

ACHIEVING MENTOR-PROTEGE RELATIONSHIP: PANACEA TO THE PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT OF TEACHERS IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The importance of mentoring for professional advancement of teachers cannot be overemphasized especially with regards to the present downward trend in the development of education in Nigeria. Teaching is one profession that has for many years suffered crisis of lack of quality and experienced teachers. Most of the teachers; essentially the engaged ones are in difficulty and deserve to be guided, supported and protected by the experienced and influential teachers so as to find their footing. The role of a teacher goes beyond classroom teaching and learning to include facilitating professional ethics. Teaching requires procedures and provisions designed to provide knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits which every teacher is expected to acquire formally and sometimes through informal interactions in order to be competent in the job. This paper stresses on the importance of mentor-protege relationship as a panacea for proper advancement of the professional roles of teachers especially the inexperienced ones. Challenges such as: resistance to change and innovations by teachers, time constraints, lack of orientation to deal with the background of the protege among others, play some distracting roles. The paper further recommends among other things: adaptability of teachers to innovations, proper time schedule and projections, workshops and effective supervision in the schools.

Keywords: Mentor, Protege, Professional Advancement, Newly Recruited Teachers.

Introduction

The Nigerian education is one sector that the United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF 2018) has ranked low in terms of the fallen teacher quality at all levels. According to the international perception, learners have suffered a great deal of backwardness due to lack of experience, motivation and transfer of knowledge and skill among teachers. This situation seems to persist, despite the acclaimed posting of qualified teachers to the schools by the government as well as release of other human and material resources to sustain the teachers and the students.

With the prevailing situation, it is not surprising that Ogwo (2023) has classified Nigeria and its education system as weak and non-qualitative to addressing the challenges of the times of the society. With a heavy burden of resource use as stated by the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF 2023), the problem of education in Nigeria is further compounded by lack of qualitative teachers: a situation which has rendered the students vulnerable.

In an attempt to grapple with the rising level of illiteracy and the apparent lack of motivation, most teachers have for one reason or the other lost the zeal and enthusiasm to monitor and extend their wealth of experiences to the inexperienced teachers who are left to grapple with the extent of what they learnt theoretically from their institutions of training. In effect, the travail of the inexperienced teachers is also exacerbated by the hardship and technological advancement and innovations in schools and the society are large at large, which demand the competence of the experienced teachers

in order to share with the less experienced ones. According to Daniel and Chandler (2009) experienced teachers are expected to be effective and role models in instructional delivery, speech, dressing and sense of responsibility at work. Similarly, Jerry (2022) observed that inexperienced teachers are more and more disadvantaged in terms of lack of monitoring and prone to suffer marginalization and under-representation. This position is further supported by Izuagba (2016) who adduces that those teachers who do not obtain mentorship are as good as emitting wrong human potentials which can be avoided.

Thus, in making any meaningful decision for improving the quality of education in Nigeria, it is pertinent to bear in mind that the teacher of today is the Education of tomorrow. The quality of teachers today determines if the Education of tomorrow will be comparable to global standards and an asset to the development of the Nation in general. This paper is poised to discuss the achievements of mentor-protege relationship as a major criterion for professional advancement of teachers and the consequent quality education in Nigeria.

Why should inexperienced teachers be mentored?

One of the major reasons is the unprofessional attitudes of most of the inexperienced teachers which Agabi & Ogah (2018) described as disrespectful, overbearing and stubborn. According to the scholars, the more such teachers are subjected to mentoring, the more they tend towards other vices. Experienced teachers have acquired the culture within and outside the school and are less tempted to misbehave. They are more likely to value positive behaviors for peaceful coexistence and professionalism and so should act as role models to the inexperienced ones. Lesson contents and their relevance, instructional material, methods of lesson delivery and resources, strength and weaknesses of inexperienced teachers need to be discussed and evaluated with a view to achieving better results. This is a period which Jones, Matthew and Joseph (2023) described as a critical moment for inexperienced teachers to engage with the realities of the times for a successful career development. Inexperienced teachers especially the newly engaged ones need to enjoy positive feelings and thoughts from their seniors. Showing love without using abusive voice or slander to each other, welfare and protection from undue malice from colleagues or school management cannot be overemphasized in the quest for mentor-protege relationship because such interactions encourage hard work.

