

GENDER AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA: EMERGING ISSUES

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL
& INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE
HELD AT THE CONFERENCE CENTRE,
UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, IBADAN, NIGERIA**

(MARCH 12TH – 14TH 2013)

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**1ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
GENDER: UNIBADAN, MARCH 12TH-14TH, 2013**

**INFLUENCE OF MENTORSHIP EXPERIENCE
AND GENDER ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
OF STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

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Abstract

Research evidences have shown that mentorship is an important learning component that ensures the successful transference of knowledge, skills and improved performance of learners in the tertiary educational system. Nevertheless, it has been observed that many tertiary institutions in Nigeria are deficient in the utilisation of mentorship programmes as a result of inadequate knowledge of mentorship. In addition, the cultural factors of gender predisposition and the insufficient academic staff also constitute major constraints to the effectiveness of mentorship relationship. The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of mentorship experience of students on their academic performance. Research samples of three hundred students were drawn from three universities (FUTA, AAUA and AUO) in Ondo State using stratified random technique. Four research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Structured and validated questionnaire was used to assess mentorship experience, degree of relationship between the mentees and the mentors while respective participant range of CGPA was used to determine their level of academic achievement. The data obtained were analysed using Pearson correlation, and t-test of independent. The major finding of the study showed that there is significant positive relationship between students' mentorship experience and academic performance. Secondly, students with mentoring experiences are better academically than students without mentoring experience. Thirdly, same-gender mentorship enhances academic performances than cross-gender mentorship. While elaborating on its implications, the study concludes that greater result can be achieved towards enhancing students' academic performances, particularly in relation to gender equity, by emphasising the importance of mentorship in the Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Keywords: *Mentorship Experience, Gender and Academic Performance*

Introduction

Several factors have been identified as contributing to the poor performance of students in various tertiary institutions all over the world. These factors include educational system, parental background, reading culture of the student, peer factors, lack of facilities and others. These factors

have been classified into three major elements consisting of parental (family causal) factors, teachers (academic causal) factors and students (personal causal) factors (Diaz, 2003, cited by Mlambo, 2011). Although many African governments including Nigeria are constantly implementing policies to ensure the

maintenance of the educational standard, there still remains much to be done in relation to the declining performance of students in higher institutions. According to Nwagwu (2002), parents often attribute the performance of their children on the school and the teachers, founded on the belief that schools are expected to be staffed with good teachers and adequate facilities. Therefore, considering the response of the government in recent years towards the provision of more facilities, staffing and funding of the higher institutions, poor performance of students can be attributed to the inadequacy of the teachers and the administrators which represent the academic casual factor.

In view of this, the researcher believes that much has not been achieved towards the improvement of the academic performance of students in tertiary institutions because of the under emphasis on the importance of mentoring. In addition, mentorship has also been diagnosed as one of the methods of promoting gender equality especially in the area of science and technology towards national development (Tsai, 2010). Therefore, considering the urgent need to address and proffer solutions to the declining academic performance of students in higher institutions, the role of mentorship is pertinent. Available literature also points to the fact that mentorship has actually helped, to a large extent, in bridging the gap.

This study hopes to show the importance of mentorship programme in the academic setting by increasing the dyadic staff-student relationship, boost the academic performance of the Nigerian students and also bridge the wide gap in the level of academic performance between male and female especially in technical orientated disciplines, such as engineering.

Objectives of the Study

The principal aim of this study is to examine the impact of mentorship experience of students on their academic performance. The study also aims at bridging gender

differences in academic performance and also to identify the differences in academic performance of students both under same gender mentorship and under cross-gender mentorship.

Mentoring is not a new concept in academic circles (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005) but it has recently been revived in Nigerian universities as there is a growing concern about raising academic standards and a desire for Nigerian universities to compete favourably with their counterparts in other parts of the world. The management of each institution is therefore under increased pressure to create opportunities for professional guidance and development of their academic staff to avert a slide in academic performance. One way to maintain academic standards and performance is mentoring – a training and development relationship that enhances an individual's professional growth (Jennings, 1971; Orth & Jacobs, 1971; Levinson *et al*, 1978; Roche, 1979; Kram, 1985; McCall *et al*, 1998).

