



Article

Mentorship in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: Importance, Barriers and Strategies for Effective Implementation

Ben Ethel Eke

1. Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt

Abstract: Mentorship has become an indispensable strategy for promoting academic excellence, professional development, leadership succession, and institutional sustainability in tertiary institutions across the world. Through mentorship, experienced academics transfer knowledge, research skills, professional ethics, and leadership competencies to younger colleagues and students, thereby strengthening institutional capacity and improving educational quality. Despite its numerous benefits, mentorship in Nigerian tertiary institutions remains inadequately institutionalized and faces several implementation challenges. These include the shortage of experienced mentors, excessive workload, inadequate funding, absence of formal mentorship policies, weak mentoring culture, poor communication, and insufficient institutional support. These barriers have weakened knowledge transfer, reduced research productivity, slowed career progression, and limited leadership development among academic staff. This paper examines the concept of mentorship, discusses its importance in tertiary institutions, identifies the major barriers to effective mentorship in Nigerian higher education, and proposes strategies for strengthening mentorship practices. The paper concludes that effective mentorship is essential for improving teaching quality, research productivity, staff retention, and institutional competitiveness. It recommends the development of comprehensive mentorship policies, increased funding for staff development, reduction of academic workload, recognition of mentoring in promotion exercises, capacity-building programmes for mentors, and the establishment of institutional mentoring frameworks to promote sustainable academic development.

Keywords: Mentorship, Academic Staff Development, Professional Development, Higher Education, Nigerian Tertiary Institutions, Research Productivity.

Citation: Eke, B. E. Mentorship in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: Importance, Barriers and Strategies for Effective Implementation. Web of Scholars: Multidimensional Research Journal 2026, 5(4), 8-14.

Received: 10th Jun 2026

Revised: 1st Jul 2026

Accepted: 18th Jul 2026

Published: 7th Aug 2026



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

1. Introduction

The quality of any tertiary institution largely depends on the competence, productivity, and continuous professional development of its academic staff. Universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education are expected to produce skilled graduates, generate new knowledge through research, and contribute to national development through community engagement. Achieving these objectives requires deliberate investment in human capital development, one of which is mentorship. Mentorship is a professional developmental relationship in which experienced academics provide guidance, coaching, counselling, encouragement, and career support to less experienced colleagues and students. It facilitates the transfer of knowledge, research competence, professional ethics, leadership skills, and institutional values that are essential for academic excellence [1].

Mentorship has been recognized as an effective mechanism for improving teaching effectiveness, increasing research productivity, enhancing career progression, strengthening leadership succession, and promoting institutional sustainability. In developed higher education systems, structured mentoring programmes have become an integral component of academic staff development because they improve the quality of

teaching, encourage collaborative research, enhance grant acquisition, and support succession planning. Mentorship also contributes to job satisfaction, staff retention, innovation, and institutional competitiveness. In Nigeria, tertiary institutions operate in a rapidly changing educational environment characterized by technological advancement, globalization, increased competition, and growing expectations for quality assurance. These developments require continuous capacity building of academic staff. However, many newly employed lecturers encounter challenges in adapting to academic responsibilities, including teaching, research, supervision, scholarly publishing, grant writing, and university administration [2]. Without effective mentoring, these challenges may negatively affect their productivity, career progression, and overall institutional performance.

Despite the strategic importance of mentorship, its implementation in many Nigerian tertiary institutions remains weak. Many institutions lack formal mentoring policies and structured programmes to support the professional development of young academics. In addition, inadequate funding, shortage of experienced mentors resulting from brain drain and retirements, excessive workload, poor institutional support, weak mentoring culture, and communication barriers have significantly limited the effectiveness of mentoring relationships. Consequently, knowledge transfer between senior and junior academics has declined, reducing opportunities for leadership development and institutional continuity [3].

Although several studies have examined staff development and academic productivity in Nigerian higher education, relatively few have comprehensively synthesized the importance of mentorship alongside the barriers hindering its effective implementation. This gap underscores the need for a conceptual review that integrates existing knowledge and proposes practical strategies for strengthening mentoring practices in Nigerian tertiary institutions. It is against this background that this paper examines the concept of mentorship, discusses its importance in tertiary institutions, identifies the barriers to effective mentorship in Nigerian tertiary institutions, and recommends strategies for improving mentorship practices to enhance institutional effectiveness and sustainable academic development [4].

