

IGBO APPRENTICESHIP MODEL AND MENTORSHIP IN THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT: There is a growing concern among Igbo people that the apprenticeship system, which produced a lot of their prominent sons, is on the decline. Similarly, in the Nigerian university system, there appears to be appreciable decline in mentoring. The study examined the Igbo apprenticeship model, its structure, and modus operandi, and compared it to mentorship in Nigerian universities. Kram's mentoring theory provided the theoretical foundation for the study, which is essentially qualitative. The data utilized were obtained from secondary sources, largely text books and journals. The study maintained that mentorship is critical for capacity building and beneficial to mentees, mentors, the university and society. It reiterated the vitality, value and relevance of the Igbo apprenticeship model in addressing contemporary problems of insecurity and unemployment in Nigeria. Consequently, the study recommended, among other things, that the Igbo apprenticeship model be revamped and that the other socio-cultural groups in Nigeria be encouraged to domesticate or adapt same in their zones. It further recommended that the mentorship process in Nigerian universities be structured and integrated as part of the promotion requirements for junior academic and administrative staff.

Keywords: Apprenticeship, Igbo, Mentorship, University, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Mentoring is a very fascinating subject that can be looked at from various perspectives. There are individuals, foundations and corporate entities that have transformed the lives of so many people. Bill Gates, Warren Buffetts, Femi Otedolas, Emeka Offors, Arthur Ezes, Leostan Ekehs etc have impacted the lives and livelihood of many people who regard them as their mentors. Also in politics, godsons regard their godfathers as their mentors, notwithstanding that friction sometimes occurs between them.

The focus of this study is not on philanthropic individuals, organizations and politicians. Rather the study examined mentoring from the perspective of culture, especially the Igbo culture and her apprenticeship model. The study also analysed mentoring in the university system. The Igbo apprenticeship system was selected for study because the model became an integral part of the people's culture and was instrumental to the springing up and flourishing of many enterprises and corporate entities in Igbo land and Nigeria. Many Igbo people who humbled themselves to undergo

apprenticeship in various trades, businesses and crafts later emerged as successful entrepreneurs and leaders in their various endeavours. This apprenticeship system is worthy of study.

The university plays a vital role in the socio-economic transformation of a nation. According to Akobundu (2014) the university is a complex organization. Omeire (2016) conceptualized the university as one of the three sacred institutions in society, the other two being the church/mosque and the law court. As a sacred institution, the university has the Vice-Chancellor as the Chief Priest, the academic staff as the Priests, the non-teaching staff as the Aaron and Hur that support and strengthen the hands of the Chief Priest. In this conceptualization, the students constitute the congregation. A sacred institution is a hallowed place where one is conscious of his or her appearance and comportment. It is a place you go to with the intention to achieve specific purpose, not to waste time. A sacred institution is not a place to be flippant or garrulous. In a sense, the university can also be regarded as a fortress predominantly inhabited by intellectuals and technocrats. Students enter the university as raw materials and are received, processed and refined to become finished products.

Given the sensitive and crucial nature of the university, it is expected that those who work there must be professionally competent and dedicated in order to preserve the integrity, sanctity and culture of the system. What are the mechanisms that should be in place to ensure that those recruited either as academic or administrative staff, especially at the junior level are groomed to become top-notch in their chosen career? This study considered mentoring as it relates to the university system. It compared the Igbo apprenticeship model and mentorship in Nigerian universities, highlighting similarities, differences and their relevance to modern socio-economic issues in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Kathryn Kram's (1985) mentoring theory provided the theoretical underpinning for this study. Kram postulates that mentors carry out two important functions, namely career function and psychosocial function. The career function entails imparting knowledge and skill through various means such as teaching, guiding, directing, nurturing, leading, interrogating, dialoguing, coordinating, etc. The aim is to ensure that the learner is sufficiently equipped with the basic and essential knowledge and skills that will enable him to independently navigate and find his or her bearing in the profession, trade or business.

Kram maintains that the psychosocial functions of mentoring seek to assist the learner to build confidence and engender a sense of professional self. It also strives to equip the greenhorn with problem-solving techniques, using counselling. According to Kram the psychological function aims at creating an environment of friendship in which the learner feels recognized, respected, supported and at home, not intimidated or treated as a nonentity. This mentoring function presents the mentor as a role model and reference point to the neophyte based on the mentor's sagacity, depth and exemplary conduct.