Historically, mentoring has its root in the ancient Greek myth where a man called Mentor became a guiding force to a child's development while the father was away. This later led to the discovery of mentorship as an important field in education and counselling (Ismail, Jui & Shah, 2011). In accordance with this, mentoring was defined as a relationship between an older more experienced adult who helps the younger individual to learn (Ismail & Arokiasamy, 2007). Subsequently, several studies have defined mentoring in different ways with reference to the historical background. According to Bryant-Shanklin and Brumage (2011), mentoring is a process involving two or more individuals known as the mentor and mentee, working together to develop the abilities of one individual which is geared towards career and/or personal development. The mentor is considered as an experienced, older individual who guides a younger inexperienced individual known as the mentee to promote his/her professional and personal development. Therefore one's

mentor can be referred to as a teacher, a guide, an advisor, a friend, a sponsor and anyone who is contributing to one's development.

Mentoring relationships can be informal or formal. Informal mentoring relationships are those which evolve naturally from shared admiration, aspiration, values and interests (Kram, 1983, 1985; Sullivan, 1992), while the formal types are those created to ensure that newly admitted students are exposed and given the opportunity to be shaped and guided by the experienced tutors. This is necessary because many newly admitted students in the tertiary institutions often find it difficult to adjust to the social pressure, and academic freedom in the tertiary institutions. Therefore, the presence of a mentor becomes very significant in assisting the students in navigating through the various challenges towards the desired academic goals.

Mentoring was identified as an essential factor that propelled the academic success of the first generation of college students (Smith, 2009). Accordingly, several studies on traditional mentor programmes have reported success in increasing the retention and graduation rates among the students. Mentoring programmes implemented in the context of higher education have been found to generate positive effects for mentees, as well as for mentors and universities. This has led to better academic performance, development of personal relationships with students and reduction in dropout rates (Campbell & Campbell, 1997).

In addition, mentors are key in facilitating career development of mentees and serving as role models, counsellors and friends to meet the psychological and emotional needs of the mentees (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Typical career development functions include progress in academic development, assured accessibility, moral development, among others. Psychosocial functions comprise role modelling, friendship, counselling and acceptance. Mentoring is regarded as one of the best tools

for "reducing stress for novice teachers, orientation to curriculum and promoting the creation of better norms of collegiality and collaboration" (Sweeney, 2004). It helps in the resolution of challenges and predicaments, making it more likely that an individual attains his or her career goals and growth.

In this regard, mentoring is especially valuable for the transmission of positive attitudes as mentors provide invaluable information on the mission and philosophies of the organisation, help employees cope with career stress and give proper orientation towards workplace values (Murray, 1995; Gilley & Boughton, 1996; Payne, 2006).

The outcomes of mentoring programmes have often been discussed in various literatures, but individual differences in realizing mentoring (gender issues) are rarely taken into consideration. In this regard, a person-oriented approach shows promise in the sense that combination of variables describes the gender combination of both the mentee and the mentor. Gender represents an important consideration for ensuring effective mentorship programme in any institution. According to several researchers, gender category in mentoring relationship involves the interaction between same-gender and cross-gender (Gaskill, 1991; Ragins, 1997, 1999; Ragins and Cotton, 1993, 1999; Young et al., 2006; and Ismail, Khian Jui and Abdullah, 2009, cited by Ismail, Jui & Shah, 2011). Same-gender in mentorship is viewed as the interaction between male mentor-male protégé and the interaction between female mentor-female protégé (Allen & Eby, 2004; Hegstad & Wentling, 2005; Lyon et al., 2004). Same-gender mentoring relationship is the interaction between male mentor-male mentee and the interaction between female mentor-female mentee, while the cross-gender mentoring is the interaction between male mentor-female mentee and female mentor-male mentee. These interactions often have a significant impact on the

mentee's professional and psychological advancement (Okurame, Bologun, 2005; Niehoff, 2006). Interaction between the same and cross-genders in formal mentoring programmes is often done through building good contacts, exchanging personal and work problems in friendly situations, and supporting the advancement of individuals' psychosocial (Baugh & Scandura, 1999; Hansford & Ehrich, 2006; Hansford et al., 2003; Lyon et al., 2004).

