

Information Provision: A Critical Support for Mentoring Undergraduate Students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

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Abstract

Purpose: The paper elucidates on the critical role information provision plays in the academic mentoring process and how academic mentoring can help ameliorate undergraduate students' development in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Design/methodology/approach: Survey research method was adopted for this study and the instrument utilized for data collection was questionnaire. The objectives of the study were achieved by formulating and answering two (2) research questions, and 1 hypothesis tested at α 0.05. The reliability of the questionnaire was determined using a Guttman split half technique and a reliability coefficient of 0.87 was observed. Frequencies and percentages were used to compute results descriptively, while one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the hypothesis raised.

Findings: The findings reveal that Information provision for support of academic mentoring in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, is inadequate. This has a profound effect on the academic mentoring culture in the institution. The paper concluded that non-implementation of formal mentoring program is majorly because of the inadequacy in information provision for mentoring of undergraduate students'.

Practical implications: The paper recommends among others that; the management of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria should design and implement a formal academic program on mentoring, establish an academic mentoring office under the overseer of the Directorate of Academic Planning office, design and publication of Academic Mentoring Magazine, Training and designation of at least one Academic Mentoring Officer in each faculty.

Original/value of paper: These finding and recommendation will greatly ameliorate academic development of undergraduate students' in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and other universities in Nigeria at large.

Keywords: Information Provision, Academic mentoring, Undergraduate Students, Universities.

Introduction

Universities are complex institutions with distinctive culture, where students face several challenges at the early stages to adapt to a new environment. Transition from secondary school to tertiary institution is one of the most challenging phases in the educational life of undergraduate students. The period is mostly characterized by loss of friends, inadequate filial attachment, peer pressure, misplaced priority, increased anxiety and feelings of isolation and depression. Academic mentoring programs have been developed in an effort to prevent the problems typically associated with the transition from secondary school to tertiary institutions. Planned mentoring program has been touted as solutions to various problems affecting youths

such as; increased drug and alcohol use, teenage pregnancy, poor academic performance, low self-esteem, increase in juvenile crime etc. Because at-risk youth are more likely to experience failure or drop out, school psychologists, educators, counselors, and parents continue to look for effective interventions for both school-related and non school-related problems affecting at-risk youths. Proponents of mentoring programs hypothesize that mentoring programs could be part of the answer to these problems (Thompson and Kelly-Vance, 2001).

There is a prevalent dearth in the availability of information resources on academic mentoring from Nigerian literatures which presents a major handicap in the pursuit of mentoring programs in Nigerian

tertiary institutions and these reflects the state of affairs in most developing countries. However, scorers of literatures suggest that academic mentoring is concerned with conveying and interpreting information about rules, requirements, and policies of the university by a faculty member to facilitate the development of a student. It focuses on the career goals and educational plan of the student. Academic mentoring help students create and facilitate educational, social, and career networks as a basis for optimum integration within and outside the university environment. Academic mentoring requires a willingness to share, listen and provide advice in a flexible relationship shaped by the needs of the mentee.

OTIS College of Arts and Design (2011) define academic mentoring as a developmental academic support program that provides sequential, guided discussion that fosters student reflection about educational and career path issues. This definition underscores academic mentoring as a process that is intended to assist students in the articulation of their career goals. It is a decision-making activity which aids student in realizing their maximum educational potential through communication and information exchange with a mentor. Consequently, academic mentoring is a critical component of career development and success. Students involved in the mentoring program may be going through a challenging situation, a period of life in which they need extra support, or they may simply need to have another significant adult present in their life. The goal of student mentoring is to help students involved in the mentoring program to gain the skills and confidence to be responsible for their own futures.

Academic mentoring therefore facilitates the integration of a student into the fabric of the department, cultivation of essential professional and social networks in students, aids students in acquiring core research competencies, and paves the way for placement in the work force upon graduation. Information is critical to the success of academic mentoring. An important element of the mentoring relationship is access and utilization of information.

