

Mentoring and Collaboration by LIS Educators for Effective Teaching and Good Practice in Library Schools in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examined mentoring and collaboration of Library and Information Science (LIS) educators for effective teaching and good practice in library schools in Nigeria. The study conceptualised mentoring, types of mentoring, advantages of mentoring, and the needs for mentoring. It delved into the concept of collaboration, types of collaboration, benefits of collaboration and the reason for collaboration among LIS educators. Reviewed literature shows that LIS educators are concerned with the development of inexperienced educators and to provide a supportive structure that will enhance their career development in the academia. Mentoring is an avenue through which the senior educators have to teach and guide the new and young educators how to carry out research and pass the right knowledge to students through lecturing. Collaboration among LIS educators is a process of educators coming together to brainstorm on the courses taught and in the area of research. This study concluded that the synergies realised through collaborative expertise, will actualise more benefits than individual effort. Mentoring and collaboration should be a means of successful progression in the academia. This paper has recommendations for some stakeholders in the training of LIS professionals.

Keywords: Mentoring, Collaboration, LIS Educators, Mentoring, Collaboration programmes

Introduction

The responsibilities of academics are basically teaching, research and community service. To effectively carry out these responsibilities and sustain an academic culture that will continually supports the development of the society, library and information science (LIS) educators need to engage in collaboration and mentoring. Collaboration is when two or more professionals come together to share ideas or achieve some defined objectives while mentoring is the act of providing guidance by a more qualified person to a less qualified person in a particular profession. Collaboration can be across the different strata of any professional set-up. In mentoring a professional higher on the ladder (mentor) guides someone less qualified and probably with less experience (mentee) than him or her.

Collaboration by educators has been credited with positive results for decades. The benefits are associated with effectiveness and improvement in

every classroom setting and research. Moreover, autonomous forms of educator action are being discouraged and research literature proposes the salvation through collaborative forms (Bondorf, 2013). For example, many educators experience difficulties in designing their course content because they lack the appropriate tools to facilitate good content. The assistance of teammates who have these tools will be well appreciated by these educators. Collaboration is described as a guarantor of a better school (Bauer, 2008). The concept of collaboration has a strong normative reference in academic research.

In teacher education, the search for more effective forms of delivering instruction is an on-going effort. The integration of technology in the library and information science profession is making the delivery of instructional methodology more engaging and innovative. However, it is widespread belief that the educators, not technology, are the drivers that can bring about desired change in library and information science education (Pier, Junor & Wanjira, 2009), and this can be achieved through collaboration. Collaborations among LIS educators are mainly in two areas. The first is in the area of teaching and secondly in the area of research.

Enhancing of the abilities of LIS educators should be a major step to take in improving the quality of lectures being delivered by new LIS educators and in turn help to preparing LIS graduates to contribute meaningfully to national development. According to Ladd and Fiske (2008), quality mentoring through professional development programmes will go a long way in improving the quality of the existing LIS educators' population. Wenglinski (2002) contends that some researchers have found that mentoring among educators can improve educators' quality by changing educators teaching style and practices. (Todaro and Smith, 2012).

Kumari (2010) explains that professional development and mentoring of educators implies their growth in knowledge and in their subject, training techniques, and their love for students and for their institution, in moral and ethical values and growth of their desire to give their best to the world of educating and society. This implies that not putting the mentoring of young LIS educators into consideration may jeopardise the growth of LIS education in Nigeria. According to Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002), mentoring is one of the learning methods used to enhance individuals learning and development in all aspects of life. Developing academic staff through mentoring and collaboration processes is to possess the necessary sets of academic competencies that will have a tremendous impact on the effectiveness and sustainability of LIS educators in Nigeria. But the challenge is that there seems to be no enough collaboration and mentoring programme in place in our universities. Consequently, there are so many gaps in what the new LIS educator is teaching and what it is supposed to be and a low research output among LIS educators. So it is against these backdrops that this paper looks at the mentoring and

collaboration by LIS educators for effective teaching and good practice in library schools in Nigeria.