Studies have also shown that there exist different expectations and perceptions from both the mentees and the mentors in mentorship relationship. Considering the female make up, their expectations of mentoring tends to be more of emotional support than that of the male which is inclined towards professional career. According to Sosik and Godshalk (2000), female-female mentoring relationship offers a greater level of friendship counselling and personal support than the other combinations of mentorship. Such differences may cause the relationships to take on greater meaning and importance to women. Therefore understanding the effect of gender on effective mentoring of the mentee can also be further elucidated through the similarity/attraction theory of organisational behaviour which posits that people like and are attracted to others who are similar, rather than dissimilar, to themselves. People's inclinations to be attracted to those who share similar attitudes, tend to propel them to be willing to associate with people based on personality characteristics (e.g., optimism, self-esteem, shyness, conscientiousness) that are similar to them (Encyclopaedia, 2008).

Apparently, gender becomes a major consideration in designing an effective mentorship programme but there are constraints to over emphasising on same gender mentoring, especially the female gender due to the lack of adequate willing female mentors. Nevertheless, the issue of gender in mentorship remains a contentious

one, since some studies view it as an important consideration while others do not. The moderating effect of gender type in mentorship is consistent with formal mentoring research literature mostly published in Western countries. For example, several recent studies used an indirect-effect model to examine formal mentoring programmes in Western organizations using different samples, such as 500 companies in the US (Hegstad & Wentling, 2005). Feldman, Folks & Turnley (1999) argue that the diversity of identity itself reduces the effectiveness of the mentoring experience because it produces discomfort for both parties, inhibits trust and weakens psychosocial functions. This explanation suggests perceptions about differences, rather than any real differences due to gender, which inhibit the mentoring relationship in terms of psychosocial support. External factors, such as potential misperceptions of the cross-gender relationship, are also blamed. Previous studies have examined outcomes based on actual dyadic mentoring relationships; our study examined perceptions about the role or function of mentors independent of participation in a dyad. Specifically, similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne & Griffitt, 1973), often viewed from the perspectives of social psychology, emphasizes more on the integration of similarity, attractiveness, and liking in human relationship. These findings are consistent with the notion of organisational behaviour theory, similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne and Griffitt, 1973), and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969).

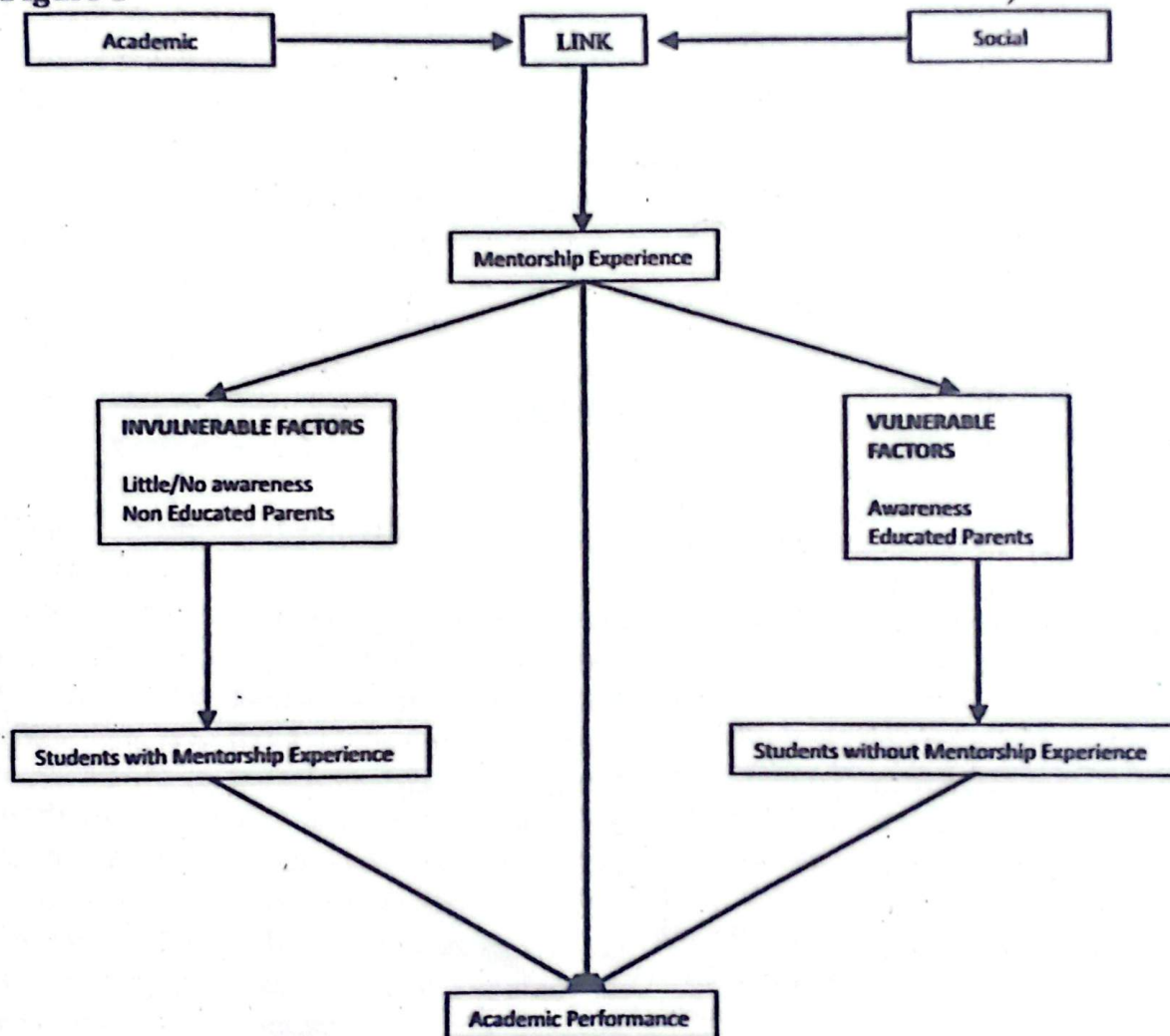
Consequently, these views are not expected to be binding in all research contexts. Hence the purpose of this research is to explore the outcome of mentorship experience of the students in the selected tertiary institutions in Ondo State in relation to the gender factors on the academic performance.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the conceptual framework adopted for this study, it seems reasonable to assume that the properly implemented formal mentoring programmes will

