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Academic Staff Mentorship at Makerere University: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Mentorship involves exchanging knowledge, skills, and experience between a more knowledgeable and skilled individual and a less experienced and skilled one. Mentorship fosters professional skill development, confidence, scholarly productivity, career advancement. It also helps in stress reduction, and increasing job satisfaction. There is limited research on academic staff mentorship in tertiary institutions in Uganda. This study sought to address this knowledge gap by examining how mentorship is undertaken by academic staff, the challenges it faces, and how it can be improved at Makerere University in Uganda. This study was conducted using a qualitative research design. The participants were purposively selected from three colleges at the university. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and manually analyzed using a thematic approach. The major results revealed that mentorship among academic staff at this institution was practiced informally as there were no formal structures to guide and facilitate mentorship practice. Therefore, we recommend that formal structures be implemented to guide, facilitate, and enhance this practice.

Keywords: Mentorship, collaboration, tertiary institutions, academic-staff

Introduction

Mentorship is commonly understood as the exchange of knowledge, skills, and expertise between more experienced individuals and those who are less knowledgeable, skilled, or experienced (Burgess et al., 2018). Mentorship is also a reciprocal learning relationship characterized by trust, mutual respect, and commitment. A mentor supports a mentee's professional and personal development by sharing their life experiences, influence, and expertise (Zellers et al., 2008). Mentorship is essential and beneficial for early career academicians in terms of capacity building. It fosters professional skill development, confidence, scholarly productivity, and career advancement. It also reduces stress and enhances job satisfaction (Harker et al., 2019).

In tertiary learning institutions, mentorship can exist in three forms: faculty–undergraduate student mentoring, faculty–graduate student mentoring, and mentoring relationships among faculty members (Lechuga, 2011). These relationships can be formed either formally or informally. Formal mentoring relationships are organized, planned, structured, and institutionalized by university management or systems. Informal mentoring relationships occur spontaneously among individuals in organizations based on mutual respect, friendships, and common interests (Anafarta & Apaydin, 2016).

Mentorship is a developmental and collaborative practice that has been used globally to enhance capacity development in higher education institutions (Lumpkin,2011; Lumpkin, 2009). Previous studies have viewed it as a way to facilitate and improve knowledge, skills, and exchange of ideas among individuals with common interests (Noonan et al., 2007; Wenger, 2000). This encourages collaboration and professional growth between senior and junior academics (Mazerolle et al., 2018).

Mentorship is one of the many aspects of university roles. Its importance and urgency have not been contested. However, most research has been conducted in the business sector rather than in education. This is because no distinct

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demarcation or line of research distinguishes mentorship from other dimensions in an academic setting (Allen et al., 2004; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005). In the Ugandan context, there is limited literature regarding the mentorship practices of academic staff in tertiary institutions, such as Makerere University (Mubuuke et al., 2020; Ssemata et al., 2017). Little is known about how it is undertaken by academic staff, the challenges it faces, and how it can be improved at the institution. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the mentorship practices of the academic staff at Makerere University, explore the challenges it faces, and examine how the practice can be improved.

Literature Review

Mentorship refers to a cultural, natural, or professional relationship that results from a person working with a peer(s) or older person(s) to develop their skills within the expectations of a cultural, religious, political, social, academic, or professional context (Mugumbate et al., 2020). Traditionally, in the professional context, the concept of mentorship has been attributed to the process of knowledge transfer and sharing between more senior, experienced, and less experienced junior personnel (Ismail & Jui, 2014; Mugumbate et al., 2020).

Various scholars have argued that the definition of mentorship has widened and moved away from the traditional one-to-one relationship between a senior person and a younger protégé, to a dynamic educational process that facilitates and enables learning, collaboration, guidance, and support between two or more individuals (Mundia & Iravo, 2014; Mullen, 2017).