Kram further identified four phases in the mentoring relationship which she refers to as initiation stage, cultivation stage, separation stage and re-definition stage. At the Initiation stage, the learner

and the mentor seek to know each other. During this period, the mentor seeks to know the learner, his background, strengths, goals, values and weaknesses. On his part, the learner is full of expectation and may experience some form of discomfort or anxiety. At the cultivation stage, the learner becomes more relaxed, a relationship begins to evolve with trust developing. During this stage, each session becomes meaningful and beneficial to the learner who eagerly craves for more engagement. The mentor is also satisfied with the progress arising from the relationship. At the separation stage, the learner has acquired reasonable knowledge and skill and has developed confidence from the training received. When it gets to this phase, meetings between mentor and learner become less frequent because the learner can navigate the terrain with minimal assistance from the mentor. The re-definition stage is the post-mentoring phase where the relationship becomes that of mutual respect and friendship. At this level the engagement takes the form of father or mother and child for life. Reverse mentoring can also occur at this stage whereby the learner mentors the mentor.

Kram's mentoring theory is relevant to this study given that mentors in both the university system and the Igbo apprenticeship model are involved in executing both career and psychosocial functions. These mentors whether they are operating in the academic or in the non-teaching cadre groom their learners to become capable in their professions and in the mentoring process, some intangible qualities and idiosyncrasies of the mentor are adopted or adapted by the learner.

The career mentoring function of an academic mentor includes guiding the learner on the process and techniques for writing journal articles, incorporating him or her in the mentor's research team and pointing the learner to reputable and acceptable journals within the system. The mentor also encourages the learners to enhance their academic qualification and provides necessary support and guidance in this regard. Furthermore, the mentor gives the learner the opportunity and encouragement to publish in books and journals edited by the mentor. He also vets the learner's manuscripts. The mentor also supervises the learner when he or she is lecturing. Additionally, the academic mentor defends and protects the learner, particularly in fora where the learner is not qualified to be present.

On their part, non-teaching staff mentors groom learners on the techniques for writing good minutes, memoranda, reports, position papers, accurate record keeping etc. Such learners are also guided on the specific requirements of the jobs in the units to which they are posted. This could be Senate Affairs, Council Matters, Central Registry, Admissions, Human Resources, Public Relations, Exams and Records, College Office, Departmental Office, Directorate etc.

In terms of psychosocial function, the mentors in the university through encouragement and counselling help the learner to gain confidence and assert himself or herself professionally. The mentor also serves as a torch bearer who illuminates the learner's path by pointing the way out of darkness. Mentors also impart values of hard work, integrity and fairness to the learners. Learners through mentoring learn to eschew selfishness, greed and materialism while imbibing the philosophy of "chop small small and chop forever." In the course of time some mentors become role models to the learners based on their exemplary conduct and carriage.

Okurame (2008) reiterates the role of mentoring in the university. According to him, mentoring in the Nigerian university system facilitates the transfer of skills that protégés can apply in diverse professional circumstances, promotes productive use of knowledge, clarity of goals, career success, career growth, salary increases and promotions, career and job satisfaction.

The master or mentor in Igbo apprenticeship generally regards the apprentice as part of his business and guides and guards him into the rudiments, complexities and nuances of the business, trade or craft. The learner is taught the *modus operandi* of the business, how things are done, where required materials are procured or sourced and how to navigate the terrain in the particular line of business. The apprentice also learns by closely observing the master and takes note of the strategies he adopts to achieve desired results.

Kram's phases in the mentoring relationship also apply to the university and the Igbo apprenticeship systems. At the initiation stage, both the mentor and the learner familiarize themselves with each other. At this phase, some of the learners may exhibit nervousness or trepidation but regain composure with time. At the cultivation stage, the learner feels free and a relationship of cordiality is established and the learner becomes very determined to tap from the expertise and exposure of the, mentor. On his part, the mentor, academic or non-teaching, is pleased to make the learner aware of his or her knowledge. The separation phase can be likened to the weaning stage whereby the learner is no longer tied to the apron string of the mentor, either academic or non-teaching. At this stage, the learner has imbibed sufficient knowledge and gained the required confidence to pilot the aircraft to a safe landing. At this phase, the academic learner has a number of publications in journals while his or her non-teaching counterpart can write good minutes, memoranda, reports and papers for presentation to Council, Senate etc.

