resources and materials	220	3.38	0.49

Expected Mean = 2.50

From results in Table I, respondents are of the opinion that effective research skills, supervision and evaluation of students, interpersonal relationship between colleagues and students, effective communication skills, management of students' academic records, mastery of subject matter, techniques in proposal writing, techniques of classroom management, best use of resources and materials are areas of professional competence of lecturers that could be enhanced through mentoring.

TABLE 2:

Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of relationship between mentorship and professional competence of newly employed lecturers N = 220

Variables	ΣX ΣY	ΣX^2 ΣY^2	ΣXY	Rxy
Mentorship (X)	4,184	79,680		
			79,602	0.668
Professional competence (Y)	4,182	79,592		

*p<.05; df = 218; critical r = 0.138

From Table 2, the results showed that calculated r-value of 0.668 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.138 at .05 level of significance with 218 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. This finding implies that there is a significant relationship between mentorship and professional competence of newly employed lecturers.

Discussion of findings

The research questions that guided the study focused on the areas of professional competence of lecturers that could be enhanced through mentoring. The result of findings in Table 1 showed that lecturers from both Universities in Cross River State agreed that areas of professional competence of newly employed lecturers that could be enhanced through mentorship include; effective research skills, effective teaching skills, supervision and evaluation of students, interpersonal relationship between colleagues and students, communication skills, management of students academic records, mastery of subject matter, proposal writing, techniques on classroom management and best use of resources and materials.

This finding is consistent with the position of University of Bradford (2014) which stated that the intention of mentorship is that by the end of the period, the newly employed academic staff will have developed skills and competencies as a university lecturer in terms of teaching and scholarship, knowledge transfer, research with a good understanding of students and their needs. The finding also authenticated Duke (2012) who stated that University lecturers face rigorous workload in the area of teaching, research, students' evaluation, classroom management, mastery of subject matter, supervision of students' projects, participation in committees and community development. It therefore implies that developing these areas through Mentoring will help ease the work load on the newly employed lecturers and enable them perform their jobs more effectively. It is the responsibility of mentors to hold periodic discussions with mentees (new lecturers) to teach them the dynamics of research and other areas of their job as indicated above.

The result of the hypothesis holds that there is a significant relationship between mentoring and professional competence of newly employed lecturers. This necessitated the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternate hypothesis. This indicated that lecturers from both Universities in Cross River State agreed that mentorship enhances their professional competence. This finding is in line with Armstrong (2011) who in a study discovered that new teachers perceived increased confidence in their abilities, support with

resources and materials specific to their situation, and the opportunity to ask critical questions in complete confidence as some of the benefits of mentorship.

This finding also corroborates Fischer and Andel (2002) who stated that Mentoring can play a critical role in continually improving the professional knowledge and skills that teachers need to instruct and prepare students for the next century. This implies that through mentoring, new lecturers can acquire effective teaching skills, communication skills, techniques on classroom management, best use of resources and materials, management of students' academic records and mastery of subject matter. These can be achieved when mentors expose their mentees to effective teaching and classroom management by allowing new lecturers follow them (mentors) to the classroom to observe them teach. Mentors can equally expose new lecturers to practical classroom teaching experience by allocating courses to them and following the new lecturers to the classroom to observe them teach and then providing feedback to new lecturers on their progress. Mentors can also help to provide current resources, text books, journals and periodicals for new lecturers. By encouraging new lecturers to attend conferences, workshops and seminars, linking new lecturers with colleagues in other universities, encouraging new lecturers to be information and technology (ICT) compliant, mentors help their mentees to learn more in their field, update their knowledge in their specific areas of specialisations and also learn new and modern ways of carrying out assigned tasks.

This finding also supports Hobson et al (2009) who remarked that career-related benefits of mentorship include higher job performance ratings which lead to promotion and salary increases, and improved esteem and competence in the job. Thus, Mentors impart wisdom about the norms, values, and mores specific to the organization. In line with university norms; research, supervision and evaluation of students' projects or theses are some of the criteria for promotions in Nigerian universities. Lecturers are expected to be active researchers who publish the findings of their research and these help them to gain experience and progress steadily in their career.