influence students' academic performances. Theories and literatures suggest that properly implemented formal mentoring programmes may increase individuals' psychosocial disposition.

Figure 1



(I) Research Hypotheses

These objectives were explored by formulating three hypotheses:

- There will be significant positive relationship between mentorship and students' academic performance.
- Mentorship will have a significant influence on students' academic performance.

There will be significant difference in academic performance between students under same gender mentorship and students under cross-gender mentorship.

Inclusion criteria

- Participants must be registered students of the university undergoing full time programme.
- Students in their second year to final years are strictly involved.

Exclusion criteria

- Students other than those on full time were dropped in this study in order to control for extraneous variables at minimal.
- First year students were also excluded because of valid data on the dependent variables (academic performance).

(iii) Research Methodology

(a) Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional research design that allowed the researchers to integrate mentorship experience, literatures, and the actual survey as a main procedure to gather relevant data. Using such methods may result in more accurate data, decrease bias and increase quality of data being collected (Sekaran & Bougie, 2011; Zikmund, 2000). The design in this study also enables us to survey a group of students with mentorship experience and another group of students without mentorship experience, then assess the group on the scale of their academic performances.

(b) Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all undergraduate students of Federal University of Technology Akure (FUTA), Adekunle Ajasin University (AAU) and Achievers' University Owo (AUO). The population excluded the 100 level students.

(c) Sample and Sampling Technique

Participants for the study were undergraduate students of Federal University of Technology Akure, Adekunle Ajasin University, and Achievers University Owo, selected through the use of randomized cluster sampling. Participants were made up of three hundred students (135 males and 165 females) undergraduates from 200 level to 400/500 level across different faculties in the universities. The age range was between 17 and 30 years, with the mean of 23.5 years and standard deviation of 11.04 years. Participants were solicited from a variety of campus locations including the computer café, library, relaxation centres, eateries and classrooms. All participants were assured that their response would be treated with much confidentiality and anonymity. The collected data were subjected to statistical analysis, where T-Test of independent was used to test the differences in academic performance among students that reportedly experienced mentorship influence and those without mentorship experience. The study also adopted the use of Pearson correlation to test the relationship between students' mentorship experience and academic performances.

(d) Instruments

The research instrument used for the data collection is a well structured and standardized questionnaire, which has three basic sections, with options ranging from A-E:

Section A of the questionnaire contains items measuring socio-demographic information of the students such as, age, sex, present level of studies, parents' educational levels, and mentor's gender.

