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MENTORING OF PARA-PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN NORTH-CENTRAL, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The study investigated mentoring of para-professional staff in federal university libraries in North-Central Nigeria. This research determined the extent of mentoring and factors militating against mentoring of para-professional staff. The study adopts descriptive Survey research design and content analysis. The population of the study comprised of 161 para-professional staff in federal university libraries in North-Central Nigeria. Total enumeration was used because the population size was small and manageable. Questionnaire was adopted and designed as a survey instrument for data collection. Out of 161 copies of questionnaire distributed, 132(82%) copies were properly filled, returned and used for the analysis. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that: extent of mentoring of para-professional staff is high with ($\bar{x}=3.15$), mentees becoming too much dependent on the mentor for all decisions ($\bar{x}=2.90$) and inadequate professional orientation ($\bar{x}=2.87$) were the major factors identified militating against mentoring of para-professional staff among others. To effectively prevent future problems the study therefore, recommended that concerted effort should be made to sensitize both the mentors and the mentees, orientation programme on mentoring and its benefits should be frequently organized by libraries and professional associations

Key words: Mentoring, Federal university libraries, Para-professional staff, North-Central Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

University libraries are established to support the teaching, research and community functions of the parent institutions. To this end, they are responsible for identifying, selecting, organizing, processing and providing access to information resources in various format that are required for academic work. Information and human resources are required if libraries are to meet the need of their academic environment. Academic library is measured by the extent to which its resources and services meet the needs of the academic community where it is established. This implies that both information and human resources are required if libraries are to meet the needs of their academic community. However, beyond possession of information resources, an academic library must have competent human resources whose responsibility is to ensure that

the information resources and other services provided by the library are made accessible to users.

The quality of academic library depends upon the quality of workforce, which in turn directly depends on knowledge, adaptability, and satisfaction level of the professionals working in a given library. High quality staff can transform even the poorest library into an operation offering excellent service. Ibegbulem and Eze (2016) noted that the library staff are classified into two major groups: professionals or librarians and para-professionals or support staff. The librarians staff hold a first degree in the field of library and information science in recognize university library science programmes while the para-professional staff are those workers who do not hold a degree in library and information science but assist the librarians in their work. They are classified into library assistants and library officers. In terms of educational qualification, the library assistants they are graduates of secondary schools that possess West Africa Examination Council certificate (WAEC) while the library officers possess Diploma Certificate in Library and Information Science.

Mentoring practices enable the para-professionals to gain relevant skills in providing appropriate information resources to meet the increasing demand of the clientele. Productivity is achievable in libraries if the library management can discover the inherent potentials in each library staff and apply all needed strategies to ensure these potentials are harnessed, among these numerous strategies is mentoring. Mentoring is a developmental, caring, sharing, and helping relationship where one person (mentor) invests time, technical know-how, and efforts in enhancing another person's (mentee), knowledge, growth, and skills by responding to critical needs in the mentee's life in ways that prepare him/her for greater productivity or achievement in the future.

Researches have shown that having a mentor improves employees' engagement. Over the last several decades, mentorship has been increasingly recognized as essential to personal productivity in an institution. Mentoring is an important concept for libraries as work functions cannot be adequately performed, where less experienced staff members are left to perform library duties without the guidance of more experienced personnel. Irrespective of library holdings, a library cannot meet the needs of the users if the personnel lack the required job skills.

Mentoring can occur in a formal or informal way. Formal mentoring is when there is a programme designed to guide mentoring activities within an organization. Formal mentoring is structured, limited time, professional relations, monitored and controlled, success depends on mutual responsibility and known expectation while informal mentoring is less structured, continue independently, more like friendship, based on trust, no supervision involved, no prearranged plans, meetings or expectation. *Timsal et al.* (2016) posited that a training programme could never be Academic libraries make effort in structuring a mentoring program to assist both new and old librarians in keeping abreast their professional, skill and career growth. They achieve this by organizing internal workshops, training, seminars etc. The professional training will help build the librarian's depths of knowledge required overtime. Mentoring relationships play vital role in professional development. Library school has not met this requirement of equipping the young librarians or the technically unskilled librarian to meet up with the required skills to fit the new roles of library. Harrington and Marshall (2014) opined that the successful transition from library school programme to a practicing academic librarian requires a complex combination of skills. These skills can be acquired on on-the-job training.