It has also been attributed as a process that imparts, cultivates, and incorporates organizational goals and objectives into the hearts and minds of young professionals (Inzer & Crawford, 2005). The overall aim of mentorship is to help people function effectively and achieve success in their professional and personal lives (Schunk & Mullen, 2013). Mentorship in tertiary institutions exists in three categories: academic staff-to-undergraduate student mentoring, academic staff-to-graduate student mentoring, and mentoring among academic staff (Lechuga, 2011). These relationships are embedded within institutional structures (Lunsford et al., 2017). Therefore, mentorship among academic staff is defined as mutual collaboration and engagement that enables professional growth and development between senior and junior academicians (Zemichael, 2020).

The mentored person is called a "protégé" or a "mentee" whereas the experienced person who imparts wisdom and knowledge is often referred to as a "mentor." Previous studies have argued that the mentor's role is to guide, counsel, teach, inspire, challenge, and correct, among others (Naris & Ukpere, 2010).

Effective mentoring relationships can advance the academic careers of junior academic staff by providing them with means and support to cope with challenges in their career paths. All these are beneficial to their personal and professional learning and development as academicians in terms of increasing research output and publications, increasing collaboration between junior and senior academic staff, and providing more opportunities for networking (Kolade, 2015; Oberhauser & Caretta, 2019; Sola, 2018).

The mentorship of academics is also influential in continuity and retention, as it can be used to build a new generation of academics and incorporate responsible leadership traits and values into junior academic staff (Kolade, 2015; Sola, 2018).

Academic Staff Mentorship Practices in Institutions of Higher Learning.

Previous studies have found that academic staff mentorships in tertiary institutions can be undertaken formally or informally (Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Woo, 2017). Informal mentoring relationships occur spontaneously based on mutual respect, understanding, and relationships, whereas formal mentoring relationships are

organized, institutionalized, and implemented by the institution, (Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Freedman, 2009).

Different forms of relationships are found in mentorship practices. They include peer mentoring relationships in which two or more academic staff members with similar experience or rank interact and work together as equal partners and mentors to achieve mutually determined goals. In addition, constellation mentoring relationships comprise a mentee with more than one mentor. Group mentoring relationships involve one or more mentors (s) supporting a group of mentees who hold themselves individually and collectively accountable for a common purpose of learning and development (Nowell et al., 2017).

Mentorship practices and relationships in the Sub-Saharan context

In the Sub-Saharan African context, mentoring relationships among academic staff members have a common feature or assumption that senior academic staff members are more knowledgeable and impart wisdom to young junior academic staff members (Okurame, 2008).

Results from other studies conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa have described the mentorship practice of academic staff in tertiary institutions as largely informal; that is, there are no formal guiding structures to guide and facilitate it. These are in terms of clear policy guidelines and monitoring and evaluation frameworks (Naris & Ukpere, 2010; Okurame, 2008; Onyemaechi & Ikpeazu, 2019). This may be due to attitudes toward mentorship, the limited pool of mentors, and the limited resources in those institutions to facilitate a mentorship program among academic staff (Mgaiwa & Kapinga, 2021; Nakanjako et al., 2011; Sawatsky et al., 2016).

As a result, this has created various challenges facing mentorship practice in Sub-Saharan Africa, as some academic staff miss out on the opportunity to be mentored by their peers or senior academic staff (Mgaiwa & Kapinga, 2021).

Establishing formal structures in terms of clear policy guidelines and monitoring and evaluation frameworks can help improve the mentorship practices and outcomes of academic staff in terms of achieving professional and personal development in tertiary institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa. Creating a conducive environment for effective mentoring relationships by incorporating it with the institutions' organizational culture can also improve the mentoring outcomes of academic staff (Abugre & Kpinpuo, 2017; Okurame, 2008; Walbe, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was founded in 1978. This is among the developmental theories of education. This theory assumes that individuals learn best when working together with others during collaboration, and that through collaborative endeavors with more skilled learners, learners learn and internalize new concepts, psychological tools, and skills. It also suggests that knowledge is co-constructed, and that individuals learn from one another.

Vygotsky's theory also emphasizes the aspect and value of social interaction and further advocates a collaborative environment that encourages people of different calibers to work together and learn from each other, sharing skills, experiences, knowledge, and competencies. This in turn fosters professional and career growth. Through the principles of this theory, we find that a conducive and open environment in which personnel of different calibers freely interact and share knowledge, expertise, and experience is essential for promoting a mentorship culture in an organization of higher learning.