Section B of the questionnaire called Mentoring Functions Scale was developed

by Raymond A. Noe who conducted a study designed to "assess the various types of functions provided by mentors" (1988:460). *Section C* of the questionnaire contains the categorization of cumulative grade performance average (CGPA) on a 5-point scale. Participants are to respond by identifying where they fall into in the various classification grades.

Results and discussion

Basic statistical analysis was used in analysing the data collected, to carry out the influence of mentorship on academic

performance. Result in Table 1 shows the verified output of hypothesis one, which states that there will be significant positive relationship between mentorship and students' academic performance, which was analysed using one way Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The results of this analysis, presented in Table 1, reveal that mentorship experience has a significant positive relationship with students' academic performance ($r = 0.315$, $P < .01$). The study proposes that mentorship has significant high relationship with academic performances of students as supported by hypothesis one.

Table 1: Summary of Pearson correlation analysis and descriptive statistics showing the significant relationship between Mentorship on Academic

Variables Correlation Analysis	Performance		Pearson
	X	SD	
			1
		2	
1. Mentoring	9.31	1.44	(1)
2. Academic Performance (1)	3.13	1.97	315**

Note: Significant at 0.01

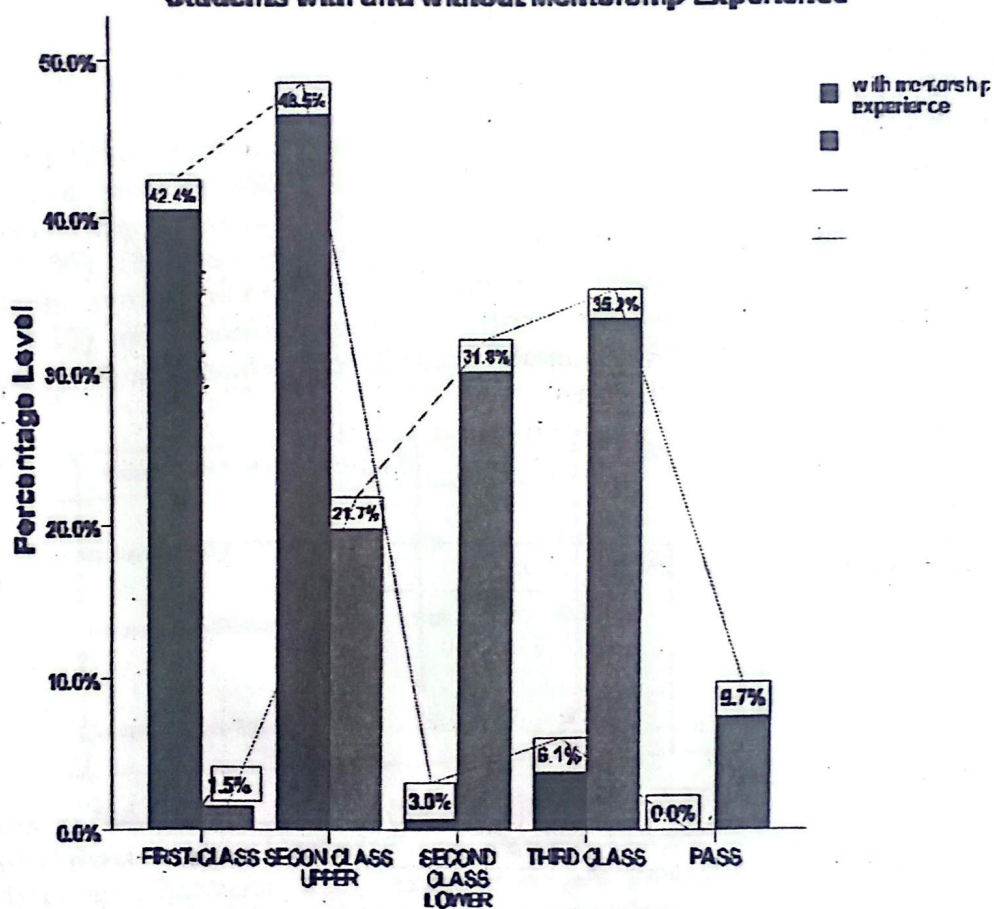
Preliminary statistical analysis (using complex descriptive statistical analysis) was carried out to ascertain the percentage distribution of academic performance among students with mentorship experience and those without mentorship experience. The pattern of percent scores obtained in the population is illustrated in Figure 1. As shown here, the greatest academic

achievement was registered with students who were exposed to formal mentorship experience (positively skewed towards high grades on academic rating scale in Figure 1) while much poor achievement was registered among students without mentorship experience (negatively skewed toward low grades on academic rating scale in the graph in Figure 1).

