

Impact of Mentoring Policy on the Development of Psychology Graduate Students in Nigeria

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Abstract

This research examines the critical role of mentoring within the context of psychology graduate education in Nigeria, a domain that has historically been underexplored in empirical literature. Recognizing mentoring as vital for both professional and personal growth, the study emphasizes its importance in equipping graduate students with essential skills, fostering resilience, and enhancing community belonging, particularly in a challenging educational landscape marked by systemic issues like underfunding and faculty shortages. The paper first delineates the theoretical foundations of mentoring and its significance to psychology education, followed by an analysis of the existing policy framework governing mentoring in Nigerian graduate programmes. Subsequently, it investigates the effects of formalized mentoring policies on students' academic, professional, and psychosocial development, synthesizing insights from pertinent Nigerian studies. Furthermore, the research confronts the challenges inherent in current mentoring initiatives, spotlighting structural and cultural impediments that limit their efficacy. The conclusion offers actionable recommendations for policy reform and outlines avenues for future research, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of how mentoring policy can enhance educational outcomes for psychology graduate students in Nigeria. This study contributes to closing the gap in mentorship literature, paving the way for informed policy interventions aimed at improving graduate education in psychology and beyond.

Keywords: Mentoring Policy, Development, Psychology Graduate Students

Introduction

Mentoring has long been recognized as a crucial component in the professional and personal development of graduate students across various disciplines. In psychology, a field intimately connected with human growth, learning, and adaptation, the role of mentoring becomes even more significant. Effective mentoring policies can facilitate the acquisition of critical academic, research, and professional skills, foster resilience, and promote a sense of belonging within academic communities. In the context of Nigeria, where higher education institutions are grappling with systemic challenges such as underfunding, infrastructural deficits, faculty shortages, and socio-cultural complexities, the implementation of robust mentoring policies emerges as a potential lever for enhancing graduate education outcomes.

Despite the acknowledged importance of mentoring, empirical research on the direct impact of mentoring policy on the development of psychology graduate students in Nigeria remains limited. Existing literature on mentorship in Nigerian higher education often focuses on structural or organizational change (Sabo & Utulu, 2023), technological adaptation (Onuegbu et al., 2024), or macro-level socio-political influences (Iorliam et al., 2021). Little attention is paid to the mechanisms by which formalized mentoring policies shape the academic, professional, and psychosocial

experiences of psychology graduate students. This research seeks to fill this lacuna by interrogating the impact of mentoring policy on the development of psychology graduate students in Nigeria, drawing upon insights from related disciplines and empirical studies within the Nigerian context.

The paper is structured as follows. First, it explores the theoretical underpinnings of mentoring and its relevance to psychology education in Nigeria and Africa. Second, it examines the policy landscape governing mentoring in Nigerian higher education, with a focus on psychology graduate programmes. Third, it analyzes the multifaceted impact of mentoring policy on the academic, professional, and psychosocial development of psychology graduate students, integrating findings from related Nigerian studies. Fourth, it critically evaluates the challenges and limitations of current mentoring policies, drawing attention to structural, cultural, and contextual barriers. Finally, the research offers recommendations for policy reform and adjustment and future research directions.

Theoretical Foundations of Mentoring in Psychology Graduate Education

Mentoring is widely defined as a developmental relationship in which a more experienced individual (the mentor) provides guidance, support, and feedback to a less experienced protégé (the mentee) to foster the latter's personal, educational and professional growth (Aliегда, & Inalegwu, 2024). In the context of graduate psychology education, mentoring encompasses academic supervision, research collaboration, career guidance, and psychosocial support, all embedded within the broader institutional and socio-cultural milieu.

The Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) model, as applied in studies on technological adaptation and professional behaviour in Nigeria (Onuegbu et al., 2024), offers a useful lens for understanding the mentoring dynamic. The KAP framework posits that knowledge acquisition is a precursor to attitude formation, which in turn influences practice or behaviour. When transposed to mentoring, this suggests that effective mentoring policies should not only transmit knowledge about research and professional norms but also cultivate positive attitudes toward scholarship, professional ethics, and community engagement, ultimately shaping the professional practices of graduate students.