At this stage the apprentice under the Igbo model has started attending to customers, whether the master is around or not. He may also be allowed to relate with his master's business associates and can be assigned to procure large quantities of materials from suppliers on behalf of the master.

The re-definition phase is an entirely new chapter in the mentoring process in the university system. The period of mentor vs. learner stage is ended. It is now a relationship between parent and children built on mutual respect with deference to the parent. The mentor becomes akin to a consultant who is approached as the need arises. Sometimes, however, reverse mentoring can occur whereby the former learner teaches his mentor in a specific area.

Apart from Kram's mentoring theory, other perspectives exist in literature regarding mentoring. For example, the self-determination theory which is associated with Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, holds that the individual has an innate propensity to aspire for personal improvement, competence and autonomy. Advocates of self-determination theory maintain that it can enhance motivation and stronger self-confidence, create a safe and trusting environment, engender a growth mindset, enhance ownership of the process by mentee and lead to effective mentoring. There is also the Zachary's theory of mentoring which maintains that the learning process has progressed from mentor directed to self-directed. This theory posits that the emphasis on mentoring partnership has moved from knowledge transfer and acquisition to critical reflection and

application. Proponents of this theory indicate that mentoring achieves the best result when it is done collaboratively.

METHODOLOGY

The study is essentially a qualitative research designed to provide in-depth understanding of mentoring in its cultural context, using the Igbo apprenticeship model. In the course of the study some Igbo apprentices were interviewed. Also interviewed were randomly selected masters who have trained apprentices, Contextual analysis was used in analysing the data obtained from the interviews, Mentoring was also examined as it applies to the university system. Except for the interaction with some Igbo apprentices and business masters, the study did not involve extensive field trip. Consequently, the data used and analysed were obtained largely from secondary sources such as text books and journals.

Exegesis of Igbo Apprenticeship Model

The Igbo people represent an ethnic group in Nigeria. They are primarily located in five states in South East Nigeria (Imo, Abia, Anambra, Enugu and Ebonyi). A considerable Igbo population is also found in Delta and Rivers states. Igbo people are industrious, republican and adventurous. The Igbo ethos includes respect for elders and constituted authority, recognition of legitimate achievement, and kinship solidarity and affection. The Igbo people believe strongly in being one's brother's keeper and this is symbolized by the traditional expressions *onyeaghalanwanne ya* (no one should abandon his relation) and *onunuubenwanneagbalaoso* (no one should ignore the distress shout of a *relation*).

An apprentice is a learner who is being tutored or guided by a more knowledgeable person on the rudiments and intricacies of a particular job or trade. In the Igbo context, an apprentice is one who has volitionally decided to subject himself to the authority of an expert to learn the trade of the trainer. Also, an apprentice could be a minor or teenager, who under the guidance of the parent or guardian, is taken to a master in a particular trade or craft for the young person to learn the trade, skill or business.

Though the Igbo apprenticeship model predated the Nigeria Biafra civil war (1967-1970), the system was tremendously boosted after the war. The Nigerian government confiscated the bank accounts of many Igbo people. At the end of the civil war, they were given only twenty pounds, irrespective of how much a person had in the bank. Rather than deter the people, this obnoxious policy spurred many Igbo persons to engage in trading and various businesses. As the business progressed apprentices were brought in, usually kinsmen of the business owner. Some social groups, like the Peoples Club of Nigeria formed in Aba in 1971, also helped to propagate the apprenticeship model by encouraging members to help uplift their kinsmen.

Igbo apprenticeship can be regarded as an economic model conceived and practiced by Igbo people. Its objective is to propel economic growth and progress. As pointed out by Ohazuruike and Elechi (2023) this model is also rated as the biggest and most enduring business incubator in the world. Apprenticeship in Igbo land is of two types. The first variant is referred to as *Imu Ahia*

(to learn a trade/business) or *Imu Oru* (to learn a skill). The second type is known as *Igba Odibo* (to serve a master). The two are different.

In the case of *Imu Ahia* or *Imu Oru*, the apprentice is usually a major. The person is mature and deliberately wants to learn a trade or acquire a skill from an expert in that field. The duration is generally shorter than a person who is engaged in *Igba Odibo* (serving a master). The duration of *Imu Ahia* or *Imu Oru* ranges from six months to four years. It could be shorter or longer depending on the type of trade involved and the learner's mental and financial capacity. In contemporary Nigeria, a considerable number of graduates of tertiary institutions, go to learn various trades and after acquiring the skill, some set up their own enterprises which may be in fashion design, building materials, information technology, catering services, plumbing, car repairs etc.