Figure 1

Graph showing the Percentage distribution of Academic Performance among

Students with and without Mentorship Experience



Source; Field research survey 2012

Academic Performance

In order to explore further, students with mentorship experience were compared with those without mentorship experience. That is the essence of hypothesis two, which states that students with mentorship experience will be academically better than those

without mentorship experience. The result of the T-Test analysis that examined the differences in the academic performance of students with mentorship experience and students without mentorship experience is presented below.

Table 2: T-Test summary showing the differences in the academic performance of students with mentorship experience and those without.

Academic Performances	N	X	SD	DF	T	P
With Mentorship Experience	33	3.73	0.80	298	8.99	<0.05
Without mentorship Experience	267	1.30	0.97			

The result reveals a significant difference in academic performance between students with and without mentorship experience ($t = 8.99$, $df = 298$, $p < .05$). The mean scores show that students with mentorship experience ($M = 3.73$) are academically better than those without mentorship

experience ($M = 1.30$). Thus, hypothesis two is fully supported.

Further statistical exploration was conducted to ascertain if mentorship programme can actually bridge the gap in the performance rate between male students and female students, resulting in Table 3 below.

Dependent Measure	Compared Group	N	X	SD	DF	T	P
Academic Performance	Non-mentored male students	119	3.18	9.56	265	1.75	<0.05
	Non-mentored female students	148	2.89	8.66			
	Mentored Male Students	15	2.17	0.39			

The results in Table 3 reveal that there is significant difference in the level of academic performance between non-mentored male students and non-mentored female students ($t = 1.75$, $df = 265$, $p < .05$), while the results in Table 3 also reveal that there is no significant difference in the level of academic performance between mentored female students and mentored male students

($t = 0.28$, $df = 31$, $p > 0.05$).

Further analysis was conducted to examine certain gender issues relating to mentorship in academic settings, which is the basis of hypothesis three which states that there will be no significant difference in academic performance between students under same gender mentorship and cross-gender mentorship. The result of the t-test is presented in Table 3.

Table 4: T-Test Summary showing the difference in academic performance between students under same gender mentorship and cross-gender mentorship.

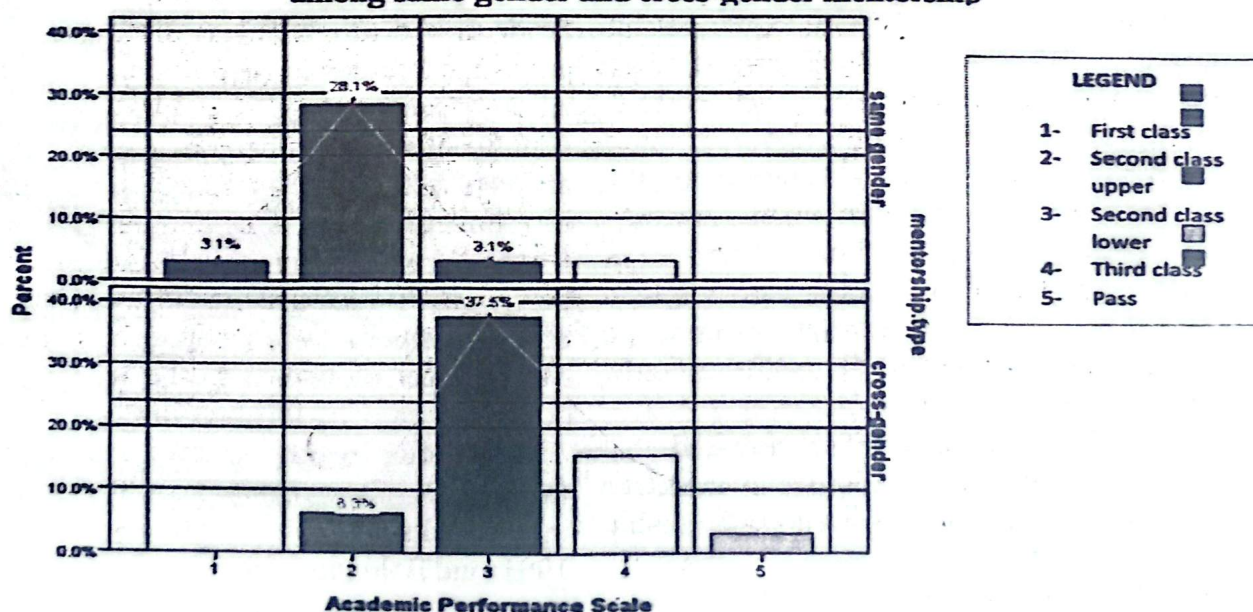
Academic Performances	N	X	SD	DF	T	P
Same-Gender Mentorship	12	2.17	0.39	31	3.82	<0.05
Cross-Gender Mentorship	21	1.10	0.79			