Tertiary education offers a broad range of academic disciplines and professional programs, including bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, doctoral degrees, and professional certifications. It focuses on in-depth exploration of subject areas, critical thinking, research skills, and the development of specialized expertise. Tertiary education is an organized educational system that is consciously designed for manpower production, in-service training and national development. Tertiary education is an education that advances teaching, research and community services for national development. Tertiary education is an education industry that is meant for the production of manpower and national development via implementation of teaching, research and provision of community services [5]. According to Edinoh and Wali-Essien, tertiary education is a social agent of progress and development in the society and aids technological advancement. It is designed to help in the development of nations by providing the high as well as the middle level manpower needed for the social, economic and political advancement through the programme of teaching, learning, research and community services. Tertiary education is defined by National policy on Education as the education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-University Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and the National Teachers' Institutes (NTI). Tertiary education is a crucial component of national development, designed to address and solve pressing local, national, and international problems through intensive teaching, research, and the provision of community services [6]. It plays a pivotal role in fostering individual development and growth, while also making a positive impact on society at large. By equipping individuals with advanced knowledge and skills, tertiary education contributes to the creation of a knowledgeable and skilled workforce capable of driving

innovation and progress. Tertiary education is an education designed for transformation of the states and for production of manpower through active engagement of teaching, research and provision of community services. Mentoring is a social interaction that leads to the process of transferring knowledge, value and ethics of profession to young ones in an institutions. Mentorship according to Mentorship Akpotohwo, mean someone who imparts wisdom to or shares knowledge with a less experienced colleague. It can also be seen as a wise and trusted counselor or teacher. For Ekechukwu and Horsfall, 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) [7]. Thus, mentoring in universities can loosely be described as the responsibility or task of an experience staff (academic and non-academic staff) to instruct and guide another staff that is less experience and sophisticated with knowledge by way of sharing his expertise, knowledge and wisdom which is a social capital and invaluable asset of an organization. Cranwell-ward; Mavuso 2007 and Akpotohwo, stated that mentoring is an excellent development initiative to help address the challenge brought up by the knowledge economy. Through mentoring, knowledge will be shared both ways between mentors and protégé's, also ensuring that there is little or no knowledge lost when a staff member resigns from the university. Effective knowledge management plan will ensure transferring and sharing knowledge across through mentoring. By this, universities are making sure that knowledge is retained at all times and that there is no loss of the most valuable asset of the university. Mentoring is an informal and formal arrangement that provide support, advice, encouragement, and even friendship to students, academic, non-academic, researchers and university administrator. Academic mentoring is designed to help and improve students and academic to be more grounded in the academic profession [8].

Mentorship is a developmental relationship in which a more experienced individual (mentor) provides career guidance, psychosocial support, coaching, protection, and role modelling to a less experienced individual (mentee) to facilitate personal and professional growth.

Anderson and Shannon viewed Mentorship as he act of nurturing process in which a skilled and experienced individual guides, supports, counsels, and encourages another person to achieve professional competence, confidence, and career success. For Crisp and Cruz, Mentorship is a purposeful relationship through which experienced individuals provide emotional support, career guidance, academic assistance, and role modelling that contribute to the educational and personal development of mentees. Also, UNESCO defined Mentorship as a structured professional relationship in which experienced practitioners intentionally support the learning, leadership development, capacity building, and career advancement of less experienced individuals. Mentorship in tertiary institutions refers to a formal or informal professional relationship in which experienced academic staff intentionally guide, supervise, motivate, and support younger academics or students in developing the knowledge, skills, values, research competence, leadership ability, and professional ethics required for academic excellence and career progression [9], [10].