Institutional theory, as explicated by Sabo and Utulu (2023), further underscores the importance of context in shaping organizational behaviour. Institutions comprising rules, norms, and cultural-cognitive frameworks legitimize certain practices and constrain others. Mentoring, therefore, is not merely an interpersonal relationship but is also constituted by the rules, expectations, and resources embedded within the institution. In the Nigerian context, where institutional arrangements are often in flux and subject to multiple external pressures, the formalization of mentoring through policy becomes a mechanism for legitimizing and standardizing developmental practices in graduate education.

Policy Landscape of Mentoring in Nigerian Higher Education

The evolution of mentoring policy in Nigerian higher education reflects broader trends in industrial and organizational studies and regulatory reform. Historically, Nigerian universities, operated under a loosely structured apprenticeship model, wherein graduate students relied on informal relationships with faculty members for academic guidance and career advice (Sabo & Utulu, 2023). The absence of formalized mentoring policies often resulted in inconsistent experiences, with some students benefiting from robust mentorship while others were left to navigate the academic environment in isolation.

Recent years have witnessed a gradual shift toward institutionalization and formalization, spurred by global trends in higher education quality assurance, national policy reforms, and increasing recognition of the role of mentorship in academic success and workforce preparedness. The Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR), though focused on data management (Sabo & Utulu, 2023), exemplifies the broader move toward codifying institutional practices to align with international best standards. In psychology graduate programmes like in the case at Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi, this is gradually translating into the development of departmental guidelines on thesis supervision, research ethics, publication mentorship, and career counseling.

Mentoring in institutions such as universities generally is guided by some policies and it is not an exception in the case of graduate programmes in psychology. Some of these policies typically

encompass the following elements:

- ◆ *Assignment of Mentors:* Policies stipulate the assignment of faculty mentors to graduate students, often at the point of admission or upon selection of research topics.
- ◆ *Mentor Roles and Responsibilities:* Clear articulation of mentor duties, including academic supervision, research guidance, career counseling, and psychosocial support.
- ◆ *Mentoring Structures:* Establishment of formal mentoring committees, peer mentorship schemes, and regular progress review meetings.
- ◆ *Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms:* Procedures for monitoring mentoring effectiveness, gathering student feedback, and addressing grievances.
- ◆ *Professional Development Opportunities:* Provision of workshops, seminars, and training sessions for both mentors and mentees to enhance mentoring skills and outcomes.

Despite these policy provisions, the efficacy of implementation and the actual impact on graduate student development remain subjects of debate.

Mentoring and Academic and Professional Development

Mentoring serves as a critical conduit for academic socialization, transmission of disciplinary knowledge, and cultivation of research skills. In the context of psychology graduate education in Nigeria, mentoring policies have the potential to address persistent gaps in research training, methodological competence, and scholarly confidence.

Effective mentoring policies facilitate structured transfer of knowledge from experienced faculty to graduate students. Drawing on the KAP model, Onuegbu et al. (2024) demonstrated that awareness and utilization of technological tools (e.g., Google Translate) among Nigerian journalists correlated strongly with structured training and mentorship. By analogy, psychology graduate students exposed to systematic mentoring are more likely to acquire advanced research skills, including literature review, data analysis, and academic writing. However, as observed in related studies, mere assignment of mentors without ongoing engagement fails to yield substantive learning gains (Onuegbu et al., 2024). Mentoring policies, therefore, must incentivize active mentor involvement and provide resources for continuous mentor-mentee interaction. The establishment of research clusters, journal clubs, and collaborative projects within psychology departments can operationalize policy intentions and bridge the knowledge gap.