The world of today is widely acclaimed to be information-driven. Information is very important among all people and its indispensability is a fact that cannot be disputed. It is regarded as an essential part of a nation's

resources and access to it is considered as one of the basic human rights. Information is not only a national resource vital for scientific and economic development but is also a medium for social communication. All human activities revolve around information. Today, it is widely recognized that most organizations need information to survive and succeed in the competitive business environment. Thus, as a powerful tool, information facilitates as well as guarantees personal, organizational and national developments. Consequently, information is one of the critical factors that define the progress of advanced countries.

Providing information in a timely and targeted manner can be a huge benefit to communities if the information reaches the right people in a way they can understand and respond to. Association for Information and Image Management (2011) indicated that information access is the findability of information regardless of format, channel, or location. This definition may well be based on the fact that the value of information is dependent on its access and utilization. As observed by Womboh and Abba (2008) providing information is the principal activity that guarantees information utilization. Consequently, information utilization is a function of access. Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) are of the view that the great importance attached to information springs from the fact that it can be exploited to advance mans' progress in all fields and that information access and dissemination encourages information utilization and cross-fertilization of ideas. Anderson and Morck (2011) suggested that information utilization is the transfer of information along series of pathways that connect groups and individuals in a variety of roles and settings. It is noteworthy to mention that, information utilization is most likely to occur when potential users are aware that they have a need for particular information.

From the foregoing, the basic assumption upon which this study is founded is that, designing and implementing an information dissemination plan that addresses areas of concern in the mentoring process by the Management of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria will improve academic productivity and academic performance in the institution but the extent to which this has been put in place in this university is not known.

Statement of the Problem

Demand for higher education is booming around the world. In Nigeria, statistics from Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB) reveals that the number of youths enrolling as university students increases every year. The experience of attending university is complex and pregnant with challenges that impinge on new students' academic success and these include inadequate high school preparation, a sense of feeling disconnected and an increase in personal responsibility. Thompson and Kelly-Vance (2001) noted that planned mentoring programs have flourished as one possible solution to the problems affecting youths, such as increased drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, poor academic performance, low self-esteem, and increase in juvenile crime. It is against this background that this research was conceived to investigate how provision of information for mentoring of undergraduate students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria can help in establishing a climate where developing undergraduate students is recognized as a valued activity wherein academics strive to inculcate in these students skills and competencies required to meet performance expectations.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to create awareness on the role of mentoring in ameliorating the academic development of undergraduate students in Nigerian tertiary institutions. In line with this, the study was guided by the following two specific objectives:

1. To determine the type of information resources provided for the support of academic mentoring of undergraduate students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
2. To find out the information providers on academic mentoring of undergraduate students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Research Questions

1. What type of information is provided for the support of academic mentoring of undergraduate students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?
2. Who are the information providers for academic mentoring of undergraduate students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?

Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the type of information provided for academics in mentoring undergraduate students among the

selected faculties in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Review of Related Literature

According to Mudhovozi (2012), he corroborated that for most students, the transition to university classroom requires an adjustment of academic habits and expectations. For these students to succeed, it is imperative that undergraduate students respond to the demands by studying harder, change their study habits and rearrange their priorities. As pointed out by Chikwem (2006), when students find it difficult to maintain their academic grades, more often than not, these students indulge in cultism, prostitution and armed robbery as a means of remaining on campus. Bernier, Larose and Soucy, (2005) asserted that faculty members who represent the institution's rules and values, and who are willing to mentor students, are especially determinants in student adjustment to the institution. According to American Speech-Language-Hearing Associates, (2011), a mentoring relationship is the third most powerful relationship for influencing human behavior (after the family and couple relationship).