Both informal and formal mentoring can help in achieving this purpose. Nwabueze and Ozioko (2013) observed that no institution can exist without order and more experienced members passing on knowledge acquired over years to new members.

Mentoring is a method of learning and development based on individual relationship in which an experienced librarian, called a mentor helps a newly employed staff, called a mentee to develop and achieve professional goals. Mentoring programme in university libraries boosts individuals and team commitment and permits individuals to gain greater insight into the library's workings and help to increase communication within the library. It also helps to change organizational culture to better level, give individual the chance to meet different people within the library and network, and improves levels of performance success.

The concept of mentoring is an evolving one, because of recent developments in the field of mentoring programmes and activities. A process that supports the mentee's career growth by providing coaching, visibility, protection, and challenging assignments. This can be a valuable factor of the agenda. A newly recruited staff needs to undergo orientations or induction before he/she can perform effectively and efficiently in library. Recent mentoring programmes and studies have brought about flexibility of mentoring as a continuing professional development activity.

Academic mentoring has expanded and is found in most colleges and universities frequently as a means of outreach. Academic mentoring is used extensively in library for several reasons. It has been said that one will be mentally more powerful, if one concentrates on how to find knowledge rather than try to remember everything one has learned. It is also widely recognized that the ability to use information is extremely important in today's society. Mentoring can be achieved by pairing experienced employees with new or less experienced ones and it is an often-overlooked method of providing staff development opportunities within libraries. The very best type of mentoring occurs when the relationship between new and experienced employees develops naturally.

Benefits of Mentoring include the following;

The best way to share knowledge and the unique experience of a library; 2. Supportive relationship of a seasoned knowledgeable colleague to hoist her less experienced peer; 3. An investment to the professional growth of new staff with no money spend for outside training; 4. The effective way of adaption of the new library staff to the library culture; and 5. Benefit a mentor, a mentee and a library.

Mentoring influences information sharing behavior by creating a supportive environment where people feel comfortable sharing their knowledge and experiences with others. Individuals may become more confident in their abilities and more willing to share their insights and perspectives with the help and encouragement of a mentor (Ransdell et al., 2021). A mentor may also demonstrate the value of sharing knowledge and expertise with others by modeling positive information-sharing behaviors. Mentoring can help build more robust and collaborative students by fostering a culture of information sharing, where individuals can learn from one another and achieve their goals together. Also, mentoring supports development of competence by providing guidance, support, and feedback as they gain new knowledge and skills (Mullen and Klimaitis, 2021).

A mentor helps identify areas where mentees need to improve their competence and can provide resources and support to achieve their goals. For instance, mentors can provide valuable perspectives and guidance by sharing their own experiences and insights, assisting the individual to overcome challenges and progress in their development. This may boost the mentees' confidence and self-efficacy for continuous growth and improvement. Overall, mentoring can be an effective tool for promoting development of competence and assisting individuals in reaching their full potential. Consequently, mentoring improves research skills by providing guidance, support, and feedback throughout the research process (Atkins *et al.*, 2020). For instance, mentors offer feedback, identify areas for improvement, and provide encouragement and motivation.

Mentoring tools for professional development

Mentoring tools help mentees identify what success look like. In this era of global competition, restructuring, rapid technological changes and constrained resources, organizations are searching for what to do more with less expertise in the area of human resources development (Dominguez and Hager, 2013).

- 1. Identification of Mentees and their Specific Needs:** to understand the interest of the mentees, the organization will conduct a need assessment. This can be through the performance appraisal system or a survey, which will highlight what the mentee requires both professionally and personally. Mentees may also express to the mentor to be mentored in a given area. Also, the library management should identify a number of mentors. The mentors will be identified based on their qualification highlighted in the mentoring fundamental.
- 2. Orientation for Mentors and Mentees:** mentoring programmes can benefit the library organization as a whole through orientation. The programme is most successful when mentors and mentees receive thorough orientation before they are given mentors/mentees. They should be allowed to make informal decisions about whether or not to participate in the programme or not. The prospective mentors / mentees should clearly understand the goals of the programme as well as their roles and responsibilities. There should be an overview on the mentorship programme including goals, mission, commencement date and duration. There has to be a level of commitment on the both sides.
- 3. Matching Mentors and Mentees:** the senior person acts as a mentor to provide a variety of functions that support, guides, protect, expose and counsel the young adult to get work done effectively. Matching mentors and mentees is very crucial for the success of the overall programme. The matching procedure will help in understanding the process of properly matching the senior as mentor and the junior as mentee based on the needs. It is more effective if a mentee chooses his/her mentor than if they are matched by administration.
- 4. Evaluation of the Programme:** effective database evaluation of mentoring is important to help overcome biases and make good decision about mentoring relationship changes. It also enables appropriate allocation of departmental resources and effects toward supporting the most effective elements of mentoring. It allows sharing of success with stakeholders and participants. Evaluation is an important tool in mentoring programme tool box.