The result reveals a significant difference in academic performance between students under same gender mentorship (male mentor vs. male mentee or female mentor vs. female mentee, and vice-versa) and cross-gender mentorship (male mentor vs. female mentee or female mentor vs. male mentee, and vice-versa), ($t = 3.82$, $df = 31$, $p < .05$). The mean scores however show that, students under same gender mentorship ($M = 2.17$) are academically

better than students under cross-gender mentorship ($M = 1.10$). Therefore, hypothesis three is accepted.

Also, descriptive chart was presented in Figure 2, showing the percentage distribution of gender factor in mentorship process in comparison with its influence in academic performance among students to further expatiate the claim of hypothesis three above.

Figure 2: Descriptive chart showing academic performance distribution among same gender and cross-gender mentorship



The descriptive chart above shows that 3.1% of the students under same gender mentorship fell within the CGPA of first class, 28.1% under second class upper, 3.1% fell under second class lower, 3.1% under third class and there is no record of pass, while 6.3% of the students under cross-gender mentorship fell under second class upper, 37.5% under second class lower, 15.6% under third class and 3.1% fell under pass grade on academic performance scale.

The major findings revealed that mentorship plays significant roles in students' academic performance. The study shows that mentorship role in enhancing academic performance is quite significant in the process of ensuring improvement in learning quality, in the academic context. Mentees perceive levels of communication, openness, and participation style as dependent clues in promising academic performance in the academic societies of the mentors. The abilities of mentors to properly implement the clues in formal and informal mentoring activities have increased mentees' self-motivation to study. This leads to an increased academic performance in the studied organization. The outcome of this hypothesis has severally been argued out in the literatures of some researchers (e.g. Campbell and Campbell 1997) that mentoring styles were related to the academic performance of mentees, in which the mentees completed more units per semester and received higher grades than non-mentees. The mentoring programme thus showed positive effects on the academic performance of mentees.

Study findings also revealed that there was significant difference in academic performance of students with mentorship experience as against those without it. Students with mentorship experience were

found to be academically better than students without it. Possible explanation for such idea about the differences in performance can be found in relevant literature. Moreover, people with mentors receive numerous benefits from the relationship including more promotions, higher incomes (Dreher & Ash, 1990) and more career satisfaction (Fagenson, 1989) than those people without mentors. Mentorship results in high academic performance, while interaction between mentors and mentees can lead to training and development programmes that enhance an individual's professional growth, as rightly found in the literatures of Jennings, 1971; Orth & Jacobs, 1971; Levinson *et al*, 1978; Roche, 1979; Kram, 1985; McCall *et al*, 1998. These researchers claimed that mentors often spend much resources not limited to time and effort in ensuring that mentees are trained and guided till positive results are achieved. Social integration overtime elicits much perceived social support among mentees, while the mentees in return try more often to meet up with the requirements or expectations of the mentors which consequentially results into better academic performances as discussed in the empirical literatures of researchers such as Allen, McManus & Russell, 1999. The benefits of mentorship to mentees sometimes are not strictly based on the dyadic interaction but sometimes on a developmental social learning perspective which posits that behaviour is learned in interaction with others, especially when they serve as models. Mentees get motivated in the fulfilment of academic career via observing and getting challenged through series of career fulfilments of the mentors, similarly quoted in the works of researchers like Sarason *et al*, 1991; and Baldwin, 1992.