In the case of *Igba Odibo* (serving a master), the apprentice is usually young, sometimes a minor. The young person is generally handed over to the master for training by his parent or guardian. The young learner usually lives with the master and becomes an engrafted member of the household. He must render service both in the house and in the workplace. The duration of *Igba Odibo* (serving a master) ranges from 4-8 years or more depending largely on the nature of the trade or craft, the learner's background and capacity.

Under both types of apprenticeship, the learner enters into agreement with the master. This may be written or unwritten. The agreement usually specifies the duration of the apprenticeship and a commitment on the part of the apprentice to be honest, loyal, hardworking and humble. In the case of *Imu Ahia* or *Imu Oru*, the learner usually pays an agreed fee while in the case of *Igba Odibo*, the person bringing the child may come with a token, drink, bird or animal. An apprentice who is misbehaving may be suspended for some time or dismissed. At the end of the agreed period, the apprentice who came for *Imu Ahia* or *Imu Oru* can leave and work elsewhere or establish his or her own trade. In some cases, the person may be employed to now work for the master and be paid for doing so. It is important to indicate that in some cases the initiative to take an apprentice may come from the master. In this case, the master approaches the family of the apprentice, who usually is a kinsman, and expresses his desire to have the particular son train under him. In most cases, the family welcomes this gesture, which is regarded as a form of family support.

As it relates to *Igba Odibo*, at the end of the agreed period, the master is expected to settle the apprentice by giving him a reasonable amount of money as reward for the good services rendered over the years. The amount for the settlement is not fixed. It is usually based on the purse of the master, his generosity and his evaluation of the performance of the apprentice over time. After settlement, the former apprentice may decide to establish his own business/trade, work for another person or work for his master. Also, the master may establish and equip a new branch to be managed by the erstwhile apprentice on partnership basis.

The apprenticeship system in Igbo land was very successful in the past. Most of the prominent entrepreneurs in Igbo land today are products of *Imu Ahia*, *Imu Oru* or *Igba Odibo*. Most of them grew and became even more successful than their masters but they still defer to their erstwhile bosses. A few examples might suffice. Chief Augustine Ilodibe, founder Ekene Dili Chukwu Company, was a motor spare parts apprentice under his master, Chief D. C. Chukwujekwu, a

maternal relation. Also, Chief Innocent Chukwuma, founder of Innoson Group of Companies (Innoson Manufacturing and Innoson Tech and Industries) was in 1978 a motor cycle spare parts apprentice under his master, Chief Romanus Onwuka. Similarly, Mr Cosmas Maduka, founder of Coscharis Group of Companies (Coscharis Motors, Coscharis Farms, Coscharis Motor Assembly and Coscharis Technology), served his master, Chief P. N. Okeke, who was his uncle, as motor cycle spare parts apprentice for seven years. Chief Cletus Ibeto, a captain of industry whose business empire ranges from cement production, energy to real estate was an apprentice to Chief J. Mbonu. Other prominent Igbo sons who were apprentices under Chief J. Mbonu are Chief Emeka Offor (CEO Chrome Group with subsidiaries in oil and gas, energy and construction), and Chief Alexander Chika Okafor (CEO Chikason Group which diverged into pharmaceuticals, oil and gas, transportation and real estate). Chief Louis Carter Odili (CEO L. C. Odimili & Sons with subsidiaries in construction and real estate) was also an apprentice under Chief J. Mbonu. (Ohazuruike & Elechi, 2023; Adeola & Ozigbo, 2021; Nwadike, 2017; Ogbuagu, 2015). The companies owned by these individuals and others like them employ quite a number of people, thereby helping to reduce unemployment and insecurity. As the saying goes an idle hand is the devil's workshop. It thus follows that through the Igbo apprenticeship model job openings emerge, wealth is created and prosperity is shared. Entrepreneurship's role in the progress of any society cannot be overemphasized. Studies have shown that small scale business enterprises contribute greatly in the economic growth and development of a nation (Livsey, 2019; Okoroigwe, 2022).