Mentoring policies also shape the development of scholarly identity, defined as the internalization of disciplinary values, ethical standards, and professional aspirations. Sabo and Utulu (2023), in their organizational analysis of regulatory propositions, argue that the socio-cultural context of organizations mediates the legitimacy and adoption of institutional practices. For psychology graduate students, mentoring policies that emphasize ethical conduct, critical inquiry, and engagement with professional networks foster a sense of belonging and purpose. Psychology, as a discipline, is particularly attuned to the nuances of identity formation and self-efficacy. Robust mentoring policies that include regular feedback, recognition of achievements, and opportunities for conference participation or publication can reinforce students' identification with the field and motivate persistence in the face of challenges.

Mentoring policies also play a pivotal role in preparing psychology graduate students for professional careers within and beyond academia (Amador-Campos, et al 2023). In a labour market characterized by high unemployment, underemployment, and sectoral mismatch, structured mentoring can enhance employability, career adaptability, and entrepreneurial orientation.

Formal mentoring policies often mandate career counseling as a core component. Mentors provide guidance on career pathways, professional certifications, and opportunities for internships or field placements. The value of such guidance is underscored by studies in related fields, where structured professional development activities contributed to improved knowledge, attitude, and practice among practitioners (Onuegbu et al., 2024). Moreover, mentoring policies that encourage participation in professional associations, conferences, and workshops expand students' networks and expose them to diverse career trajectories. The organizational analysis by Sabo and Utulu (2023) highlights the importance of external linkages and inter-organizational relationships in shaping organizational outcomes. Psychology graduate students, through mentor-facilitated networking, can access

opportunities for collaboration, funding, and employment.

Mentoring policies that integrate experiential learning such as supervised internships, research assistantships, and community engagement equip students with practical skills relevant to the evolving demands of the psychology profession. In the context of health crises like COVID-19, adaptability and cross-disciplinary competence became essential (Ogundepo et al., 2020). Mentors, drawing on their own professional experiences, can guide students in navigating complex work environments, managing ethical dilemmas, and responding to societal needs.

Beyond academic and professional outcomes, mentoring policies exert a profound influence on the psychosocial development of psychology graduate students. Graduate education is often characterized by high stress, isolation, and uncertainty, particularly in resource-constrained settings like Nigeria. Effective mentoring can buffer these stressors, foster resilience, and cultivate a supportive academic community. Mentors serve as confidants, role models, and advocates, providing emotional support during periods of academic and personal difficulty. The KAP model, as applied in Onuegbu et al. (2024), recognizes the importance of attitude and practice in shaping behavioural outcomes. Mentoring policies that legitimize and encourage psychosocial support through regular check-ins, mental health awareness, and peer support groups contribute to students' well-being and resilience.

In the context of terrorism and insecurity, which have affected many Nigerian communities and universities (Iorliam et al., 2021), the role of mentors as sources of stability and guidance becomes even more critical. Students from conflict-affected areas or marginalized backgrounds may require additional support to navigate trauma, displacement, or discrimination.

Relatedly, mentoring policies that promote inclusivity, diversity, and community engagement can mitigate feelings of alienation and foster a sense of belonging. Sabo and Utulu (2023) emphasize the role of institutional propositions in shaping organizational culture. Inclusive mentoring policies that recognize the diverse identities and experiences of psychology graduate students across gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status create a more equitable and supportive academic environment. Peer mentoring schemes, group supervision, and collaborative projects further strengthen community ties and enable collective problem-solving. As observed in technological adaptation studies, communities of practice facilitate knowledge sharing and innovation (Onuegbu et al., 2024).

Challenges in Academic Mentoring

Despite policy provisions, several challenges are known to undermine the academic development of psychology graduate students in Nigeria. Faculty shortages and high student-to-mentor ratios limit the frequency and depth of mentoring interactions. Furthermore, limited access to research funding, laboratory resources, and contemporary literature constrains the scope of research activities and innovation. As seen in the COVID-19 context, where data accessibility and technological adaptation became critical (Ogundepo et al., 2020), mentoring policies must be agile and responsive to emergent academic realities.