The Concept of Mentoring

Mentoring is a professional relationship in which a more experienced individual invest time, resources and expertise in an inexperienced person to help develop specific skills and knowledge that will enhance the less-experienced person's professional and personal growth. Bozeman and Feeney (2007) observed that a mentoring relationship involves the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital and the psychological support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development. Similarly, Triple Creek Associates (2007) suggested that a mentoring relationship is a valuable asset in any organization, because it is a personal enhancement strategy through which one person facilitates the development of another by sharing known resources, expertise, value, skills, perspectives, attitudes and proficiencies. These perceptions suggest that mentoring is a process that involves communication and cordial relationship between the mentor and mentee.

According to MENTOR (2005) youth development experts now agree that mentoring is a critical element in any child's social, emotional and cognitive development. In the light of the foregoing, MENTOR (2005)

reported that research shows that youth who participate in mentoring relationships experience a number of positive benefits. These benefits include better attendance and attitude toward school, less drug and alcohol use, improved social attitudes and relationships, more trusting relationships and better communication with parents and a better chance of going on to higher education.

The need to facilitate the development of academic skills as well as imbibe positive attitude toward schooling emphasizes the indispensable role of the academic mentoring process in tertiary institutions. Seattle Pacific University (2009) observed that, academic mentors are role models who inculcate interest in course content and learning, offer resources regarding learning strategies, build mentoring relationships with class members, and refers students to other campus services as appropriate. Thus, a mentor inspires, counsels and encourages the mentee in developing their vision for the future and skills needed to advance on a career path.

Information Provided For the Support of Academic Mentoring

- ***Information for Organization:*** Center for Creative Leadership (1997) suggested that for organizations interested in formal mentoring, there are two basic steps to be considered in the development stage of the program: (1) define the organization's need for mentoring and (2) design the program. In defining the mentoring needs, program developers need to identify the future needs and skills of the organization, assess organizational capabilities, and define values for employee development. Center for Creative Leadership (1997) further stated that, in designing the program, there is the need to draw up a mentoring plan. There are four steps to designing a mentoring plan: (1) identify proposals for learning certain skills; (2) identify the barriers to and positive influences on achieving these proposals; (3) identify required actions and resources; and (4) develop a monitoring and evaluation process.

Various scholars, as reported by Center for Creative Leadership (1997) outline eight basic steps in the development of an effective mentoring program: (1) identify the purpose of the program and obtain top-management support. (2) Allocate

responsibilities and identify a program coordinator. (3) Allocate resources to cover selection, training, and monitoring costs. (4) Introduce the program to potential participants and relevant individuals, making the purpose of the relationship clear to the participants. (5) Carefully select and match participants. (6) Train participants—training would cover topics such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, various learning styles, and an understanding of the phases of a typical mentoring relationship. (7) Develop a structure for the program by establishing a timetable, providing facilities, installing some recognition and reward systems, and providing support mechanisms for mentors. (8) Monitor the program and make improvements.

- ***Information for Mentors:*** As observed by Ehrich and Hansford (1999) there are many potential concerns regarding mentors. For instance, do they have the capacities required? Are they to be rewarded? How will they be selected? Will they be trained? What criteria will be used to match them with a mentee? Will they create an elite patronage system that excludes the socially different? It is questions such as these that must be addressed when a mentoring program is being considered. Center for Creative Leadership (1997) argued that developing and managing effective mentoring programs requires much effort in terms of the structures and systems that should govern the mentoring process.

- ***Information for Mentees:*** Literatures reviewed indicate that clarity is the foundation upon which a successful relationship is built between mentors and mentees. From its onset mentees must be aware of what the program does not imply. A mentor is not a social worker, source of money, babysitter, parent or disciplinarian, rather, a mentor is a role model, friend, coach, companion, and source for new ideas and opportunities. Inzer and Crawford (2005) believe that mentees can be disappointed in a poorly planned and implemented mentoring program. In the light of the above, Long (1997) stressed the importance of communicating to mentors the nature, if any, of the link between a specific mentoring program and career advancement. The mentees acceptance, cooperation, commitment and development can be

measured by clarity of accrueable benefit, interest shown by the mentor and excellent human relations and communication skills.