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Factors Militating against Mentoring of Paraprofessional Staff

There are factors that militate against effective mentoring in academic libraries; some factors may come from the mentors, mentees or the organization (Osadebe et al., 2016). The mentioned ones are mentees inability to open up during interaction, unconstructive criticism from mentors to their mentees, setting behavioural goals, inability to keep to plan, mentee becoming too dependent on the mentor for all decisions, development of inappropriate feelings as a result of the close nature of the relationship as well as professional jealousy from colleagues. Also, lack of sincere desire to share knowledge by the mentor and inability of both mentor and the mentee to keep to goals and objectives of the relationship. It is not all relationships that are successful. An unsuccessful mentor/ mentee relationship may be due to lack of sensitivity, academic preparation and miscommunication, difficulty in establishing peer relationships and also lack of professional role models.

Every mentoring programme ought to observe a little of the 80/20 rule whereas 80% is the planning and 20% is implementation. Another militating factor is unwillingness of both the mentor (skilled librarian) and the protege (less skilled librarian). This might occur because of mandatory mentoring programmes in the organizational setting. Management sometimes makes participation in the mentoring programme mandatory for certain individuals. Such individuals see it as punishment rather than an opportunity. Another challenge is wrong choice of mentors. In such arrangement all the senior staff to become mentors with the assumption that they had both the skills and experiences necessary to be good mentors to an extent its leads to having mentors who cannot mentor or just do not want to mentor. Ugwuanyi (2014) identifies some challenges to successful mentoring relationships in libraries as: (a) Wrong choice of mentors: mentors are chosen without due consideration of career goal or interests, aptitude and attitudes of the mentee. In this case, the effectiveness of the programme will be challenged; (b) Setting behavioural goals: Goals comprise broad objectives, which need to be broken down into objectives that are specific, measurable and achievable. Without specific objectives, it becomes difficult to assess or measure the extent to which the broad goals have been attained; (c) Mentee's inability to open up during interaction. When this happens, mentees fail to interact and operate at required frequencies. As these types of mentoring behaviours are emitted both parties loose direction and achieve less; (d) Unconstructive criticism from mentors to their mentees instead of encouraging them: this kills inventiveness as it dampens the zeal and spirit of self-discovery, under this condition the mentees go into desperation and despondency. when the mentor does not specify the objectives of informal mentoring there is every possibility that problems will arise that will hinder rather than enhance the career development of the mentee (David and Nmecha, 2019). The issues of too much dependency on the mentor by the mentees which is likely to hinder their growth and development in their career. Also, the issue of insubordination, which is likely to make it impossible for the mentor to impart the much-needed knowledge to the mentee may cause retrogression in the career development of the mentee because nobody will want to associate with a fellow that does not heed to advise and instructions.

This inhibitive attitude may not allow the mentor to identify areas of need and address them appropriately. In another vein, the challenge that comes from both the mentor and mentee in the course of mentoring of academic librarians for career development bothers on their inability to keep to the goals and objectives of their relationships. When there is a violation of the rules

of engagement of the mentoring process by either of the parties involved, the goals and objectives of the whole exercise will not be accomplished (David-West and Nmecha, 2019). This will be to the detriment of the mentor and mentees career development. Other issues of challenge to mentoring of academic librarians have to do with development of inappropriate emotions either on the part of the mentor or mentee. This is likely to lead to diversion and distraction from the main purpose of mentoring which is to enhance the mutual career development of both the mentor and mentee. Broken confidence is yet another challenge of mentoring academic librarians. When this happens, it creates a distrust which is inimical to achieving success in mentoring. This will hinder lifelong learning which mentoring is meant to ingrain in the mentee for career development and success.