In a related sense, some barriers impede the translation of mentoring into professional advancement. The disconnect between academic training and labour market requirements remains a persistent challenge. Sabo and Utulu (2023) point to the need for regulatory alignment between institutional propositions and socio-cultural realities. In psychology, inadequate curricula, limited industry partnerships, and insufficient career tracking systems dilute the impact of otherwise robust mentoring policies. Additionally, mentorship fatigue among faculty, lack of incentives for mentoring, and bureaucratic obstacles to innovation stifle the dynamism required for effective professional development. To address these gaps, mentoring policies must be embedded within a broader strategy of curriculum reform, industry engagement, and accountability.

Risks of Dysfunctional Mentoring

Dysfunctional mentoring refers to relationships in which the mentor fails to provide the expected support or, worse, causes harm to the mentee (Eby et al., 2000). Such dysfunction may arise from mentor neglect, misuse of power, or interpersonal incompatibility, leading to negative outcomes distinct from the advantages typically associated with effective mentoring (Eby & Allen, 2002). Research indicates that dysfunctional mentoring is not uncommon. Eby et al. (2004) found that up to one-third of reported mentoring relationships were characterized by some form of dysfunction.

Manifestations include mentor absenteeism, lack of feedback, manipulative behaviours, and even harassment (Eby & Allen, 2002). These negative interactions can undermine the developmental intentions of mentoring programs and damage the trust essential to mentor-mentee relationships.

Not all mentoring relationships are positive. Dysfunctional mentoring, characterized by neglect, or abuse, can have deleterious effects on students' psychological well-being and academic trajectories. The absence of grievance redress mechanisms or lack of policy enforcement exacerbates vulnerability to such risks. Mentoring policies must, therefore, include safeguards, ethical guidelines, and oversight structures to prevent and address harmful mentoring practices.

The risks of dysfunctional mentoring are substantial for mentees. Affected individuals often report diminished self-esteem, and higher levels of stress (Eby et al., 2000). In the context of graduate students, dysfunctional mentoring can lead to reduced academic performance and achievements. Dysfunctional mentoring may also hinder career advancement and skill development, leading to disengagement and increased turnover intentions (Eby & Allen, 2002). Moreover, mentees exposed to negative mentoring experiences may become reluctant to seek future mentoring, perpetuating a cycle of inadequate support. Mitigating strategies are therefore imperative.

Addressing the consequences associated with dysfunctional mentoring requires proactive measures. Eby and Allen (2002) advocate for thorough mentor selection, comprehensive training, and ongoing evaluation of mentoring relationships to identify and address dysfunction early. Establishing clear expectations and feedback mechanisms can also help to minimize the incidence and impact of dysfunctional mentoring (Eby et al., 2004).

Challenges and Limitations of Current Mentoring Policies

Despite the promise of mentoring policies, their implementation in Nigerian psychology graduate programmes is beset by structural, cultural, and contextual challenges. Chronic underfunding of higher education limits the availability of faculty, research infrastructure, and support services necessary for effective mentoring. Other challenges are associated with faculty workload. High student-to-mentor ratios and competing faculty responsibilities reduce the time and energy available for individualized mentoring.

Inconsistent and variability in policies in universities is recognized as another challenge. Variability in policy adoption and enforcement across institutions leads to uneven mentoring experiences for students. Other limitations of mentoring policies include:

- i. **Hierarchical Norms:** Traditional academic hierarchies may inhibit open communication and discourage mentees from voicing concerns or seeking support.
- ii. **Social Inequality:** Students from marginalized groups such as people living with disabilities and internally displaced communities may face additional barriers to accessing quality mentorship, including bias, discrimination, or lack of representation among faculty.
- iii. **Socio-political Instability:** Insecurity, strikes, and disruptions to academic calendars undermine the continuity and effectiveness of mentoring relationships.
- iv. **Lack of Incentives:** Limited recognition or reward for mentoring activities diminishes faculty motivation to engage in meaningful mentorship.
- v. **Insufficient Training:** Both mentors and mentees often lack formal training in effective mentoring practices, leading to suboptimal outcomes.
- vi. **Monitoring and Evaluation Deficits:** Weak mechanisms for tracking mentoring outcomes and gathering feedback hinder continuous improvement.