Mentoring among LIS educators

Mentoring is a nurturing process, through which a more skilled and experienced educator is looked upon as role model and counsellors and be friendly to the new LIS educators to encourage, guide and direct them for the purpose of promoting the mentee professional growth. There are many benefits for the mentee through the mentoring process in which the mentee will grow faster in the career than what it would be if not mentored. Mentoring functions are carried out within the context of an on-going, caring relationship between the mentor and the mentee. Resource persons or mentors are professional educators whom work with the new educators on their entering into the academic environment as educators to help them to improve their knowledge of what they have acquired in the Library school (Stock and Duncan, 2010). Mentoring is an avenue for providing help, advice and guidance to new educators in the teaching profession for the main aim of helping them in the career growth. Mentoring can be defined as process whereby the mentee is being mentored. Mentoring in academia embraces multi-dimensional roles and perspectives. It is an avenue through which the senior academics have to teach and guide the young academic to work things out themselves on the project that is being carried out, which helps to identify the research output as a joint venture. The mentor and the mentee through the relationships that exist between mentor and mentee gain satisfactions and step –up their lecturing competencies as well as enhance reputations for themselves and that of their institution via a successful outcome of their innovation and creativities (Knight, 2007). According to Hanson and Moir (2008) mentoring is most often defined as a professional relationship in which an experienced person(the mentor) assists another (the mentee) in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance the less-experienced person’s professional and personal growth. Mentoring is a relationship-based process between colleagues in similar professional roles, with a more experienced individual with adult learning knowledge and skills, the mentor, providing guidance and example to the less-experienced mentee. Mentoring is intended to increase an individual’s personal or professional capacity, resulting in greater professional effectiveness.” (Lutton, 2012). Mentoring is ‘off line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking. A mentor is ‘someone who helps another person to become what that person aspires to be. A mentor is therefore someone who helps another person through an important transition such as coping with a new situation like a new job or a major change in personal circumstances or in career development or personal growth. The person being helped is often called the ‘learner’ or the ‘mentee’.

The purpose of mentoring is to help the new and less experienced person to be mentored to progress in his or her professional career; the mentor often finds the process personally beneficial. Talley and Henry (2008) described the process of mentoring as assisting both the mentee and the mentor by increasing their satisfaction and their knowledge. Another positive impact of some mentoring programs is the leadership development potential provided for the mentors (Hanson & Moir, 2008).

Types and Benefits of Mentoring

There are different types of mentoring that ranges from formalized mentoring programs, peer mentoring and informal developed mentoring. According to Mullen and Hutinger (2008), formalized mentoring is that mentoring that takes place within the identification of specific roles and practice that would be assessed through the participant feedback to ensure that mentoring has actually occurred. Elaborating on the advantages of having formal mentoring within LIS educators, Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) also identified that formal mentoring is an integrated approach for customised development on a broader scale which encourages continuous self-managed learning that will inspires educators to consistently improve their performance. Megginson et al. (2006) posit that the mentor gets extrinsic benefits such as enhanced professional recognition when mentees perform well, new knowledge and skills; and leadership development, and for a mentee it provides a great opportunity for networking; career opportunity and advancement; improved knowledge and skills; greater confidence and well-being as well as improved performance and productivity.

Mullen & Hutinger (2008) opines that peer mentoring is a process in which people in the same rank or statues mentor one another, they also stated that peer mentoring is different from formalized mentoring in that there is mutual understanding in formalized mentoring rather than complementary that characterized the relationships that exist between peers.

Relationship within the informal mentoring is usually open and has the opportunities of being challenged. In this scenario, LIS educators see themselves as co-authors in their objective for improving their research skills, competencies and their careers. Mentees can benefit by understanding how professional or their mentors identifies a research problem, address research challenges and work on real research problems. The mentees works with their mentor in order to become more proficient in their professional careers. Korantwi-Barimah, McBrighth and Ofori (2014), is of the view that the importance of mentoring cannot be over emphasized. The core purpose of academic mentoring is to aid the development of the academics in their basic functions of teaching, research and administration. It also enables the academics at all levels and ranks to benefit from mentoring, assists the emerging

researchers to become familiar with the university culture and patterns of creative output.

The Deakin University scheme (2010) stated that the main aim of academic mentoring in academe is to aid in the development of academics in the three key aspects of teaching, research and administration. There are other benefits academic mentoring scheme which include but not limited to offers opportunities for all levels of staff to benefit from a mentoring relationship, assists young and new educators become familiar with the University culture, supports new and inexperienced academics in the development of their teaching, increases faculty and school retention, assists academic staff with career development, supports academics in their role as researchers, promotes the development of the scholarship of teaching and learning, develops a sense of belonging in an academic community of practice. Furthermore, a study conducted by Megginson et al. (2006) is of the opinion that benefits from mentorship revealed that the mentee received 40% benefits, the organisation 33% and mentor 27%. This indicates that all the stakeholders will benefit from introducing mentoring programmes. Therefore, the purpose of mentoring in higher educational institutions should be to acquire skills that have been described by Leslie et al. (2005) as “understanding the underlying values, traditions and unwritten behavioural codes of academics; effectively managing a productive career in LIS profession by establishing and maintaining a network of professional colleagues.