2. Methodology

2.1. Importance of Mentorship in Tertiary Institutions

2.1.1. Enhances Professional Development of Academic Staff

Mentorship accelerates the professional growth of newly employed lecturers by exposing them to institutional norms, teaching methodologies, research ethics, grant writing, curriculum development, and academic leadership. Experienced mentors transfer tacit knowledge that cannot easily be acquired through formal training programmes. Through continuous guidance, mentees develop competence in teaching, supervision, administration, and community service, thereby becoming productive

academics. Effective mentoring also shortens the adjustment period for newly recruited staff and improves institutional productivity.

2.1.2. Improves Research Productivity

Research productivity remains one of the primary indicators of academic excellence in universities. Mentorship enables junior academics to acquire competencies in research design, scholarly writing, publication strategies, data analysis, citation management, grant proposal development, and conference presentations. Mentors often introduce mentees to collaborative research networks and multidisciplinary teams, increasing opportunities for high-quality publications and funded research projects. Consequently, institutions with strong mentoring cultures generally record higher research outputs and improved global rankings.

2.1.3. Facilitates Career Progression

Academic promotion depends on measurable achievements in teaching, research, publications, administrative responsibilities, and community service. Mentors assist mentees in understanding promotion requirements, setting career goals, building academic portfolios, and avoiding professional mistakes that may delay advancement. Regular mentoring therefore increases promotion success rates and prepares future academic leaders capable of assuming administrative responsibilities such as Head of Department, Dean, Director, and Vice-Chancellor.

2.2. Promotes Quality Teaching and Learning

Mentorship improves instructional quality by helping lecturers master effective teaching strategies, learner-centred pedagogies, classroom management techniques, curriculum implementation, assessment methods, and educational technologies. Mentors provide constructive feedback after classroom observations and encourage reflective teaching practices. Improved teaching competence enhances students' academic achievement, learning experiences, and overall institutional quality.

2.3. Strengthens Institutional Culture and Leadership Development

Mentorship facilitates the transmission of institutional values, ethical standards, professional conduct, and organizational culture from experienced academics to younger colleagues. It prepares future institutional leaders by developing decision-making abilities, communication skills, conflict management competence, strategic planning capacity, and administrative experience. As leadership succession improves, institutional stability and continuity are enhanced.

2.4. Improves Staff Retention, Motivation and Job Satisfaction

Junior academics who receive regular mentoring experience greater confidence, reduced work-related stress, increased motivation, and stronger commitment to their institutions. Mentoring provides emotional support, encourages resilience during career challenges, and creates a sense of belonging within the academic community. Staff turnover declines while organizational commitment and productivity increase.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Inadequate Number of Experienced Mentors

One of the greatest challenges confronting mentorship in Nigerian tertiary institutions is the shortage of experienced academic staff available to mentor younger academics and students. The persistent brain drain, retirement of senior lecturers, poor staff replacement policies, and inadequate recruitment have significantly reduced the number of professors and senior academics in many institutions [11]. Consequently, Ogunode observed that the few available senior academics are expected to mentor numerous junior lecturers while simultaneously performing teaching, research, administrative, and community service responsibilities. This excessive mentor-to-mentee ratio reduces the quality of mentoring relationships, limits regular interaction, and deprives mentees of the individualized guidance required for professional growth. In some departments, newly recruited lecturers are left without mentors, forcing them to learn through trial and error, which may negatively affect their teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and career progression.

3.2. Heavy Workload of Academic Staff

The workload of academic staff in Nigerian tertiary institutions has continued to increase due to rising student enrolment, inadequate staffing, and expanding institutional responsibilities. Lecturers are expected to teach several courses, supervise undergraduate and postgraduate students, conduct research, publish scholarly articles, participate in accreditation exercises, attend committee meetings, perform administrative duties, and engage in community service. These responsibilities consume a significant proportion of their working hours, leaving little or no time for structured mentoring activities [12]. As a result, mentoring meetings become irregular, feedback to mentees is delayed, and meaningful professional relationships are weakened. Without sufficient time for interaction, mentees are unable to benefit fully from the experience and expertise of their mentors [13].