Research, supervision and evaluation of students, interpersonal relationship between colleagues and students and proposal writing are therefore critical areas in the job of lecturers that could be strengthened through mentoring. Mentors can guide new lecturers on the best approach to interpersonal relationships with colleagues as this could enhance collaboration in publications and research, sharing of ideas on the best ways of writing proposals and accessing grants. Mentors can also encourage new lecturers to embark on personal research projects and publications by setting deadlines for new lecturers for completion of research projects and publications and to provide research materials and resources for new lecturers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made;

1. University administration should establish formal mentoring programmes in all departments and faculties to cater for the professional development and competence of newly employed academic staff.

2. University Administrators should encourage mentors to be patient, friendly, constructive, and always accessible to mentees if the aim of mentoring is to be realised.

3. A monitoring body should be set up by the university administration to carry out periodic checks of the mentoring program for each mentor and mentee to ensure progress and success of the program.
4. New lecturers should endeavour to be open to different views and demonstrate willingness to listen and learn from their mentors.

Conclusion

Based on the outcome of this study, it could be concluded that effective research skills, effective teaching skills, supervision and evaluation of students, interpersonal relationship between colleagues and students, communication skills, management of students academic records, mastery of subject matter, proposal writing, techniques on classroom management, best use of resources and materials are areas of job specifications of newly employed lecturers that could be enhanced through mentoring. It was concluded that there is a significant relationship between mentorship and professional competence of newly employed lecturers in universities in Cross River State.

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APPENDIX I

MENTORSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF NEWLY EMPLOYED LECTURERS' QUESTIONNAIRE (MPCNELQ)

This questionnaire seeks the collection of data to ascertain the relationship between mentorship and professional competence of newly employed lecturers in Universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.
 This research has nothing to do with you as an individual or your job as a lecturer. It is purely an academic exercise.
Kindly feel free to respond appropriately and honestly to the questionnaire items in each of the sections. All information given would be treated confidentially.
Thanks for your cooperation.
Please indicate the level of your agreement to the items

Strongly Agree	SA
Agree	A
Disagree	D
Strongly Disagree	SD

S/no	Items	SA	A	D	SD
	Mentorship **My mentor:**				
1.	takes me to classroom to observe him/her teach				
2.	gives me personal tasks to encourage me embark on personal projects				
3.	holds private sessions with me on a weekly basis				
4.	provides me with textbooks in my area of specialty				
5.	does not advice me to attend conferences				
6.	and I have not collaborated in any research project				
7.	does not always make himself/ herself available for me because of his/her tight schedules				
8.	is eager to see me learn				
9.	provides me with useful websites from where to gather resources for research				
	Professional competence **Through mentorship I have:**				
10.	acquired effective research skills				
11.	acquired effective teaching skills				
12.	acquired good classroom management skills				
13.	gotten good knowledge of the techniques for writing proposal				

	for research grants				
14.	learnt how best to maintain cordial relationship with colleagues				
15.	learnt the dynamics of supervising students projects				
16.	a good knowledge of how to prepare students results				
17.	a good mastery of my subject area because my mentor provides me with necessary resources				
18.	learnt the different ways to evaluate students				

APPENDIX II

Assessment of areas of professional competence of lecturers that could be enhanced through mentoring
Please indicate the level of your agreement to the items below
4 indicates the highest and 1 the lowest

S/N	Items	4	3	2	1
1.	Effective research skills				
2.	Effective teaching skills				
3.	Supervision and evaluation of students				
4.	Interpersonal relationship between colleagues and students				
5.	Effective Communication skills				
6.	Management of students' academic records				
7.	Mastery of subject matter				
8.	Techniques in Proposal writing				
9.	Techniques of classroom management				
10.	Best use of resources and materials				