Responsibility for the Provision of Information for Academic Mentoring

The sole responsibility for the provision of information on formal mentoring within an organization lies with the management of the organization. Cameron and Jesser (1992) and Garrett (1990) have argued that a lack of commitment can totally destroy a mentoring program. Inzer and Crawford (2005) argue that management of organization is not to enter into the privacy of the mentoring relationship; rather it should develop mentors and mentees through training and education. Management of organizations can demonstrate ongoing support by designing an information dissemination plan that addresses areas of concern in the mentoring process. Inzer and Crawford (2005) opined that, for a successful implementation of a mentoring program within an organization, a cross-section

of the entire strata and focus groups are involved in the mentoring process.

Research Methodology

The study employed survey research method. The survey method is adopted because survey research is one of the most important areas of measurement in applied social research. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Inorder to ensure that the questionnaire is capable of eliciting the required information from the respondents, the instrument was subjected to face validation. The reliability of the questionnaire was determined using a Guttman split half technique and a reliability coefficient of 0.87 was observed. The population comprises lecturers and undergraduate students in the institutions. Records from the Ahmadu Bello University, Management Information System (MIS) showed that there are 1405 lecturers and 27798 undergraduate students in the twelve faculties.

Table 1a Sample distribution of subjects across faculties

S/no	30% of Departments from four Faculties	No. of Academics	No. of UG Students	Total
1	Education			
	Lib. & Info. Sci.	4	231	271
	Phi. & Health Education	7	62	69
	Total	11	293	304
2	Engineering			
	Agricultural Engineering	3	54	57
	Civil Engineering	5	128	133
	Mechanical Engineering	6	119	125
	Total	14	301	315
3	Medicine			
	Human Anatomy	5	92	97
	Medicine	3	71	74
	Total	8	163	171
4	Social Sciences			
	Sociology	4	162	
	Total	4	162	166
	Grand Total	37	919	956

A sample size of 30% was used for the study across faculties, departments, lecturers and undergraduate students. 30% of the faculties were randomly sampled by assigning a consecutive number from 1 to 12 to each of the faculties, then using a computer program known as Research Randomizer that generates random numbers, 4 faculties representing 30% (by approximation) of the 12 faculties were randomly selected; namely Faculties of Education, Engineering, Medicine and Social

Sciences. Using the same principle, 30% of the departments within these faculties were randomly selected. The sampled departments are; Education (Library and Information Science and Physical and Health Education), Engineering (Agric., Civil and Mechanical Engineering), Medicine (Human Anatomy and Medicine), and Social Sciences (Sociology). This sample size of 30% is considered sufficiently large enough to be a representative of the study population in order to arrive at a

more reasonable, realistic and acceptable conclusion that would apply to others which the study could not cover. The questionnaire was distributed by the researcher to academics and undergraduate students in the selected faculties. A structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents for the purpose of data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A: deals with Personal data, while Section B deals with data relating to the issue under study. Section (B) addresses the

research questions on information provision and utilization for academic mentoring in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Two weeks was used to distribute the questionnaires and an addition of one week was given to complete the questionnaire. The study made use of descriptive statistics to answer research question raised. Frequencies and percentages were used to compute and present results descriptively. This is in order to present and analyze the data collected effectively.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