The Igbo apprenticeship model contrasts sharply with the orientation of classical capitalism which dictates that you do not encourage or empower your competitor or rival. The uniqueness and beauty of the Igbo model is that you not only train but you also equip and financially empower your apprentice to confidently go and compete with you, not minding if in the course of time his enterprise outgrows yours. The Igbo apprenticeship is to a large extent informed by the twin Igbo philosophies of "onyeaghala nwanneya" (let no one abandon his relation) and "onye hu uzomayagosinwanneya" (one that has seen a good road or opportunity should show same to his relation).

It is, however, lamentable that in contemporary times the degeneration in the values of the society has adversely affected apprenticeship in Igbo land. Many young ones currently lack the discipline and patience required to fully undergo training. Many are interested in making quick money, usually through dubious means. These days apprentices are difficult to find either among artisans or in the line of trade. Some of those who come as apprentices abscond midway with half-baked knowledge. While some of these dropouts go into "yahoo yahoo" or other dubious ventures the others practice the trade they have not sufficiently learnt and, in the process, display the "expertise" of the non-expert which is fraught with dangerous consequences.

Etymology and Definitions

It may be interesting to indicate that mentor is the name of a person. Etymologically the word mentor in Greek legend is the name of the faithful friend of Odysseus, king of Ithaca. In Greek and Roman mythology, Odysseus, also known by the Latin variant Ulysses, is a legendary Greek King of Ithaca and hero of Homer's epic poem the *Odyssey*. The epic describes his travails, which lasted for ten years, as he strives to return home. Before leaving his home during the Trojan War,

he was away for ten years, Odysseus handed the care of his household to his trusted friend Mentor. Mentor effectively played the role of guardian and teacher to the king's son, Telemachus. With the passage of time, the name mentor began to be used as nomenclature for a wise man, a knowledgeable guardian, a trusted adviser, a teacher or a counsellor. The above narrative gives us insight on the origin of the word mentor.

Definition: Mentoring, Mentor and Mentee

Mentoring

Mentoring may be defined as the process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital and the psycho-social support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career or professional development. Mentoring is a strategy to boost management skills, shape attitudes, enhance productivity and solidify lifelong orientation. Mentoring can also be viewed as a secured relationship that facilitates learning and assists individuals in actualizing their potentials. Effective mentoring is predicated on trust and confidentiality.

Mentor

A mentor is a senior or more experienced and knowledgeable person who provides the junior (or mentee) with the tools, guidance, support and feedback which the junior requires to grow and flourish in his or her career. A mentor is like a guardian, adviser, friend, counsellor and trainer to his mentee. A mentor provides direction and inspiration to the mentee and is interested in the subordinate's progress. According to Birt (2023) a mentor is someone who acts as an advisor to a less experienced individual. The mentor is familiar with the terrain because he has gone past the route that the mentee is currently trudging through. The mentor is familiar with the bumpy and slippery areas and knows how to navigate and get to destination in a timely manner. Having a mentor is immensely beneficial. As Lussier (2012) indicates mentors are higher-level managers who prepare high-potential employees for advancement. As Kram (1983) rightly points out, mentoring entails "dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants to attain great heights." It is imperative that to advance, meaningfully and on merit, every junior scholar and administrator needs to be mentored.

Mentee

A mentee is one who is being mentored. Other synonyms for mentee include trainee, protégé or apprentice. A mentee is a person that is under the tutelage of, or learning from, a more experienced or knowledgeable person. A mentee can also be regarded as an individual who is committed to expanding his or her capabilities and is open and receptive to new ways of learning and trying new ideas.

Types of Mentors

Broadly, mentors can be categorized into four namely; (i) sponsors (ii) connectors (iii) point experts and (iv) trusted friends. As it relates to mentorship, a sponsor is one who advocates for,

champions and promotes the interest of a particular subordinate(s). The sponsor speaks for the mentee at meetings and fora where the subordinate is not privileged to attend. He recommends the mentee for trainings and career advancement exposures. He works to ensure that the mentee advances in his career and always projects him or her.

When applied to mentorship, connectors are people who have enormous social capital and can leverage on their extensive reach for the benefit of their mentees. Such network of relationship could be based on position occupied, professional affiliations, alumni ties, political associations, socio-cultural identities, residential propinquity, religious/ denominational attachment etc. Connectors introduce their mentees to people, events and opportunities that will be beneficial to them.