3.3. Poor Funding of Higher Education

Poor funding remains a major obstacle to effective mentorship in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Government allocations to higher education are often insufficient to meet institutional needs, resulting in inadequate resources for staff development and mentoring programmes. Financial constraints limit the organization of mentor training workshops, research collaborations, academic conferences, leadership development programmes, and mentoring seminars. Many institutions are unable to provide incentives or recognition for mentors who devote considerable time to developing junior colleagues. Furthermore, inadequate funding reduces opportunities for research grants, international academic exchanges, and professional networking, all of which strengthen mentoring relationships. Consequently, mentoring programmes remain largely informal, poorly coordinated, and unsustainable [14], [15], [16].

3.4. Absence of Formal Mentorship Policies and Institutional Frameworks

Many Nigerian tertiary institutions lack comprehensive mentorship policies that clearly define the objectives, procedures, responsibilities, monitoring mechanisms, and evaluation criteria for mentoring programmes. In the absence of institutional guidelines, mentoring is often left to individual initiative rather than becoming an organized institutional responsibility. Mentor selection is frequently informal, and there are no standardized procedures for matching mentors with mentees based on academic interests or career goals [17]. Similarly, institutions rarely assess the effectiveness of mentoring relationships or provide training for mentors. The absence of policy frameworks results in inconsistency, poor accountability, weak programme implementation, and the discontinuation of mentoring activities whenever committed individuals leave the institution.

3.5. Weak Mentoring and Research Culture

A strong mentoring culture encourages experienced academics to intentionally develop younger colleagues [18], [19]. Unfortunately, such a culture is weak in many Nigerian tertiary institutions. Promotion systems often place greater emphasis on publications, grants, and administrative appointments than on mentoring contributions. Many senior academics devote more attention to activities that directly influence promotion while giving limited attention to mentoring responsibilities. Some academics may also perceive junior colleagues as competitors rather than future collaborators, thereby reducing their willingness to share research ideas, professional networks, and career opportunities [20], [21], [22]. This weak culture of knowledge sharing hinders leadership succession, institutional continuity, and the development of future scholars.

3.6. Communication and Interpersonal Challenges

Successful mentorship depends on mutual trust, respect, effective communication, confidentiality, and commitment from both mentors and mentees [23], [24]. However, interpersonal challenges frequently undermine mentoring relationships in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Differences in age, personality, gender, disciplinary orientation, expectations, communication styles, and professional values may create misunderstandings between mentors and mentees. In some cases, mentors may adopt authoritarian approaches that discourage open communication, while some mentees may be reluctant to seek advice due to fear of criticism or rejection. Irregular meetings, lack of

feedback, poor listening skills, and limited interpersonal trust further weaken mentoring relationships. These communication barriers reduce knowledge transfer, diminish mentees' confidence, and ultimately limit the effectiveness of mentorship programmes.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Mentorship is an indispensable component of academic staff development and institutional sustainability in tertiary education. It facilitates knowledge transfer, enhances research productivity, improves teaching effectiveness, supports leadership development, and prepares the next generation of scholars and administrators. Despite its enormous benefits, mentorship in Nigerian tertiary institutions is constrained by numerous challenges, including the shortage of experienced mentors, excessive workload, inadequate funding, absence of institutional mentoring policies, weak mentoring culture, and communication barriers. These challenges have limited the effectiveness of mentorship programmes and slowed the professional development of many academics. Addressing these barriers should be a priority for governments, institutional administrators, and regulatory agencies because effective mentorship is essential for improving the quality, competitiveness, and global relevance of Nigerian higher education. The Federal and State Governments should increase funding for tertiary institutions to support structured mentorship programmes, staff development, research collaboration, and leadership training. Governing councils and institutional management should develop comprehensive mentorship policies that clearly define mentor selection, mentoring responsibilities, programme implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Tertiary institutions should recruit more qualified academic staff to reduce workload and enable senior academics to devote adequate time to mentoring junior colleagues. Mentorship activities should be recognized as a criterion for staff promotion and annual performance evaluation to encourage greater commitment among senior academics. Regular capacity-building workshops should be organized to equip mentors with effective mentoring, coaching, communication, and leadership skills. Institutions should promote a culture of collaboration, mutual respect, research partnership, and knowledge sharing that encourages productive and sustainable mentor–mentee relationships across departments and disciplines.