The Zonal Proximal Development and scaffolding aspects seen in Vygotsky's theory can also be used to promote effective mentor-to-mentee relationships. The Zone Proximal Development model used in Vygotsky's social cultural theory can be described as what an individual can achieve with expert assistance (Kamarudin

et al., 2020). On the other hand, scaffolding is described as a structure that must be put in place for learners to achieve their goals (Dennen, 2013). Scaffolding in mentorship helps mentors to build mentees in various aspects. Scaffolding can be done through different stages in the mentorship relationship (Asogwa et al., 2023)

These are provisions of feedback to the mentee on the basic areas they need to improve to grow and develop in their professions. As mentorship occurs in a social context, the aspects of Zonal Proximal Development and Scaffolding are essential tools that senior academic staff can use to mentor, build, and grow the competencies of junior academic staff. This can be in terms of teaching, publication, and research (Asogwa et al., 2023).

In institutions of higher learning, this is fundamental to the growth and development of not only junior academic staff but also senior academicians, as it encourages them to mentor each other in various teaching, research, and publication activities. However, there seems to be limited research or empirical evidence on whether an open and conducive environment for the mentorship of academic staff exists in the low-resource settings of tertiary institutions in Uganda. This makes it difficult to determine the status of academic staff mentorship in these institutions and how well it has affected their growth and development (Edoru & Adebayo, 2022). The following research questions guided the study.

Research questions

1. How can you describe the mentorship practices of the academic staff at Makerere University?
2. What challenges are faced by the mentorship practices of the academic staff?
3. How can the mentorship practice of academic staff at the university be improved?

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative design for data collection, interpretation, and analysis. A qualitative research design collects non-numerical data to understand the perspectives, experiences, and beliefs of different individuals or situations in a community (Tenny et al., 2017). This was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the different ideologies, experiences, and perspectives of the mentorship practices undertaken by academic staff at Makerere University. The study participants included both senior academic staff (Professors, Associate Professors, Senior lecturers) and junior academic staff (Lecturers and Assistant Lecturers) at the institution.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in three colleges at Makerere University (MAK) in Kampala, Uganda. The institution has ten colleges. The study setting was chosen because Makerere University is the oldest of the 12 public universities in Uganda, with great influence on what happens in younger universities. It also has large academic staff, with the majority of them at the lower ranks of senior lecturers and below (Asogwa et al., 2023). The Human Resource Manual at the university requires senior academic staff to mentor junior staff members.

Population and Sampling

Random sampling was used to select three colleges at Makerere University. Purposive sampling was used to identify and select participants from the three colleges. We enrolled 36 academic staff who were perceived to have different experiences and knowledge regarding mentorship. This method enabled us to document different experiences among the academic staff at Makerere University.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the participants. The principal investigator conducted the interviews using interview guides with open-ended questions.

The interview guides were pre-tested on two academic staff members who were not included as participants in the study. The interview guides had questions focusing on the mentorship practices undertaken by the academic staff and the challenges facing the mentorship of academic staff at the institution. They also provided suggestions and recommendations on how it can be improved. Participants' responses were audio-recorded based on their consent and approval. The principal investigator took notes during the data-collection stage.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed thematically. The participants' responses were transcribed and analyzed according to the content areas related to the study objectives. Before the analysis, we listened to the audio recordings more than once and transcribed them verbatim in English. Each transcript was crosschecked with audio recordings to ensure the accuracy, consistency, and completeness of the data collected. Similar codes were grouped into categories based on the key themes. Data coding and analysis were performed manually. Participants' quotes were used to support the results.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers received an introductory letter from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, School of Social Sciences at Makerere University. It was presented to the participants in the study to ensure that the research being conducted was for academic purposes. This helped schedule appointments with the participants and obtain their consent. Before starting the interviews, the participants were asked to approve and consent to be audially recorded. In addition, the researchers maintained the principles of confidentiality and anonymity, in which participants were not identified by the names given in their responses. The recorded audio data were stored and kept safe on the researcher's hard drive**.**

Researcher's Reflexivity

As researchers, we might have been biased in believing that mentorship among academic staff existed at the university and that the structure of academic staff mentorship existed at the university. This was based on our mentorship experience. We were also biased in believing that all academic staff working at the institution understood what mentorship was based on their experience. We however acknowledge our beliefs in the research process and kept them in check.