- Type of Information Provided for the Support of Academic Mentoring

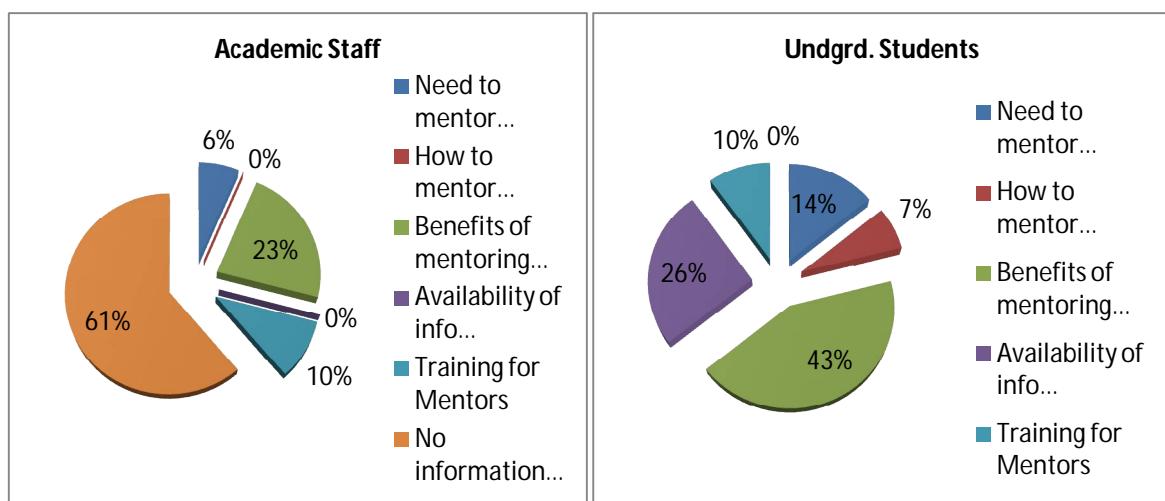


Figure 1: Type of Information Provided for Academic Mentoring.

Figure 1 revealed that only few academic staff acknowledged that they were provided with information for academic mentoring. On “the need to mentor students” 2(6.5%); on “benefits of mentoring students” the score was 7(22.6%). However, a larger proportion of the Academic staff responses from the list of options provided opted for the option “others please specify”. The option solicited for personal opinions from the respondents. 19(61.3%) of the academic staff endeavored to comment on the issue at stake. The general trend of the comments can be categorized into two; 1) little information is provided on mentoring at the university management/faculty/departmental levels - for example, Table 1 revealed that only 7(15.6%) academics indicated that they obtained information on academic mentoring from the Bulletin published by the Public Affairs Office of the Registrar’s Office of the Institution - and 2) the presence of senior colleagues is majorly why mentoring takes place. This finding reveals that the level of awareness and availability of

information resources in the area of academic mentoring in Nigeria is low.

The implication of this finding is that the low provision of information for the support of academic mentoring in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, has a profound effect on the mentoring culture. Mentoring cannot thrive without adequate information and training. This discovery is worrisome given that, the University of Wisconsin (2010) affirmed that the life and quality of an academic institution is dependent on the willingness of its academic staff who are involved in the primary activities of teaching, research, and knowledge and manpower production to groom successive academics through mentoring. More so, reports from the Center for Creative Leadership (2007) and the International Mentoring Association (2012) emphasized the critical role of on-the-job relationships in career development of the academics and students alike. It may then be concluded that informal developmental relationships such as mentoring has not been fully utilized in the faculties studied and by

extension all the faculties in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria due to inadequate information on the need to mentor, how to mentor, benefits of mentoring and training on academic mentoring.

Providers of Information for Academic Mentoring

In order to find out who are the Providers of information on academic mentoring in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, a list of information providers within the institution was provided for the respondents to indicate their opinions. Below is Table 2 showing the responses.