REFERENCES

- [1] T. D. Allen, L. T. Eby, M. L. Poteet, E. Lentz, and L. Lima, "Career benefits associated with mentoring," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 89, no. 1, pp. 127–136, 2004.
- [2] E. M. Anderson and A. L. Shannon, "Toward a conceptualization of mentoring," *Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 38–42, 1988.
- [3] F. C. Akpotohwo, "Knowledge management: A strategy for mentoring in Nigerian universities," *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management*, vol. 8, no. 11, pp. 388–398, 2020.
- [4] C. J. Bland, A. L. Taylor, S. L. Shollen, A. M. Weber-Main, and P. A. Mulcahy, *Faculty Success Through Mentoring*. Lanham, MD, USA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.
- [5] G. Crisp and I. Cruz, "Mentoring college students: A critical review of the literature," *Research in Higher Education*, vol. 50, no. 6, pp. 525–545, 2009.
- [6] D. F. Dietlind and L. V. A. Lydia, "Mentoring in teacher education—Towards innovative school development," presented at the 27th Annual Conference of the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE), Warsaw, Poland, Sep. 2002.
- [7] G. T. Dayo, "Mentoring in educational education in Nigeria: Problems and solution," *Journal of Social Science*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 25–37, 2015.
- [8] R. O. Ekechukwu and M. Horsfall, "Academic mentoring in higher education: A strategy to quality assurance in teacher education in Nigeria," *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Educational Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 37–45, 2015.
- [9] R. I. A. Eyitayo, A. F. Bamidele, and M. A. Aremu, "Mentoring among academic staff of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria," *Journal of Education and Human Development*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 159–167, 2015.
- [10] Federal Republic of Nigeria, *National Policy on Education*, 4th ed. Lagos, Nigeria: Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, 2013.
- [11] F. U. A., L. M. U., and K. O., "Academic mentoring relationship: A necessity for the sustainability of education in Nigerian universities," unpublished manuscript.

- [12] K. E. Kram, *Mentoring at Work: Developmental Relationships in Organizational Life*. Glenview, IL, USA: Scott, Foresman, 1985.
- [13] P. Mathew, "Academic mentoring: Enhancing the use of scarce resources," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 13–34, 2003.
- [14] National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), *Issues and Problems in Higher Education in Nigeria*. Lagos, Nigeria: National Open University of Nigeria, 2009.
- [15] A. E. Nwisagbo, "Balancing authority and mentorship: An ethical framework for supervisor-supervisee relationship in academic settings," *International Journal of Education, Management Sciences and Professional Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 285–297, 2025.
- [16] M. A. Mavuso, "Mentoring as a knowledge management tool in organization," Master's thesis, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa, 2007.
- [17] "Mentoring model," Wikipedia, 2018. [Online]. Available: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mentor>. [Accessed: Aug. 5, 2019].
- [18] K. T. Muhammed, "Mentoring in higher education in Nigeria," *International Journal of Education*, vol. 6, no. 5, pp. 20–30, 2013.
- [19] W. N. Ofojebe and E. T. C. Chukwuma, "Managing the Nigerian tertiary education for national transformation through effective continuous staff training and development (CSTD)," *International Journal of Education and Practice*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 143–155, 2015.
- [20] N. J. Ogunode, "Benefit of digital literacy for academic staff and students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria," *American Journal of Alternative Education*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 43–53, 2025.
- [21] N. J. Ogunode, A. E. Olaoye, and I. Yakubu, "Adequate funding of public universities and effective implementation of Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) in North-East, Nigeria universities," *Analytical Journal of Education and Development*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 215–222, 2023.
- [22] N. J. Ogunode, *Mentoring in Tertiary Education in Nigeria*. Nigeria, 2024.
- [23] ProctorEdu, "Tertiary education—Definition & meaning," 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://proctoredu.com/glossary/tertiary-education>. [Accessed: Jul. 2025].
- [24] T. Outhred and A. Chester, "The experience of class tutors in a peer tutoring programme: A novel theoretical framework," *Australasian Journal of Peer Learning*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 12–23, 2010.