Statement of the problem

Mentoring stands to be one of the tools in which library staff can be re-skilled to meet up with their new roles. Newly employed library staff in university libraries have challenges in getting to know their expectations, routines, standards and organizational culture. It was discovered that early career librarians face challenges in areas of assimilation, isolation, work satisfaction and stress. Causes of these challenges could be inexperience, uncertain about their expectations, nervousness, etc. Rod-Welch and weeg (2022) asserted that mentors are chosen without due consideration of career goal or interest, aptitude and altitudes of the mentee, which in most cases make the effectiveness of the program devoid. Hence, this study investigates the extent of mentoring and factors militating against mentoring of para-professional staff in federal university libraries in North-Central Nigeria.

Objectives of Study

The aim of the study is to investigate mentoring of para-professional staff in federal university libraries in North-Central Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

1. determine the extent of mentoring of paraprofessional staff in federal university libraries in North-Central Nigeria.
2. identify the factors militating against mentoring of para-professional staff in federal university libraries in North-Central Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. what is the extent of mentoring of paraprofessional staff in federal university libraries in North-central Nigeria?
2. what are the factors militating against mentoring of para-professional staff in federal university libraries in North-Central Nigeria?

Research Methodology

The study adopts descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consist of 161 paraprofessionals in federal university libraries in North-Central, Nigeria namely: Federal --University of Technology, Minna, University of Abuja, Federal University, Lafia, University of Ilorin, Federal University, Lokoja and University of Jos. A questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. One hundred and sixty one (161) questionnaire were administered to the respondents and one hundred and thirty two (132)(82%) responses were received from the respondent which was used for data analysis. The data and research questions were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Response rate

The para-professional were asked to indicate their demographic data. Table 1 shows the responses based on name of academic library, academic qualification, year of experience(s) and gender.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Data

S/N	Names of Federal University	frequency	Percentage(s) (%)
1	University of Abuja	26	20
2	Federal University, Lafia	18	14
3	Federal University, Lokoja	9	7
4	Federal University of Technology, Minna	31	23
5	University of Ilorin	16	12
6	University of Jos	32	24
	Total	132	100

Data analysis and Result

Table 2: Demographic Distribution of the Respondents

Academic Qualification	Frequency	Percentage(s)
OND	54	41
NCE	48	36
HND	30	23
Total	132	100

Years of Experience	Frequency	Percentage(s)
1-5 years	29	22
6-10 years	48	36
11-15 years	26	20
16-20 years	19	14
21 years and above	10	8
Total	132	100

S/N	Gender	Frequency	Percentage(s)
1	Male	85	64
2	Female	47	36
Total		132	100

The results from Table 1 shows that 26(20%) of the respondents were from Abuja University, 18(14%) of the respondents were from Federal University, Lafia, 9(7%) of the respondents were from Federal University, Lokoja, 31(23%) of the respondents were from federal University of Technology, Minna, 16(12%) of the respondents were from University of Ilorin, 32(24%) of the respondents were from University of Jos. This shows that most of the

respondents were from Jos and federal university of technology Minna university libraries respectively. similarly, 54(41%) of the respondents were Diploma OND holders, 48(36%) of the respondents were NCE holders and 30(23%) of the respondents were HND holders.

Furthermore, 29(22%) Respondents have 1-5years working experience, 48(36%) of the respondents have 6-10 years of work experience, 26(20%) of the respondents have 11-15 years of work experience, 19(14) of the respondents have 16-20 years and 10(8%) of the respondents have 21 and above years of working experience. On the other hand, 85(64%) of the respondents were male, while 47(36%) of the respondents were female. This indicate that most of the respondents were males

Research question 1: what is the extent of mentoring of paraprofessional staff in Federal University libraries in north Central Nigeria?

Table 3: Extent of mentoring of para-professional staff

S/N	Statements	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	N	FX	\bar{X}	STD
1	Coaching	38	61	27	6	132	395	2.99	0.82
2	Visibility	33	50	45	4	132	376	2.84	0.83
3	Orientation	49	60	18	5	132	417	3.15	0.80
4	Pairing experienced staff with new or less experienced staff	38	57	30	7	132	390	2.95	0.85
5	Organized mentoring activities (mentoringprogramme)	32	58	40	2	132	384	2.90	0.78
6	Publishing in high impact journals	30	43	50	9	132	358	2.71	0.90
7	Challenging assignments	24	57	44	7	132	362	2.74	0.82
8	Grant funding	23	48	50	11	132	347	2.62	0.87