Regarding mentorship, point experts are people you can rely on to get the information you seek or solution to your problem. Point experts serve as search engines to their mentees. They may provide the answer to the problem directly or point their mentees to where such an answer can be found.

Trusted friends are mentors who have developed very strong ties with their mentees, such that both are like members of the same family. At this level, the mentee can have access to the mentor at any time. Here, the mentee confides in the mentor and seeks his validation before embarking on any project. Based on this classification, a mentee should be able to identify the category his or her mentor belongs. It is, however, apt to indicate that a mentor can fall into two or more categories for example a sponsor can also be a connector and a trusted friend.

Qualities of a Mentor in the University

A mentor has to be knowledgeable, professionally competent and experienced in his discipline to effectively serve as a knowledge and opportunity bank to the mentee. As Heller (1999) points out, the greater your knowledge and expertise the more influence you will have. A mentor is also required to have passion for helping others. A person may be very knowledgeable but he cannot be a mentor if he is reclusive, sadistic, selfish or unwilling to impart knowledge for the benefit of others.

Another attribute is that a mentor has to be a good communicator whose speech is clear and devoid of ambiguity. The mentor is also expected to be a reflective listener who encourages the mentee to speak out, realizing that someone listens with patience and interest. Experts advise that mentors should spend 80% of their time listening to mentees, 10% asking them probing questions and 10% advising mentees.

A good mentor does not judge his mentee. He criticizes and corrects the mentee constructively, realizing that no one is perfect and that Rome was not built in a day. A mentor is also expected to demonstrate empathy by intuitively putting himself in the place of the mentee and genuinely understanding the reasons for his actions or inactions. As Myers (1990:284) points out “empathy is to feel what others feel”. When you understand a person’s feelings you can appreciate the person better.

Other attributes of a good mentor include having a sacrificial disposition; the willingness to provide honest and frank feedback; being friendly and approachable; possessing discerning mind to spot potential professional giants, and willingness to accept responsibility and admitting where one does wrong or makes a mistake. Furthermore, as Thomas (2004) points out mentors should themselves be sufficiently motivated; treat each learner as an individual with individual needs; set challenging but realistic tasks; provide fair rewards linked with achievement and give recognition publicly when it is due.

It may be pertinent at this point to reiterate aspects of Abraham Lincoln's letter to his son's teacher as cited by Nnaji (2010) which states: (a) Teach him to listen to all men, but teach him also to filter all he hears. (b) Teach him how to laugh when he is sad. (c) Teach him gently but do not cuddle him because only the test of fire makes fine steel. (d) Let him have the courage to be impatient, let him have the patience to be brave. (e) Teach him always to have sublime faith in his creator and faith in himself too, because then he will have faith in humanity.

Attributes of a Mentee in the University System

Willingness to learn is a major attribute of a mentee. A mentee has to also be teachable and not self-opinionated. He has to be diligent and focused. A mentee has to be obedient and respectful to his mentor. A mentee is further required to be patient and humble. Honesty and discipline are very important items in the toolkit of any mentee who wants to succeed in his profession.

Igbo Apprenticeship Versus University Mentorship

Is there any similarity or lack of it between the Igbo apprenticeship model and mentoring system as it applies to the university? Here attempt is made to highlight the distinguishing factors between the two.

Learners as Mentees

A common characteristic in both the Igbo apprenticeship model and mentoring in the university system is that learners in both systems are mentees. As mentees they are required to exhibit the qualities of their status as learners which include loyalty, willingness to learn, hard work and humility.

Ceremonial Entry

In the Igbo apprenticeship model, the entry or commencement is neither automatic nor haphazard. It is entered into intentionally and with care. The apprentice has to formally approach the master, usually in the company of an elderly relation or significant other, and request to be admitted to undergo tutelage in the trade or profession. The master will normally interview or interrogate the prospective apprentice to determine his suitability and willingness for the training. In most cases an agreement, written or unwritten, will be entered into that stipulates what is expected from the apprentice and the master's obligation to him.

In the Nigerian university system, mentoring is carried out largely informally on the job. The learners in the university are already employed and they are mentored by their superiors as they progress through the hierarchy. In some cases, however, individuals in the university undertake mentorship courses, either privately or corporately sponsored. According to Okurame (2008) mentoring relationships in the Nigerian university system often develops spontaneously based on proximity, competence, shared values and gender concerns.