Results

Data from in-depth interviews with the respondents were collected between December 2021 and January 2022. The study participants comprised academic staff of different ranks, including professors, lecturers, and assistant lecturers. The participants were from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Health Sciences, and College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. The total number of participants interviewed in the study was 36, based on the principle of saturation. Of these, 19 were male and 17 were female.

Themes

Four key themes emerged from the data: a description of the mentorship practices undertaken by academic staff, facilitators of the mentorship practice of academic staff, the challenges facing the mentorship practice at the institution, and improving the mentorship practice of academic staff at the institution.

Table 1

Summary of results.

Themes	Categories	Academic Staff Perspective Summary
Theme 1: Description of mentorship of academic staff.	- It is largely informal with no formal structures for assigning a mentor to a mentee. - Mentorship doesn't exist.	- Academic staff described the mentorship practice to be largely informal. - Some junior academic staff noted that they weren't attached to a mentor. - Few academic staff described the practice to be non-existent.
Theme 2: Facilitators to mentorship of academic staff	- -Research projects, research grants, orientation and induction programs, Masters & PhD facilitate and create opportunities for mentorship.	- Some academic staff revealed that mentorship of academic staff was facilitated through research projects, grants, orientation and induction programs and Master and PhD courses.
Theme 3: Challenges experienced by the mentorship practice	- Lack of formal structures - Time constraints - Lack of motivation, - Limited pools of mentors.	- Majority of participants reported that the lack of formal structures in terms of clear policy guidelines and monitoring and evaluation frameworks were the major challenges facing mentorship of academic staff. - Other challenges reported were a lack of motivation, time constraints, lack of incentives and a limited pool of mentors.
Theme 4: Improving the mentorship practice of academic staff at the institution	- Establishment of formal structures - Training of potential mentors and mentees - Use of online digital technologies - Use of peer-to-peer mentorship, - Establishing a clear reward system	- Most of the participants posited that formal structures like clear policy guidelines and monitoring and evaluation frameworks should be put in place, training of potential mentors and mentees, the use of online digital technologies, use of peer-to-peer mentorship and establishing a clear reward system were also seen as other ways to improve the practice

What are the mentorship practices of Academic Staff at Makerere University?

From the findings, the majority of academic staff described the mentorship practice of academic staff as largely informal. They explained that academic staff tend to choose who they want to be their mentors/mentees, as the practice is based more on mutual rapport or common interests shared among the academic staff. The following responses reflected this theme:

Mentorship of academic staff is really happening but not so formalized. Much as it has been discussed in the university circle, the emphasis is on student mentorship. However, most mentorships between junior and senior faculty members are passive. It is also like people choosing whom to approach as mentors (Key Informant 1). Conversely, another academic staff member emphasized that mentorship practice was informal.

No, it's informal, it's not formal. It is informal. Someone looks at you and says I can work with this one. That's how it's done. (Key Informant 2). Another participant expressed that junior academic staff were not attached to or assigned mentors at the institution.

I mean, we are the junior ones in this department, but I do not find myself attached to

anyone who can mentor me. Though informally, you will find some senior staff on a personal basis because they are your friends, they will help to make you better (Key Informant 3).

This is similar to the findings of previous studies by Mgaiwa and Kapinga (2021), Okurame (2008), and Thorne et al. (2021), who also described academic staff mentorship in their institutions as largely informal. These studies also reported a lack of formal structures to pair mentors and mentees, limited institutional support for the facilitation of formal mentoring relationships, and a lack of a policy framework with clear mentorship guidelines, which were reasons why the practice was largely informal.

However, a few believed that the practice of mentorship of academic staff did not exist at the institution. They argued that it was up to the self-initiative and determination of academic staff to be responsible for their own professional growth and development.