Key: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), Very Low Extent (VLE)

Table 4.3 showed that eight items were listed for paraprofessional staff to respond on the extent of mentoring of para-professional staff. All the eight items Produced high score which were above the average bench mark of 2.50. These items include item 3: Orientation (\bar{x} =3.15), item 1: Coaching (\bar{x} =2.99), item pairing experience staff with new or less experienced staff (\bar{x} =2.95), item 4: organized mentoring activities (\bar{x} =2.90), item 2: Visibility (\bar{x} =2.84), item 7: challenging assignment (\bar{x} =2.74), item 6: publishing in high impact journal (\bar{x} =2.71) and item 8: Grant funding (\bar{x} =2.62).

Research Question 2: what are the factors militating against mentoring of paraprofessional staff in Federal University libraries in North-Central Nigeria?

Table 4: Factors militating against mentoring of paraprofessional staff

S/N	Statements	SA	A	D	SD	N	FX	\bar{X}	STD
1	Mentees inability to open up during interaction	30	63	34	5	132	380	2.88	0.79
2	Unconstructive criticisms from mentors to their mentee	32	51	34	15	132	353	2.75	0.95

3	Mentees becoming too much dependent on the mentor for all decisions	38	48	42	4	132	385	2.90	0.85
4	Wrong choice of mentor	32	46	44	10	132	359	2.75	0.90
5	inadequate professional orientation	39	47	37	9	132	379	2.87	0.93

Key: Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D), Strongly Disagreed (SD)

Table 4.6 showed that five items were listed for the respondents to indicate the factors that militate against mentoring of para-professional staff. Five items produced high mean scores which were above the bench mark of 2.50. these items include item 3: mentees becoming too much dependent on the mentors for all decisions (\bar{x} = 2.90), item 1: mentees inability to open up during interaction (\bar{x} =2.88), item 5: inadequate professional orientation (\bar{x} =2.87), item 4: wrong choice of mentor (\bar{x} =2.75) and item 2: unconstructive criticisms from mentors to their mentee (\bar{x} =2.75).

Discussion of Findings

What is the extent of mentoring of para-professional staff in federal university libraries in North-Central Nigeria?

The finding from research question one revealed that the extent of mentoring of para-professional in staff federal university libraries is high. The result supports the study of Freedman (2021) who highlighted that mentoring programs should therefore be elevated to the level of a major strategic priority. Library organizations that provide structured, formalized mentoring opportunities set themselves apart as compelling cultures to join where academic librarians can be nurtured and developed. Therefore, the result of the study is important for the fact that mentoring gives room for professional development of librarians

Research question 2: what are the factors militating against mentoring of para-professional staff in federal university libraries in North-Central Nigeria?

Results from research question revealed that the respondents agreed with all the problems associated with mentoring of para-professional staff. This indicate that mentoring of para-professional staff in federal university libraries is negatively affected with those factors. This is in agreement with findings of Njoku 2017 who reported that inadequate facilities required for e-mentoring, unconstructive criticisms by mentors to the mentees, broken confidentiality by both mentor and mentee, lack of sincere desire to share knowledge by the mentor and inability of both the mentor and the mentee to keep to goals and objectives of the relationship are the major problems militating against mentoring strategies in use for professional development of librarians.

CONCLUSION

Mentors need the right environment to carry on their role of mentoring to the mentees on research writing and job duties. Objectives and goals must be clearly defined, both for the programme overall and for the individuals in the mentoring relationship. Mentoring programme in university libraries boosts individuals and team commitment and permits individuals to gain greater insight into the library's workings and help to increase communication within the library. It also helps to change organizational culture to better level,

give individual the chance to meet different people within the library and network, and improves levels of performance success.

Numerous challenges to mentoring are all related to the attitude of the mentee, mentor, library management and lack of mentoring orientation in the practice of librarianship. With adequate training, good interpersonal and professional skills by both the mentee and the mentor, good communication from the library management among others are the suggested ways to overcome mentoring challenges in university libraries.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Orientation programme on mentoring and its benefits should be frequently organized by libraries and professional associations. This will enhance library staff development through skill acquisition and consequently ensure career success.
2. Concerted effort should be made to sensitize both the mentors and the mentees in changing their attitudes towards mentoring relationships for the benefit of the profession.

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