Formal Graduation

In the Igbo apprenticeship model, at the agreed duration which ranges from three to eight years, the apprentice graduates and is formally released from the earlier agreement. This is usually celebrated with joy when the apprentice is disciplined enough to go through the period of learning. The graduation event or ceremony is traditionally referred to as “Idoka akwukwo nkwekorita” (tearing of agreement paper). On this occasion, the graduating apprentice comes with selected relations and friends to the master who blesses and releases him to go and prosper, through diligence and integrity. In some cases, based on mutual agreement, the former apprentice is employed by his master as a paid worker.

In the university system, there is no formalized graduation for mentees. The tradition is that as the mentees grow on the job and are exposed to external trainings, they acquire requisite competence to undertake higher responsibilities and, in turn, serve as mentors to some of those under them. For example, the mentees in academics who started as Graduate Assistants or Assistant Lecturers over time gain additional qualifications and, with experience and exposure, rise to become Senior Lecturers, Readers and Professors. Those in non-teaching cadre rise from Administrative Assistants and Administrative Officers to become Principal Assistant Registrars, Deputy Registrars, Directors and Registrars.

Settlement or Empowerment

In the Igbo apprenticeship model, there is usually a provision for the settlement or empowerment of an apprentice who has meritoriously served his master for the agreed period of time. This settlement or empowerment takes place under the “Igba Odibo” (to serve a master) type of apprenticeship which is usually of longer duration than “Imu Ahia” (to learn a trade) or “Imu Oru” (to learn a skill) variant of apprenticeship.

The settlement or empowerment of a graduating apprentice which is locally referred to as “Idu Odibo” (settlement or empowerment of a learner) goes with a ceremony wherein the close relations or friends of the graduating apprentice are usually present. There is no stipulated amount of money to be given to the graduand. However, it is expected that the master will give a reasonable amount to cover renting of shop and purchase of some goods with which the graduand will commence his business. In some cases, as part of settlement, the master opens and equips a new branch which the erstwhile apprentice, will run on a partnership basis with the master. Through settlement or empowerment, the one-time apprentice is given wings to fly and soar. Within a short time, he becomes a master and recruits some apprentices who will serve and learn from him. Through this

means, unemployment and insecurity are mitigated, and sustainable development and progress are ensured.

In the university mentoring system, there is neither formalized graduation nor settlement upon the acquisition of requisite skill or appropriate knowledge. What is assured is payment of salary and promotion to the next level on the basis of hard work and meeting stipulated criteria. However, a former mentee in the university can leverage on his knowledge and skills and engage in other legitimate activities that could give him additional income.

Dedication to Mentor

Under the Igbo apprenticeship model, particularly the “Igba Odibo” variant, the apprentice is required to be totally dedicated to his master. He is expected to respect and serve his master unconditionally. The apprentice usually lives in the master’s house and is expected to carry out official and unofficial assignments, including going on errands as instructed by the master or his wife. An apprentice who fails to meet the dedication and other stringent requirements such as honesty, humility, hard work and loyalty can be disciplined through suspension or expulsion.

In the university system, mentees are required to respect and be courteous to their mentors. However, they are not under obligation to carry out any unofficial assignment given by the mentors. Mentees in the university also relate more freely with their mentors, they do not approach them with trepidation as most apprentices do in relating to their masters.

Post Mentoring Relationship

In the Igbo apprenticeship system, even when the apprentice has graduated and becomes successful in his business, he still defers to his former master. It does not matter if the ex-apprentice has become more prosperous than his master, he still respects and regards him as a leader and father-figure. From time to time, he pays homage to him as a sign of appreciation for the tutelage he receives.

In the university system, the same applies equally. Mentees usually continue to respect and value their mentors for life. In both the Igbo and university systems, reverse mentoring sometimes occurs in which case mentees teach their mentors in certain areas. This could be in the area of technological development, fashion or new line of business.

Mentoring Challenges

In the Igbo apprenticeship model, challenges do occur. Some obstacles may arise from the learner, and sometimes the hindrance can emanate from the master. Some apprentices can be fraudulent and device ingenious means to steal from their masters or divert customers. Some apprentices may be so vicious as to render their masters bankrupt. Furthermore, the naivety or incompetence of an apprentice may result to financial loss in the master’s business.