> *I would not say there is much to discuss concerning academic staff mentorship. There are many things that we know we have learned on the job. So, there is not a direct effort for mentorship (Key Informant 4)*

This stems from the lack of formal structures to guide and facilitate academic staff mentorship, as has been reported in previous studies (Nakajanko et al., 2011; Walbe, 2020). Because of this, most academic staff are left to look for other ways which can help them grow and develop as academicians (Naris & Ukpere, 2010).

How is mentorship undertaken by academic staff at Makerere University?

The study revealed that research projects, research grants, orientation and induction programs, and master's and PhD programs created opportunities for academic staff to be mentored in different activities such as teaching, research, and publication.

Research projects and grants were also seen as other ways to create mentorship opportunities for academic staff, specifically in areas of research based on the findings (Amosun et al., 2021; Nundullal & Dorasamy, 2012). Most of the study participants were of the view that research projects and research grants facilitated mentorship among academic staff in the institution, specifically in the areas of research and publication.

> *There are those who are in projects and the project has senior staff, junior staff, and research assistants. So, there are those projects which come as capacity-building projects. Those have room for junior staff to be attached to senior staff for mentorship purposes. So, they get to research together, they get to co-teach, and to co-publish (Key Informant 5).*

Orientation and induction programs were also identified as other ways in which academic staff could undertake mentorship. This is in line with (Law et al., 2014), who sees mentorship as a way to orient and induct new academic staff into the institution.

> *For new staff, an orientation program is normally conducted. It is well-coordinated throughout the college especially for new staff to show them what is expected of them and what they need to do as teachers (Key Informant 6)*

Challenges facing the mentorship practices of academic staff at the institution

The findings of the study revealed several challenges in the mentorship practices of academic staff at Makerere University. According to most participants, the major challenge facing the practice was the lack of formal structures in terms of clear policy guidelines, monitoring, and evaluation frameworks. Participants stated that the lack of these structures made it challenging for mentorship practice to be deliberate, as the practice was ad hoc.

Due to the lack of formal structures, there are no formal expectations from mentorship practices among the academic staff at the institution. This, in turn, forces academic staff to seek informal mentoring, creating the risk of unexpected outcomes (Mullen & Fletcher, 2012). As a result, this leaves the practice to be done in a

less organized and unplanned way, making it difficult for academic staff to see its value and importance in their career growth and development (Edoru & Adebayo, 2022; Thorne et al., 2021).

> *We do not have these structures for mentorship, which is a challenge. Therefore, even if someone is mentored or if a senior person mentors a junior person, they may be rewarded during promotion without providing evidence of the mentorship outcome or activity. (Key Informant 7).*

Similarly, another study participant argued that: *Mentorship is ad-hoc. It's not well planned. The process is a huge challenge because there is no clear way to do so at the university. Maybe there's no clear policy on mentorship (Key Informant 8)*

Most junior academics lack the motivation to be mentored. This is generally attributed to the need to achieve financial gain. This relates to Mayer (2006), who posited that junior academic staff enter academia for various reasons; that is, there are those who may enter the profession for extrinsic reasons like money or status and may fail to recognize mentorship as beneficial or valuable.

> *Young people seem to be impatient, and by this, I mean young staff. They seem to have so many challenges and so many problems with financial need so they spend most of their time chasing financial need (Key Informant 5)*

Time constraints were also reported as another challenge facing the mentorship of academic staff at the institution because of the heavy workloads and fixed deadlines they faced as academic staff. This is in relation to (Talbert et al., 2021) who note that junior academic staff are faced with the challenge of heavy workloads and busy schedules, leaving them with no time to participate in mentorship. This could be due to the high pressure, demands, and expectations placed on academic staff regarding publishing, teaching, community work, conducting research, and many others. Consequently, they are left with no time to participate in mentorship practices (Talbert et al., 2021).

> *As an academic staff member, you have fixed deadlines at the university. You have too many things to do. You have to publish, teach, graduate students, etc.. So many times, you find that you cannot create some time off to do the mentoring because you have too much on your desk and want to beat deadlines for every activity (Key Informant 9)*

Some participants reported not having experienced senior personnel to mentor them. Some had busy schedules or had left the university due to the age retirement aspect included in their contracts. This aligns with previous studies (Edoru & Adebayo, 2022), which state that the mentorship level of academic staff at Ugandan universities is low. According to them, academic staff who may have the potential and expertise to mentor others are scarce. They also stated that most senior faculty members have heavy workloads and may not get time to mentor novice junior academicians.