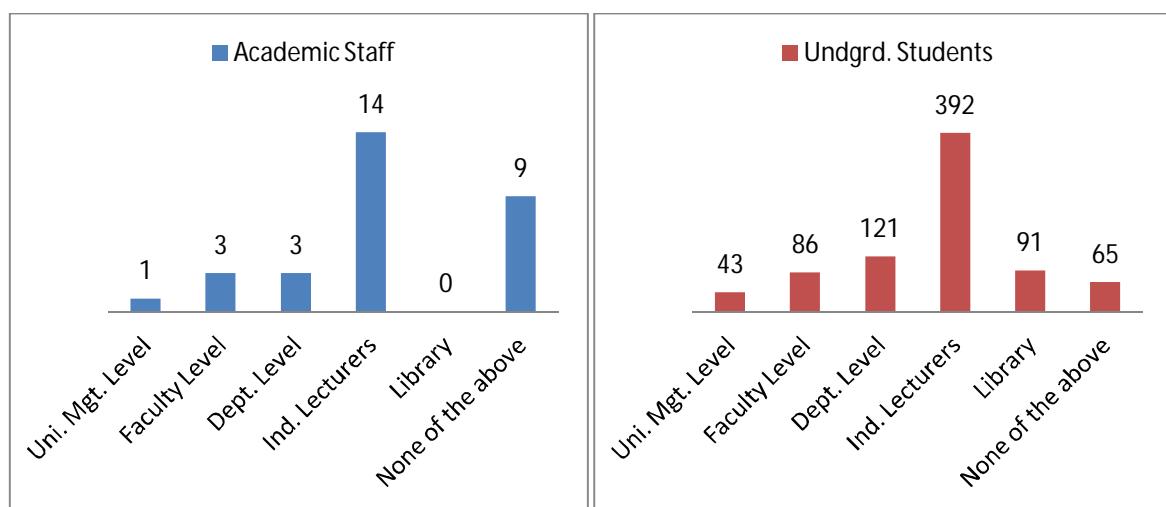


Figure 2: Providers of Information for Academic Mentoring.

Figure 2 revealed that majority of the respondents, 14 (46.7%) academic staff and 392 (49.1%) undergraduate students in the faculties studied indicated that individual lecturers were the primary providers of information on academic mentoring. The Table also revealed that the University management, faculty and department scored low as providers of information of academic mentoring. This could be attributed to none availability of formal mentoring programs in most tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This finding is directly contrary to Inzer and Crawford (2005) who stated that management of organization is not to enter into the privacy of the mentoring relationships; rather it should develop mentors and protégés through training and education. For successful implementation of a mentoring program, a cross-section of all the strata and focus groups must be involved in the mentoring process. This finding pointed to the fact that much work still needs to be done in developing, promoting and

maintaining a thriving mentoring culture in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

The implication of this finding is that where informal mentoring takes place in an organization, information provision is deficient because there is no specific policy, unit or agent saddled with that responsibility promoting and sustaining mentoring.

Hypothesis I: There is no significant difference in the type of information provided for academics in mentoring undergraduate students among the selected faculties in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

The types of information on academic mentoring by the lecturers of the different faculties selected for investigation was computed into aggregate mean that was used for this test. The means of the different faculties were then compared for possible significant differences using the one way analysis of variance. The result of the analysis of variance procedure is summarized in Table 1b.

Table 1b: Analysis of Variance on the Type of Information Provided on Academic Mentoring for Lecturers in Mentoring Undergraduate Students among the Selected Faculties

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F-calc.	Sig.
Between Groups	33.765	3	11.255	31.457	.000
Within Groups	10.376	29	.358		
Total	44.141	32			

(P<0.05)

The result in the table revealed significant difference between the lecturers from the different faculties on the type of information on academic mentoring for the undergraduate students. This is indicated in the table by an observed F-value of 31.457 and with a probability level of significance of 0.0000 ($P < 0.05$). Therefore the null hypothesis that there is

no significant difference in the type of information on academic mentoring of undergraduate students among the selected faculties in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria is thus rejected. The mean score of the lecturers from the different faculties are tabulated in Table 1b.

Table 1b: Mean scores of the different faculties on the type of information on academic mentoring of the undergraduate students by the faculties

Faculties	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Education	9	2.0000	.61644	.20548
Engineering	13	1.7077	.52035	.14432
Human medicine	8	4.1500	.69898	.24713
Social sciences	3	1.6667	.57735	.33333
Total	33	2.3758	1.17448	.20445

The mean scores in the table showed that the faculties of Social sciences along with Engineering had the least scores respectively. The highest score was by the faculty of Human Medicine with 4.150 and was followed by the

Faculty of Education. To determine the statistical significance of this variability in the mean a post hoc test was conducted with the Scheffe procedure. The result of the Scheffe procedure is summarized in Table 1c.