On their part, some masters maltreat their apprentices in various ways. Some humiliate them in the public by calling them derogatory names. Some learners are given tasks far beyond their physical and mental capacities. Some masters do not feed the apprentices living with them well. With respect to “Igba Odibo” (serving a master), some wicked masters fabricate false accusations against apprentices who are at the verge of being settled or empowered. The result is that instead of being settled, the apprentice will be ignominiously dismissed and, in some cases, detained for a long time by the police. Commenting on the negative actions of some masters, Chukwu, Ugochukwu and Njoku (2024) advocate that the Nigerian government should intervene and criminalize the default by a master to settle an apprentice who has served him for a long time. This, they maintain, will serve as a deterrent to other masters who may contemplate not to settle their faithful apprentices.

Another drawback in the Igbo apprenticeship model, which could be regarded as a challenge, is the lack of formal certification for apprentices that have graduated. This deficiency may hinder the engagement of a graduate apprentice who may desire to attach himself as a paid worker to another enterprise in a different location.

A major contemporary challenge to mentoring in the Nigerian university system is that the environment (macro/ micro) does not appear conducive. Many of the mentors, arising from poor remuneration and dearth of facilities, are not sufficiently motivated to give their best and reproduce themselves. Also, a good number of the junior academic and administrative staff are either indifferent or unwilling to learn. Instead, they prefer to focus on how to make quick money. Okurame (2008) identifies the barriers to mentoring in the academia to include the lack of formal mentor/mentee structures, the pressure of administrative duties on the senior academic and non-teaching staff, the unresponsive attitude of junior academic and administrative staff and lack of funds to meet essential needs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worth emphasizing that mentoring is very necessary in the university system. It benefits the mentee, the mentor and the institution. Through mentoring, the mentee grows professionally and advances in his or her career. The mentor derives a sense of fulfilment in being part of a subordinate’s success story.

Mentorship in the university system is a symbiotic relationship. The case of Socrates and Plato should be enough to buttress this concept. One of the greatest philosophers of our time whose works are still relevant to date is Socrates. Unfortunately, Socrates died without leaving a single written material of his own and most of what we get to know about him today come from the works of one of his famous students, Plato. Such works include *Phaedo* and *The Apology*. In *Phaedo*, Plato tells the story of Socrates’s final moments and explores the immortality of the soul, the nature of death and the afterlife. *The Apology* is Plato’s presentation of Socrates’s defence at his trial for impiety and corruption of the youth. Sometimes reverse mentoring occurs whereby the mentor learns certain things from the subordinate. The institution benefits from the enhanced productivity and positive work orientation engendered through mentoring.

It is imperative that in order to become a professor or a registrar or go far in the university, every staff must have a mentor or mentors. Upcoming academics and administrators are enjoined to respect their mentors. On their part mentors should be gentle and considerate towards their mentees, realizing that someone mentored them at the early stages of their career in the university system. It is true that quite a number of young people these days find it difficult to stoop to conquer. However, mentors in the university should draw inspiration from King David. The bible tells the story of how vagabonds, rascals, scoundrels and societal rejects clustered around David and became fugitives with him during the years of his travail. David mentored these men so thoroughly that a good number of them were listed as Mighty Men in Israel and honourably included in the national hall of fame as recorded in 2 Samuel 23: 8-39. Mentors should, therefore, borrow a leaf from the patience and sagacity of David.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Mentorship in the university system should be structured rather than the present situation where mentoring occurs largely informally and sometimes haphazardly. Senior academics and administrators should be assigned, or mandated to choose junior staff that they will mentor.
2. All junior academics (Graduate Assistants and Assistant Lecturers) and administrators (Administrative Assistants and Administrative Officers) should be mandated to undergo mentoring for three years. Successful completion of the mentoring exercise should be among the requirements for promotion.
3. Mentors should be humane and treat their mentees with kindness, firmness and fairness. On their part mentees should be humble, diligent, exhibit teachable spirit and show loyalty to the mentors.
4. The Igbo apprenticeship model which has been beneficial to the Igbo society, particularly in the past, should be revived.
5. The government should establish a body with the mandate to examine and certify trained apprentices, particularly those who graduated from “imu oru” (learning a skill).
6. The Nigerian government should encourage other socio-cultural groups in the country to adopt and domesticate the Igbo apprenticeship system in their zones.

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