> *Mentors, if they are not teaching, are carrying out research and looking for bread. They are interested in obtaining money to sustain their lives and family needs. If they are not teaching, they are carrying out research or doing consultancy, so they do not have that time to mentor you (Key Informant 10)*

Previous studies by (Law et al., 2014) identified a lack of clear rewards as a major challenge facing mentorship in higher education institutions. They posited that the absence of a clear reward system discourages academic staff from engaging and participating in mentorship practices. This is because there is no motivation for senior or junior academic staff members to engage in mentoring activities.

> *I think if there is no clear reward system attached to it, it is one of the things that makes it fail to take off as well as would have been. Human beings, by nature, want to feel that they are benefiting from some work they are doing. (Key Informant 1)*

According to some study participants, the confusion of mentorship with supervision was also reported to be a challenge facing mentorship

practice at Makerere University. A study conducted by Arnesson and Albinsson, (2017) confirms that is not uncommon for scholars to think that mentorship and supervision are similar, yet they are not. This may be due to the lack of mentoring skills and competencies exhibited by potential mentors (Nundullall & Dorasamy, 2012). This implies that some academic staff may still be unfamiliar with mentorship and may not know what it entails, which creates a challenge in overall practice.

> *I think the major challenge is that mentorship is not clearly described or understood by everyone. We are used to supervision. Mentorship is a bit foreign to Makerere and many African universities as they are being trained at the graduate level. I should say that many mentors or seniors were never mentored very well. We are used to supervision because even with research, many people, when they're being trained at the graduate level, go through supervision, but supervision is different from mentorship (Key Informant 7)*

How can the mentorship practice of academic staff be improved?

Study participants were asked how the mentorship practices of the academic staff could be improved. A number of participants suggested that formal structures should be put in place to facilitate and formalize the mentorship of academic staff and make it more intentional. They believed that formal structures in terms of clear policy guidelines and mentorship frameworks can help in better planning, programming, and setting clear goals and objectives to improve the mentorship practices of academic staff at the institution. Previous studies done by (Baker, 2015; Mgaiwa & Kapinga, 2021; Nakanjako et al., 2011) have also suggested that in order for higher education institutions to create effective staff mentoring, leadership must provide a multi-dimensional framework to support the development, implementation, and assessment of these programs through policy.

> *Therefore, if we had a formalized mentorship program, I think there would be many publications. The mentor should be interested in making us publish more. She gets information, she comes and tells you, you know, for next year, you need to publish at least two articles in a year, that's when you can survive, and so it becomes like a colleague or a friendship thing, but there's a structure to it (Key Informant 11)*

Formal structures such as clear policy guidelines can also create a conducive environment for academic staff mentorship. This can facilitate the overall practice by encouraging and enabling academic staff to participate more (Jackevicius et al., 2014).

> *I think it would be much better because you know mentorship, which comes from my experience being elsewhere in other universities where I have studied or worked in and outside Uganda, there's a deliberate effort to make the mentorship formalized for academic staff. They do this to see the impact and know how to address any challenges arising from these processes. Once you do not document something, you cannot count, you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it. So, I think formalizing it would be a good way to start, but even having said that the issues of mentorship, I think have a lot to do with the chemistry of the people involved. Thus, formalization can happen, but people should interact in ways other than formal establishment (Key 1nformant I).*

Formal mentorship structures can also be used to establish the monitoring and evaluation systems. This helps evaluate the performance of the practice and assess whether the objectives of the practice are being met, as noted by the study participants. Research findings from previous studies have found that monitoring the mentorship process ensures that the desired goals are achieved. They recommended that higher education institutions incorporate verbal and written reports, annual surveys, or questionnaires administered by mentors and mentees. This can improve feedback and facilitate communication, thereby improving mentorship practices (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Megginson, 2006).