Having identified the verified facts on significant difference in the level of education performance between students with mentorship experience and those without it, the statistical probe further reveals that there is a significant difference in the academic performances of non-mentored males and non-mentored females. Non-mentored male students show better academic performances than non-mentored female students. A possible explanation for this fact may be that men are much intrinsically and extrinsically challenged towards academic tasks than women. Thus, male students perceive heavy responsibilities in the societal and family contexts, unlike female students who really have less perceived responsibilities, especially in the African context. According to Sundra (2007), non-mentored student participants typically indicated that personal motivation and family expectations were the primary factors in their persistence. Family relationships were key motivating factors for many of the students as they felt an obligation to graduate, particularly if they were the first in their family to achieve such a goal. Other students expressed a deep emotional desire to succeed due to the sudden death of a parent or grandparent while still enrolled. However, the outcome also shows that there is no significant difference between mentored male students and mentored female students. Literatures have shown that mentorship programme has really promoted gender equity in academic performance (*Saralyn, Morahan, Linda, Vivian, and Susanne Tropez-Sims, 2001*).

The findings of this study explore the implication of gender interaction between mentors and mentees in determining academic performance. Same-gender

mentorship was found in the study to be efficient in ensuring standard academic performance than cross-gender mentorship. Same-gender in mentorship is viewed as the interaction between male mentor-male protégé and the interaction between female mentor-female protégé (Allen & Eby, 2004; Hegstad & Wentling, 2005; Lyon et al., 2004). Cross-gender in mentorship is seen as the interaction between male mentor-female protégé and female mentor-male protégé (Allen et al., 2005; Gaskill, 1991; Lyon et al., 2004). Interaction between students of the same gender or across genders in formal mentoring programmes is often done through building good contacts, exchanging personal and work problems in friendly situations, and supporting the psychosocial advancement of individuals (Baugh & Scandura, 1999; Hansford & Ehrich, 2006; Hansford et al., 2003; Lyon et al., 2004). Both same-gender and cross-gender mentorship types do create caring and comfortable environments to discuss, seek clarification, and encourage the sharing of knowledge and experiences, as well as making decisions for improving performance and solving problems. This result is consistent with studies by Byrne and Griffitt (1973), Bowlby (1969), Allen et al. (2005), and Hegstad and Wentling (2005). However, cross-gender mentoring interaction has been faulted in various studies. For instance, Feldman, Folks and Turnley (1999) argue that the identity diversity itself reduces the effectiveness of the mentoring experience because it produces discomfort for both parties, inhibits trust and weakens psychosocial functions. This explanation suggests that perceptions about differences, rather than any real differences due to gender, inhibit the mentoring relationship in terms of psychosocial support. External factors, such

as gross potential misperceptions of the cross-gender relationship, are also blamed. The effect of gender in mentoring is fairly complex in that it "not only influenced mentoring functions and outcomes" but also moderated the relationships of other factors, such as relationship type and assignment type (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Recommendations were made in the work of Azman, Michael, and Muhammad (2009) that current research practice within mentoring programme models needs to consider gender type in mentorship as a critical aspect of organisational mentoring programme where properly implemented interaction styles between cross-gender and same gender in mentoring programmes may strongly induce positive subsequent attitudinal and behavioural outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, commitment, performance, trust, and good moral values). Thus, these positive outcomes may lead mentees to sustain and support organisational and departmental strategies and goals.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study confirms that mentorship has much significant influence on students' academic performances. More precisely, it reveals that students (mentees) who have much functional relationship with mentors perform significantly better academically than students without mentorship experience. Further exploration among the mentored students revealed that same-gender mentorship interaction showed better academic success than cross-gender mentorship. This result has supported the findings of previous studies and extended mentoring research literature mostly published in Africa. Therefore, current research efforts and practices within academic environment need to explore the practices of mentoring programme and gender type in mentorship as a critical aspect of organisational mentoring programme where properly implemented interaction styles between cross-gender and same gender may produce favourable results, academically and behaviourally (e.g., satisfaction, commitment, performance, trust, and good moral values). The study however recommends that institutions around the country should explore the establishment of formal mentorship programmes across departments as necessary tools in increasing the academic performances and standards of the students.

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