Comparative Insights: Lessons from Parallel Domains

While direct empirical studies on mentoring in Nigerian psychology graduate programmes are sparse, lessons can be drawn from adjacent domains and populations. For instance, Onuegbu et al. (2024) explored the knowledge, attitude, and practice of Nigerian journalists regarding the Google Translate application. The study found that while knowledge of the tool was widespread, actual utilization was limited, particularly within certain regions. The gap between awareness and practice was attributed to insufficient training, lack of institutional support, and weak policy enforcement. By analogy, mentoring policies in psychology may similarly falter in the absence of robust implementation frameworks and ongoing capacity building.

Similarly, Sabo and Utulu (2023) analyzed the impact of the Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) on organizational behavior. The study concluded that regulatory propositions alone are insufficient; successful policy implementation requires alignment with organizational culture, stakeholder buy-in, and adaptive mechanisms. In psychology graduate education, mentoring policies must be contextualized within the unique socio-cultural and institutional realities of Nigerian universities.

Ogundepo et al. (2020) and Iorliam et al. (2021) documented the impact of COVID-19 and terrorism on Nigerian society and institutions. Both studies underscore the importance of resilience, adaptability, and proactive institutional support in mitigating the adverse effects of crises. Mentoring policies that incorporate crisis management, mental health support, and flexible learning modalities are better positioned to support graduate students in turbulent times.

Recommendations and Future Research

To maximize the impact of mentoring on the development of psychology graduate students in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. *Contextualization*: Mentoring policies should be tailored to the specific needs and realities of psychology graduate programmes, taking into account faculty capacity, student demographics, and institutional culture.
- ii. *Resource Allocation*: there should be increased funding and resource allocation to support mentoring activities, including stipends for mentors, research grants, and infrastructural improvements.
- iii. *Training and Capacity Building*: There should be continuous training programmes for both mentors and mentees, focusing on effective communication, cultural competence, and ethical mentoring practices.
- iv. *Incentivization*: Recognition and reward systems for exemplary mentoring, including awards, promotion criteria, and public acknowledgment should be institutionalized.
- v. *Monitoring and Evaluation*: Robust mechanisms for tracking mentoring outcomes, gathering student feedback, and conducting regular policy reviews should be implemented.
- vi. *Diversity Initiatives*: There should be recruitment and retention of diverse faculty and students. Mentoring policies addressing the unique needs of underrepresented groups should be consciously ensured.
- vii. *Grievance Redress*: Accessible and confidential channels for reporting and addressing mentoring-related grievances should be made available in cases of need.
- viii. *Comparative Analysis*: Cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary studies to identify best practices and lessons for policy transfer should be conducted periodically.
- ix. *Longitudinal Tracking*: Mechanisms for tracking graduate trajectories over time to assess the long-term impact of mentoring should also be put in place.

Conclusion

Mentoring policy represents a vital instrument for enhancing the academic, professional, and psychosocial development of psychology graduate students in Nigeria. When effectively designed and implemented, such policies can bridge knowledge gaps, foster professional readiness, and cultivate resilient academic communities. However, the promise of mentoring policy is contingent upon contextualization, resource commitment, and continuous evaluation.

The Nigerian higher education landscape, marked by structural challenges and socio-cultural complexities, requires innovative and adaptive approaches to mentoring. Drawing on organizational theory and empirical insights from parallel domains, this research has shown that mentoring policy must be embedded within a broader strategy of institutional reform, stakeholder engagement, and cultural transformation.

Future research should prioritize the systematic investigation of mentoring outcomes in psychology graduate education, leveraging both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Policymakers and institutional leaders must work collaboratively to align mentoring policy with the lived realities of faculty and students, ensuring that the next generation of Nigerian psychologists is equipped to contribute meaningfully to scholarship, practice, and society.

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