> *For anything to take root, you have to teach and then evaluate it. You have to monitor the delivery of the same. But in this informative*

way, there are no areas to mark against (Key Informant 12)

The training of potential mentors and mentees was also suggested by the study participants as a way to improve the mentorship practice of academic staff. Training is a valuable feature and strategy used to incorporate relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies needed for an effective mentorship program in any Higher Education Institution (Dancer, 2003; Mendez *et al.,* 2019).

Training someone to train others. So, if I trained or mentored someone, I can also encourage that person I've mentored to mentor another, and then I can interact with both of them or each one so that there can also be that pathway of doing things to that approach (Key Informant 10)

Attaching incentives to academic staff mentorship can encourage motivation among academic staff to undertake or participate in mentorship. This aligns with studies conducted by Nundullall and Dorasamy (2012) and Schulze (2009), who recommended that mentorship should be part of work allocation and rewarded. According to the study participants, this can be done by retaining senior academic staff who have mentored junior academicians by renewing or extending their contracts at the university, or recognizing those who have participated in mentorship practices as mentors or mentees.

An incentive would be to say that you helped us. So, for you, because of the mentoring you have done in the department, they give you extra years because they value the service you are providing to the institution (Key Informant 10)

Online digital platforms, such as e-conferencing, e-mail, WhatsApp, and Zoom, can also be used. This can create flexibility between mentors and mentees, allowing them to meet and mentor each other at a distance (Cross et al., 2019).

I think we can use Zoom from a distance or other means of interaction such as employing technologies. If face-to-face meetings are a challenge and those seniors do not have time to interact with you, there are other means of interacting. In this era of technology, you can interact, or you can be mentored through Zoom from a distance or by using other means, like WhatsApp or e-mail (Key Informant 13).

The data also revealed that peer-to-peer mentorship could create other alternatives or ways for academic staff of the same caliber to mentor with each other. Previous studies have found that peer-to-peer mentorship allows faculty members of the same caliber to share experiences and support each other in their academic careers. It also helps faculty to cope with both the demanding society and job expectations (Schmidt, 2012).

Younger staff members can also interact in their own ways, which could be peer-to-peer mentoring. They mentor each other, and in that way, they help each other because they share their experiences (Key Informant 14)

The study also found that for the mentorship of academic staff to improve, knowledge sharing and learning among potential mentors and mentees should occur on both sides. A few respondents believed that the mentee should learn from the mentor, but the mentor should also learn from the mentee, so that both sides can benefit from the entire process of mentorship. This can also reduce power and dominance mostly found in a hierarchical relationship found senior-to-junior mentorship relationship.

We need to move now towards an equilibrium where mentorship is more of a young colleague, a young lover of a subject, and a young enthusiastic person whom I am aiding to grow by challenging them constantly, not by determining the limits of their thinking (Key Informant 15).

This is similar to the study by (Sarabipour et al.,2022), who advocated for a mentee-driven and mentor-guided relationship. As a result, both sides can equally communicate, interact, and learn from each other, resulting in an effective and successful relationship. The findings of this study show the need and relevance of having a formal mentorship structure for academic staff. This could enable senior and junior academic staff to learn from each other by giving them an open and conducive environment to share their

knowledge, experiences, and skills freely. This aligns with Lev Vygotsky's 1978 social-cultural theory, which emphasizes the principles of Zonal Proximal Development and scaffolding.

Conclusion

The mentorship practices of academic staff at Makerere University are mainly informal, with no formal structures, guidelines, or frameworks to facilitate it. This has created a major challenge for academic staff in implementing mentorship and measuring its impact on career development. Other challenges faced by the practice were a limited pool of mentors, time constraints faced by academic staff, lack of motivation to be mentored by junior academic staff, and lack of clear reward systems.

Therefore, we recommend that Makerere University establish a system to improve the mentorship practices of its academic staff. We recommend that formal structures, such as clear policy guidelines, monitoring, and evaluation frameworks, be put in place to facilitate the practice. A formal mentorship structure can create an open and conducive environment in which senior and junior academic staff can freely share knowledge, skills, and expertise. Furthermore, we recommend training academic staff on mentorship and how it can be successfully implemented to enhance their professional development.

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