As observed by Ahukanna (2021) and Izuagba (2018), the concept of mentor-protege relationship has become a collective vision where they duo act as problem finders and at the same time problem solvers. What this means is that, both the mentor and the protege work in synergy to discover strengths and weaknesses of each other. The current innovations in information, communication and technology (ICT) and the digital literacy have widened the horizon of everyone in such a way that even an inexperienced teacher can be more experienced than the seniors in certain aspects of innovation. The world is fast becoming a global village and more than ever before, the new generation teachers are improving their skills, knowledge, ability, physical and mental resources to overtake the limitations of existing teachers who are yet resistant in embracing the digital age.

Major Obstacles to Mentor-Protege Relationship in Nigerian Schools

Renowned scholars such as Swun (2017), David (2019), Murray, Mac & Judith (2006) share similar views that experienced teachers in schools are resistant to change, especially with regards to ICT, globalization and integration using the internet. This situation has made such teachers un-innovative

to the emerging technologies and an apparent lack of critical thinking, creativity and collaboration which affect the quality of their output in schools.

The society is changing day by day to meet global competitiveness. The general opinion of the above scholars is that, even when the experienced teachers are provided opportunities for in-service training through seminars, workshops and talks on contemporary innovative issues in education, most times, they opt for other activities that are not relevant to their career development. In other words, they opt out from core training programmes, referring to such opportunities as programmes for the young, even in the present changing society. In a study conducted by Perry (201) it was discovered that most teachers in the schools do not manifest self-confidence at work. They study recommended a compulsory in service training for all teachers.

Another significant obstacle to mentor protege relationship among teachers is lack of time and opportunity to have meaningful and productive experience with each other. There is need for time to meet, evaluate strength and weaknesses. Reuben (2021) identified a variety of activities which pose constraints in a mentor-protege relationship to include: preparation and presentation of lessons, marking examination scripts and computation as well as engaging in other extracurricular Programmes of the school which are tasking and time consuming.

Importantly, it has become evident that most experienced teachers lack the orientation to deal with the backgrounds of their proteges especially in identifying their needs and interests. In other words, most of the experienced teachers lack the courage in effective monitoring. David (2019) observes that weakness among teachers is the root cause of uncooperative attitudes in schools; a situation which has caused more harm than good in the development of education in Nigeria. Related to the above is the dearth of professionally qualified and registered teachers who are guided by the regulations and Mandates of the teaching profession as well by the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN). Saha (2020) emphasized on the need for professionalism among teachers as the condition for achieving quality educational practice in the schools.

Overcoming the Obstacles to Mentor- Protege Relationship in Schools

Collaboration and its impact cannot be undermined when discussing the strategies for overcoming the obstacles to mentor-protege relationship. This will give room for interpersonal relationship, team spirit especially in digital literacy, creative and innovative technologies for problem solving. Professionalism is a virtue that improves proficiency and discipline at work. Izuagba (2018), Chukwuezi (2022) and Onyeneho (2022) share similar views that mentors are known advisers on professional ethics. With the right attitude to work, inexperienced teachers acquire greater skills and chances of contributing to the improvement of their schools in particular and the society at large.

Timing as a major obstacle to mentor - protege relationship can be addressed through adequate planning and allocation of programmes to create opportunities for informal relationships among colleagues. In a study conducted by Ebong & Kaegon (2008), it was discovered that school administrators barely allocate time for leisure due to the retinue of school programmes. They study also affirmed that numerous other school leaders were in the habit of being stressed with work and do not see mentorship programmes as a good opportunity for teachers' development. School administrators need to consciously create time for professional coaching. Adequate welfare and care can encourage the inexperienced teachers to teach, observe, inform, trust and care for the inexperienced teachers.

Related to the above is the perception of value and worth about every teacher which gives a sense of positive feeling and warmth even as they collaborate with each other and as partners in progress.

Recommendations

It has been established in this paper that the issue of mentor-protege relationship in Nigerian schools has not been adequately addressed.

This paper recommends as follows: -

- i. The culture of adaptability to innovations and re-orientation directed at the experienced teachers and school administrators in particular, on the importance of adapting to innovations.
- ii. Reorientation programs for all teachers irrespective of gender, social /economic background or status through seminars, workshops, radio programs and the internet on the relevance of mentorship among teachers.
- iii. Proper time projections for school activities to be made with a conscious effort to create time for mentor-protege relationship where teachers can informally engage in some social and interactive activities to learn from their experienced colleagues.
- iv. Ethics committee to be set up in schools to facilitate adherence to professionalism and standards among teachers so that inexperienced teachers can develop high level of ethical conducts and decorum.

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