Table 1c: Result of Scheffe procedure on the mean scores by the different faculties

(I) Faculty	(J) Faculty	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Education	Engineering	.29231	.25938	.738
	Human medicine	-2.15000(*)	.29065	.000
	Social sciences	.33333	.39877	.873
Engineering	Education	-.29231	.25938	.738
	Human medicine	-2.44231(*)	.26879	.000
	Social sciences	.04103	.38313	1.000
Human medicine	Education	2.15000(*)	.29065	.000
	Engineering	2.44231(*)	.26879	.000
	Social sciences	2.48333(*)	.40495	.000
Arts and social sciences	Education	-.33333	.39877	.873
	Engineering	-.04103	.38313	1.000
	Human medicine	-2.48333(*)	.40495	.000

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

The result revealed that only the lecturers in the faculty of Human Medicine that were significantly different from the others in the type of academic information provided for the mentoring of the undergraduate students. Between the lecturers from faculty of Education, Social sciences and Engineering, no significance difference was observed.

Summary of the Findings

- Information provision for support of academic mentoring in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, is inadequate. This has a profound effect on the academic mentoring culture in the institution. This may be attributed to the dearth of published

materials in the area of academic mentoring in Nigeria. It is therefore logical to expect a weak academic mentoring culture in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, given that inadequate information is available and provided to support and promote academic mentoring. Mentoring cannot thrive without relevant and adequate information and training.

2. It was discovered the University management, faculties and departments provide little or no specific information tailored toward supporting academic mentoring of undergraduate students. Individual lecturers were the primary providers of information on academic mentoring. Due to the unlikely commitment in developing, promoting and maintaining a mentoring culture in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, there is a perceived inconsistency in the quality and practice of academic mentoring in the institution.
3. There is significant difference in the type of information provided for academics from the different faculties in their mentoring of undergraduate students.

Conclusion

From the analysis and summary of findings, it could be concluded that information provision and utilization by Academics in mentoring of undergraduate students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria is inadequate. This is attributed to the fact that no formal mentoring program is in place in the institution. More so, the low level of awareness of the role of academic mentoring in the academic development of undergraduate students has resulted in a weak academic mentoring culture in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Interpersonal communication among academics and their students remains the most reliable source of information for mentoring undergraduate students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. However, this source of information on academic mentoring is insufficient to promote, support and sustain an effective mentoring culture as oral sources of information cannot be evaluated to determine whether they present information that is accurate and consistent or conforms to international mentoring standard. The non-implementation of formal academic mentoring program in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria is majorly responsible for inadequate provision and utilization of

academic mentoring information among the academics and undergraduate students in the institution. Thus, the design and implementation of formal mentoring program across all the faculties and departments will sensitize, motivate and instill a mentoring culture among the academics and undergraduate students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Recommendation

Information provision for academic mentoring of undergraduate students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria needs urgent attention if such an exercise to be successful and effective in the institution. In the light of the findings from the study, it is therefore recommended that:

1. The management of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria should design and implement a formal academic mentoring program, establish an academic mentoring office under the oversight of the Directorate of Academic Planning office, design and publication of Academic Mentoring Magazine, training and designation of at least one Academic Mentoring Officer in each faculty.
2. In order to tackle the problem of inadequate provision of information in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, it is imperative that the University Management, faculties and departments provide relevant and adequate information and training tailored toward equipping the Academics and undergraduate students on 1) the need to mentor undergraduate students, 2) how to mentor these students, 3) benefits of mentoring these students, etc.
3. While the University Management and faculties have a part to play as providers of information on academic mentoring, most of the responsibilities lay with the departments. Departments are better suited to affirm that academic mentoring is a core component of the educational experience for undergraduate students by developing a compact or agreement, relevant to the discipline and providing periodic reviews. Through coordinators and committees, faculties and departments can constantly evaluate the mentoring processes.

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