Benefits of collaborative Teaching

There are a number of benefits that are associated with the concept of collaborative teaching. It is through understanding these benefits that LIS educators can truly leverage on collaboration to deliver quality teaching. Before one can make a judgment on the merits of collaborative teaching, it is important to understand exactly what collaborative teaching is. According to Darnell (2017), collaborative teaching is the traditional concept in which two teachers share or divide responsibility for planning, designing curriculum, teaching, and assessing the same group of students. Collaboration is a promising mode of human engagement that has become a twenty-first-century trend, because the need to think together and work together on critical issues has increased (Austin, 2000)

Collaboration is a philosophy of interaction and personal lifestyle where individuals are responsible for their actions, including learning and respect the abilities and contributions of their peers. The underlying premise of collaborative teaching is based upon consensus building through cooperation by group members, in contrast to competition in which individuals best other group members. Collaborative teaching practitioners apply this philosophy in the classroom, at committee meetings, with community groups, within their

families and generally as a way of living with and dealing with other people (Panitz, 1996).

Brown and Lara (2011) cite Johnsons (2009) that say; there are three ways when individuals take action in relation to the actions of the others. One's actions may promote the success of others, obstruct the success of others, or not have any effect at all on the success or failure of others. In other words, individuals may be: working together cooperatively to accomplish shared learning goals; Working against each other (competitively) to achieve a goal that only one or a few can attain; Working by oneself (individualistically) to accomplish goals unrelated to the goals of others. According to Darnell (2017) many educators who have participated in collaborative teaching arrangements include the following "positives" as a rationale for incorporating co-teaching into their schools: increased adult attention to students, since co-taught lessons can reduce the teacher-to-student ratio; shared expertise among two or more teachers; shared responsibility for instruction and management; increased opportunity to differentiate for student needs; greater social integration among student sub-groups and demonstrated improvement in student achievement.

Quality Research Output through Collaboration

According to Owen (2018) collaborative research is working together in a joint intellectual effort in the production of “knowledge” and “innovation” for a common purpose or benefit. The aim of collaborative research is to understand the complex problems facing our global communities and how to design and implement research-based responses and solutions to those problems - such as climate change or health challenges.

When LIS educators work with new fields and areas, they stimulate new enterprises; they allow methodologies to be applied across disciplines and motivate impactful research. There is also evidence to support the view that collaboration itself increases the productivity of researchers (Landry, Traore & Godin, 1996). Furthermore, the collaboration agenda has provided new opportunities for researchers to develop their skills in management and communication. The ability to form fruitful, sound partnerships, to lead a team or to play an essential role in a consortium is all legitimate ingredients for academic promotion in modern universities.

To make sure that LIS educators are choosing the right people, it's worth making early contact and establishing a connection before a research project begins. An LIS educator could also collaborate on something small or less pressured to determine how people work and what skills they bring to a team. If the person you're collaborating with is a brilliant researcher who can't meet deadlines, it's good to know that long before you're lagging behind in the project milestones for large scale funding. Yet collaboration is not without its risks. Understanding what they are early in the process, or preferably before you

take the first step in forming a team, can help you to tackle problems before they become an issue.

Conclusion

The findings of this structured review from the education literature revealed that while mentoring and collaboration have many benefits for the collaborators; mentor and mentee, they are not without their problems. As with many types of relationships, issues pertaining to compatibility of personalities, commitment, trust and support can enhance or destroy the dynamics between collaborators, mentor and mentee.

There are many great opportunities to be gained from mentoring and research collaborations, from growing your own skills and experiences to opening up new routes to publishing and impact. Collaboration for the sake of collaboration is rarely successful in terms of outputs or research funding. If an LIS educator is responding to a research funding call, the educator should be careful of re-inventing the wheel. You could investigate what existing consortia exist, which you could realistically join, or strengthen with your contacts. Also, the educator should be careful of joining up with friends for the sake of it, or because a research grouping is expected. You want a strong working relationship based on a common goal, and mutual benefit and respect.

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